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HERO OR TYRANT: IMAGES OF JULIUS CAESAR IN SELECTED WORKS FROM  
VERGIL TO BRUNI

by

Sarah M. Loose

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of History

Brigham Young University

July 2007

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Sarah M. Loose

This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

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As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the dissertation of Sarah M. Loose in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographic style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

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## ABSTRACT

### HERO OR TYRANT: IMAGES OF JULIUS CAESAR IN SELECTED WORKS FROM VERGIL TO BRUNI

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Gaius Julius Caesar is not only the most well-known figure in Roman history, but he is also one of the most difficult to understand. Since his assassination, Caesar has played an important role in discussions of political power, imperial government, tyranny, and tyrannicide. While there have been literary treatments of Caesar from William Shakespeare to the present, little has been done to trace the image of Caesar through the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. The present work attempts to fill that hole by examining portrayals of Caesar in medieval and early Renaissance texts. An examination of specific authors such as Geoffrey of Monmouth, John of Salisbury, Thomas Aquinas, Dante, Petrarch, Salutati, and Bruni, clearly demonstrates that Caesar was consistently portrayed as the first emperor and used to represent

the Roman Empire. As the first emperor, representations of Caesar figured significantly in debates about the power of the Church and the Empire, the benefits and downfalls of imperial government, and tyrannicide. Authors were influenced in their portrayals of Caesar by the classical portrayals found in the works of Vergil, Lucan, and Suetonius. Each author's interpretation of Caesar was also impacted by the political and intellectual milieu in which he flourished. Analysis of Caesar's image over this time period serves not only as a part of Caesar historiography, but also provides insight into the ways that scholars write history to understand the world around them.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## CONTENTS

### Chapter

1. Introduction. . . . .	1
2. Classical Images of Caesar: Vergil, Lucan, and Suetonius. . . . .	24
3. From Late Antiquity Through the Thirteenth Century: Ammianus Marcellinus to Thomas Aquinas. . . . .	49
4. Transition to the Renaissance: Dante and Petrarch. . . . .	75
5. The Early Renaissance: Salutati and Bruni. . . . .	123
6. Conclusion. . . . .	156
7. Bibliography. . . . .	161

## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction and Background**

Since the Ides of March, 44 BCE, historians have struggled to understand the actions and define the goals, purposes, and intents of Gaius Julius Caesar. Caesar has proved elusive and difficult to comprehend for both modern and ancient scholars in several ways, one of which is the challenge in separating the public image that Caesar tried to present from the man Caesar himself. Julius Caesar's public image was of great importance to him because it earned him the support of the common people; unfortunately it also engendered the disdain of the Roman oligarchy, and eventually led to his assassination. It can be assumed that, like any good politician, Caesar had one image with the public, another with the Senate, and another in his private life. These different images, along with conflicting portrayals in Roman literary works, gave rise to a kind of "Caesar myth" which, as it evolved over the years, increased the difficulty of explaining Caesar. However, because of portrayals of Caesar and the mythic persona that surrounded him, as well as the lack of actual firm evidence readily available, it became quite easy for authors and historians to interpret Caesar any way they chose, and his image became a tool for arguing in behalf of various causes.

The range of ways that medieval and Renaissance authors used Julius Caesar as a symbol is evidence of the power and utility the Caesar myth grew to possess. The growth of this power is manifest in political writing throughout the Middle Ages and the early stages of the Italian Renaissance. A compilation of every mention or discussion of Julius Caesar across this broad sweep of time would be exhaustive and would not allow for careful examination of any particular source. However, an examination of key authors

and ideas from the Middle Ages and the early Renaissance provides a representation of the general ways in which Julius Caesar was understood and portrayed throughout this time. Because of Caesar's own political involvement, he is most often discussed in a political context. Therefore, the sources most valuable in an attempt to trace the use of Caesar's image are all of a political nature. A study of key authors and their use of Caesar as a symbol demonstrates that the two main factors which influenced how Caesar has been understood include the depictions of Caesar in the classical texts available to medieval and Renaissance authors, and the political and intellectual background of each individual author. Furthermore, a study of key authors highlights three ways that Caesar's image was consistently used: as a representation of the Roman Empire in discussions about the power of the Empire versus the power of the Church, as a representation of imperial or monarchical power in disputes concerning whether monarchy or independent republics were the best form of government, and as a positive or negative example in debates over what constitutes a tyrant and whether it is lawful to kill a tyrant.

Unfortunately, scholarly examination of Caesar and his image throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance has been largely ignored. While a great deal of work has been published on Caesar himself and on the classical sources that discuss him, little has been done to trace historiographical treatment of Caesar before the modern period. The most recent historiographic work about Julius Caesar and his image is a collection of essays, edited by Maria Wyke, entitled *Julius Caesar in Western Culture*.<sup>1</sup> Divided into five sections the authors of these essays tackle portrayals of Caesar in early modern and modern sources such as Shakespeare, the French Resistance, and fascist plays. There are

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<sup>1</sup> Maria Wyke, ed., *Julius Caesar in Western Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

also several essays dedicated to early literary characterization of Caesar in sources such as Lucan. However, although this book shows a current, renewed interest in the image of Caesar and marks new strides in the historiography, still leaves holes for the time period of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance that need to be filled.

Another important work concerning the image of Julius Caesar is Zwi Yavetz's *Julius Caesar and His Public Image*.<sup>2</sup> Although the entire work is not historiography, Yavetz spends his first chapter doing much of what Ron Rosenbaum did with his *Explaining Hitler*, that is he attempts to explain those who have tried to explain Caesar, his motives, and actions. Yavetz details the historiography of Julius Caesar from the mid-nineteenth century to the present, and he convincingly demonstrates that historians' attempts to understand Caesar have been continuously thwarted by bias and perspective. Yavetz argues that based on the time in which a particular historian lived, Caesar was considered a Napoleonic figure, a Stalin or Hitler-like dictatorial tyrant, or a power-hungry would-be king.

According to Yavetz, for many years no analytical distinction was made among interpretations of Caesar the man, Caesar's political agenda, and the "Caesarism" of modern politicians. The great Roman historian Theodore Mommsen was one of the first to make a careful distinction between these different, though related, topics. As Yavetz points out, Mommsen feared that the history of Caesar and the history of Rome were too often one and the same, and that the events of this history were more often used to censure modern autocracy than to tell actual history.<sup>3</sup> Arnaldo Momigliano also argued

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<sup>2</sup> Zwi Yavetz, *Julius Caesar and His Public Image* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1983).

that Caesar must be understood on his own, and not in modern, terms. These statements represent the troubles that have plagued the history of Julius Caesar since his own day. Modern scholarship has tried to rectify this, but interpretations of Caesar over time have never been completely free from bias and perspective.

In the remainder of his historiographical treatment, Yavetz examines the various ways that modern scholars have attempted to get at Caesar through looking at epigraphic evidence, Caesar's own writings and those of his contemporaries, his religious reforms and efforts, and so on. Yavetz himself utilizes the rest of his monograph to add another perspective to the mix: an examination of Caesar's public image and personal motives through the laws and reforms he enacted. Consequently, Yavetz provides a valuable analysis of the methods modern historians have used to try to explain Caesar, and it is an important source for modern historiography of Caesar. The intent of the present study is to accomplish additional historiographical analysis by considering and subjecting to examination authors from earlier periods who wrote about Caesar.

There are other studies which have commented on portrayals of Caesar in medieval and Renaissance texts. In that regard, an important one is Manfredi Piccolomini's *The Brutus Revival: Parricide and Tyrannicide in the Renaissance*.<sup>4</sup> As the title suggests, Piccolomini's book focuses on Brutus and the manner in which he was depicted and understood during the Renaissance. Although the scope and topic of his book differs from that of this study, Piccolomini's methodological approach and

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<sup>3</sup> Yavetz, *Julius Caesar*, 16.

<sup>4</sup> Manfredi Piccolomini, *The Brutus Revival: Parricide and Tyrannicide in the Renaissance* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991).

conclusions about the elusiveness of Brutus as portrayed through the ages is quite similar: “Wanting to study the cultural origins of political terrorism, in *Brutus* I discovered a powerful example, a mythologized historical figure whose name and actions were often recalled whenever political circumstances presented predicaments similar to his own.”<sup>5</sup> In his study, Piccolomini highlights various approaches to Brutus during the Renaissance, including the writings of Bruni, Salutati, Dante, and especially Shakespeare, to try and determine whether Brutus was always the tragic hero of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* or was more often depicted as a tyrannicide and parricide. Because Brutus and Caesar are so closely linked, Piccolomini discusses the manner in which Caesar was portrayed in connection with Brutus. In this sense, his study contributes valuable insight into the present work on the connections between the images of Brutus and Caesar.

On the subject of tyrannicide, it is important to note that some attention has been given to Caesar’s assassination and the impact it had on later ideas about tyranny and tyrannicide. Michael Parenti provides an interesting analysis of Caesar’s assassination in *The Assassination of Julius Caesar: A People’s History of Ancient Rome*. Parenti’s main goal is to look at the assassination from the perspective of the people of Rome, in order to determine whether the murder of Caesar was tyrannicide or treason. When this is done, he argues, it is clear that Caesar’s assassination was “one incident in a line of political murders dating back across the better part of a century, a dramatic manifestation of a long-standing struggle between opulent conservatives and popularly supported

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<sup>5</sup> Piccolomini, *The Brutus Revival*, x-xi.

reformers.”<sup>6</sup> In his quest to discuss Caesar’s assassination, Parenti addresses representations of the assassination in Shakespeare, Shaw, and Hollywood, but medieval and Renaissance portrayals are ignored. Likewise, Greg Woolf’s study of the role that Caesar’s murder plays in the history of political assassination focuses entirely on images of the assassination in classical sources and then jumps to Shakespeare, Machiavelli, and beyond.<sup>7</sup> In both books the discussion of Caesar’s murder and its implications for later representations of Caesar is fascinating and convincing, however, each author leaves the Middle Ages and the Renaissance untouched in their analysis, areas which certainly deserve attention.

Other contributions to the study of Caesar’s image come from the works of Hans Liebeschütz and Hans Baron.<sup>8</sup> However, the effort of these historians does not focus directly on images of Caesar; instead they examine the topic of Caesar’s image only in the context of trying to understand a broader subject. For Liebeschütz that subject is John of Salisbury and evidence of medieval humanism in John’s writings. As a part of his analysis, Liebeschütz examines and seeks to explain Salisbury’s disparate portrayals of both Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great in various writings. He points to medieval methods of scholarship as the main reason for John’s conflicting portrayals of these two men, whom John sometimes uses as examples of tyranny and at other times as an

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Parenti, *The Assassination of Julius Caesar: A People’s History of Ancient Rome* (New York: The New Press, 2003), 2-3.

<sup>7</sup> Greg Woolf, *Et Tu Brute? The Murder of Caesar and Political Assassination* (London: Profile Books, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Hans Liebeschütz, *Medieval Humanism in the Writings of John of Salisbury* (London: Warburg Institute, University of London, 1950); Hans Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni: Studies in Humanistic and Political Literature* (Chicago: Published for the Newberry Library by the University of Chicago Press, [1968]).

example of noble qualities which rulers should seek to emulate. Liebeschütz makes a great contribution to our understanding both of John of Salisbury and also of the way in which he understood Julius Caesar, but he does not relate John's work to other contemporary and later authors. By contrast, the present study does endeavor to combine and compare the information contained in various secondary sources and offer additional insight to connect and provide a picture of the image of Caesar from Late Antiquity to the Early Renaissance.

Like those of Liebeschütz, the works of Hans Baron also focus on the writings of specific authors, and within his discussion of these authors, Baron occasionally addresses treatments of Caesar in particular texts. Specifically, Baron spent much of his scholarly career studying the writings of Petrarch, and his analyses of Petrarch's works all include consideration, if only brief, of Petrarch's approach to, and uses of, Caesar. In this way, Baron's work, like that of Liebeschütz, is important to this study, but it needs to be placed in context with other secondary sources and further primary source analysis focused specifically on Caesar.

In general then, historiographical treatment of Julius Caesar's image is a neglected area, passed over or briefly mentioned in many works, but never the main focus of a single study. In 1969 historian David Thompson stated that insufficient attention has been paid to the image or memory of Caesar and not much has been done to solve the problem since then.<sup>9</sup> The present work attempts to provide the beginnings of a remedy and further exploration of the topic. Thus, unlike those discussed above, this work focuses solely on analyzing medieval and early Renaissance use of Julius Caesar as an

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<sup>9</sup> David Thompson, *The Aims of History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), 57.



image, and it will highlight the various ways that the historical Caesar and his image were understood and used.

When surveying the progress of any subject over a period of time, the naturally desired result is the discovery of a neat and tidy pattern of progression. For Caesar's image, such a pattern ideally would follow the notion that authors contemporary to Caesar possessed a fairly clear understanding of his rule as dictator, but that by the late medieval period Caesar's image had become that of an emperor, king, and tyrant. Unfortunately, history can rarely be explained in such easy terms. So although this simplistic conclusion is generally true, there is a more correct but complicated development of the use of Caesar as an image. During the late medieval and Renaissance periods, although Caesar is sometimes discussed as the historical man himself, he is also consistently employed as an "exemplum" and to represent the Roman Empire. Whether that representation is positive or negative depends both on a particular author's interpretation of classical sources and that author's agenda as well.

Like modern scholars, medieval and Renaissance authors were limited in their knowledge of Caesar to the sources available to them. The lack of information is one of the factors that shaped understanding of Julius Caesar and the development of the Caesar myth. With the split of the Roman Empire between East and West, the limitations to knowledge increased: while the Greek tradition remained strong in the East, it faded in the West, leaving European scholars with primarily Latin knowledge. In fact, for most of the early Middle Ages the majority of scholars did not read Greek at all, and they had to rely on Latin sources accessible to them for any knowledge of Greek philosophy and

ideas. Therefore, in addition to Christian theology and ideas, the main influences, particularly on political thought, came from Latin political treatises such as those of Cicero, as well as the Roman law traditions which survived in medieval government.<sup>10</sup> This limited access to Greek writings, specifically Greek sources dealing with Caesar such as Plutarch, certainly affected their understanding use of Caesar as a symbol.<sup>11</sup>

Beyond the limitations set by availability of knowledge, another determining factor in the use of Caesar's image is how authors chose to interpret the sources they did have, and the fact that their analyses, for the most part, were influenced by the environment in which they lived, their own biases, and agendas. It is important to note that classical sources themselves portray Caesar in differing lights: sources contemporary with Caesar or Augustus explain the dictator in light of the civil wars and republican Roman politics, whereas depictions of Caesar from the time of the Empire are more prone to explain him in terms colored by the imperial rule and practice. Suetonius, in fact, may be largely responsible for the medieval misunderstanding that Caesar was the first Roman emperor, simply because he includes Caesar as the first entry in his biographies of the emperors.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Cary J. Nederman and Kate Langdon Forhan, *Medieval Political Theory – A Reader: The Quest for the Body Politic, 1100-1400* (London: Routledge, 1993), 3.

<sup>11</sup> For more information on the influence of Greek thought (particularly Aristotle) in medieval political theory see Cary J. Nederman, *Medieval Aristotelianism and Its Limits: Classical Traditions in Moral and Political Philosophy, 12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Aldershot, Hampshire, Great Britain: Variorum, 1997); see also Janet Coleman, "Some Relations Between the Study of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, *Ethics*, and *Politics* in Late Thirteenth- and Early Fourteenth-century University Arts Courses and the Justification of Contemporary Civic Activities," in Joseph Canning and Otto Gerhard Oexle, eds. *Political Thought and the Realities of Power in the Middle Ages* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> Suetonius, *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, J.C. Rolfe, trans. and ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979). Another factor, which will be discussed later in this study, is the adoption of the family name Caesar as a title by the Julio-Claudian emperors. The fact that every emperor from Augustus

Like their classical counterparts, whose interpretations of Caesar were shaped by their own political and intellectual milieus, medieval and Renaissance authors were also impacted by their own environments and the unique worldview which developed during the Middle Ages. Medieval scholars not only practiced frequent imitation of the classics, but they also used classical examples and forms to discuss medieval issues. In other words, medieval poets wrote in classical meters, and medieval scholars composed treatises with reference to ancient logic and examples, but they drew on these classical images and forms to make a point about life in the Middle Ages. For instance, John of Salisbury used Julius Caesar as an example of tyranny while writing against the “rapacious barons” of his own day, but in a treatise against animal hunting, John used Caesar as a positive supporting example because, according to sources, Caesar did not like to hunt.<sup>13</sup> These kinds of contradictions appear often in medieval writing, as authors use classical forms and ideas, but do so with the purpose of making a statement about their own day. Similarly, medievalist Carolly Erickson has pointed out that the visions recorded by medieval chroniclers, which were often full of metaphor and allegory related to classical ideas and legends (such as Aeneas’s trip in the underworld), were not just stories, but were a medieval way of teaching about and understanding reality.<sup>14</sup> Thus,

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on down used the title “Caesar” probably suggested to the minds of medieval scholars that the emperors were the successors of Caesar who must, then, have been the first emperor. In some ways the debate over who was the first true emperor of Rome still exists; in general, however, Roman historians currently pinpoint three main periods in Roman history: the Republic, the Principate (rule of Augustus), and the Empire.

<sup>13</sup> R. R. Bolgar, *The Classical Heritage and its Beneficiaries from the Carolingian Age to the end of the Renaissance* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1954), 199.

<sup>14</sup> Carolly Erickson, *The Medieval Vision: Essays in History and Perception* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 37-40.

scholars in the Middle Ages were not just mindless imitators of classics, they were creative thinkers who used classical ideas to discuss and portray the important events and issues of their own day.<sup>15</sup>

For example, one crucial issue faced by Western Europe in the Middle Ages was the struggle for power between church and state. As the institution of the papacy evolved, it proved to be a dominant force in secular affairs, especially in questions of authority. In the medieval mind, the trouble with authority was that if the pope crowned the king, then it appeared as if the power of the king to rule depended on the authority of God as delegated by the pope. This meant that the pope possessed higher authority than the king; this, of course, did not make kings happy. Although this conflict over who held ultimate secular authority lasted through the Renaissance, and even into the Reformation, medieval intellectuals did their best to use ancient sources to provide solutions. Dante for example, heavily influenced by Vergil, Lucan, Ovid, and Aristotle, argued that both the King and the Pope were necessary and that neither one derived his authority from the other. Some scholars used passages of scripture to argue for or against the separation of secular and spiritual powers. So, as the church and state struggled to define authority and find a balance, scholars turned to ancient sources and applied the lessons contained therein to their own day. Consequently, it cannot be said that the Middle Ages lost the wisdom of the ancients; neither did they simply imitate them. Instead they applied classical ideas to their own problems and created solutions unique to their day.

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<sup>15</sup> William R. Cook and Ronald B. Herzman, *The Medieval Worldview* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 260-261.

In addition to classical influences, Christianity was also a significant component of the medieval world. As such, it impacted all aspects of intellectual inquiry, including the subject in which Caesar's image most often appears – political thought. In a recent work on medieval political theory, Cary J. Nederman and Kate Langdon Forhan aptly describe medieval political thought as situated “between heaven and hellas,” or, in other words, it consisted of a delicate balance between Christian theology and the classical tradition.<sup>16</sup> This delicate balance began to take shape as early as Tertullian and Justin Martyr in the third century, both of whom brought classical ideas and philosophies into their writing. Then, after Constantine and the adoption of Christianity as the religion of the Empire, Christian theology became a force for scholars to reckon with. Through Christian interpretation of classical sources, a unique form of thought developed and Christianity became a central part of the intellectual world.

In his work on education and the intellectual world of the Middle Ages, historian Robert E. Lerner determines that much of their thought was based on Christian traditions. He points out that Saint Augustine established the foundation of what medieval scholars should study, and classical studies were a part of that foundation only as they applied to Christianity. Saint Augustine also established the idea that classical training was a good and necessary preparation for the study of the Bible and theology. This accomplished two important things: first, it made the study of the classics acceptable (whereas before Augustine scholars and Church leaders constantly questioned it), and second, it established the learning of the ancients as preparatory to, or lesser than, the Bible.<sup>17</sup> This

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<sup>16</sup> Nederman and Forhan, *Medieval Political Theory*, 1.

gave added emphasis to the importance of Christianity in the intellectual world, and furthered the idea that Christian and classical ideas must be studied and examined together.

In addition to the quest to safely combine Christian and pagan ideas, medieval thought, and political philosophy in particular, was also impacted by the interaction between church and state within the medieval social and political systems. In many places, bishops and clergy not only filled ecclesiastical positions, but also heavily influenced local leaders or even served as the local government. On a larger scale, the actions of powerful bishops such as Ambrose of Milan, and powerful popes, such as Gregory the Great and Leo III, gave the Church a significant role in the secular sphere. The interplay between kings and popes, bishops and counts, created an environment within which political power shifted and balanced between the two.<sup>18</sup> Although the issue was ever-present, a semblance of balance was usually maintained, until the Investiture Controversy of the eleventh century.

The Investiture Controversy brought the issue of spiritual and temporal politics to the forefront in a significant manner, although the conflict had existed for centuries.<sup>19</sup> A

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<sup>17</sup> Robert E. Lerner, "Literacy and Learning," in *One Thousand Years: Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard L. DeMolen (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974), 165-223.

<sup>18</sup> For a good survey of medieval political thought and the interaction between Church and State in government see Gerd Tellenbach, *The Church in Western Europe from the Tenth to the Early Twelfth Century*, Timothy Reuter, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), and Walter Ullmann, *A History of Political Thought: The Middle Ages* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965); see also J.H. Burns, ed., *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c. 350-c.1450* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Antony Black, *Political Thought in Europe 1250-1450* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); and Colin Morris, *The Papal Monarchy: The Western Church from 1050-1250* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 109-133, 182-236.

large part of the controversy centered on authority to appoint bishops, resulting in a declaration that only the Church had the right to appoint bishops and grant them their authority. For medieval political theory, the Investiture Controversy signified, among other things, the beginning of serious intellectual inquiry into the origins of authority in government. Although, on the surface, the debate revolved around bishops and who could appoint them, the ultimate disagreement centered on the issue mentioned above, whether secular rulers held more authority than popes, or vice versa.<sup>20</sup> Medieval scholars energetically addressed this issue, producing volumes of literature on the topic, arguing both in favor of and against the imperial and papal sides.<sup>21</sup> In much of this literature, Caesar became an important figure, most often used to represent the Roman Empire, whether the argument was against imperial authority, or not.

Another important point to make is that medieval scholars, up until the transition to Renaissance humanism, viewed themselves as the inheritors of the classical tradition. This had significant ramifications for the terms within which they understood and used classical texts. They rarely examined texts critically or treated them as a modern historian treats a primary source document; instead they studied and wrote as if building upon, and not responding to or analyzing, classical texts.<sup>22</sup> This, in many ways, explains the

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<sup>19</sup> For a history of the Investiture Controversy see Uta-Renate Blumenthal, *The Investiture Controversy: Church and Monarchy from the Ninth to the Twelfth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988).

<sup>20</sup> Karl F. Morrison, ed., *The Investiture Controversy: Issues, Ideals, and Results* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 6-37. These pages divide the Controversy into three issues: law, government, and property; at the heart of these issues are the conflicts between the Church and Empire and difficulties within the Papacy itself.

<sup>21</sup> Nederman and Forhan, *Medieval Political Theory*, 14-15.

standard representation of Caesar found throughout early and some late medieval literature: Julius Caesar was the man who built the Roman Empire and ruled as the first emperor, but was slain because he became a tyrant. This conception of Caesar was not, as far as can be determined, seriously examined, changed, or questioned until the High Middle Ages and the movement from scholasticism to humanism.

Recognizing the transition between medieval scholasticism and Renaissance humanism is important for the present study, particularly how that transition influenced views of Julius Caesar. The idea of an intellectual transition, including how, when, and why such a change occurred, is debated among historians of the late Middle Ages and the early Renaissance. While humanism can be described as a radical revolution from the intellectual methods of medieval scholasticism, it can also be contended that the process was evolutionary, rather than revolutionary. However, although the degree of difference is debatable, it is clear that there was some shift between medieval and Renaissance thought. And, while historians debate over the areas in which scholarship changed between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, methods of source analysis and the manner in which classical texts were used as sources to write history are areas where changes clearly occurred.

Although there are many similarities between scholasticism and humanism, one main difference is the use of classical texts. Medieval scholars, as previously discussed,

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<sup>22</sup> Nederman and Forhan explain this point quite well, stating: “Where Renaissance Humanism sought to study antiquity as the distant historical past – emphasizing textual and contextual accuracy – medieval thinkers perceived themselves as the direct heirs of classical Greece and Rome. As such, political theorists in the Middle Ages were usually most concerned to adapt the lessons of ancient writing to more immediate circumstances and problems. Fidelity to the original author’s intentions meant considerably less during the Middle Ages than did quests for truths which were ultimately rooted in Holy Scripture,” 3-4.



generally used classical texts for facts and details, rather than looking at them in context or as a whole. Bolgar states that during medieval times, “outside the specialties, the classical learning of the age was focused on the detail rather than on the broad general characteristics of ancient authors.”<sup>23</sup> Instead of questioning and criticizing classical texts, medieval scholars took them at their word, using details and facts from texts as well as adapting classical forms in their writing. This stands in stark contrast to the humanism of the early Renaissance, when scholars began to critically examine and question classical texts.

In accordance with this shift in intellectual inquiry, Bolgar, in his work on the classical heritage, argues that from the Carolingian Age to the end of the Renaissance the classical heritage has two parts, imitation and discovery.<sup>24</sup> As humanism developed, scholars shifted from merely imitating the classics to discovering them; they began to look beyond details and facts to study the authors of texts and how classical sources related to each other. Comparing and contrasting increased, and previously unpopular and ignored texts were more frequently used.<sup>25</sup> Also, as scholars shifted their focus to a critical analysis of texts, they began to discover the classics, and not just imitate them.

Interestingly, despite this altered scholarly focus, it appears that images of Caesar changed little from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. Over time, he was consistently portrayed as the founder of the Empire, and remained a representation of imperial power

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<sup>23</sup> Bolgar, *The Classical Heritage*, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Bolgar, *The Classical Heritage*, 4.

<sup>25</sup> Caesar’s own writings are an example of this; by the fifteenth century Caesar’s works were a standard part of the educational curriculum.

and tyranny. The development of humanism added more nuance to these images and Caesar himself began to warrant closer scrutiny. (This is evidenced by the more frequent appearance of Caesar's image in Renaissance texts, as well as the increased use of Caesar's own writings by Renaissance authors.) Nevertheless, Caesar's image as the founder of the Roman Empire and the first emperor remained strong.

The differences between scholastic and humanistic thought are especially pertinent to the present work, as several of the authors examined herein highlight various aspects of both systems of thought. John of Salisbury, dubbed by Liebeschütz as a "medieval humanist," represents a medieval attitude towards the classics, but his analysis often tends to move deeper than most of his contemporaries, foreshadowing the humanist scholars to come. Petrarch, commonly known as the father of humanism, also embodies the transition from scholastic to humanistic thought in his approach to classical texts. Throughout his writings it is clear that Petrarch approached his study of the classics with a great deal of care, and that he meticulously compared authors and texts in order to determine the most correct representation of events. However, there is still an element of medieval thought in his writings, especially in his use of Caesar as an example of imperial power. In the works of these authors, Caesar's image can be seen as representative of the transition from a medieval to a humanist approach to the classics.

Set into this intellectual background, there are three main discussions in which Caesar's image consistently plays a role over the course of the Middle Ages and the early Renaissance. First, as mentioned above, Caesar appears as a representation of the Roman Empire in discussions of the power of the church versus the power of the state. The

power struggle between the church and medieval kings dates back, at the very least, to Ambrose, Bishop of Milan and his assertion of control over the Emperor Theodosius in the sixth century.<sup>26</sup> This struggle continued to rage after the collapse of the Roman Empire in the west, as bishops took over local leadership; then, as the Franks rose in power, the relationship of the Church and the State further solidified with the conversion of Clovis to Catholic Christianity. Perhaps one of the most important events in this debate was the coronation of Charlemagne, who, according to Einhard, would not have participated in Mass on Christmas day 800 had he known the pope would crown him emperor.<sup>27</sup> The struggle for ultimate authority continued with the successors of Charlemagne and the development of the Holy Roman Empire. In medieval Italy in particular, the struggle for secular power was mixed between the church, independent communes, republics, duchies, and the Holy Roman Empire. As the Papal States expanded and the popes obtained more political control, the debate concerning the right of the Church to secular rule inspired many works attempting to justify either the secular rule of the Church or the separation of spiritual and temporal powers. Because of his close association with the Roman Empire and its foundation, Julius Caesar's image appeared in this discussion both in favor of and opposing the papacy.

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<sup>26</sup> Ambrose suggested that the Church held a higher power than the Empire when he refused to give Theodosius the sacrament after a battle in which Theodosius and his armies slaughtered hundreds of innocent people. Theodosius had to do penance and submit to Ambrose in order to regain good standing with the Church. This incident was one of the first in a long line of similar occasions, when the Church exerted spiritual authority and demonstrated that the Church ultimately held authority over the temporal powers of the Empire. See Neil B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 141, 143, 307, 315-322, 354.

<sup>27</sup> Einhard, *The Life of Charlemagne*.<sup>28</sup>

Another debate in which the image of Julius Caesar figures is the question of whether the independent republic or the imperial monarchy is the best form of government. Caesar's image is significant in these discussions because of his position in history between the fall of the Roman Republic and the rise of the Empire. Caesar's role as dictator, the extension of his dictatorial powers for life, his military prowess, and his popularity with the people of Rome, combined with the establishment of the Empire by his grand-nephew Augustus and his successors, make it hard even for modern historians, with more available sources available than earlier scholars, to determine the nature of Caesar's rule. Uncertainty about his motives and designs enabled writers to view Caesar in any light they desired; thus he is portrayed diversely as the hero who saved the Republic until he was undeservedly assassinated, the great founder of the Empire who was wrongly assassinated by the jealous oligarchy, and as the imperial monarch justly killed by those who loved the best form of government – the Republic.

Perhaps the most important discussion in which Caesar serves as a central figure is the tyrannicide debate. The lawful killing of tyrannical monarchs and emperors was an important topic for medieval and Renaissance Italians in particular (though scholars in other countries also concerned themselves with tyranny) since their world oscillated between government by independent city-states and the rule of the Empire. During the late Middle Ages and throughout the Renaissance, Italian scholars wrote a number of treatises on government, most of which contain some kind of statement on tyranny. In these writings Caesar appears either as the justly slain tyrant and destroyer of the Republic, or a fallen hero, the murdered founder of the glorious Roman Empire. Also, in

these discussions, Caesar's image is closely tied to that of his assassins, especially Brutus. The tyrannicide debate often involves argument over whether Brutus was a hero or a murderer, and Caesar, not surprisingly, is either a hero or a tyrant based on the author's view of Brutus, and vice versa.

Through an examination of the writings of several key authors from the Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance, these themes become evident. Although there are numerous texts and authors which employ Caesar as an image, there are a few which powerfully illustrate the ideas and themes discussed above. These authors include Geoffrey of Monmouth, John of Salisbury, Thomas Aquinas, Dante Alighieri, Francesco Petrarca, Coluccio Salutati, and Leonardo Bruni. An analysis of Caesar's image in the works of these authors firmly demonstrates that the two main factors which influenced how Caesar was portrayed include the ways depictions of Caesar in the classical texts available to medieval and Renaissance authors, and the contemporary political issues and intellectual environment of each author. Close study also shows that Caesar consistently served as a representation of the Roman Empire in discussions about the power of the Empire versus the power of the Church, in disputes concerning whether monarchy or independent republics were the best form of government, and in debates over what constitutes and whether it is lawful to kill a tyrant. Accordingly, each chapter hereafter focuses on images of Caesar in these authors, the reasons for their specific portrayals, and the ramifications they hold for the image of Caesar as a whole.

For example, Chapter Two focuses on the classical sources most influential in later knowledge and portrayals of Caesar, namely the works of Vergil, Lucan, and

Suetonius. In the writings of these three men we find the source of Caesar's imperial image, as well as information pertinent to positive and negative depictions of Caesar. Each author makes a different contribution. Vergil ties Caesar firmly to the foundation of the Empire and Rome's divine destiny, allowing later authors such as Dante to exalt Caesar as the founder of a divinely inspired Roman Empire. Lucan's depiction of an arrogant, blood-thirsty tyrant who was the source of so much civil war and destruction provided the image of Caesar that later republican, anti-imperial authors such as Leonardo Bruni used; Lucan's Caesar also became a Caesar for whom tyrannicide was justified. Suetonius's impact also cannot be underestimated, especially his influence on the idea of Caesar as the first emperor. Because Caesar was the first of Suetonius's imperial biographies it was easy for later authors to assume that Caesar was the first emperor. Also, the various anecdotes and contradictory descriptions of Caesar found in Suetonius provide later authors with the ability to portray any kind of Caesar they desired, facilitating a malleable concept of who Caesar was and what he represented.

The third chapter surveys images of Caesar from Late Antiquity through the Middle Ages, focusing specifically on authors of the High Middle Ages such as Geoffrey of Monmouth, John of Salisbury, and Thomas Aquinas. Throughout the Early Middle Ages there are a few important portrayals of Caesar, such as that of St. Augustine, but in general Caesar was used only as a time reference in a chronicle, or discussed in conjunction with a particular topic such as the conquest of Gaul. Geoffrey's portrayal of Caesar as the conqueror of Britain is also an example of the flexibility of Caesar's image, while John of Salisbury and Thomas Aquinas's use of Caesar in discussion of tyrannicide

shows an increased interest in Caesar himself, not just what he represented, and foreshadows later depictions of Caesar.

In Chapter Four, which treats the transition to the Renaissance in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, the focus shifts to Dante and Petrarch, both of whom used images of Caesar to argue on behalf of imperial government. Caesar was an important symbol for Dante, particularly in his great epic poem, the *Divina Commedia*, and Dante uses Caesar to discuss the relationship that he believes should exist between the Church and the Holy Roman Empire. Petrarch also ties Caesar to the Empire, but he adds to the image of Caesar as well, by focusing on Caesar's personality and moral characteristics.

Following the trends set by Dante and Petrarch, Chapter Five describes how Renaissance scholars such as Coluccio Salutati and Leonardo Bruni continued to use Caesar as a symbol and central figure in discussions of tyrannicide and government. The influence of humanism and new scholarly methods are evident in Bruni and Salutati's portrayals of Caesar, however there are also signs of continuity from the Middle Ages, since their use of Caesar remains consistent with the idea of Caesar as the first emperor. Salutati's goal was to create an image of Caesar that would vindicate Dante's portrayal of Caesar while at the same time staying true to Florentine, republican ideals. Similarly, Caesar becomes an important symbol for Bruni in his defense of republican ideals against monarchy and the empire. Both Bruni and Salutati's portrayals of Caesar are more nuanced than those that went before, however, both also continued the medieval tradition of an imperial image of Caesar.

Settled into their proper intellectual and political backgrounds, the images of Caesar in the works of these authors not only provide us with a better understanding of Caesarian historiography, but they also lend insight into the issues important to medieval and Renaissance scholars, and the ways in which classical knowledge was transmitted into and interpreted by the medieval world. In general, Caesar's image is representative of the transition between ancient, medieval, and Renaissance scholarship, and as such deserves careful study and consideration. Additionally, an examination of Caesar's image over this time period also gives insight to the reasons that Caesar remained an important figure in Roman history, and perhaps even suggests why he remains the most well-known Roman in the world today.



## Chapter II Classical Images of Caesar: Vergil, Lucan, and Suetonius

Any study of the image of Julius Caesar must necessarily begin with some examination of classical portrayals of Caesar the man and his life. Much of the information known about Julius Caesar comes from the writings of his contemporaries such as Cicero and Sallust, in addition to his own written works. Then there are the authors who follow behind Caesar a generation or two, such as Tacitus and, even later, Plutarch. In fact, the list of ancient sources that deal with Caesar is extensive and would require more space than available to adequately inspect each one. However, since the task at hand is to trace the image of Caesar from Late Antiquity through the Early Renaissance it is essential to examine carefully the works which most heavily influenced medieval and Renaissance scholars: Vergil's *Aeneid*, Suetonius's *Divus Iulius*, and the *Civil War* of Lucan. Through their epic poetry both Vergil and Lucan communicate ideas about Caesar's motives and personality as well as Caesar's place in Roman history, while Suetonius connects Caesar to the imperial period with his biographies of the twelve Caesars. A close study of these works reveals them as the source of several trends in later portrayals of Caesar, including the image of Caesar as the founder of the empire, his image as a tyrant, and the adaptability of his image for both positive and negative use.

At first, Vergil's *Aeneid* is not an obvious choice for one of the works that most influenced later portrayals of Caesar, especially since the poem focuses on glorifying Augustus, not Julius, Caesar. However, because Augustus was the heir and adopted son of Caesar, the two are closely tied together by family relation and their name. In fact, Augustus owed much of his success to the Caesarian name, and was even referred to as

“the boy who owes everything to a name.”<sup>28</sup> Because of Augustus the family name “Caesar” became associated with imperial rule and became the title for the office of emperor, but it was through his relation to Julius Caesar that Augustus was able to claim direct descent from Aeneas. And, since Aeneas is the main character in Vergil’s poem, even if Caesar himself does not figure prominently, he is certainly the reason that Vergil was able to connect Augustus and Aeneas thereby creating a glorious destiny for Rome. There is no question then, that the *Aeneid*’s glorification of Aeneas and the Julian clan as his descendants were reflected in later images of Julius Caesar.

The purpose for which Vergil composed the *Aeneid* is still a hotly debated topic among historians and classicists. Some argue that Vergil was forced to write the poem as propaganda for Augustus, while others argue that Vergil composed the poem with a sincere desire to portray Augustus in a favorable light. It is true that Augustus commissioned Vergil to write the *Aeneid* and this leads some to immediately argue that Vergil’s praise in the poem cannot then be sincere. However, Stocker points out that poets at the time, in order to have their work published and read by a large audience, needed patrons to support them, and there was no better patron than the emperor. Also, Stocker reminds us that at the time the epic was commissioned Octavian was generally viewed as a victorious leader, who had restored peace to the Roman world. This must have given the Romans high hopes for the future to come. Also it is important to keep in mind the fact that nearly everyone at the time was honoring Augustus, including the government and the Senate. There is just as much reason, then, to argue that the

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<sup>28</sup> Cicero, *Phillipic* 13.XI.24. Here Cicero actually quotes and criticizes a letter written by Marc Antony and addressed to Hirtius and Octavian, in which Antony addressed Octavian: “O puer . . . qui omnia nomini debes.”

commission was a normal patron-client transaction and that Vergil was glad to accept the task as there is to argue that the fact that it was commissioned suggests that it was forced.<sup>29</sup>

Further convincing evidence that Vergil was not forced to write such a favorable portrayal of Augustus is found simply in the length of time that the poem took to compose. Vergil wrote the *Aeneid* at a pace of only two lines a day, and left the last part of the poem unpolished when he died. If the poem was nothing more than forced propaganda for Augustus, then there would be no need for Vergil to take such care and agonize over the details of the story. Vergil brilliantly and carefully reworked the legend of Aeneas in a way that would glorify Augustus, give Rome a divine destiny, and create a strong feeling of imperial pride.<sup>30</sup> Surely a poet of Vergil's caliber could churn out a mere piece of propaganda in a few years, rather than dedicating the major part of his life in its composition. Of course, it could also be argued that Vergil took so long to compose the epic because he never wanted it to be finished and published, but taken into consideration with several other factors, such as the fact that it generally took him a long time to compose (he took seven years to write the *Georgics*), it seems that the length of time was not a tool for delay, instead it was the conscientious care of a perfectionist poet who wanted to create an epic worthy of Augustus and Rome.

Other considerations in determining whether Vergil sincerely meant for the *Aeneid* to praise Augustus and the Julian family include the imagery of the poem and

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<sup>29</sup> Arthur F. Stocker, "Vergil in the Service of Augustus," *Vergilius*, Vol. 26 (1980): 1-3.

<sup>30</sup> Stocker, "Vergil in the Service of Augustus," 4-5; also John F. Hall, "The Original ending of the Aeneas Tale: Cato and the Historiographical Tradition of Aeneas," *Syllecta Classica* 3 (1991): 13-20.

Vergil's Etruscan origins. Although some scholars such as William R. Nethercut read an underlying pessimism towards Augustus in the imagery of the poem, others such as Chester G. Starr argue that the imagery of the poem clearly proves that Vergil's praise was, indeed, sincere.<sup>31</sup> Also, John F. Hall argues convincingly that Vergil's Etruscan connection naturally inclined him to be an Augustan supporter and to portray Aeneas in a positive light.<sup>32</sup> Also, taking into account the fact that Vergil reconstructed the original Aeneas legend by adding episodes such as the time spent with Dido in Carthage and the visit to the Underworld, both of which reflect positively on the character of Aeneas, it is difficult to read the poem as an insincere piece of propaganda. Also important to note is the fact that most medieval authors seem to have taken the *Aeneid* at face value and interpreted the work as an epic poem glorifying Augustus and emphasizing the divine destiny of the Roman Empire.

Although Caesar appears in the poem several times, it is not necessarily these representations that influenced later portrayals of Caesar. Instead, it is the overall purpose of the epic and the message that it is meant to convey which impact later depictions of Caesar. In the *Aeneid* Vergil portrays Aeneas as a pious Trojan warrior, thus tracing the heritage of the Romans back to Troy. As a part of his reconstruction of the original tale, Vergil depicts Aeneas as destined to found the city of Rome, which he and his descendants were fated to rule, and Rome itself is described as a city with a great and

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<sup>31</sup> Chester G. Starr, "Virgil's Acceptance of Octavian," *The American Journal of Philology*, Vol. 76, No. 1 (1955): 34-46; William R. Nethercutt, "The Imagery of the *Aeneid*," *The Classical Journal* Vol. 67, No. 2 (Dec., 1971-Jan. 1972): 123-143.

<sup>32</sup> John F. Hall, "Publius Vergilius Maro, *Vates Etruscus*," *Vergilius* 28 (1982): 44-51.

glorious future. According to Vergil, Caesar, and Augustus as his heir, both play central roles in fulfilling the divine destiny of Rome established by Aeneas.

With the larger purpose of the poem being to demonstrate Rome's divine destiny, Vergil glorifies Augustus and Caesar by placing them into the context of that fate: both play essential roles in fulfilling the divine destiny of Rome. Vergil's choice of Aeneas as the hero of the poem allows him to bolster the reputation of Augustus and the Julian family in several ways. First, the character of Aeneas allows Vergil to easily connect Augustus and the Julians to the gods' divine plan for Rome, and not only connect them to it, but give them a central role. The Julian family claimed to be direct descendants of Aeneas through his son Iulus.<sup>33</sup> Vergil gives Iulus an important role in the poem; whenever Aeneas is waylaid on his journey from Troy to Italy, and it seems that obstacles will prevent him from fulfilling his destiny to establish Rome, he is reminded that he must continue on to Italy and found the city for the sake of his son. And, whenever the gods remind him of the responsibility he bears to his son, Aeneas always manages to achieve the task before him. By identifying Aeneas's love for and responsibility towards his son as one of his motivations, Vergil places great emphasis on Iulus and his descendants. He subtly shows his reader that Aeneas had to found Rome so that Iulus and, ultimately, the Julian family, could rule.

Further connecting Aeneas to Julius Caesar and Augustus, Vergil depicts Aeneas with certain personality traits that reflect the personalities of his descendants. One of the characteristics that both Caesar and Augustus were praised for was clemency; both were

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<sup>33</sup> John F. Hall, "The Saeculum Novum of Augustus and Its Etruscan Antecedents," in *ANRW* II.16.3 (1986): 2564-2589.

known for their religious piety and devotion to the traditions of the fathers (the *mos maiorum*) as well.<sup>34</sup> For example, in Book II of the *Aeneid* Vergil describes the sack of Troy and Aeneas's flight from the city. As one of the only men left alive in the palace of Priam, Aeneas, angry and distraught over the death of the king and his sons, sees Helen, the cause of the whole war, hiding, and in a rage he decides to kill her as punishment for the destruction she brought upon Troy. Fortunately, Vergil recounts how at that very moment the goddess Venus, Aeneas's mother, appeared to him and spoke thus:

Son, how can any bitterness awake in you such ungovernable fury? Why this blind anger? And how can your love for us have passed so far from your thoughts? Ought you not first to see where you have left Anchises your age-wearied father, and whether your wife Creusa and your son Ascanius still live? Around them everywhere the hordes of Greeks are prowling, and, if my thoughts for them had not been their defense, they would be now have been caught by the flames or devoured by the pitiless sword.<sup>35</sup>

Venus then informs Aeneas that neither Helen nor Paris were responsible for the fall of Troy, rather it was the gods and their lack of mercy that were at fault. She commands him to flee the city, and promises to guide him safely. Chastened by his mother and reminded of his family Aeneas returns home, but when he arrives Anchises, his father, refuses to leave. Disappointed, Aeneas begins to return to the battle when Creusa his wife begs him either to take them with him or stay and defend their home, pleading "Otherwise, to whom will you leave our little Iulus, your father, and me, whom you once called your

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<sup>34</sup> Piety, or *pietas*, was an important concept to the ancient Romans and entailed the fulfillment of one's duty to the gods, family, and the fatherland. For a detailed analysis of *pietas* and particularly the role it played in the Augustan Age see H. Wagenvoort, *Pietas: Selected Studies in Roman Religion* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1980), 1-20.

<sup>35</sup> Vergil, *The Aeneid*, trans. W.F. Jackson Knight (London: Penguin Books, 1958), 68. There are various Latin texts of the poem available; for the purposes of the present work however, the Latin was consulted but this prose translation was selected for use for the facility of the reader.

wife?” Then, a miracle occurs: “. . . there between the faces of the two distressed parents, and between their hands as they held him, the light cap worn by the little boy caught fire, and a bright flame, harmless to the touch, licked his soft hair, and played about his forehead.”<sup>36</sup> As Creusa and Aeneas try to extinguish the fire Anchises prays to Jupiter for confirmation that the fire is truly a sign. Suddenly, a shooting star streaks across the sky, falling near their house. Together, the fire and the star are enough to convince Anchises that the gods will favor Aeneas and his family and so, with Aeneas’s reminder that they must bring their household gods with them, the family leaves. Along the way Creusa becomes lost, and her ghost appears to Aeneas, encouraging him to go forward and fulfill the divine plan that the gods have for him.

With these events Vergil portrays Aeneas as a man favored of the gods and destined to found Rome, and he also shows the filial and religious piety possessed by Aeneas.<sup>37</sup> Aeneas is the son of a goddess (which means by extension that Caesar and Augustus were also related to the divine) and his character was such that his family meant more to him than anything else.<sup>38</sup> This image then reflected on Caesar and Augustus as descendants of Aeneas, connecting them to the divine destiny of Rome,

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<sup>36</sup> *The Aeneid*, 71.

<sup>37</sup> Another event in the poem that deserves mention here is Aeneas’s encounter with Dido in Book IV. Although he falls in love with the Carthaginian queen and almost forsakes his destiny, Venus again reminds him that he must think of his son and his destiny. This reminder from his mother spurs Aeneas into action and he forsakes Dido in order to fulfill his destiny. Wagenvoort points out that Vergil even has the distraught Dido exclaim that it was the piety of Aeneas which caused him to leave her. The fact that Aeneas would forsake all else to fulfill his duties to the gods and his family demonstrates his piety and, by extension, the piety of his descendants. See Wagenvoort, *Pietas*, 17; also *Aeneid* IV.331-448.

<sup>38</sup> According to Wagenvoort, “Aeneas is the hero because he sacrifices his own desires, his own love, for the formidable task of seeking a new land for the fugitives from Troy for whom a glorious future lay in wait,” *Pietas*, 17.

giving the foundation of the Empire a solid theological backing, while also highlighting the piety and mercy for which both men were famous.

Another influential aspect of the *Aeneid* is Aeneas's visit to the Underworld. Vergil's invention of a journey through the Underworld creates further opportunity to showcase the great future of Rome and Aeneas's descendants. As his son's guide, Anchises explains Aeneas's whole destiny and shows him the whole line of Iulus, the future rulers of Rome, including Julius Caesar and Augustus. Anchises states: "Now turn the twin gaze of your eyes this way, and look at that family, your own true Romans. For there is Caesar, and all the line of Iulus, who are destined to reach the brilliant height of Heaven. And there in very truth is he whom you have often heard of prophesied, Augustus Caesar, son of the Deified, and founder of golden centuries once more in Latium . . ." <sup>39</sup> Here Vergil mentions the deification of Caesar and portrays him as destined to become a god. This is essential to the glorification of Augustus, since he was the son of Caesar and it was Augustus himself who identified the star signifying the deification of Caesar. The star, as a symbol of Caesar's deification also appears later in the *Aeneid* during Vergil's description of a shield given to Aeneas by his mother. The famous battle of Actium appears on the shield and Augustus is described wearing his father's divine star on his forehead. Caesar then, represented as a god, lends further justification to Vergil's idea of Rome's glorious destiny and creates another divine stamp of approval for the Empire. <sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *The Aeneid*, 171.

<sup>40</sup> Wagenvoort, *Pietas*, 216-220.



Despite the fact that Vergil's poem rarely mentions or portrays Julius Caesar himself, through the glorification of Aeneas as Caesar's ancestor and Augustus as Caesar's heir, Vergil creates by extension a similar conception of Caesar. And, as mentioned above, Vergil's creation of a divinely blessed Roman Empire particularly impacts later depictions of Caesar, and allows for Caesar to be used as an image representing the Roman Empire and its establishment throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

Alongside Vergil, the Roman poet Lucan exercised a profound influence on later images of Julius Caesar. Lucan's poem, the *Civil War*, is particularly important since the entire work focuses on the war between Caesar and Pompey, who are the main characters of the poem. Lucan is not a favorite among modern scholars, but he enjoyed great popularity during the Middle Ages and was often referred to as an authoritative source by men such as Dante, Petrarch, and Bruni.<sup>41</sup> Lucan's poem is almost a polar opposite of Vergil's positive imperial stance, and Lucan certainly has no desire to portray his characters as destined by the gods for specific roles in the history of Rome. Additionally, Lucan is often criticized for his poor historical sensibilities, as he is guilty of inventing circumstances, speeches, events, etc., that make the poem an untrustworthy account of the historical civil war. This explains medieval misunderstandings by authors who used Lucan as a factual source. Lucan, however, did not intend to write a chronicle of events; instead he aimed throughout the poem to communicate a message about the horrific destruction caused by civil war. This accounts for the fact that his characters become

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<sup>41</sup> Christine Walde, "Caesar, Lucan's *Bellum Civile*, and their Reception," in Maria Wyke, ed., *Julius Caesar in Western Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 45-59.

larger than life, ridiculous caricatures; he does not intend to correctly portray Julius Caesar, instead he uses Caesar as a symbol to express his message about civil war and the destruction of freedom.<sup>42</sup> Thus Lucan's portrayal of Caesar does two things: for those authors who take Lucan at his word, Caesar becomes an awful tyrant, it also paves the way for other authors to use create their own version of Caesar and use him as a symbol to communicate ideas in their own writing.

As the nephew of Seneca, author and tutor to the Emperor Nero, and as one of Nero's inner circle of friends Lucan experienced the imperial rule of Rome firsthand. He also experienced the damage caused by political intrigue; although he was close friends with the emperor for many years and took part in the literary revival promoted by Nero, the two men eventually parted ways, perhaps due to Nero's falling out with Seneca in 62 AD, and certainly impacted by the fact that Nero banned Lucan from reciting his poetry in public and blocked him from advancing in the law courts.<sup>43</sup> In 65 AD Lucan joined a conspiracy to overthrow Nero, headed by Calpurnius Piso. Unfortunately, Nero discovered the conspiracy and forced all the participants to commit suicide or be put to death. As an adherent of Stoicism, Lucan followed in the footsteps of previous stoics such as Cato and opted for suicide. Only twenty-five years old, he killed himself in April of 65 AD.

The context of Lucan's life is a key component to understanding the *Civil War* and the depiction of Caesar in this work. Due to Lucan's involvement in the conspiracy

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<sup>42</sup> For critical discussion of the poem see W.R. Johnson, *Momentary Monsters: Lucan and his Heroes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987) and Jamie Masters, *Poetry and Civil War in Lucan's 'Bellum Civile'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>43</sup> See Braund, xiv; also Masters, *Poetry and Civil War*, 217.

against Nero it would seem that the poem's negative portrayal of Caesar serves as a direct commentary against Nero as Caesar's heir. However, S.H. Braund points out that it is important to remember that Lucan was a good friend of the emperor early on, and that Lucan participated in a conspiracy whose goal was not to restore the Republic but instead to replace Nero with a better emperor.<sup>44</sup> Braund also highlights Lucan's favorable treatment of Domitius Ahenobarbus, Nero's great-great-grandfather, including the fact that Lucan altered historical details to make Nero's ancestor appear quite heroic.<sup>45</sup> Based on this evidence then, it is difficult to read Caesar's character in the poem as a negative representation of Nero. Also, because Lucan was not necessarily opposed to absolute power – just Nero's misuse of it – Lucan uses Caesar's character to show, in his opinion, the end result of the misuse of power. The poem, then, can be read as a warning for Nero to be aware of his power and to use it well.

In its entirety, the poem covers the events of the civil war between Caesar and Pompey, beginning with Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon in 49 BC and ending with the death of Pompey in Egypt in 48 BC. The poem was longer than this, but the concluding books were either lost or never finished; speculation suggests that the poem ended, or was intended to end, with the suicide of Cato in 46 BC. As stated earlier, Caesar and Pompey, along with Cato, serve as the major characters in the epic, although among them it is difficult to find a protagonist who fits the classic ideal of a hero. Both Caesar and

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<sup>44</sup> Lucan, *Civil War*, S.H. Braund, trans. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), xiv-xv.

<sup>45</sup> Braund, *Civil War*, xv, 293. Here Braund explains that Lucan portrays Ahenobarbus as valiant and noble in his surrender to Caesar and his death at the battle of Pharsalus whereas in reality other sources such as Caesar and Cicero record that Ahenobarbus betrayed his garrison to Caesar and was killed either by the cavalry or by Antony at the battle of Pharsalus. It obvious then that Lucan reconstructed events to glorify Nero's ancestor, suggesting that the poem is not entirely anti-Neronian.

Pompey are portrayed with significant weaknesses, Caesar his lust for power and Pompey his insecurity and hesitation, and even Cato, although depicted as the wise Stoic valiantly fighting for the Republican cause, is a one-dimensional character.<sup>46</sup>

Also, unlike other epics such as the *Aeneid*, the *Civil War* never mentions specific gods or divine intervention. Braund suggests that Lucan avoided any “divine machinery” in the poem so the reader would not be distracted from his main characters and because he wanted to highlight human responsibility for the war. Lucan does, however, include the ideas of Fate and Fortune, portraying the outcome of the Civil War as the handiwork of Fate and the respective rise and fall of each character as the work of Fortune. Lucan also allows his characters to have visions and dreams which influence and foreshadow their future actions and ends.<sup>47</sup> This lack of divine intervention serves the purpose of the poem, and Lucan’s character of Caesar, well.

In order to create the image of a brilliant, talented, but power-hungry Caesar, Lucan uses several characters and analogies that prove influential in the writing of later authors. For example, Lucan brings the Roman senator Curio into the poem to showcase the corruption of the Roman government, and shift some of the blame for the civil war onto Curio’s shoulders, since Curio was one of those who encouraged Caesar to fight. This characterization of Curio becomes essential later for Dante, who is able to preserve his positive image of Caesar by placing the blame for Caesar’s march on Rome on Curio. In addition to Curio, Lucan briefly recounts the horrors that occurred during an earlier

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<sup>46</sup> Braund, *Civil War*, xxii.

<sup>47</sup> Braund, *Civil War*, xxiii, xxix.

civil war between Marius and Sulla, using them as a historical parallel for the wars that occur between Caesar and Pompey.

However, it is Lucan's association of Caesar with Hannibal that is perhaps the most damning element for Caesar's character in the poem.<sup>48</sup> Hannibal was the most hated of all Roman enemies, and the defeat of Hannibal and the ultimate conquest of Carthage were remembered as the most glorious of all Roman victories. Associating Caesar with Hannibal then, is the ultimate way of portraying Caesar as an enemy to Rome. Lucan draws a connection between Caesar and Hannibal several times throughout the poem, such as likening Caesar to an angry "Libyan lion" in Book I. Also in the first book, after describing the crossing of the Rubicon, Lucan relates the events of Caesar's march through Italy towards Rome. Lucan depicts Caesar's arrival at Arminium and depicts the people of the city as terrified of Caesar's invasion:

When they recognized the gleam of Roman eagles, Roman standards and caught a sight of Caesar towering among his troops, they stiffened in fear, their icy limbs were seized by terror, and in their breasts they silently turned over unuttered complaints: 'O how unlucky are these city-walls, established next to Gauls, doomed by bitter position! Throughout all peoples deep peace reigns but we are madmen's victims, their first halt . . . We were the first to witness movements of Senones, the Cimbrian attack, the Libyan war-god, and the charge of frenzied Teuton: whenever Fortune challenges Rome, this is the path of war.'<sup>49</sup>

Not only does Lucan portray the people of Arminium as terrified at the presence of Caesar's army, but he also cleverly adds the lamentation that their city is always invaded

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<sup>48</sup> Masters, *Poetry and the Civil War*, 1. Masters argues here that one of Lucan's consistent themes through the poem is that of Caesar crossing boundaries, both physical and intangible; Master's points out that the first boundary Caesar crosses in the poem is the Alps, which immediately calls to mind the Hannibal's crossing of the Alps as well.

<sup>49</sup> Lucan, *Civil War*, Book I.244-257.

because of its position on the way to Rome. Lucan lists the enemies who have assaulted Arminium during attempts to invade Rome and the “Libyan war-god” referred to here is Hannibal, to whom Arminium fell victim on his march through Italy. Now, according to Lucan, Caesar makes Arminium a victim again, just like Hannibal and other enemies have done. Later in the same book Lucan again compares Caesar’s march on Rome to the march of Hannibal: “By warfare’s vast commotion Rome is shaken just as though the Carthaginian were crossing the Alps . . .”<sup>50</sup> This comparison makes Caesar equal with Hannibal and sets the stage for another, even more unflattering analogy.

Lucan draws a further parallel between Hannibal and Caesar in the seventh book of the poem, and this time the comparison is less subtle and more severe. Lucan depicts Caesar on the morning after the battle of Pharsalus looking over the destruction and bloodshed strewn across the battle field. The description of the scene is gruesome, and Lucan’s account of Caesar’s feelings at the sight of the dead is less than flattering. He writes:

He [Caesar] sees rivers driven on by gore and mounds of corpses high as lofty hills, he watches heaps sinking into putrefaction and counts the peoples of Magnus; a place for feasting is prepared from where he can discern the faces and the features of the dead. He is delighted that he cannot see the Emathian land and that his eyes scan fields hidden underneath the carnage. In the blood he sees his fortune and his gods. And not to lose the joyful sight of his wickedness, in a frenzy he refuses those unfortunates the pyre’s flame and forces on to guilty heaven the sight of Emathia. The Carthaginian who buried the consul at Cannae lit by Libyan torches do not compel him to observe the customs of humanity towards an enemy . . .<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Lucan, *Civil War*, Book I.303-304.

<sup>51</sup> Lucan, *Civil War*, Book 7.789-801.

As if the joy he felt at viewing the battlefield was not enough to condemn Caesar, Lucan relates that he did not even give the dead a proper burial.<sup>52</sup> The severity of this accusation is increased by Lucan's comparison of Caesar's behavior to that of Hannibal after the battle of Cannae. Even Hannibal, Lucan points out, granted the enemy the courtesy of a proper burial, and Caesar didn't even grant his enemy – his countrymen – the same consideration. In this instance, Caesar is more than just similar to Hannibal, Lucan portrays him as worse than Hannibal, going beyond the idea of Caesar as a power-hungry dictator to depict Caesar as an enemy to Rome.

In addition to drawing a parallel between Caesar and Hannibal, Lucan also places an unflattering comparison to Alexander the Great in the poem. Lucan creates an opportunity for himself to discuss Alexander by having Caesar visit Alexander's grave at the beginning of Book Ten. Then, Lucan uses a description of Alexander and his unhappy end to foreshadow the life of Caesar. Lucan describes Alexander as "an evil deadly to the earth, a thunderbolt which struck all peoples equally, a star baneful to humankind."<sup>53</sup> The description of Alexander as a thunderbolt here is significant, since in book one of the poem Lucan also uses a simile of a thunderbolt to describe Caesar:

. . . fierce, indomitable, wherever hope and indignation called he moved to action, never shrank from defiling his sword . . . Just so flashes out the thunderbolt shot forth by the winds through the clouds, accompanied by the crashing of the heavens and sound of shattered ether; it splits the sky and terrifies the panicked people . . . both as it falls and then returns great is the devastation dealt far and wide before it gathers again its scattered fires.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Johnson, *Momentary Monsters*, 102-103.

<sup>53</sup> Lucan, *Civil War*, Book 10.34-35.

<sup>54</sup> Lucan, *Civil War*, Book 1.146-147, 151-157.

Just as Alexander was a thunderbolt who struck all nations, so Caesar was a thunderbolt who brought devastation to the peoples he conquered and to the Roman world.

There is another part to Lucan's description of Alexander which, if the poem had been finished or the final books not been lost, might have taken the comparison between the two further. Lucan ends his brief discussion of Alexander by describing how his death brought on the ruin of many cities. Because Alexander died suddenly and left no heirs to inherit his entire fortune, he left the cities of his empire, in Lucan's own words, "to be torn apart."<sup>55</sup> Lucan highlights the fact that after Alexander's death his empire was divided among his generals and warfare eventually ensued. What has this to do with Caesar? Perhaps had Lucan carried the work to the assassination of Caesar he might have pointed out that Caesar's death, like Alexander's, plunged the Empire again into a state of civil war. The comparison does not entirely work (since Caesar did leave Octavian as his heir) however, there were others such as Antony, who competed with Octavian for control of the state, causing years of civil war until Octavian emerged victorious. Of course it is impossible to know if Lucan even considered such a connection; however, the other parallels drawn between Caesar and Hannibal suggest it as a possibility.

Besides the countless unflattering descriptions of Caesar found throughout the *Civil War*, even the general theme of the poem creates a negative image of Caesar. As stated earlier, the poem is meant not as an anti-imperial epic, but rather as a demonstration of the devastation caused by civil warfare. Also, Lucan's epic serves as a warning against the causes of civil war: the lust for power and competition between

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<sup>55</sup> Lucan, *Civil War*, Book 10.44-45.



political rivals. If Lucan's overall goal is to showcase the evils and horrors of civil strife, and if his main characters are the participants in that civil strife, then these characters must be made to appear as terrible as the destruction they cause and represent.<sup>56</sup> Thus neither Caesar nor Pompey receives a flattering image in Lucan's work; they cannot if his poem is to achieve its purpose. Of course Lucan also does his best to accentuate the chaos, death, and devastation caused by war simply through graphic depictions of battles and their aftermath, but that itself is not enough to communicate his message. Instead, unlike Vergil who places some responsibility for events on destiny and the gods, Lucan must portray his main characters as the source of the strife, thus warning against others who may behave in a similar fashion. In fact, according to W.R. Johnson, "Lucan's Caesar, in his ephemeral glory, in the violence of his feeding frenzy, surrounded by the crowds who create him, stands as a brilliant, suitably grotesque, suitably terrifying symbol. It is because Lucan hates and fears so utterly what Caesar represents that he devotes so much of his poem to him . . ."<sup>57</sup> This theme of the poem and Caesar as its symbol make the *Civil War* incredibly useful to later authors, who use the example of Caesar based on Lucan's account to argue against tyranny and absolute rule in their own day.

Moving outside the realm of epic poetry, the most significant source that medieval and Renaissance scholars turned to for factual information about Caesar and his

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<sup>56</sup> The major proponent of this interpretation of the *Civil War* is W.R. Johnson who, in his analysis of the poem, argues that Lucan's characters are so outlandish and dramatic that it is highly unlikely that he was attempting to write history, rather exaggerated his characters and their flaws to demonstrate the evils of civil war. Johnson even aptly calls Lucan's main characters "momentary monsters" who serve as representations of the forces of history; Cato as the "delusions of virtue," Pompey as the "illusions of history," and Caesar as the "phantasmagoria of power." See Johnson, *Momentary Monsters*, 37-38, 69-71, 103-105.

<sup>57</sup> Johnson, *Momentary Monsters*, 117.

life was the work of Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, commonly known as Suetonius. A prolific author and scholar who flourished during the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian, Suetonius composed works on topics ranging from natural history to grammar, but he is best known for his biographies of the emperors, or *Lives of the Caesars*, the only of his works to survive almost in its entirety to the present day. The work is divided into twelve books chronicling the lives of twelve Emperors, beginning with Julius Caesar and ending with Domitian. Unfortunately, the only portion of the biographies that did not survive to the present includes the first few chapters of the life of Caesar; these are believed to have been lost somewhere between the sixth and the early part of the ninth century.<sup>58</sup>

Nevertheless, the *Lives of the Caesars*, influenced later authors such as Einhard (who imitated the biographical form for his life of Charlemagne) and became one of the main sources scholars turned to for information concerning the emperors. As such, the information Suetonius included about Caesar and the manner in which Caesar is portrayed in the biography significantly impacted later characterizations of Caesar.

Suetonius's book on Caesar, entitled *Divus Iulius*, is more a collection of facts and information about Caesar than a biography in the traditional sense.<sup>59</sup> Suetonius appears to have no ultimate goal in his portrayal of Caesar, other than to provide the reader with information about the dictator's life that could not be found elsewhere.

Indeed, Suetonius includes both positive and negative representations of Caesar, creating

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<sup>58</sup> Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, J.C. Rolfe, ed. and trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), xiii.

<sup>59</sup> Andrew Wallace-Hadrill aptly describes Suetonius's form of biography thus: "Rather than let biography become history, he would write not-history . . . negatively Suetonius wrote not-history; positively he wrote scholarship," see Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius: The Scholar and His Caesars* (London: Duckworth, 1983), 9-10.

opportunities for analysis of Caesar beyond the mere facts of events.<sup>60</sup> According to Rolfe, Suetonius employed a variety of sources to gain his information, including historical records and personal interviews, and although it may seem as if this would make his biography more trustworthy it often does not.<sup>61</sup> Despite his attempt at impartiality, Suetonius rarely discriminates between sources to determine credibility, although he occasionally comments on the truthfulness of information he includes.<sup>62</sup> Thus, instead of creating an unbiased account, Suetonius sometimes treats false information with the same validity as realistic fact. Stories of scandal are placed alongside solidly documented political events creating intriguing, complex, and somewhat contradictory portraits of each emperor, including Julius Caesar.<sup>63</sup> For this reason, Suetonius, perhaps unwittingly, creates the flexibility of Caesar's image: later

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<sup>60</sup> One pertinent example of this is how Suetonius deals with the Gallic Wars. Instead of describing the battles and events of the war in detail Suetonius spends only one paragraph on the Caesar's successes and failures. Then, he spends a good deal of time discussing Caesar's qualities as a leader, sharing anecdotes about his relationship with the troops, his bold strategies, and his bravery on the battlefield. Such discussion set Suetonius apart from other Roman authors and, again, contributes to the multi-purpose nature of Caesar's image in later years. See Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, 12.

<sup>61</sup> Rolfe, xviii.

<sup>62</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, 23-24. This is another unique point about Suetonius's style; he is an extremely un-intrusive author. Wallace-Hadrill states: "He offers no epigrams or *sententiae*. He does not even guide the reader towards approval or disapproval. Value-judgments must often be implicit in the items he relates; yet he seeks to keep himself and his opinions in low profile."

<sup>63</sup> It is important to note here that Suetonius's method of composition is not necessarily bad, rather it can be looked at as a part of Suetonius's style as an author. In fact, Richard C. Lounsbury calls for a revision of Suetonian scholarship and argues convincingly that too often Suetonius is viewed as a bad historian, instead of an author with a particular style. Lounsbury asserts that Suetonius was keenly aware of his role as a biographer, not a historian, and that his *Vitae* were written in accordance with that role and the goal to bring his subjects to life. Lounsbury states, "History is gossip that lasts; who has made it last deserves the credit . . . Suetonius is the engraver, his *vitae* the engraver's art," nevertheless, Suetonius "must be acquitted" of the charge of being a gossip because stylistically his work lacks the salacious and ephemeral tone of gossip; see Richard C. Lounsbury, *The Arts of Suetonius: An Introduction* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 26, 107, 119-120.

authors were able to draw both positive and negative anecdotes about Caesar, whichever suited their purpose at the time, from the variety of fact found in Suetonius.

In general, *Divus Iulius* discusses Caesar's military and political careers, as well as his personal life. Caesar is portrayed neither as a glorious leader nor as a cruel tyrant; rather he is a mixed character. Based on the information included by Suetonius, Caesar can be depicted as a brilliant administrator who knew how to bend the government and the system to his will, but also a man who had many moral weaknesses. He is an arrogant aristocrat and power hungry, but also a favorite of the people and possessed of great mercy.<sup>64</sup> These conflicting reports on Caesar's character are central to understanding later uses of Caesar as a symbol. Because he is described in both positive and negative terms, authors took from Suetonius only the information necessary to support their particular point. Eventually, this trend distanced representations of Caesar from the actual historical man and contributed to the mythic persona of Caesar.<sup>65</sup>

One of Suetonius's significant contributions to later representations of Caesar is his discussion of Caesar in relation to monarchy and the establishment of imperial rule. Although Suetonius never calls Caesar an emperor, he does suggest that Caesar had monarchical aspirations and often portrays Caesar as a man willing to do almost anything to gain the favor of the people and political power. For example, in his discussion of the issues surrounding the crossing of the Rubicon, Suetonius suggests that Caesar's claim

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<sup>64</sup> Suetonius, *Divus Iulius*.LXXIV. Wallace-Hadrill also comments on the balance in the work between friendly accounts of Caesar and the negative accusations of his contemporaries, see Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, 63.

<sup>65</sup> Proof of the popularity of Suetonius's work lies not only in the numerous references made to him by medieval authors, but also in later printing statistics; from 1407 to 1829 more than two hundred editions of Suetonius were published. Lounsbury, in fact, spends an entire chapter of his work discussing the frequent use of Suetonius in early modern texts, see Lounsbury, *Suetonius*, 27-39.

that he marched on Rome to defend the Tribunes and the people from the Senate was merely an excuse for civil war. Suetonius then proceeds to give other possible reasons for the march on Rome, such as Pompey's accusation that Caesar didn't want to return because he could not give the people all that he had promised them and Cato's intention to impeach and try Caesar upon his return. Suetonius also includes a quote attributed to Caesar after the battle of Pharsalus: "Even I, Gaius Caesar, after so many great deeds should have been found guilty, if I had not turned to my army for help."<sup>66</sup> Suetonius further explains that the loyalty of his army developed in Caesar a love of power and that "weighing the strength of his adversaries against his own, he grasped the opportunity of usurping the despotism which had been his heart's desire from his early youth."<sup>67</sup> Suetonius then turns to Cicero for support of this opinion: "Cicero too was seemingly of this opinion, when he wrote in the third book of his *De Officiis* that Caesar ever had on his lips these lines of Euripedes, of which Cicero himself adds a version: 'If wrong may e'er be right, for a throne's sake were wrong most right: – be God in all else feared.'"<sup>68</sup> It seems then, that in Suetonius's opinion, Caesar crossed the Rubicon and seized control of Rome out of a desire for power and despotism, and that he was willing to do wrong in order to gain a throne. Suetonius also asserts that Caesar knew he was guilty of breaking the law, but that he justified this by believing that anything done in an attempt to gain the throne was right, not wrong.

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<sup>66</sup> *Divus Iulius*.XXX.2-4, trans. J.C. Rolfe, 43.

<sup>67</sup> *Divus Iulius*.XXX.5, trans. J.C. Rolfe, 43.

<sup>68</sup> *Divus Iulius*.XXX.5, trans. J.C. Rolfe, 43.

Besides the march on Rome, Suetonius also discusses Caesar's monarchical aspirations in his account of Caesar's assassination. Suetonius takes time to describe how Caesar, as dictator, did and planned to do much good for Rome and the Empire, and laments that these goals were cut short by his death. Such a focus on his positive actions implies that Caesar was not a tyrannical, cruel, or power hungry ruler.<sup>69</sup> Also, Suetonius ends his life of Caesar by pointing out that none of the assassins survived Caesar by more than three years, and that many if not all of them met bad ends, perhaps as punishment for their deeds.<sup>70</sup> This would seem to suggest that Suetonius felt that Caesar's murder was unjust, especially since he calls the conspirators "Damnati omnes" and describes their murder of Caesar as "violaverant." On the other hand, Suetonius also highlights Caesar's powers as dictator and that there were many who wanted him to be king. He also cites Caesar's aspirations to monarchy as the main reason the conspirators killed him. Essentially, Suetonius asserts that the assassination of Caesar may have been just because he abused his powers and accepted too many honors:

Yet after all, his other actions and words so turn the scale, that it is thought that he abused his power and was justly slain. For not only did he accept excessive honors, such as an uninterrupted consulship, the dictatorship for life, and the censorship of public morals, as well as the forename of Emperor, the surname of Father of his Country, a statue among those of the kings, and a raised couch in the orchestra; but he also allowed honors to be bestowed on him which were too great for mortal man: a golden

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<sup>69</sup> *Divus Iulius*.XLIV.4. Again, Suetonius's contradictory portrayals of Caesar pose problems here, because it is difficult to tell if Suetonius believes that Caesar desired power his whole life long or whether he was simply driven to extreme measures by the actions of his enemies; see Christopher Pelling, "Judging Julius Caesar," in Maria Wyke, ed., *Julius Caesar in Western Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

<sup>70</sup> Suetonius states: "Hardly any of his assassins survived him for more than three years, or died a natural death. They were all condemned and they perished in various ways – some in shipwrecks, some in battle; some took their own lives with the self-same dagger with which they had impiously slain Caesar." *Divus Iulius*.LXXXIX, trans. J.C. Rolfe, 119.

throne in the House and on the judgment seat; a chariot and litter in the procession at the circus; temples, altars, and statues beside those of the gods; a special priest, an additional college of the Luperci, and the calling of one of the months by his name. In fact, there were no honors which he did not receive or confer at pleasure.<sup>71</sup>

Suetonius goes on to describe how Caesar disregarded the law in matters of elections and government office, as well as his arrogance in public speech. The final straw, according to Suetonius, which earned Caesar the eternal hatred of the Senate, was the fact that when the Senate approached him in front of the temple of Venus Genetrix to grant him honors, he did not rise to greet them. Additionally, he deposed two Tribunes who wanted to remove a white ribbon from a laurel wreath placed on the head of a statue of Caesar. From that time forward, Suetonius states, Caesar could not avoid accusations that he aspired to be a king, even though he consistently denied such allegations.<sup>72</sup>

This information, and much more, included by Suetonius, presents a mixed image of Caesar that no doubt laid the groundwork for future representations. Because Suetonius's own opinion of Caesar is difficult to glean from the work, and since he describes Caesar throughout in both positive and negative terms, later authors found in Suetonius a variety of information to support their own depictions of Caesar.<sup>73</sup> For example, Suetonius's discussion of Caesar's monarchical aspirations in connection with

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<sup>71</sup> *Divus Iulius*.LXXVI.1, trans. J.C.Rolfe, 99.

<sup>72</sup> *Divus Iulius*.LXXVII-LXXIX., trans. J.C.Rolfe, 99-103.

<sup>73</sup> Lounsbury makes an important point about the motives of Suetonius in his detailed analysis of scholarship on Suetonius, asserting that it is extremely difficult to assign a motive to Suetonius based on patronage or politics because all evidence to suggest particular motives is lost. Additionally, the style of his work is such that it is difficult to determine a specific motive behind his portrayals of the emperors. See Lounsbury, 13-15.

the assassination certainly furthered the image of Caesar as an imperial ruler, but his condemnation of the conspirators encouraged the idea of Caesar as an unjustly slain hero.

Another of the most influential aspects of *Divus Iulius* is the description of Caesar's personal appearance, mode of living, character, and conduct in personal and military life. As Andrew Wallace-Hadrill points out, this is one way that Suetonius set himself apart from other ancient historians. Instead of including only great events and high politics Suetonius concerns himself with everyday aspects of the emperors' lives, making his biographies more personal.<sup>74</sup> Woven throughout descriptions of character and habits are various anecdotes about Caesar, both positive and negative in nature, which serve as useful exempla for later medieval and Renaissance authors. And, although the truth of the stories is in many cases doubtful, they nonetheless make for an entertaining read. Famous and well-used anecdotes from Suetonius include stories about Caesar's baldness and the claim that he wore the laurel wreath all the time to cover it up (a story used later by John of Salisbury) and the fact that Caesar drank little or no wine (a story later used by Petrarch to discourage others from heavy drinking).<sup>75</sup> To his credit, Suetonius relates most of the information in this chapter as rumor, often using phrases like "It is said that" or "it is reported that," but he rarely names sources, making it difficult to determine the validity of every report. With these anecdotes and descriptions of Caesar, Suetonius creates the image of a complex man, displaying both weaknesses

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<sup>74</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, 18.

<sup>75</sup> For Suetonius's commentary on Caesar's baldness see *Divus Iulius*.XLV.2; Suetonius's commentary on Caesar and wine reads thus: "That he drank very little wine not even his enemies denied. There is a saying of Marcus Cato that Caesar was the only man who undertook to overthrow the state when sober," *Divus Iulius*.LIII.



and strengths, idiosyncrasies and perfections, all the qualities that earned Caesar both censure and praise.

Through their depictions of Julius Caesar and their own use of his image, Vergil, Lucan, and Suetonius exerted an influence over later portrayals of Caesar. Vergil contributed to the image of Caesar as the glorious founder of the Empire, blessed and destined by the gods to achieve greatness. The idea of a divinely established Empire fit in well with Christian theology and the theory of the two swords; thus through Vergil's influence, Caesar's image became useful in later discussion of the Roman Empire and secular and papal authority. Under the influence of Lucan, Caesar became a tyrant in the eyes of later authors, a blood-thirsty, power-hungry despot whose desire for absolute rule brought about the ruin of the Republic. Medieval and Renaissance authors also found plenty of good anecdotes about Caesar to use as exempla in their own writings; they also obtained from Suetonius a complicated image of Caesar, thus allowing for a wide interpretation of who Caesar really was.

Under these influences then, the image of Caesar proceeded forth into Late Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance. Inspired and informed by these classical representations of Caesar, scholars such as Thomas Aquinas, Dante, Petrarch, and Bruni not only perpetuated classical interpretation of Caesar, but each contributed to the growth of a mythic Caesar by creating their own versions of the dictator. These conceptions of Caesar, though far removed from the historical man, proved most useful in discussing and debating the issues of their own days.

### **Chapter III**

#### **From Late Antiquity Through the Thirteenth Century: Ammianus Marcellinus to Thomas Aquinas**

The image of Julius Caesar is somewhat difficult to trace through Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. One reason for this is simply that the majority of scholarly texts that survive from the third through the twelfth and thirteenth centuries do not discuss Caesar in any great detail. Since the Church became dominant in scholarly and educational matters after the fall of the Roman Empire in the West, many of the texts written during this time period focus on matters of doctrine and theology, and there was rarely a need to discuss Julius Caesar in such a context.<sup>76</sup> Caesar's image does appear in histories from the time period, but because the most popular form of historical writing during the Middle Ages was the chronicle, which rarely include debate or analysis, Caesar is usually mentioned only as a time reference in the history of the Empire, or in the context of his various conquests and foundation of cities.

However, although depictions of Caesar are not plentiful during the Early Middle Ages, there are several important points that foreshadow the images of Caesar which develop in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. First is the common medieval misconception that Caesar was the first emperor. Authors who lived under the Later Empire (before the collapse of the West in 476 AD) seem to have a more correct understanding of Caesar's office: he was a constitutional dictator, not emperor. However, after the collapse of the Empire, the nature of Caesar's rule appears to have become more blurry. There are several possible reasons why Caesar came to be viewed as the first

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<sup>76</sup> Theological texts often mention Mathew 16:21, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's," however this scripture is not a reference to Julius Caesar himself, rather to the Emperor, whoever it might be.

emperor, one being the fact that the name “Caesar” became a title associated with the office of emperor. In his will, Caesar adopted Octavian as his son. When Octavian accepted the adoption, his name became C. Julius Caesar, and later, after the deification of Caesar and the addition of several titles Augustus’s official title became “Imperator Caesar Divi Iulius filius Augustus.”<sup>77</sup> The heirs of Augustus also styled themselves as “Imperator Caesar” and thus the name transformed from a family name to an imperial title. It is then easy to see why medieval scholars naturally associated Caesar with the imperial office and believe: since he was the first “Caesar” to rule Rome, he was also the first emperor.

A second cause for the medieval misconception of Caesar as the first emperor is the influence that Suetonius’s *Lives of the Caesars* had on medieval knowledge of the early empire. Not only does Suetonius portray Caesar as an imperial figure, but the mere fact that he begins his series of imperial biographies with a biography of Julius Caesar is enough to suggest that Caesar was indeed the first emperor. And since Suetonius was one of the main sources that medieval scholars turned to it is not surprising that their image of Caesar was one of an imperial persona.

Another contributing factor to the confusion about Caesar as the first emperor was his location in time, or the chronological place he occupied between the downfall of the Republic and the beginnings of the Empire. Because the life of Caesar chronologically falls between the two forms of government it is difficult to separate him from either one, making his image utilitarian; he can either be viewed as the tyrant who overthrew the Republic and established the Empire, or he can be seen as the glorious founder of the

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<sup>77</sup> Syme, *Roman Revolution*, 113.

divinely inspired Roman Empire. However, no matter what the context in which Caesar's image appears, and despite the fact that his image is either positive or negative, the one consistency we can see throughout the Middle Ages is the portrayal of Caesar as the first emperor. An examination of a several authors from the fourth through the thirteenth centuries demonstrates that during the Middle Ages the image of Caesar as the first Roman Emperor was solidified, and that Caesar became a utilitarian symbol. As such, medieval authors invoked Caesar's image in both positive and negative ways depending on the topic and the purpose of their writings.

The work of fourth century historian Ammianus Marcellinus provides us with a useful example of the context in which Caesar's image often appeared during Late Antiquity. Ammianus's history also demonstrates that authors who lived and wrote under the Late Empire understood Caesar's role as dictator and did not view him as the first emperor. In the fifteenth book of his *Res Gestae* (a work of history which began with the accession of Nerva as emperor and was meant to pick up where Tacitus's writings left off) Marcellinus discusses the relationship between the emperor Constantius II and Gaul. But before he can discuss the dealings of Constantius in Gaul, Ammianus first provides his readers with a description of Gaul and its history. Twice within this section Julius Caesar is discussed, both times in connection with his conquest of Gaul. The first time Caesar is mentioned he is described as the "dictator Julius" who besieged the Gauls with constant warfare so till they finally ceded to him.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, when Caesar appears the

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<sup>78</sup> "Regebantur autem Galliae omnes, iam inde uti crebritate bellorum urgenti cessere Iulio dictatori, potestate in partes divisa quattor . . ." or "All the Gauls, ever since under the perpetual pressure of wars they yielded to the dictator Julius, have been governed by and administration divided into four parts,"

second time Ammianus writes: “Now the whole of Gaul . . . after losses on both sides during ten years of war the dictator Caesar subdued and joined to us in an everlasting covenant of alliance.”<sup>79</sup>

There are several points to be gleaned from these passages. First is the fact that Ammianus refers to Caesar not as “imperator” but as “dictator.” This suggests that Ammianus was well-acquainted with Roman government and did not view Caesar as the first emperor. Also, it is interesting that the only time Caesar is mentioned in the entire *Res Gestae* is in conjunction with his conquest of Gaul.<sup>80</sup> It seems then, that Caesar was only important to Ammianus as the conqueror of Gaul and he had no need to use Caesar as an image to communicate a political message about empire or government in general.

If Ammianus Marcellinus in the fourth century portrayed an image of Caesar as a great military conqueror and dictator, it in the fifth century we find an image of Julius Caesar firmly tied to the downfall of the Republic and the establishment of the Empire, set in the context of a Christian version of world history in St. Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei*. Augustine’s masterpiece is important for numerous ideological, theological, intellectual, and literary reasons, and it exercised so dominant an influence over the Middle Ages in terms of theology, philosophy, and historical thought that one historian suggested that “No one can understand the Middle Ages without taking [*De Civitate Dei*]

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see Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*.XV.11.6, trans. John C. Rolfe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 189.

<sup>79</sup> “Nam omnes Gallias . . . post decennalis belli mutuas clades subegit Caesar dictator, societatique nostrae foederibus iunxit aeternis,” *Res Gestae*.XV.12.6, trans. Rolfe, 197-199.

<sup>80</sup> It is true that the first thirteen books of the *Res Gestae* are missing, and it is possible that Caesar was discussed in another context within those books, but unfortunately they are no longer extant.

into account.”<sup>81</sup> In order to prove that Christianity did not cause the downfall of the Roman Empire, Augustine re-wrote the history of the West and interpreted actions and events to favor Christianity. Through recounting Roman and biblical history Augustine sought to discredit the pagan gods and prove that the downfall of Rome was part of the establishment of the City of God on earth.<sup>82</sup> As an important part of Roman History, the transition from Republic to Empire receives some attention from Augustine and, as a key figure in that transition, Julius Caesar is mentioned as well.

Augustine does not treat Julius Caesar in any great depth, but he does, however, put him into context as part of the long series of civil wars which led, in Augustine’s opinion, to the birth of Christ. Augustine also presents a mixed image of Caesar: he describes Caesar as a man opposed to the power of Pompey, but only because he was jealous of it, and as a man who granted clemency to his enemies but was killed because he sought to establish a monarchy.<sup>83</sup> Thus Caesar is depicted as jealous and power hungry, but also merciful. Augustine describes the conspirators who killed Caesar as “nobilium” but then states that they killed Caesar “as if for the liberty of the state.” Augustine acknowledges the nobility of the conspirators, but seems to doubt that their motive was truly the liberty of the state, perhaps because, as he points out, the state fell

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<sup>81</sup> John Neville Figgis, *The Political Aspects of S. Augustine’s ‘City of God’* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1963), 1. For more on how *De Civitate Dei* influenced and was understood during the Middle Ages see the same work, 81-100.

<sup>82</sup> For a comprehensive introduction and guide to *De Civitate Dei* see: Gerard O’Daly, *Augustine’s City of God: A Reader’s Guide* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

<sup>83</sup> Augustine states: “Pompei quipped victorem Gaium Caesarem, qui victoriam civilem clementer exercuit suisque adversariis vitam dignitatemque donavit, tamquam regni adpetitorem quorundam nobelium coniuratio senatorum velut pro rei publicae lebertate in ipsa curia trucidavit,” see *De Civitate Dei*.III.XXX.

first to Antony and then to Octavian after Caesar's death, and the liberty of the Republic became enslaved to the authority of one man.

With this depiction of Caesar, Augustine establishes a mixed image of Caesar, one that perhaps allows later medieval scholars, such as John of Salisbury, to also portray Caesar as both a positive and negative figure. Augustine also continues the tradition of linking Julius Caesar to the events that occurred after his death, thus blending his image with those of his successors.

In the sixth century we come upon another example of Caesar's image as an emperor in the writings of Jordanes. In the *Origins and Deeds of the Goths*, a history of the Gothic peoples of Europe, Jordanes presents Caesar briefly in this work as a conqueror and the first emperor, but only within the context of relating the history of the Goths. Caesar is first mentioned in relation to Britain: Jordanes informs his reader that Britain remained unaffected by Roman power until Julius Caesar, who more for glory and fame than anything else, chose to invade.<sup>84</sup> Then, a few chapters later while recounting all the encounters of the Goths with various famous rulers such as Darius, Xerxes, and Alexander, Jordanes again mentions Caesar as a conqueror, but this time it is as the conqueror and first emperor of Rome: "Then came Julius Caesar, the first of all the Romans to assume imperial power and subdue almost the whole world, who conquered all kingdoms and even seized islands laying beyond our own world, reposing in the bosom of the ocean. He made tributary to the Romans those who knew not the Roman

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<sup>84</sup> "[Britain] was long unapproached by Roman arms, until Julius Caesar disclosed it by battles fought for mere glory," Jordanes, *The Origins and Deeds of the Goths*.II.10, trans, Charles C. Mierow (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1908.)

name even by hearsay, and yet was unable to prevail against the Goths, despite his frequent attempts.”<sup>85</sup>

Jordanes’s agenda in this work is clear: to write a history of the Goths which gives them a glorious origin and portrays them as a strong, powerful people. This purpose certainly influences his portrayal of Caesar in connection with the Goths. Essentially, Jordanes describes Caesar as the first emperor and exaggerates Caesar’s conquests so that when he points out that Caesar never conquered the Gothic kingdoms the accomplishments of the Goths appear great. Jordanes, then, provides evidence of the flexibility of Caesar’s image, since he can be used within a certain context to prove the greatness of another people.

Also in the sixth century we find a similar reference to Caesar in the *History of the Franks* by Gregory of Tours. Like Jordanes, Gregory’s goal in writing this history is to give the Franks a distinguished origin and to portray them in a favorable light. However, Caesar is used here only as a reference point in time. Gregory, like many medieval chroniclers, begins his history with a recounting of world history, starting with Adam and moving forward in time through the great kingdoms and empires. Gregory’s one sentence referring to Caesar states: “After these, Julius Caesar was the first Emperor to gain jurisdiction over the whole empire.”<sup>86</sup> Gregory then informs his reader that “The second was Octavian, the nephew of Julius Caesar, who is known as . . . In the nineteenth year of his reign, Lyons, a city in Gaul, was founded, as we are clearly informed. Later

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<sup>85</sup> Jordanes, *Origin and Deeds of the Goths*.XI.68, trans. Mierow.

<sup>86</sup> Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks* I.18, trans. Lewis Thorpe (London: Penguin Books, 1974), 80.



this city was made famous for the blood shed there by martyrs, and it bears a most noble name.”<sup>87</sup> There are several factors at work here which affect Gregory’s portrayal of Caesar, including the fact that his main goal is to discuss the Franks and Gaul/France. This is made apparent by his digression to the city of Lyons and its founding. Additionally, his reference to the martyrs of Lyon highlights the fact that Gregory was a churchman and that he certainly interprets history through the lens of Christianity. Thus, there is nothing significant about Caesar in Gregory’s history, though it seems that there should be.<sup>88</sup> All that is apparent is further transmission into medieval thought of the idea that Caesar was the first emperor.

The image of Julius Caesar as the first emperor was obviously engrained into the medieval consciousness by the late Middle Ages. Reaching into the twelfth century, we find another interesting depiction of Caesar in the works of Geoffrey of Monmouth: Caesar the conqueror of Britain. Geoffrey’s agenda is, of course, to write a history that proves the greatness and glory of Britain.<sup>89</sup> In order to portray Britain in the best possible light Geoffrey attempts to make the British kings and people appear at their best in every

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<sup>87</sup> *History of the Franks* I.18, trans. Lewis Thorpe, 81. As an interesting side note, and evidence that Gregory’s history is often not the most correct account, his assertion that Augustus founded Lyons is false, the city was actually founded in 43 B.C. by Lucius Munatius Plancus, a senator and commanding officer under Julius Caesar.

<sup>88</sup> For more information on Gregory’s history in general and his life see Martin Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours: History and Society in the Sixth Century*, Christopher Carroll, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>89</sup> A part of the purpose to give Britain a substantial history, as argued by Robert W. Hanning, is to communicate “a uniquely adverse judgment of the great empire; practically nowhere else in twelfth-century historical, philosophical, and legal works can we find a denigrating response to the enormous prestige of classical Rome’s achievements.” This directly influences Geoffrey’s portrayal of Caesar, since neither he nor the Roman Empire he represents can be portrayed positively. See Robert W. Hanning, *The Vision of History in Early Britain: From Gildas to Geoffrey of Monmouth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 163.

situation, often inventing letters and speeches, as well as re-writing historical events to demonstrate Britain's glory.<sup>90</sup> Geoffrey also faces the daunting task of portraying the Roman conquest of Britain in such a way that the Britons do not appear weak or easily overrun. To accomplish this Geoffrey creates an ancient connection between the Romans and the Britons and he also portrays Caesar's invasion as a selfish incursion on people he should befriend, not conquer.

In accordance with the importance that the medieval world placed on lineage, Geoffrey needed provide the Britons with a distinguished origin. Therefore, Geoffrey adds them to the list of peoples, including the Romans, who trace their heritage back to the Trojans and the city of Troy.<sup>91</sup> But Geoffrey goes even farther than simply arguing that the Britons derive from Troy, he also connects them closely to the Romans by claiming that the Britons are descended from Brute, the son of Silvanus, the son of Ascanius, the son of the great Aeneas.<sup>92</sup> This genealogy was crucial to Geoffrey's portrayal of Britain because not only did it connect them to the Trojans, but it also connected them to the Romans and even to Julius Caesar, since the Julian family claimed that they too were descended from Aeneas's son Ascanius (also called Iulus). This connection then sets the stage for the Roman conquest of Britain and Geoffrey's portrayal of Caesar's role in that conquest.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Michael J. Curley, *Geoffrey of Monmouth* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994), 28.

<sup>91</sup> Curley, *Geoffrey of Monmouth*, 14.

<sup>92</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Histories of the Kings of Britain*.I.iii-xviii, trans. Sebastian Evans (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1944).

<sup>93</sup> Francis Ingledeew gives an interesting analysis of Gregory's use of Trojan origins in an article in which she argues that Geoffrey's recreation of Britain's foundation parallels what Vergil did when he

Geoffrey's account of Caesar's British conquest occurs over the first ten chapters of the fourth book of his history, throughout which Caesar is portrayed as a man who did not have a legitimate reason to invade the island and as a commander who earned victory only through fortunate circumstances.<sup>94</sup> Geoffrey recounts how, after conquering Gaul, Caesar saw Britain across the channel and, when he discovered that it was the home of a people who were also descended from the Trojans he decided to restore these lost people to the fold by bringing them into submission to Rome.<sup>95</sup> Consequently, Caesar sent an emissary to Cassivelaunus, the leader of the Britonic tribes, requesting that they submit to pay tribute to Rome so that Caesar will not be forced to shed the blood of his kinsmen. Cassivelaunus of course refused, calling Caesar's request an insult and requesting friendship instead of domination. According to Geoffrey, Caesar did not take this kindly and so crossed the Channel to invade. When he arrived, however, he found a large and prepared Britonic army, which quickly defeated him in battle. Geoffrey's portrayal of

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connected the Romans to Troy and gave them a Trojan foundation. She also discusses how Geoffrey's history fits into the Vergilian philosophy of history with its emphasis on genealogy and prophecy. See Francis Ingledew, "The Book of Troy and the Genealogical Construction of History: The Case of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Brittanæ*," *Speculum*, Vol. 69, No. 3 (1994): 665-704. Additionally, Hanning argues that Geoffrey's portrayal of Caesar's conquest of Britain is meant to mirror the conquest of Troy by the Greeks; just as Troy was a great nation that fell, so Geoffrey writes the history of Britain to mirror the rise and fall of Troy, see Hanning, *Vision of History in Early Britain*, 140.

<sup>94</sup> Describing Geoffrey's portrayal of Caesar, Hanning states that "Geoffrey's richly thematic portrait of Caesar is the most carefully drawn of any he attempted of an enemy of Britain," *Vision of History in Early Britain*, 165. For modern historical discussion of Caesar's conquest of Britain see Peter Beresford Ellis, *Caesar's Invasion of Britain* (New York: New York University Press, 1978) ; Guy de la Bedoyere, *Roman Britain: A New History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2006), 10-22; and D.C.A. Shotter, *Roman Britain*, Second Edition (New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>95</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Histories of the Kings of Britain*.IV.1. According to Hanning, Geoffrey reworked the standard sources for this event to portray Caesar as an arrogant, tyrannical ruler; see Hanning, *Vision of History in Early Britain*, 164-167.

Caesar in this battle demonstrates how Geoffrey was able to use Caesar's image to reflect positively on the Britons and their glorious history.<sup>96</sup>

During the battle, according to Geoffrey, Nennius, one of the British leaders, fought with Caesar hand-to-hand. Caesar almost triumphs in this fierce encounter, but Nennius manages to block a fatal blow with his shield, and Caesar's sword becomes lodged in the shield. According to Geoffrey, "the Emperor had not the strength to wrench it forth," and, since the battle closed in around them, Nennius escaped and Caesar lost his sword.<sup>97</sup> Since the Romans also lost the battle Caesar led his men in retreat back across the sea to Gaul. Geoffrey's image of Caesar here is meant to represent the difficulty that Caesar had in conquering Britain, and it also gives Geoffrey the chance to soften the fact that Caesar eventually triumphs. With the story of the loss of Caesar's sword, Geoffrey creates a dramatic event and transforms the battle into a great victory which proves that the Britons were strong enough to defeat the Roman attempts at conquest.<sup>98</sup>

Geoffrey continues this image of Caesar further by explaining that on his return to Gaul the people there viewed his weakened state they began to rebel against Roman rule. According to Geoffrey, Caesar was so demoralized by his defeat that he bargained with the Gauls to regain their loyalty instead of exerting force. Geoffrey describes the events thus: "Thus he that aforetime had stripped them of all they possessed and roared at them

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<sup>96</sup> This was especially important to Geoffrey since he labored for the first part of his book to establish Britain as a civilized land with a classical heritage, see Curley, *Geoffrey of Monmouth*, 18-19.

<sup>97</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Histories of the Kings of Britain*.IV.iii.

<sup>98</sup> In a dated but still useful article Frederic Stanley Dunn mentions how Geoffrey's use of Caesar's sword here calls to mind other famous swords he discusses, such as Excalibur, and the fact that whoever possesses the sword holds the power. Since Caesar could not keep his sword perhaps Geoffrey alludes to the eventual loss of Caesar's power. See "Julius Caesar in the English Chronicles," *The Classical Journal* Vol. 14, No. 5 (Feb., 1919): 290-291.

with the fierceness of a lion, now humbly bleateth out what a pleasure it is unto him to be able to restore them everything . . . meanwhile not a day passed but he chewed the cud over his flight and the victory of the Britons.”<sup>99</sup> In this description Caesar becomes a dejected loser, so humbled by his loss that he is willing to cave in to every demand made by the Gauls. This image of Caesar is immensely helpful to Geoffrey in twisting the events of the Roman conquest so that Britain does not look weak.

Geoffrey depicts a weak Julius Caesar when he describes Caesar’s second attempt at conquest. Once again the Britons are the picture of strength and preparedness, while Caesar is portrayed as a vengeful commander who cannot outwit the Britonic forces on his own. Geoffrey recounts how Caesar’s ships were damaged by pikes that had been placed on the bottom of the river Thames, thus necessitating another retreat. And, Geoffrey maintains, the Romans might have stayed away if Cassivelaunus had not offended Androgeus, one of the Britonic noblemen. Angry with Cassivelaunus, Androgeus wrote a letter to Caesar and offered to join forces with him to defeat Cassivelaunus.<sup>100</sup> Caesar requested hostages as a show of good faith, and when Androgeus sent them Caesar accepted his offer. Not long after, Caesar engaged Cassivelaunus in battle. According to Geoffrey, just at the battle reached its pitch, Androgeus came forth from a concealed position and, with five thousand men, fell upon the rear of Cassivelaunus’s army. Unable to fight on two sides, Cassivelaunus was forced to flee to a hill top where Caesar and Androgeus besieged him for two days, after which he was forced to surrender and submit to Roman rule.

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<sup>99</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Histories of the Kings of Britain*.IV.v.

<sup>100</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Histories of the Kings of Britain*.IV.viii.

The image that Geoffrey wishes to portray is clear: Caesar could not have conquered the Britons on his own, and indeed he was only able to do so because they were betrayed by one of their own.<sup>101</sup> The description of Cassivelaunus's reaction to the Britons' defeat in battle and Androgenus's betrayal further uses Caesar's image to reinforce the greatness of the Britonic people. Geoffrey states:

O, but in those days was the British race worthy of all admiration, which had twice driven in flight before them him who had subjected the whole world beside unto himself, and even in defeat now withstood him whom no nation of the earth had been able to withstand, ready to die for their country and their freedom! To their praise it was that Lucan sang how Caesar 'Scared when he found the Britons that he sought for, only displayed his craven back before them.'<sup>102</sup>

The image of Caesar as a conqueror of the whole world works well here to improve the image of the Britons, since Caesar, who had defeated the rest of the world, could not conquer them. Also, Geoffrey draws support from Lucan's description of Caesar's dealings with Britain, strengthening the image of Caesar who could not manage a British conquest.

Geoffrey finishes his reconstruction of the Roman conquest by portraying a repentant Androgenus asking Caesar exercise mercy on Cassivelaunus and accept the Britons as allies who will pay a yearly tribute to Rome. Androgenus also warns Caesar that he will not hesitate to take to defend Cassivelaunus should Caesar attempt to slay him. Geoffrey describes Caesar as so frightened by Androgenus's words that he accepts the agreement and grants the Britons allied status on condition of a yearly tribute. Thus to

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<sup>101</sup> Curley, *Geoffrey of Monmouth*, 30.

<sup>102</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Histories of the Kings of Britain*.IV.ix.

the end Geoffrey employs an image of Caesar as a great man cowed in submission by the strength of the British.

Although there is some truth to Geoffrey's account of Caesar's exploits in Britain – Caesar did make two trips to the country and was not successful until the second, and the British were led by man named Cassivelaunus – Geoffrey manages to add the acts of betrayal and to create noble virtues in the British in order to give them a glorious history.<sup>103</sup> Also, it is significant that Geoffrey refers to Caesar as the Emperor several times throughout Book IV, continuing the medieval tradition of Caesar as the first emperor. This actually strengthens Geoffrey's portrayal of the British: the fact that they triumphed over a great emperor brings honor to their heritage. The *History of the Kings of Britain*, then, serves as an example of the adaptability of Caesar's image. He is still portrayed as the first emperor of Rome, but his character is configured to fit Geoffrey's particular purpose.

Besides Geoffrey of Monmouth's twelfth-century portrayal of Caesar, there is another author whose portrayal of Caesar is essential in tracing the use of Caesar's image in discussions of monarchy, authority, and tyranny. John of Salisbury, a churchman and scholar, was a well-known and prolific author of the High Middle Ages. Concerned by the political troubles of his own day, namely the on-going struggle between church and state, as well as the power struggles between the barons and the monarchy in England, John composed a great number of politically themed letters and a large treatise on politics

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<sup>103</sup> For an interesting analysis of the development of legends of Caesar's conquest of Britain over the course of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, see Homer Nearing, Jr., "The Legend of Julius Caesar's British Conquest," *PMLA* Vol. 64, No. 4 (Sept., 1949): 889-829.

entitled *Policraticus*.<sup>104</sup> Besides his political works John also wrote a large treatise on education and learning, the *Metalogicon*. In each of these works Julius Caesar appears as an example, both positive and negative, to support various points John wishes to make. In this way John's use of Caesar as an image represents medieval traditions of scholarship and learning, and also demonstrates further development of Caesar's image in questions of spiritual and secular power and particularly in debates about tyranny.

Composed from 1156-1159, the *Policraticus* is arguably the first full-length work of medieval political theory.<sup>105</sup> However, the treatise does not read as a "how-to" manual for kings and rulers; instead John takes an ideological approach to the topic and emphasizes the moral standards for government conduct. In accordance with this focus, John discusses the importance of education in government, as well as moral wisdom and strength. He also addresses the topic of tyranny from a moral standpoint, and attempts to determine the lawfulness of tyrannicide. The *Policraticus* thus serves as more than an instruction manual: it is John's attempt to propose a theory that government should be based on in order for good government to exist.

In the *Policraticus*, John spends a fair amount of space discussing ideal kingship, tyranny, and tyrannicide.<sup>106</sup> The definition of ideal kingship found in the *Policraticus* is

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<sup>104</sup> John actually worked in the service of Theobald, Archbishop of Canterbury, and also for his successor, Thomas Becket. The power struggle between Becket and King Henry II no doubt influenced John's political thought. After Becket's assassination John remained active in Church government and eventually became Bishop of Chartres in 1176. See Nederman and Forhan, 27.

<sup>105</sup> Nederman and Forhan, *Medieval Political Theory*, 27.

<sup>106</sup> Tyranny and tyrannicide are important part to John's discussion of the "body politic" since he emphasizes societal accountability; a king is responsible to correct his people if they behave against the public good and likewise the people are responsible to correct the king, or replace him, if he behaves in a tyrannical manner. See Nederman and Forhan, *Medieval Political Theory*, 27.



important to understand because it relates closely to, and almost dictates, his description of what constitutes a tyrant. According to the *Policraticus*, John believes that the ideal king, or *princeps* as John terms him, was one who both ruled by law and obeyed the law himself. Interestingly, John also felt that kingship was an office, not a right, and thus it should not necessarily be hereditary.<sup>107</sup> To support this idea he cites the biblical examples of Saul and Joshua, both chosen to lead the people without hereditary claim to the throne. For John, monarchical dynasties were meant to honor a family that had proved their nobility, and even biblical promises of long reigns for the sons of kings were merely a metaphor for eternal life and blessings.<sup>108</sup> He even goes so far as to suggest that if a people were orderly and lived under the law then they didn't need a king, citing the example of Alexander the Great who, according ancient sources, left India unconquered because they did not need a king.

John's notion that kingship did not have to be hereditary has interesting repercussions for his definition of what constitutes a good king versus a tyrant. Most medieval and even some Renaissance scholars based their definition of tyranny not only on the behavior exhibited by a king during his rule, but also on his manner of acceding to the throne. Those who usurped thrones or used cruel and deceitful means of obtaining the kingship could be classified as tyrants. John, however, did not regard the manner of accession, be it through inheritance or usurpation, as a factor in determining tyranny.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Hans Liebeschütz, *Medieval Humanism in the Life and Writings of John of Salisbury* (London: Warburg Institute, University of London, 1950), 49.

<sup>108</sup> Liebeschütz, *Medieval Humanism*, 47-49.

<sup>109</sup> Liebeschütz, *Medieval Humanism*, 50. “. . . it is evident that the way of accession, whether by rightful inheritance or usurpation, is not regarded as a criterion.”

Instead, John felt that tyranny was “the outcome of the misuse of his natural powers by a man who wishes to secure for himself a free sphere of action (*libertas*), and to protect himself from being wronged.”<sup>110</sup> Essentially, tyrants were those who misused their powers selfishly (usually with oppression by violence) and disregarded the law. Under John’s definition then, it was not necessarily Caesar’s manner of gaining political power that qualified him as a tyrant, but instead it was the use of his talents to fulfill his own desire for glory and which led him to disregard Roman law and Republican traditions, which made him a tyrant.<sup>111</sup>

John’s discussion of tyranny, along with a statement made early on in the *Policraticus* are often combined and referred to as John’s own theory of tyrannicide. According to this interpretation of his writings, John’s theory argues that it is lawful to kill a tyrant, especially since he appears to support or uphold the deaths of various tyrannical kings in his chapter. However, Jan Van Laarhoven has convincingly argued that John had no real theory of tyrannicide and that this is evident when his discussion of tyranny is put into context.<sup>112</sup>

Van Laarhoven makes several key points which suggest that although John argues in favor of tyrannicide, he does not advocate a theory to support it, instead he agrees with tyrannicide only for moral reasons. According to Van Laarhoven, John cannot be said to have a theory of tyrannicide, because the whole emphasis in the *Policraticus* is on the

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<sup>110</sup> Liebeschutz, *Medieval Humanism*, 51.

<sup>111</sup> Bolgar, *The Classical Heritage*, 199.

<sup>112</sup> Jan Van Laarhoven, “Thou Shalt NOT Slay a Tyrant” in Michael Wilks, ed. *The World of John of Salisbury* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 319-341.

tyrant, instead of those who kill him. The treatise then serves more as a moral warning against tyranny than a tract in defense of or encouraging tyrannicide.<sup>113</sup>

Additionally, Van Laarhoven states that, “In John’s view tyranny appears to be first of all a moral category carrying with it moral consequences and divine punishments. Moreover, his concept of tyranny covers a wide field which exceeds our political limits. Bad priests and greedy prelates populate John’s tyrannical cosmos. The greatest part of this long chapter 17 is filled with text and commentary and application of Ezekiel 34 (on the bad shepherds of Israel) and of John 10 (on the thief and robber and the hireling).”<sup>114</sup> In a sense then, John views temporal and spiritual power, whether good or bad, as ultimately religious in nature. By extension then, this means that if a tyrant is slain, John views that death as a punishment for the moral wrongs committed by the tyrant. Van Laarhoven argues that this does not constitute a theory of tyrannicide and when a tyrant could be killed, instead John is merely pointing out that tyranny is a moral evil, because all tyrants in the past have come to bad ends.

This is further proved by the fact that John fills his chapters on tyranny with numerous exempla, sixteen Roman emperors from Caesar to Septimus, ten Biblical leaders from Nimrod to Holofernes, others at random like Pharaoh, and nine English barons and robber knights.<sup>115</sup> The fact that all of these men serve as proof that all tyrants

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<sup>113</sup> Van Laarhoven, “Thou Shalt NOT Slay a Tyrant,” 328.

<sup>114</sup> Van Laarhoven, “Thou Shalt NOT Slay a Tyrant,” 322-323.

<sup>115</sup> According to Janet Martin, John has to include Christian examples with the Classical Roman examples in order to validate them, suggesting that he trusts Biblical sources more than classical sources, at least for their value as exempla; see Janet Martin, “John of Salisbury as Classical Scholar,” in Michael Wilks, ed. *The World of John of Salisbury* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984): 187. Also, in a letter dated to 1165 John wrote that in order to solve life’s problems one should look to the laws of God, the canons of the

come to a bad end shows that John's emphasis here is not on how to kill a tyrant, or that tyrants should be killed, but instead it is that tyrants are always punished. John also points out that most tyrannicides in history have gone unpunished because, he believes, they were fulfilling god's justice on that tyrant. David is even praised for not killing Saul because, according to John, the best way to get rid of tyrants is to live a righteous life.<sup>116</sup>

Besides the *Policraticus* and John's contributions to the tyrannicide debate, the use of Caesar in John's other writing also distinctly represents medieval scholarship and the manner in which ancient sources were understood and used. According to Liebeschütz and Bolgar, the classical learning of the Middle Ages was focused more on details than on the broad concepts and characteristics of the classical works and authors they studied.<sup>117</sup> Indeed medieval scholars often used classical examples and arguments to support their own conclusions, rather than trying to place classical authors and texts in context. John of Salisbury is an excellent example of this scholarly method, as any close examination of his works demonstrates. For John ". . . the classics were a warehouse of examples . . . He drew from them suitable stories and disconnected ideas . . . The result is

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Church, and the examples of the Saints to find the solution. This makes his use of Julius Caesar and other classical exempla more intriguing; since he apparently felt that Biblical and Christian examples were the highest to learn from he also must have sincerely felt that Caesar, Alexander, and others were worth mentioning, despite their pagan status; see Peter Von Moos, "The Use of Exempla in the *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury," in Michael Wilks, ed. *The World of John of Salisbury* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984): 207.

<sup>116</sup> Jan Van Laarhoven, "Thou Shalt NOT Slay a Tyrant," 325-326; see also *Policraticus* viii.20.

<sup>117</sup> Bolgar, 220, 222. For Bolgar, there is a distinct difference between the heavily Christianized perspective of late medieval scholars and the humanists of the Renaissance. Men like John of Salisbury saw themselves as inheritors of the classics, perhaps because they were nearer in time, whereas the humanists viewed themselves as discovering the classics and looked at them in context and from a more historical perspective.

chaotic – a kaleidoscope of inconsistent impression.”<sup>118</sup> The vast number of ancient references he uses indicates that he possessed a mind full of facts, anecdotes, and stories about the figures of the past, but his use of these facts to prove diverse and disparate points raises the question of whether John had a real understanding of ancient history, including the classical references he uses such as Alexander the Great and Caesar, or not. In John’s work, it is often clear that classical figures and examples are taken out context for rhetorical purposes and not for deciphering the “truth” about ancient history.<sup>119</sup>

This point is particularly evident in the conflicting views of Caesar found throughout the different works of John of Salisbury. For example, in the *Metalogicon* during a discussion of grammar and the great men who demonstrated an appreciation for grammar, we find Caesar as an example. Cicero is of course mentioned first and then John has the following to say about Caesar: “And Gaius Caesar wrote books *On Analogy* conscious that, without grammar, one cannot master philosophy (with which he was thoroughly familiar) or eloquence (in which he was most proficient).”<sup>120</sup> This positive opinion of Caesar stands in contrast to depictions of Caesar in John’s letters and the

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<sup>118</sup> *John of Salisbury*, xlii.

<sup>119</sup> It is important to remember that John was not always the one to take classical exempla out of their context, it appears that he obtain certain facts from text where classical sources were already misquoted or taken out of context. Martin provides us with a detailed look at the manuscripts and sources that John might have used, how he quoted or misquoted them, and a detailed critical analysis of his text. For example, John often used quotes from Classical sources taken from the writings of other authors, like Heiric of Auxerre’s quotations of Suetonius on Julius Caesar, and he often invented and added to them. The example here is his invention of a sailor’s derogatory comments regarding Caesar’s baldness alongside his quotation of Suetonius from Auxerre, whose version of the episode lacks the comments of the sailor. Medieval commentaries on Lucan and Vergil also influenced his use and understanding of classical exempla, including Caesar. See Martin, “John of Salisbury as Classical Scholar,” 193, 196-197.

<sup>120</sup> John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*.I.21, Daniel McGarry, trans. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955), 61.

*Policraticus*, where John criticizes Caesar's political motives instead of praising his personal life.

John continues on in the same chapter of the *Metalogicon* to share an anecdote to further demonstrate Caesar's love for and proficiency in grammar. He states: "Caesar, while still a boy, with fine sarcasm remarked to a certain person: 'If you're trying to read, you're singing, and if you're trying to sing you're doing a miserable job.'"<sup>121</sup> By using Caesar's recognition of bad grammar even as a young boy as an example, John tries to convince his reader that a correct understanding of grammar is essential, especially if one wants to emulate the great men of history like Caesar.

Not only does John mention Caesar's love of grammar and the fact that Caesar wrote a book on grammar (which is no longer extant), but he even quotes from *De Analogia* and uses it as a source. To support his point that correct and clear word choice is essential to good grammar John quotes Caesar: "In his book *De Analogia*, wherein he is a grammarian, Caesar declares that we must avoid whatever may appear absurd to a learned listener. 'As sailors steer clear of reefs,' he says, 'so we should shun unusual and strange words.'"<sup>122</sup> The fact that John would quote Caesar himself, and not just a story about him, as a source to support his own argument suggests several things, and among them is the idea that Caesar was a trustworthy and impressive source capable of convincing John's readers that if Caesar shared his opinion on points of grammar then that opinion must be right.

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<sup>121</sup> John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*.I.21, 61. Here John quotes Quintillian, *Inst. Or.I.82*.

<sup>122</sup> John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*.I.15, 45.

Another positive portrayal of Caesar as an exemplar to imitate is found in John's argument that hunting is neither a useful nor worthwhile pastime. In order to convince his audience that excessive passion for and practice of hunting (which was an extremely popular pastime for the nobility of John's day) he relates the feelings that Caesar and Alexander the Great had towards hunting. That is, neither Caesar nor Alexander the great took any interest in the hunt and both viewed it as a waste of time. This is a small example, but once again it demonstrates the fact that John used his knowledge of classical anecdotes and facts as a way to bolster his arguments whatever they may be.

These examples taken from John of Salisbury's writings all demonstrate the manner in which late medieval scholars used classical evidence and sources. In most cases it was not concrete historical detail that mattered, but instead it was the moral principle that John could teach with the example.<sup>123</sup> They also show that John's opinion of Caesar was not set in stone. Depending on the topic of discussion, Caesar was either a positive example who should be emulated, or an example of unlawful kingship and tyranny.

Finally, no discussion of the Middle Ages would be complete without some mention of Thomas Aquinas, a theologian and scholar who, like Augustine, looms large over the intellectual world of the High Middle Ages. Like John of Salisbury, Thomas Aquinas believed that kingship, or the rule of one man was the best form of government, and if the leader ruled properly, tyranny could be prevented. However, if tyranny was present then, unlike John of Salisbury, Thomas Aquinas favored removing the tyrant, by

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<sup>123</sup> Peter Von Moos, "The Use of Exempla in the *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury," 223.

violent means if necessary.<sup>124</sup> And although Aquinas never discusses Caesar in any great depth, his writings do include one specific mention of Caesar that perhaps has an impact on later images of Caesar as a tyrant.<sup>125</sup>

In a work entitled *Scripta super libros sententiarum* Aquinas discusses the question of whether Christians are bound to obey secular powers, especially tyrants. Following the usual scholastic pattern of making a statement, recording all the objections to that statement, making a counterstatement, and then deciding on a conclusion, Aquinas begins with the assertion that “Christians are bound to obey the secular powers, and tyrants in particular.”<sup>126</sup> The objections to this statement include a reference to scripture (Matthew 17:26, which states that the children of the Lord are free) and the idea that servitude was introduced by sin, but since baptism cleanses men from sin they are no longer obliged to be in servitude. Aquinas’s objections also include a reference to Caesar.

Aquinas’s fifth objection states: “Moreover, no one is bound to obey someone whom it is lawful, or even praiseworthy, to slay. But Cicero, in the book *De Officiis*, defends those who slew Julius Caesar even though he was their friend and relative, because he usurped the rights of empire as a tyrant. We are therefore not bound to obey such persons.”<sup>127</sup> For Aquinas then, Caesar’s image is that of a justly slain tyrant, and not

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<sup>124</sup> Manfredi Piccolomini, *The Brutus Revival: Parricide and Tyrannicide During the Renaissance* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 25.

<sup>125</sup> Robert S. Miola points to Aquinas as an important source on which sixteenth and seventeenth century scholars drew for support in their own debates about tyranny and tyrannicide; see Miola, “Julius Caesar and the Tyrannicide Debate,” *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (Summer, 1985): 271.

<sup>126</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Scripta super libros sententiarum* II, Dist. 44, quaest. 2, in Dyson, R.W. ed. And trans., *Aquinas: Political Writings*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 72.



only does he assert that no one is bound to obey a tyrant, but he even that it is lawful and just to slay such men. Aquinas's definition of tyranny in this passage is also interesting; his stance is not necessarily anti-monarchical, but he seems to believe that Caesar was a tyrant because he usurped the right to rule. Unlike later Renaissance authors then, the problem that Aquinas has with Caesar is not that he destroyed the Republic or founded the Empire, but the fact that he obtained power by taking it away from others with force.

The image of Caesar as an unlawful ruler and justly slain tyrant is further emphasized in Aquinas's counter-argument to his first point. By way of arguing against the fact that Christians are bound to obey secular powers Aquinas quotes two scriptures, 1 Peter 2:18 and Romans 13:2. In the first of these scriptures Peter gives instructions that servants should be subject to the masters. In the second, Paul teaches the Romans that those who resist power and authority resist the ordinance of God. In order to bring these scriptures into agreement with the idea that children of God are free and are not bound to obey secular powers, Thomas argues that Christians are required to obey secular authorities, but only in so far as their authority is of God. He contends that once a ruler abuses his authority, that authority is no longer of God and does not need to be obeyed.<sup>128</sup> Caesar's image comes back into play to support this last argument. Aquinas argues that "Those who achieve power through violence are not truly rulers," and that concerning Caesar "Cicero was speaking of a case where someone has seized dominion for himself by violence, either against the wishes of his subjects or by coercing them into consenting, and where they had no recourse to a superior by whom judgment might be passed on the

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<sup>127</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Scripta super libros sententiarum* II.44.2.ob. 5.

<sup>128</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Scripta super libros sententiarum* II.44.2.

invader. In such a case he who delivers his country by slaying a tyrant is to be praised and rewarded.”<sup>129</sup> Aquinas solidifies his image of Caesar here, by concluding that because Caesar achieved power through violence and coercion he was not a lawful ruler and therefore the people were not bound to obey him and were even justified in killing him.

Aquinas’s support for tyrannicide as expressed here is tempered by ideas found in a few of his other writings; for example in the *De regimine principum* he qualifies the idea that a tyrant can be lawfully removed by arguing that any action against a tyrant must be taken by those qualified to do so, “Tyrants may not be overthrown merely on the private judgment of someone who happens not to like the king.”<sup>130</sup> Also, in the *Summa Theologica* he argues that mild tyranny should be tolerated if possible and that a tyrant should not be removed unless leaving the tyrant in place would be a greater danger to the state than the harm that removing him would cause.<sup>131</sup> Through combining Aquinas’s ideas about tyranny and tyrannicide then, it is clear that although he supports the idea of killing tyrant, there are situations where tyrannicide is more just than in others. However, this does not change the fact that Aquinas uses Caesar as his prime example of just tyrannicide, continuing the image of Caesar as a tyrant that in some ways still exists today.

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<sup>129</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Scripta super libros sententiarum* II.44.2.ad. 4-5, trans. Dyson, 74-75.

<sup>130</sup> Dyson, *Aquinas Political Writings*, xix-xxx.

<sup>131</sup> Dyson, *Aquinas Political Writings*, xxx. See also Antony Black, *Political Thought in Europe: 1250-1450* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 148-152.

By the High Middle Ages then, the image of Caesar as the first emperor had become firmly entrenched and also embroiled in debates over tyranny and tyrannicide. Looking at the Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages as a whole it is evident that although early authors such as Ammianus Marcellinus understood Caesar's role as dictator, as time progressed his association with the Empire caused confusion and eventually the idea of Caesar as emperor became standard. Authoritative authors such as Augustine influenced this view of Caesar, as did portrayals of him in the context of his conquests. With the rise of universities and intellectuals like John of Salisbury and Thomas Aquinas Caesar's image remained that of an emperor, but it also began to be employed more frequently in political debate. Thus two important developments occur in treatments of Caesar over the course of the Middle Ages: his association with the Roman Empire and the death of the Republic is strengthened and he begins to serve as a symbol or example in political discussions. These developments serve as crucial components and significant influences on Caesar's image in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

## Chapter IV Transition to the Renaissance: Dante and Petrarch

Of all the historical figures who represent the transition from the High Middle Ages into the Renaissance, two names stand out: Dante Alighieri and Francesco Petrarca, more commonly known as Petrarch. Although the two men were barely contemporaries (Petrarch was born in 1304 and Dante died in 1321) both made a similar impact on scholarship and literature, Dante with his Italian vernacular masterpiece, *La Commedia*, and Petrarch with his *Canzioni* and numerous letters and treatises. Heavily influenced by the political climate of Late Medieval Italy, these two men filled their writings with political commentary, and each during his own life supported monarchy as the best form of government, and the Holy Roman Emperor as the monarch who should rule. Dante's use of Caesar as an imperial symbol tied Caesar more firmly to the medieval idea of Caesar as the founder of the Roman Empire, and thus continued this medieval tradition. However, Dante also used the imperial Caesar to make a political statement about his own day, giving new depth and significance to this idea. Petrarch also contributed to the image of Julius Caesar by focusing on the historical man and employing Caesar as an example of great moral character. In creating and using these images, both men were influenced by the classical sources available to them, their own intellectual background, and, most importantly, by the political climate in which they lived.

Little detail exists concerning the life of Dante Alighieri beyond his own writings, but enough is known to provide several important insights. Dante was born in May or

June 1265 to parents of minor nobility in Florence.<sup>132</sup> This was an era of great political turmoil for Florence: the city was split between two political parties, the Guelfs, who supported the political power of the papacy, and the Ghibellines, who supported the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>133</sup> Two years after Dante's birth, the Ghibellines were driven from Florence by the Guelfs and, as Florentine historian Giovanni Villani said, "In so short a space of time . . . the state of affairs changed in Tuscany and many cities of Lombardy which from being on the side of the Ghibellines and of the Empire passed over to the side of the Guelfs and the Church."<sup>134</sup> As Guelfs, Dante's family remained in Florence where he was raised.

As a young man Dante attended a grammar school, no doubt developing a love for poetry and the classics in his early years. Between 1283 and 1295 Dante began writing love poetry, attended theological and philosophical schools, and participated in a 1289 military campaign. Also, after his death in 1283, Dante took his father's place in politics and became active in public life. As minor nobility, the family had an obligation to participate in city affairs, at least to the degree of siding with one political faction or the other. It is unknown whether Dante's father ever held political office, but Dante himself was elected in 1295 to serve on the Special Council of the Capitano del Popolo, a government advisory body. After serving two years as a government advisor, Dante was

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<sup>132</sup> Giuseppe Mazzotta, "Life of Dante," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 4; also, for a near contemporary's perspective and information about Dante's life, see Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Life of Dante (Trattatello in Laude di Dante)*, trans. Vincenzo Zin Bollettino (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1990).

<sup>133</sup> For a full discussion of the origins of these two parties and their divisions, see Giovanni Tabacco, *The Struggle for Power in Medieval Italy: Structures of Political Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 256-267.

<sup>134</sup> Paget Toynbee, *Dante Alighieri, His Life and Works* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 53.

elected in 1300 to serve as one of six Florentine priors, the highest government office he held. His election as a prior after serving two terms as an advisor suggests that he was well-respected and that his opinion was valued. His education was a valuable asset, especially in the volatile world of Florentine politics.<sup>135</sup>

Struggles between the Guelf and Ghibelline factions, which had been a part of Florentine politics since 1215, did not slow during Dante's day, even though the Ghibellines were expelled in 1267. During Dante's lifetime, family alliances played a significant role in political divisions. Since there was no longer a Ghibelline party, the Guelf party began to split into two opposing factions: the "Black" and the "White" Guelfs. Black Guelfs were those who supported the papacy and the French ruling House of Anjou, while the White Guelfs were moderate and encouraged policies of independence from the papacy and the House of Anjou.<sup>136</sup> Eventually these divisions evolved until the Black Guelfs took on the qualities of traditional anti-imperial Guelfism, while the White Guelfs became imperial supporters. When Dante was elected to the priorship in 1300, the White Guelfs held political control of Florence.

Dante served his term as prior and remained active in politics, all the while witnessing the violence of one faction against another and the exile of both Black and White Guelfs. As a prior, Dante became an ambassador for the White Guelfs.<sup>137</sup> In October of 1302 he was sent as a member of an embassy to Rome to protest Papal

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<sup>135</sup> For more general information on Dante's life see Stephen Bemrose, *A New Life of Dante* (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 2000).

<sup>136</sup> Bemrose, *Life of Dante*, 45.

<sup>137</sup> Toynbee, *Dante Alighieri*, 82-83.

interference in Florentine affairs, specifically pope Boniface VIII's attempt to subject Florence to the papacy's control. But while Dante was away with the embassy, events occurred that changed his life forever.

While Dante was traveling to Rome with the other White Guelfs, the Black factions seized control of Florence with the help of Charles II of Anjou, who had secretly been sent to Florence by the pope. Charles supported the cause of the Black Guelfs, who, with their new found power, sentenced a number of White Guelfs, including Dante himself, to exile.<sup>138</sup> The accusations made against them, which were most likely erroneous, included barratry, extortion, and resistance to the pope. The charges were recorded in two documents, the first of which, dated 27 January 1302, simply sentences the men to exile.<sup>139</sup> The second, dated 10 March 1302, condemns Dante to death by burning should he ever return or be caught by the commune of Florence.<sup>140</sup> In this way Dante was forced to go into exile, his political career was ended, and Florence, the city he loved, was no longer his home. Dante traveled extensively during exile, leaving his wife and children behind in Florence, and was only offered the chance to return once. His sentence of exile was reconfirmed in September of 1311, but in 1315 the government offered to repeal it, if he would admit guilt for the crimes with which he was charged. However, Dante refused to do this, and thus remained in exile until his death in 1321.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup>Toynbee, *Dante Alighieri*, 83-84.

<sup>139</sup> Randolph Starn, *Contrary Commonwealth: The Theme of Exile in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), 60-61.

<sup>140</sup> Starn, *Contrary Commonwealth*, 60-61.

<sup>141</sup> Mazzotta, "Life of Dante," 8-9.

The impact of these events on the political opinions of Dante is the key to understanding his major literary works. His life and political attitudes were heavily influenced by his exile, and although Dante could not maintain an active role in Florentine affairs, he used his writings to voice opinions and concerns. The election of Count Henry of Luxemburg as King of the Romans on 27 November 1308 brought new ground for controversy with the papacy, especially since the new emperor Henry took an active interest in Italy.<sup>142</sup> For Dante, Henry's election and his interest in Italy offered hope for peace, stability, and a respite from the political unrest caused by papal interference in Italian communal politics. As Dante turned to writing as an outlet for his political ideas, he voiced his hopes for political stability through examination of the ancient Roman Empire and its ties to the Holy Roman Empire of his day. Through all of Dante's writings, the ancient Roman Empire, often symbolized by Julius Caesar, is portrayed as divinely inspired by God to bring peace and safety to the world.

Additionally, as an exile from Florence, Dante recognized the problems that Guelf factionalization and the interference of the papacy repeatedly caused. As he studied and wrote under the influence of classical Roman authors, his attitude began to change from the Republicanism of his youth. Through studying the Roman Empire, he began to believe that rule centralized in one man was the only way to end political troubles. Evidences of his belief in the superiority of imperial government are particularly strong when Dante uses Julius Caesar in his works.

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<sup>142</sup> William Bowsky, "Florence and Henry of Luxemburg, King of the Romans: The Rebirth of Guelfism," *Speculum* 33, no.2 (1958): 182.



Little doubt exists among scholars today that Dante Alighieri was a political poet.<sup>143</sup> His works teem with references to the political events of late medieval Italy and his personal opinions about them. Through his own participation in the government of Florence, Dante witnessed first-hand the trouble caused by competition between the powers of the papacy and the Holy Roman Empire. Although the papacy claimed that as God's authority on earth it possessed the right to control both spiritual and temporal affairs, Dante did not agree. Instead, Dante strongly believed that God ordained the Church to rule over the spiritual affairs of men and the Holy Roman Empire to govern temporally. Dante's study of classical authors and the Roman Empire of antiquity reinforced this idea and convinced him that God had designated and established the ancient Roman Empire as his form of temporal government on earth. Because Dante viewed the Holy Roman Empire as the lawful successor to the ancient Roman Empire, he also believed that the Holy Roman Empire was ordained of God.<sup>144</sup>

Dante's belief in the ancient and Holy Roman Empires as God's designated form of government on earth is both an underlying idea and a major theme in several of his works, including the *Divina Commedia*, *Il Convivio*, his *Epistolae*, and a political treatise entitled *De Monarchia*. In his letters and treatises, Dante used ideas associated with the

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<sup>143</sup> The list of works that discuss the political nature of Dante's writings is extensive; among the most important: Robert Hollander, *Dante: A Life in Works* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); John Woodhouse, ed., *Dante and Governance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); John A. Scott, *Dante's Political Purgatory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996); Donna Mancusi-Ungaro, *Dante and the Empire* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987); Joan M. Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

<sup>144</sup> Dante Alighieri, *De Monarchia*.2.1.2-3. To Dante, the Holy Roman Empire was the Roman Empire; he himself rarely distinguishes between the ancient Roman Empire and the Holy Roman Empire in his works because one was the successor of the other. For the purposes of the present work however, the distinction will be made between the two.

ancient Roman Empire to illustrate the theme of imperial government and to state political opinions in a straightforward manner. However, in poetry such as the *Divina Commedia*, and specifically the *Inferno*, he needed to use an image to convey his political ideas. For Dante, Julius Caesar served as a representation of the ancient Roman Empire and the perfect image of imperial government. Thus throughout his works, Dante's use of ideas associated with the Roman Empire and specifically his portrayal of Julius Caesar as the founder and first ruler of the Roman Empire allowed him to promote government by the Holy Roman Empire, the successors of the ancient Roman Empire, as the solution to the political ills of his day.

Julius Caesar is always portrayed by Dante as the first of the Roman emperors, following the tradition of the common medieval misconception.<sup>145</sup> Like his earlier counterparts, it was easy for Dante to view Caesar as the first emperor, especially because of the dictatorial powers Caesar held and because Augustus and his heirs ruled Rome as emperors. The manner in which Caesar ruled and the qualities he displayed were, to Dante, clearly those of a monarch, and they were the qualities Dante believed the world of early fourteenth-century Florence needed. Caesar served as a good model for Dante, not only because of his characteristics as a ruler, but also because the story of Julius Caesar demonstrated the difference between the turmoil caused by competitive power struggles and the peaceful rule of one man. For Dante, the chaos that ensued when Caesar was killed contrasted starkly with the brief peace and clemency of his reign. The only

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<sup>145</sup> Paget Toynbee, *A Dictionary of Proper Names and Notable Matters in the Works of Dante*, revised by Charles S. Singleton (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 168.

way for political stability and peace to exist was to have a monarchy, or rule by a single man.

Besides the prospect of peace that Dante believed a monarchical or imperial form of government offered, he also believed that the Roman Empire, and thus the Holy Roman Empire, was divinely commissioned by God to rule the world. Dante saw evidence of this in the birth of Christ: Christ's choice to be born under the reign of Augustus Caesar signified his divine stamp of approval on the Roman Empire.<sup>146</sup> Although Dante became a supporter of empire, he was still a faithful Christian, and God's approval and will were important to him as evidence of the right of emperors to rule.

*Il Convivio* is the earliest of Dante's works which, although lesser known, depicts Julius Caesar and the Roman Empire in a favorable light.<sup>147</sup> Composed during the first years of his exile, from 1304 to 1308, *Il Convivio* is a work of poetry and prose in which Dante praises human wisdom and knowledge, exhibits his political philosophy regarding the right of an emperor to rule, and his belief in the divinity of the Roman Empire.<sup>148</sup> Most of the book focuses on topics other than politics, but in Book Four Dante does express some political views.

In Book Four, chapters four and five, Dante sets forth his view concerning imperial rule. The basis for his argument is the Aristotelian idea that humans are social beings and have a need for society.<sup>149</sup> Hence, cities are developed where people can

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<sup>146</sup> Dante, *De Monarchia*, 58-59.

<sup>147</sup> Hollander, *Dante*, 157.

<sup>148</sup> Dante Alighieri, *Il Convivio*, trans. Richard H. Lansing (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1990), xvii.

associate not only with their families but also with others around them. Unfortunately, by nature humans are greedy, and society provides many opportunities for discord and disagreement to arise. Dante sees monarchy, and specifically the Roman and Holy Roman Empires, as the solution to this problem. He expresses the belief that, “. . . no nature ever was or will be more tempered in the exercise of rule, stronger in preservation, and more clever in acquiring it than . . . that sacred people in whom was mingled the lofty blood of the Trojans, namely Rome. God chose this people for that office.”<sup>150</sup> He cites Vergil’s prophecy of Rome’s great destiny in the *Aeneid*, perhaps as evidence that even the Romans themselves believed their rule of the world to be divinely appointed.<sup>151</sup> Also, in chapter five of *Il Convivio* Dante continues his discourse with the argument that Aeneas left Troy and founded Rome at the same time as the birth of King David, from whose family line Christ was prophesied to descend. For Dante this, like the birth of Christ under Augustus, is another sign that God ordained the foundation and success of the Roman Empire.<sup>152</sup> Citing the peace that the world experienced under the rule of the ancient Roman Empire, he argues that “God gave Rome not only a special birth but a special evolution.”<sup>153</sup> He briefly discusses the history of Rome and calls Julius Caesar the

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<sup>149</sup> Professor of Italian Studies John Woodhouse agrees that Dante’s ideas about man and politics come from the Aristotelian mode of thought; see Woodhouse, *Dante and Governance*, 2.

<sup>150</sup> Dante, *Il Convivio*, 156-157.

<sup>151</sup> Vergil, *Aeneid*, IV.788-797. In his own works, and specifically in the *Inferno*, Dante spells the name of “Virgil” with an “i” instead of “Vergil” with an “e,” which is the correct Roman spelling. For the purposes of the present composition, when discussing the character of Vergil in the *Inferno*, Dante’s spelling of “Virgil” will be used. When referring to the poet Vergil himself, the traditional Roman spelling will be used.

<sup>152</sup> It does appear that Dante often makes great leaps and draws un-provable conclusions to support his ideas; nevertheless, there is sincerity in his own belief of the connections he makes.

“first supreme prince,” the same idea he expresses later in his portrayal of Caesar in the *Inferno*. These examples from *Il Convivio* are helpful as evidence of the evolution of Dante’s positive attitude towards the Roman Empire, which Julius Caesar is used to represent in his later works.

Another more personal reflection of Dante’s political leanings is his letters, or *Epistolae*, composed at various times during his exile. Several of the letters display his opinions about the divinity of the Roman Empire, and by extension the Holy Roman Empire, and are directly related to the political situations of Florence and his own day. For example, in an epistle written to the princes and peoples of Italy dated circa 1310, Dante passionately exhorts the people concerning the coming of Henry VII, the newly-elected ruler of the Holy Roman Empire, and encourages them to accept his rule. However, because of Papal power in Florence at the time, reactions to Henry’s trip were less than ecstatic. The Florentines saw this new emperor as a threat to their independence. In one letter, Dante tries to assure the people that this is not the case and describes the new emperor as, “the most clement Henry, Divine and Augustus and Caesar . . . he will pardon all who implore his mercy, since he is Caesar and his majesty floweth from the fount of compassion.”<sup>154</sup> Dante ties Henry to Julius Caesar and the Roman emperors of the past and invests Henry with the same qualities of clemency and compassion that both ancient authors and Dante himself attribute to Caesar and to his nephew Augustus. But, besides these qualities, he also titles Henry “Divine,” “Caesar,” and “Augustus,” all of

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<sup>153</sup> Dante, *Il Convivio*, 158-159.

<sup>154</sup> Dante Alighieri, *A Translation of the Latin Works of Dante Alighieri* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), 309.

which were official titles held by Roman emperors.<sup>155</sup> Dante thus legitimates Henry as a divinely appointed ruler and directly relates him to the divinely established Roman Empire. In Dante's eyes, this relationship gives Henry the right to govern Italy and her peoples, who should therefore welcome him.

Dante also warns the Florentines not to rebel against Henry's rule. He reminds them that Christ implicitly approved imperial government through his teachings about two kingdoms, one spiritual and one temporal. Dante also states that it was the Roman emperor "whom Peter, the vicar of God, exhorteth us to honor . . . that where the spiritual ray sufficeth not there the splendor of the lesser luminary [the Empire] may give light."<sup>156</sup> Again, in another epistle to the people of Florence, Dante shows his frustration at their refusal to accept Henry VII as their ruler. Here again he emphasizes the divine nature of imperial government, stating that God has:

committed human things, for governance, to the Holy Roman Empire, that the mortal race might be at peace under the serenity of so great a guardianship . . . [W]hen the throne of Augustus is vacant all the world turneth out of its course . . . and wretched Italy, deserted, and abandoned to private caprices, destitute of all public guidance, is tossed with such battling of winds and waves as words may not express.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Julius Caesar himself never held any of these titles, but Octavian, as his adopted son, received the family name "Caesar," which eventually became part of the emperor's title. "Divine" was added to the name of Octavian when Julius Caesar was divinized by the people and declared to be a god. Octavian was then called "the son of the divine Julius." In 27 BC the Senate granted Octavian the title of "Augustus," which refers to his role in bringing peace and a golden age to Rome. These titles passed from Augustus to his heirs and became part of the title for every Roman emperor. The only exception is the title "Divus" or "Divine," which was held only by those emperors who were divinized. Emperors whose works and acts were condemned after their death (such as Nero or Commodus) were not called "Divine." See Stefan Weinstock, *Divus Julius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); Syme, *Roman Revolution*, 295-348; also Lily Ross Taylor, *The Divinity of the Roman Emperor* (New York: Arno Press, 1975).

<sup>156</sup> Dante, *Translated Works*, 313.

<sup>157</sup> Dante, *Translated Works*, 316.

Dante's warning to the people of Florence is that if they reject the emperor, they also reject peace and harmony and submit themselves instead to a "wretched" life. Warnings such as this demonstrate in an emphatic and personal way exactly how much Dante believed in the need for imperial government, as well as the manner in which he associated that government with Rome.

Dante's personal feelings about the Empire are perhaps best expressed in an epistle to the Emperor Henry VII in the year 1311. Not only does Dante hail Henry as "the successor of Caesar and Augustus," but he also encourages him to gain firm control over Italy. He provides Henry with divine justification for his actions by again using the argument that Christ chose to be born under the reign of Augustus, thereby giving his seal of approval to the Roman Empire.<sup>158</sup> He also alludes to an idea that is implied in the *Divina Commedia*, namely the idea of Aeneas as the founder of Rome.

As mentioned earlier, Aeneas had a son, Iulus, from whom the Julian family, and particularly Julius Caesar himself, claimed descent. In the *Aeneid*, Vergil portrays the foundation of Rome by Aeneas as the fulfillment of prophecy. During his journey to Rome, Aeneas is reminded by the gods to think not only of his own destiny but also the destiny of his son. Iulus, also called Ascanius in the poem, is destined to someday rule the kingdom founded by his father. Dante draws on this example and compares Henry's first-born son, John, to Iulus/Ascanius. Dante tells Henry that in his quest to rule Italy he must think of his son and see himself as another Aeneas. Just as Julius Caesar descended

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<sup>158</sup> Dante, *Translated Works*, 324.

from Aeneas and became a second founder of Rome, so too can Henry be another heir of Aeneas and a founder of empire.<sup>159</sup>

These themes from Dante's letters not only reveal a more straightforward and passionate Dante, but they also provide clear evidence of Dante's political attitudes. They include themes common to his other works and demonstrate how deeply the political situation of his day affected his writings. The fullest development of Dante's political philosophy is found in the treatise *De Monarchia*, which expands on themes from his other works and gives a logical series of proofs that the Roman Empire and its heir, the Holy Roman Empire, were ordained by God to rule on earth.

*De Monarchia* is a work of logic and philosophy, in which Dante expounds on the theory of a divinely-approved empire. Here politics are the central focus, unlike other works such as *Il Convivio*, where Dante calls his discussion of politics a digression.<sup>160</sup> *De Monarchia*, composed during the last years of Dante's life, is often described as "not a work of theory divorced from practical experience of politics," but rather a work that "grows out of painful personal experience."<sup>161</sup> An examination of the entire treatise would be too exhaustive here, but a brief perusal of the structure and main arguments

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<sup>159</sup> Craig Kallendorf, *In Praise of Aeneas: Virgil and Epideictic Rhetoric in the Early Italian Renaissance* (London: University Press of New England, 1989), 8.

<sup>160</sup> Dante, *Il Convivio*, 166.

<sup>161</sup> Dante, *Monarchy*, xi. There is some controversy as to the actual date this treatise was composed, whether it was composed before the *Divina Commedia* or long after. Some date it as early as 1310, including Rachel Jacoff in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, xix. Most scholars, however, lean towards a later dating of 1314-1318, which would mean that the treatise was started around the time that he finished the *Inferno*. See Dante Alighieri, *Monarchy*, trans. Prue Shaw (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), x; see also Anthony K. Cassell, *The Monarchia Controversy: an Historical Study with Accompanying Translations of Dante Alighieri's Monarchia, Guido Verani's Refutation of the Monarchia composed by Dante and Pope John XXII's bull Si Fratrum* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 3; also Richard Kay, trans. *Dante's Monarchia* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1998), xx-xxxii.



sufficiently demonstrates that Dante's exile solidified his political opinions to the point that he willingly gave full support to the Holy Roman Empire.

The text of *De Monarchia* is divided into three books, each a logical progression to the next. The first discusses whether monarchy, as a form of government, is necessary for the well-being of mankind. The second recounts various aspects of Roman history to demonstrate that the Roman people ruled the world by a divinely-granted right. The third and final book confronts the issue of authority, seeking to prove that both the pope and the emperor derive their authority from God; neither one derives its authority from the other.<sup>162</sup> In all three books combined then, Dante addresses the political conflicts that plagued Florence and argues that monarchy, or empire, is the best form of government.

As a reconstruction of Roman history Book Two deserves consideration, since it details certain events that show God's hand in the establishment of the Roman Empire and also more fully develops ideas from his *Epistolae* and *Il Convivio*. Again he expresses frustration at Italy's stubborn resistance to the Holy Roman emperor, since, as he means to prove with examples from Roman history, the emperor is God's designated temporal ruler.<sup>163</sup> Dante gives examples of miracles from classical Roman military battles, and demonstrates how Roman ideas of the public good correspond with Christian beliefs; he even draws on examples from the *Aeneid* to show that the Romans themselves believed it was their destiny to rule the world.<sup>164</sup> Evidences such as this form the basis for Dante to declare that Roman rule was truly inspired of God.

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<sup>162</sup> *De Monarchia*.3.12.1-3.

<sup>163</sup> *De Monarchia*.3.1.5, 3.15.1-3.

After proving that Roman rule is divinely ordained, Dante next contends that the Holy Roman emperor derives his authority from God and not from the pope. He argues that those who support the pope and his authority over the emperor twist the meaning of scriptures, such as Genesis 1:16, which states that there are two lights in the heaven, the lesser light to rule the night, the greater one to rule the day. Those who supported papal authority interpreted this verse to mean that the lesser light, the Empire, derives its light and glory from the greater light, or the Church.<sup>165</sup> Dante points to the error in such an interpretation, stating that it is incorrect because God created the two lights on the fourth day and man on the sixth, so if man was not created until the sixth day, God would not have established any human authority on earth until that time.<sup>166</sup> Such logic, along with other scriptures and historical events, are the tools Dante uses to make his points. He portrays the Roman Empire as part of God's divine plan, working towards His divine purposes though they did not know it. He also asserts that because the ancient Roman Empire came before the Church, the Church has no authority over it or its successor, the Holy Roman Empire. Instead, they each rule God's earthly kingdoms, one spiritual and the other temporal.<sup>167</sup>

The straightforward and bold assertions made by Dante in *De Monarchia* were used by supporters of the Holy Roman Emperor for years following its publication. After Dante died at Ravenna in 1321, the conflicts for which he had provided solutions

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<sup>164</sup> *De Monarchia*.2.3, 2.6; see also Theodore Silverstein, "On the Genesis of De Monarchia II, V," *Speculum* 13, no. 3 (1938): 326.

<sup>165</sup> *De Monarchia*.3.4.1-5.

<sup>166</sup> *De Monarchia*.3.4.13-16.

<sup>167</sup> Cassell, *The Monarchia Controversy*, 13-14.

continued to rage. Due to its consistent use by those who supported imperial government, there were public book burnings of *De Monarchia* by the papists only eight years after its publication, and in 1554 it was placed on the list of books prohibited by the Vatican.<sup>168</sup> The political events of Dante's day that had shaped the attitude of his works continued to repeat themselves, as the struggle for power between the Church and the Empire carried on.

Like his political treatises and letters, Dante's poetry also addresses ideas of political power, although in a more subtle and artistic manner. Because a logical progression of evidence and argument does not work in the medium of poetry, Dante had to use images and symbols to convey political meaning. Numerous critiques of the *Divina Commedia* examine its religious and political messages, as well as its imagery and ideas. However, in discussions of the literary, mythological, theological, and political messages of the poem, one of the points often mentioned but treated only briefly is Dante's depiction of Julius Caesar in the *Inferno*.<sup>169</sup> It is true that Caesar is not a major recurring character in the poem, but the few portrayals of Caesar that Dante includes in the *Inferno* show that for him, Caesar served as a type to express the important political message that the Roman Empire was divinely designated by God to govern secular matters on earth. The one direct comment made about Caesar in the poem comes through the Emperor Justinian in the *Paradiso* section of the *Divina Commedia*, who states that Julius Caesar

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<sup>168</sup> Cassell, *The Monarchia Controversy*, 3; see also Dante, *De Monarchia*, xli-xliii.

<sup>169</sup> Hollander, Woodhouse, Scott, and Ferrante all mention Dante's treatment of Julius Caesar. None, however, write more than a paragraph or line concerning portrayals of Caesar in the *Inferno*, or they mention Caesar only in reference to other characters within the poem such as Cato: see Hollander, *Dante*, 131-132; Scott, *Dante's Political Purgatory*, 69-84. The present work adds new depth to other analyses by focusing on every mention of Caesar in the *Inferno*, as well as placing the *Inferno* in context with and in comparison to Dante's other writings.

took control of the Empire by both the will of God and the will of the Roman people.<sup>170</sup> Besides this comment however, Dante's references to Julius Caesar are not direct statements. Instead, Dante uses imagery of Caesar throughout the *Inferno* to portray his political perspectives and beliefs.

Dante's first reference to Caesar comes through the voice of the great Roman poet Virgil, Dante's guide through the *Inferno*. Virgil is an appropriate guide for Dante, especially because Aeneas, the hero of Virgil's famous *Aeneid*, takes a tour of the underworld himself.<sup>171</sup> In Canto I of the *Inferno* Virgil introduces himself, telling Dante that he was born "sub Iulio," or under the time of Julius Caesar's political career.<sup>172</sup> This brief reference gives importance to Caesar as a ruler and leader by using him as a chronological reference point, despite the fact that his actual rule of Rome was short-lived. Traditionally Romans identified years by the names of the two men who served as consuls that year. Virgil was not born during one of Caesar's consulships, but Caesar was a powerful political player at the time of his birth. Virgil's identification of his birth with Caesar's rule sets the tone for further references to Caesar in the poem.

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<sup>170</sup> Peter Armour, "Dante and Popular Sovereignty," in *Dante and Governance*, 40.

<sup>171</sup> For more on the influence of Vergil on Dante's writing, and specifically their ideas of empire, see Eve Adler, *Vergil's Empire: Political Thought in the Aeneid* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 200-212.

<sup>172</sup> Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*.I.53, trans. Robert M. Durling (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). There are other possible interpretations of "sub Iulio," including the idea that Caesar was above Virgil in hierarchy, power, and prestige, but since the line specifically refers to the time of Virgil's birth it seems more likely that it is an indication of time. Joan M. Ferrante agrees, citing, from his 1887 commentary on the *Divina Commedia*, Benvenuto da Imola's comment that although Virgil was really born under the rule of consuls, Dante has him state otherwise because of Virgil's regard for Caesar and desire to derive his origin from Caesar's reign. For further comment on Dante and his treatment of Virgil Ferrante also refers to Robert Hollander, *Il Virgilio Dantesco: Tragedia nella "Commedia"* (Florence: Olschki, 1983); see Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 138.

Next, in Canto II, lines 22-24 Virgil tells Dante, “Rome and her empire to tell the truth, were established to be the holy place where the successor of great Peter is enthroned.” Here Dante draws a connection between the establishment of the Roman Empire and the establishment of the Church. According to Dante, the city of Rome was established long before the Church, in order to be a holy place where the Church would be centered. By emphasizing that Rome and her Empire were put in place prior to, and for the express purpose of, the establishment of the Church, Dante suggests that the Empire was just as significant as the Church and even necessary to its successful establishment. Although it is only a short line, Dante conveys a great deal of political meaning within it. If the ancient Roman Empire were necessary for the establishment of the Church, then the Holy Roman Empire should be just as important to the foundation and success of the Church in Dante’s own day. Both secular and spiritual authorities were essential and were established by God to govern men together.

Having thus emphasized the importance of the Roman Empire, Dante next includes a reference to Julius Caesar himself. Dante encounters Caesar in person and describes him, but it is not how Dante depicts Caesar in this instance that is of great consequence; instead, it is the particular placement of Caesar that alludes to Dante’s high regard for this Roman. In the *Inferno*, Dante meets Caesar in Canto IV, while journeying through Limbo. Limbo, he is informed, is the resting place for the souls of those who did not receive baptism or who lived before Christianity, but did not sin. Limbo is Virgil’s assigned circle of hell, along with other great pagans and poets, and among them is Julius Caesar. Dante describes Caesar as wearing armor and having griffin-like eyes, signs of

his military skill and political sharpness. Also, he portrays Caesar standing in company with Electra, Hector, and Aeneas, all three of whom are, in a way, founders. Electra is the legendary mother of Dardanus, the founder of the Trojan race. Hector is the great Trojan prince, a descendant of Dardanus, and Aeneas is the Trojan who escaped the destruction of his home and fled to Italy, where he and his descendants founded and ruled Rome.<sup>173</sup> Caesar is appropriately grouped with them, not only because Dante viewed him as the founder of Rome's Empire, but also because Caesar's family, the Julians, claimed descent from Aeneas through his son Iulus, hence the Julian family name.<sup>174</sup>

Not only is this depiction of Caesar important because he is grouped with his ancestors and is, like them, a founder of Rome, but it is also significant because Dante positions him in Limbo, the place where souls who never received baptism but had merit were stationed. This stands in contrast to Dante's portrayal of other imperial founders such as Alexander the Great, whom Dante places in the seventh circle of hell, the location of the tyrants and the violent.<sup>175</sup> For Dante, Caesar's foundation of an empire was not the foundation of a tyranny; it was the fulfillment of a divinely inspired plan for man's temporal government.

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<sup>173</sup> *Inferno*.IV.104-107.

<sup>174</sup> Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, trans. Alan Shapiro (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1990), 201-215. In Latin the name "Julius" is spelled with an "I" as "Iulius," therefore suggesting the family connection with Iulus.

<sup>175</sup> Dante, *Inferno*.XII.100, 121. This is also significant because Dante does not include any other Roman emperors, such as Nero (who in medieval times was considered the most wicked of the Julio-Claudian emperors), among the tyrants here or anywhere else in the *Inferno*; see Scott, *Dante's Political Purgatory*, 79.

Dante's desire to portray Caesar as a founder of the Roman Empire is evident with regards to his placement of other imperial rulers, but it is also shown in his placement of Curio, one of Caesar's allies. In the *Inferno* Curio resides in the ninth circle of hell among the "sowers of discord." Historically, Curio was Caesar's ally through bribery (a common Roman political practice), and it was Curio who, after the Senate declared Caesar a public enemy, fled north to Caesar and informed him of the Senate's actions. Shortly thereafter Caesar crossed the Rubicon River and marched on Rome with his armies. The crossing of the Rubicon heightened an already tense political situation into a war between Caesar and Pompey, thus causing great discord among the people of Rome. The image of Caesar as a source of discord does not fit well with Dante's desire to depict him as the founder of a stable, peaceful empire, so Dante avoids this conflict by placing Curio among the sowers of discord, designating Curio as the cause of civil war because he encouraged Caesar to cross the Rubicon. As a result, Dante absolves Caesar of total guilt for causing a civil war, and can still use him a credible symbol of a divine empire.<sup>176</sup>

Of all the portrayals of Caesar in the *Inferno*, the most significant is Dante's depiction of the lowest level of hell, *Giudecca*, where the Devil himself resides. As Dante and Virgil descend into this last and lowest circle of the *Inferno*, they see Satan, a huge and ugly giant with three faces on his head.<sup>177</sup> As the poem describes the Devil, his front face is crimson, the one on the left is black, and on the right is a face of yellow-white. The gruesome description continues: "With six eyes he was weeping, and down

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<sup>176</sup> *Inferno*.XXVIII.85-93; also Toynbee, *Dictionary*, 210.

<sup>177</sup> *Inferno*.XXXIV.41-46.

three chins dripped the tears and the bloody slobber. In each of his mouths he was breaking a sinner with his teeth in the manner of a scutch so that he made all three to suffer at once . . . .”<sup>178</sup> Informed by Virgil, Dante then discovers the identity of the three sinners worthy of such a torment. Judas Iscariot is the wretched soul hung with his head inside and his feet outside the mouth of the front face; for Judas, “. . . the biting was nothing next to the clawing, for at times the spine remained all naked of skin.”<sup>179</sup> Those who dangled from the other two mouths by their feet, their heads being exposed, were Brutus and Cassius. All three were suffering in a manner far worse than any of the other sinners Dante had come across in his journey; they were personally tortured by Satan himself.

Of all the various sinners in hell, why were these three men accorded the worst punishment of all? Furthermore, why did Dante choose to place these three, and only these three, together in hell? In the *Inferno*, each level of hell is designated as a place for certain types of sinners, thus, since they are placed together Judas, Brutus, and Cassius share a common sin. That mutual sin is betrayal. It is obvious why Dante, as a Christian, would feel that Judas, the betrayer of Jesus Christ, deserved a horrific punishment, but at first glance it is not as clear why Brutus and Cassius, the chief conspirators who murdered Julius Caesar, would be placed along with him. It is also unclear why these men are the only three betrayers found in this level of hell; surely there are others whom Dante could have included? The answer to this question is in the political message Dante meant to convey with this imagery.

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<sup>178</sup> *Inferno*.XXXIV.54-55.

<sup>179</sup> *Inferno*.XXXIV.59-60.



By placing Judas, Brutus, and Cassius together in hell, Dante makes a significant political statement, clearly influenced by the political climate of his day. Additionally, with this grouping it appears that Dante equates the betrayal of Christ with the betrayal of Julius Caesar. This is not to say that this equation is absolute; the poem does specifically state that Judas, with his head inside Satan's mouth, is receiving the greatest punishment.<sup>180</sup> However, due to his own experiences with unstable government and Papal interference in secular affairs, Dante saw the need for both secular and spiritual government, with two separate entities to control them. He uses the lowest level of Hell to emphasize this by placing the man who betrayed Jesus Christ, the founder of the Christian church, with the men who betrayed Julius Caesar, whom Dante viewed as the founder of the Roman Empire. By giving these men such a significant place, Dante voices his political opinion that both the Church and the Holy Roman Empire are necessary and the God afflicts those who betray either with the worst punishment possible.<sup>181</sup> This explains why Judas, Brutus, and Cassius are the only three betrayers in the lowest level of hell; together they highlight and equate the importance of the Holy Roman Empire and the Church above all else.

Dante's portrayal of Judas, Brutus, and Cassius is significant not only as the climax of the *Inferno* but also because of its political meaning. Put together with the other

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<sup>180</sup> *Inferno*.XXXIV.61; also Toynbee, *Dictionary*, 116-117. Ferrante also supports this and makes an interesting comment, pointing out that the evil of Brutus and Cassius is on a level with that of Judas. Ferrante then states: "With three mouths occupied, there is no room for the betrayer of a pope, not because there were none, but because the pope is not on the same level of importance. Only the emperor is God's vicar on earth; the Pope is Christ's priest, but not as ruler [over temporal affairs]." This idea is important because it shows Dante's esteem for imperial government and respect for the Church along with his unfavorable attitude towards the Papacy and its interference in temporal affairs. See Ferrante, *Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 126.

<sup>181</sup> Toynbee, *Dictionary*, 117.

representations of Julius Caesar in the *Inferno*, it provides emphatic evidence of Dante's belief in empire. Using short but precise imagery throughout the poem, he goes to great lengths to give the classical Roman Empire and Julius Caesar, as its representative, a portrayal that is favorable not only to Caesar and the ancient Roman Empire, but also to the Holy Roman Empire of Dante's time.

Through the portrayals of Julius Caesar and the Roman Empire in each of his post-exilic writings, Dante proves himself to be not only a literary master but also a man deeply concerned with the politics of his day. As he experienced the problems caused by promoters papal authority over imperial government, he concluded that both powers were inspired by God and, in order for Italy to have peace, both were necessary. He worked to promote this idea through his writings and, as historian John Larner points out, "Without revolution, massacre, exile, and political turbulence, where is the *Divine Comedy*?"<sup>182</sup> To Larner's statement can be added the idea that without his use of the Roman Empire and Julius Caesar as its representative, Dante's support of empire in his works would not be as clear. Because Dante saw Julius Caesar as the first Roman emperor, Caesar was a perfect example for him to use, particularly in the *Inferno* where a straightforward discussion of history and scripture is instead replaced by imagery and examples. In other words, Julius Caesar served as a forceful image through which Dante could effectively express his political attitude towards empire. Dante composed not only logical treatises and impassioned letters, but also beautiful poetry, all of which articulate his belief that

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<sup>182</sup> John Larner, *Italy in the Age of Dante and Petrarch, 1216-1380* (London: Longman Group Limited, 1980), 7.

imperial government was the solution to the political ills of the time. In so doing, Dante, one of the great authors of the Middle Ages, truly proves himself to be a political poet.

Like Dante, Petrarch came from a background of exile from Florence, and, though he never really resided there, considered himself a Florentine. As a White Guelph Petrarch's father was exiled from Florence in 1302, just nine months after Dante, and Petrarch was born "in exile" in Arezzo two years later.<sup>183</sup> During Petrarch's youth the family moved to Avignon, which in 1309 had become the new home of the papacy. Petrarch's parents ensured that he received a good education, and it is obvious from his prolific scholarship that Petrarch loved learning. Unlike Dante, Petrarch never held a political office, but he did study law and was employed as an ambassador often throughout his life.<sup>184</sup>

Also unlike Dante, Petrarch took minor orders in 1330 and thus began a close association with the church. He became part of Cardinal Giovanni Colonna's household, which enabled him to earn a living and pursue his studies.<sup>185</sup> In 1333 Petrarch traveled to northern Europe and visited Paris, where he discovered several previously unknown manuscripts of Cicero. This discovery is believed to have impacted his desire to make his studies of classical Rome a life-long pursuit. Travel also became a standard part of Petrarch's life; he spent the majority of his time living in Avignon or Northern Italy, and traveling the Italian peninsula. He occupied his final years living in Milan and

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<sup>183</sup> Kenelm Foster, *Petrarch: Poet and Humanist* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984), 1.

<sup>184</sup> One example of this is a diplomatic mission to Naples which he served for the Pope in 1343; see Foster, *Petrarch*, 7.

<sup>185</sup> Foster, *Petrarch*, 4.

communicating with both the papacy in Avignon and the Holy Roman Emperor, seeking to convince both that they were each equally important to the establishment of good government.

The political struggles that existed during Dante's lifetime were also prevalent throughout the life of Petrarch. Conflict between the church and the empire continued, as well as the battle between monarchical or imperial government and independent republics. Like Dante, the failure of the Italian communes to establish stable republics, along with his studies of antiquity, convinced Petrarch that empire was the best form of government. In his early works, we see evidence of Petrarch's republican sentiments; however, there is also a progression of thought that eventually ended in his support of imperial government. Julius Caesar and his image as understood by Petrarch, play an important role in this transformation. In this way, both Dante and Petrarch demonstrate the importance of Caesar as a representation of Roman imperial government.

Accordingly, like Dante, Petrarch also found many uses for the image of Julius Caesar in his numerous writings. In the generation after Dante, Petrarch used Caesar as an image to discuss the same politic issues: the relationship between the papacy and the Empire and the right of the Empire to rule. However, a study of Petrarch's early life and works demonstrates that Caesar was not always a positive figure for Petrarch, nor was he always Petrarch's hero of choice. However, through his studies and travels, as well as the political situation in which he lived, Petrarch eventually came to hold Caesar in the highest esteem. By the end of his life, Petrarch viewed Caesar as the ultimate figure in

Roman history, and used him both as a representation of the Roman Empire and Roman moral values.

In discussing the evolution of Petrarch's thought, Hans Baron found Petrarch's use and opinion of Caesar to be one of the best examples of the shift in his political and historical views. According to Baron, Petrarch was critical of Caesar in his earlier works, such as the *Africa*, but by his later years Petrarch saw Caesar as "the apex of Roman history."<sup>186</sup> There could be many reasons for this change, including Petrarch's increased association with supporters of the Empire in northern Italy, the expansion of his studies to include various classical texts, and the spiritual crisis he suffered in the 1340s. Martellotti and Baron both argue that, more than all the other possible reasons, Petrarch's expanded study was really what caused his shift in opinion.<sup>187</sup> While there is little doubt that his association with imperial supporters influenced him to hold the Empire in higher esteem, it is not likely that this alone could be the main cause of Petrarch's great admiration for Caesar. Baron suggests that Petrarch's study of Caesar's own written works was most influential in changing his view of Caesar and Roman history. This, however, does not mean that Petrarch suddenly discovered Caesar at a certain point in his life; there is, in fact, good evidence that he was familiar with, if not engaged in a serious study of, the *Gallic Wars* as early as 1343. Additionally, Petrarch's correspondence with Charles IV dating to 1353 demonstrates an early affinity for Caesar, based almost entirely on Suetonius, rather than on Caesar's own works. So although Petrarch did not seriously

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<sup>186</sup> Hans Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni: Studies in Humanistic and Political Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), 29.

<sup>187</sup> See Martellotti, "Petrarca e Cesare," 149-158; and Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni*, 29-33.

study Caesar's own writing until later in life, there is good evidence that he was familiar with them, as well as other sources on Caesar, from his early years. Thus, before Petrarch even began a serious study of Caesar's own works, he already viewed Caesar in a positive light. His study of Caesar's writings only increased his admiration for the slain dictator.<sup>188</sup>

Along with his study of Caesar's own works, another development that seems to have influenced Petrarch's view of Caesar was a renewed study of earlier medieval texts. In his early years, Petrarch avoided using medieval ideas and norms in his studies and writing, determined to break past the barriers that medieval scholars had set for themselves. However, in his later years, there is evidence that Petrarch resumed study of Christian Rome, which led him back to medieval ideas he previously ignored.<sup>189</sup> Studying medieval concepts of Christianity and its relationship to the Roman Empire reinforced in his mind the idea of a divinely established Roman Empire, and the medieval belief that Julius Caesar was the founder of it.

Another influential factor was Petrarch's choice to live in the courts of the Northern Italian tyrants; from 1353 until his death in 1374 he lived in the kingdoms of the north, instead of France or Tuscany, where he grew up. Perhaps this was because he had never lived in Florence, or because his father had been exiled from Florence in 1302. Whatever the case may be, it is clear that Petrarch, unlike Dante who had exile thrust upon him some years earlier, was not forced, but instead chose, to live in the monarchical North. This choice signifies that he was not opposed to monarchy (for why would he live

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<sup>188</sup> Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni*, 33, 37, 39.

<sup>189</sup> Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni*, 30-31.

among tyrants, if he violently opposed them?) and perhaps even that he preferred it to the republican city-states of Tuscany. There is little doubt that this choice later influenced his opinion of Caesar. Already in the 1350s he indicates an inclination towards monarchy, especially in a letter to the Doge of Genoa in which he states that the rule of just one leader is the best form of government.<sup>190</sup>

Also an influence was Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, particularly on the points of Cato's suicide and the assassins. Petrarch reflects Augustine's accusations of pride and ambition as the main motives of Caesar's murderers; he also agrees with Augustine that Cicero and Seneca were wrong to justify Cato's suicide. In his *Secretum* and *De Remediis* Petrarch accuses the assassins of killing Caesar out of greed and speculates that Cato's suicide was caused by envy for Caesar and his glory, questioning whether Caesar, the most merciful and kind of all tyrants, really needed to be feared as Cato claimed, and also speculating that perhaps Cato simply wanted his name to be famous for a great or heroic deed.<sup>191</sup>

Petrarch, then, presents a conundrum of sorts in his use of Julius Caesar. In his depiction of Caesar as a statesman, military hero, and moral example, Petrarch moved Caesar's image beyond the simplistic medieval view of Caesar as first emperor and founder of the Republic. However, unlike later humanists, Petrarch never discourses on the political struggle that led to Caesar's death, and when he does write about the

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<sup>190</sup> Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni*, 36.

<sup>191</sup> See Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni*, 38-39, also *Secretum* 2.14.18. The example from the *Secretum* is especially significant here; written in 1353 the *Secretum* is a dialogue Petrarch imagined between himself and Saint Augustine and it is Augustine who reminds Petrarch in conversation that even great generosity like Caesar's was not enough to satisfy the greed of his assassins.

assassination he lists jealousy as the main motive behind Caesar's murder, instead of developing a complex explanation about the politics around it. Also, Petrarch continues to employ the image of Caesar as the founder of the Empire, especially in his personal correspondence.<sup>192</sup> In this way Petrarch represents the early trends of humanism, but his approach to Caesar is still tinged with medieval ideas. It is interesting that in his early years Petrarch appears more critical in his interpretation of Caesar, while towards the end of his life his portrayal of Caesar is identical to that found in medieval sources.

Perhaps the real question then, is why Petrarch, who for most of his earlier years focused on figures and examples from the republican period, eventually turned to Caesar as the main source and figure of Roman history.<sup>193</sup> The answer is perhaps that Petrarch was never the staunch republican supporter that on the surface he appears to be. As early as the composition of the *Africa*, a biographical poem about the great Roman general Scipio Africanus, there is evidence of a growing distaste for republican Rome. This was mostly likely engendered by Petrarch's irritation with the city-state politics of his own day, including repeatedly failed attempts to re-establish a Roman Republic in Italy.<sup>194</sup> And, despite the fact that Petrarch criticizes Caesar in the *Africa*, he also criticizes the Roman Republic as an institution, bemoaning the fact that so many excellent men were

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<sup>192</sup> Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni*, 39-40.

<sup>193</sup> Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni*, 34.

<sup>194</sup> In particular, Cola di Rienzo's failed overthrow of Rome in 1347 significantly impacted Petrarch; Cola was appointed "tribune" of a new Roman Republic by the people of Rome. Petrarch hoped that Cola would bring about a restoration of ancient Roman glory and a unification of Italy, but Cola resigned before the end of 1347 due to Papal pressure and lack of ability to exert authority outside of the city of Rome. This affair seems to have dealt a final blow to any Republican hopes that Petrarch held, and turned him more fully to support the Holy Roman Empire. See Foster, *Petrarch*, 9-11; Dotti, *Vita di Petrarca*, 108-110, 176-190; Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni*, 35.



limited in what they could do for Rome by the one-year term for the consulship and the pressure they felt from their peers in the oligarchy.

Also, in the *Secretum*, composed about five years after the *Africa*, Petrarch shows a growing regard for Caesar by praising his generosity and also displays a disregard for the Republic, as in the *Africa*. The *Secretum* is an imagined dialogue between Petrarch and Saint Augustine, covering all manner of theological and philosophical questions. While discussing the idea that all men live for others in some regard, Petrarch, through a comment made by Augustine, severely condemns the conspirators who assassinated Caesar. Augustine states that very few men have truly independent lives, even Caesar in a sense lived for the men who killed him. He then calls the assassins the authors of a “perfide,” or “treacherous,” conspiracy, and insinuates that they killed him out of jealousy and greed for his power by stating that even Caesar’s generosity could not satiate their greed.<sup>195</sup> In this way Petrarch condemns the motives of the conspirators; although they claimed to kill Caesar in order to free Rome from tyranny, their real reasons were probably less altruistic and more along the lines of envy.

This passage does two things, first it praises Caesar for his generosity which shows Petrarch’s growing regard for Caesar and his moral characteristics and second, by condemning the motives of the Republican conspirators it in a way criticizes the Republic which the conspirators claimed to defend. Though it is not an outright endorsement of empire, this passage from the *Secretum* demonstrates the progression of Petrarch’s image of Caesar which as Baron points out grew to the point that, “By the time he grew old,

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<sup>195</sup> “Interrogabis fortasse: Quibus? His nimirum a quibus occisus est: D. Bruto, T. Cimbro, ceterisque perfide coniurationis auctoribus, quorum cupiditates explere non valuit tanti munificentia largitoris,” *Secretum*, 2.14.18.

[Petrarch] was to ask whether Cato's suicide was not due to envy of Caesar's glory [and] whether it was really necessary to fear Caesar so much, the 'most clement and benevolent, not only of all tyrant but of all princes.'"<sup>196</sup>

In another of Petrarch's early works, a set of six poems entitled the *Triumphs*, Caesar has even more prominence in Petrarch's thought. Caesar is mentioned in three of the poems, the *Triumphus Cupidinis*, *Triumphus Pudicitie*, and the *Triumphus Fame*, but it is his image in the *Triumphus Fame* that is most significant. Petrarch begins the *Triumphus Fame* with a description of Fame as she who, after the triumph of death over man, comes and saves him from the grave. As she approaches Petrarch describes Fame's glory, and the glory of those surrounding her. Accompanying Fame on her right hand are Scipio and Caesar, whom Petrarch describes thus:

Scolpito per le fronti era il valore  
De l'onorata gente, dov'io scorsi  
Molti di quei che legar vidi Amore.

Da man destra, ove gli occhi in prima porsi,  
La bella donna aveva Cesare e Scipio,  
Ma, qual piu presso, a gran pena m'accorsi:

L'un di Vertute e non d'Amor mancipio,  
L'altro d'entrambi. . . .<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Hans Baron, *Petrarch's Secretum Its Making and Its Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: The Medieval Academy of America, 1985), 163-164. Baron also contends that this is a later insertion into the *Secretum*; although the *Secretum* dates to 1342-43, there is not enough evidence in other contemporary works by Petrarch to "attribute such an attitude to Petrarch in 1342-43." However, even if it is a later insertion is still shows that Petrarch's approval of Caesar had grown to the point that he perhaps amended earlier works to reflect this change in attitude.

<sup>197</sup> *Triumphus Fame* I.19-26. A rough English translation is: "Carved on their foreheads was the mark of an honorable people, many of them I lately saw bound by Love. On her right hand, positioned in the first place, the beautiful woman had Caesar and Scipio, but which was nearer with great struggle I could not tell. One served Virtue, but not Love, the other served both together . . ."

There are several interesting points here. First is that fact that previous to this work Scipio was foremost among Petrarch's Roman heroes, but here Caesar has risen to occupy a place next to Scipio as the first two in the company of Fame. Also interesting is the statement that he could not discern which of the two stood closer to Fame, because it suggests that Petrarch was not willing to give up Scipio as his hero, but still wanted to place Caesar on equal footing with him. Considering treatments of Caesar in other texts this portrayal shows a significant improvement of Caesar's image in Petrarch's mind.

There are a few other clues in this passage that suggest Petrarch's growing partiality for Caesar as an outstanding representation of Roman history. Before introducing Scipio and Caesar Petrarch states that those coming with Fame bore the marks of honor on their brows, and that some of those he sees with Fame are also those he saw with Love. This is notable because Caesar and not Scipio appeared with Love in the *Triumphus Cupidinis*. Additionally, Petrarch also comments that out of the two men, one served Virtue but not Love, and that the other served them both. Based on Caesar's inclusion in both the *Triumphus Pudicitie* and the *Triumphus Cupidinis*, and the fact that Scipio is mentioned only at length in the *Triumphus Pudicitie*, it is safe to assume that Petrarch is referring to Scipio as the man who served only Virtue, but Caesar as the man who served both Virtue and Love.<sup>198</sup> It is difficult to tell here whether Petrarch meant this as praise for Caesar, but Petrarch's statement that among those who bore the marks of

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<sup>198</sup> In the *Triumphus Cupidinis* I.88-93 Petrarch portrays Caesar in Egypt with Cleopatra where he, the conqueror of the world, was himself conquered by love; Caesar is also mentioned in *Triumphus Pudicitie* I.70-81. Scipio appears in the *Triumphus Pudicitie* I.169-174. For further analysis of the *Triumphus* see Marguerite R. Waller, *Petrarch's Poetics and Literary History* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 106-134.

worthiness were some whom he had seen earlier with Love suggests that it is not, at any rate, a negative association. In this passage then, it seems as if Petrarch almost struggles between his high regard for Scipio and a new admiration for Caesar. It is obvious that he does not want to replace his old favorite with a new hero (hence his statement that both men stood at the right hand of Fame, but he could not tell who was closer) but at the same time it is evident that he wants to give Caesar an honored status. Thus the *Triumphus Fame* serves as further proof that Petrarch's image of Caesar changed over the course of his life.

Following the progression of Petrarch's use of Caesar as an image, an examination of works dated to his later years reveal that by the end of his life Petrarch employed Caesar's image frequently and proclaimed his admiration for the fallen hero openly.<sup>199</sup> This is especially true in the letters he wrote in his old age, where he consistently used Caesar as a notable example whether writing to military commanders, good friends, or even the pope. It is easy to glean from these letters the traits that Petrarch especially admired in Caesar, because he often refers to the same qualities in different letters. One such example is Caesar's forgiving nature and mercy. In two different letters, written for varying purposes, Petrarch refers to Cicero's comment that Caesar never forgot anything, except for past wrongs committed against him.<sup>200</sup> In fact, Petrarch's high regard for Caesar is convincingly demonstrated in one of these letters when he states:

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<sup>199</sup> Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni*, 29, 38-40. Here Baron aptly points out that in his early works such as the *Africa* Petrarch criticized Caesar as the destroyer of the Republic, but that in later works Caesar appeared as "the supreme model and the very apex of Roman history." Also, for an account of Petrarch's later years see Ernest Hatch Wilkins, *Petrarch's Years in Milan* (Cambridge, MA: The Medieval Academy of America, 1958).

He [Caesar] so abounded in these virtues [mercy and forgiveness], not to mention others, as no one ever before, although he obtained no fit reward for them, inasmuch as he was cut down by those very men whom he had loaded with the highest honors and riches, and to whom he, the victor, had yielded every right of victory, all enmity, all their wrongdoing; nor did his liberality or clemency help him, wherefore it was for good reason that at his funeral those words of Pacuvius were sung: "To think I saved them to be killed by them."<sup>201</sup>

Petrarch not only praises Caesar for his good qualities, but it is almost possible to hear him bemoaning the death of Caesar and censuring the assassins; it is plain that he felt that Caesar's death was an unjustified incident and that he believed Caesar to be a good, moral example.

On the other hand, Petrarch's constant praise for Caesar does not mean that he never acknowledges Caesar's faults; he actually does this on occasion as well. For instance, immediately following the quotation cited above, Petrarch explains that he can find not cause for the hatred that the assassins felt towards Caesar, with the exception that Caesar did possess "a certain insolence and haughtiness of spirit that raised him above traditional rules; for he enjoyed honors too much and usurped dignities beyond his due."<sup>202</sup> This is criticism of Caesar indeed, but Petrarch does not let it sit too long; he qualifies his assertion right away by pointing out that the imperial pomp displayed by Caesar looks positively humble in comparison to that of the later and far inferior

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<sup>200</sup> Aldo S. Bernardo, Saul Levin, and Reta A. Bernardo, trans. *Letters of Old Age: Rerum Senilium Libri I-XVIII, Volume I* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). Hereafter letters from this translation shall be cited with the book and number of the letter, as well as the page number from the translation. (Example: Sen.XVI, 1, 527). Sen. XIV, 1, 527 and Sen. X, 1, 351. The first is a letter to a Cistercian monk, encouraging him to persevere in trials, the second is a letter to Francesco da Carrara, Lord of Padua, on the qualities of those who successfully govern a state.

<sup>201</sup> Sen. XIV, 1, 527.

<sup>202</sup> Sen. XIV, 1, 527.

emperors, so perhaps in Caesar's case the problem was not so much his arrogance as that Rome was not used to such displays. Petrarch here is a masterful historian, acknowledging contrary evidence in the imperfections of Caesar, but still qualifying them and strengthening his point.

Another way in which Petrarch exhibits his admiration for Caesar is his use of Caesar as an example.<sup>203</sup> In April of 1364 Petrarch wrote a letter to Luchino dal Verme of Verona, who at the time was the newly appointed military commander to put down a rebellion on the island of Crete. In his letter, Petrarch wanted to provide dal Verme with encouragement and by enumerating the qualities of a successful supreme commander. In order to do so, Petrarch of course peppers the letter with examples highlighting the qualities he feels a supreme commander should possess. Chief among these examples is Julius Caesar, whom Petrarch plainly views as a man to be emulated.

According to Petrarch, the first quality of a great military commander is a wide knowledge of the military arts, gained through experience and practice both in times of war and times of peace. Caesar serves as the supporting evidence for this point: "Julius Caesar is praised above others for this, as for almost everything else; I am speaking of things concerning war and military service, in which no one ever shone more brightly, according to the most and surest authorities."<sup>204</sup> Petrarch further encourages Luchino to study Roman history for additional examples, "for none is so rich in famous models." These statements display just how highly Petrarch thought of Caesar; not only is Caesar

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<sup>203</sup> Carol Everhart Quillen, *Rereading the Renaissance: Petrarch, Augustine, and the Language of Humanism* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998), 89.

<sup>204</sup> *Sen.* VI, 1, 118.

his first and only example for this point, and not only does he state that no one could outshine Caesar, but he also states that Roman history is the richest of all history in examples of outstanding military commanders. Petrarch's choice of Caesar as the prime example, from a history that he himself asserts is the richest in examples, gives Caesar's image increased significance and demonstrates his positive opinion of Caesar.

Continuing to elaborate on the importance of obtaining knowledge of military arts, Petrarch emphasizes the vital role of reading and writing in learning what must be accomplished before, during, and after a battle. He acknowledges that although real experience is the best teacher, reading is beneficial because a person can read about many more things that can actually be experienced. Here again Caesar is an example: "It is reported that Caesar never let a day go by without reading or writing something." Petrarch then adds that by this method Caesar wrote several books in the midst of military campaigns, a feat that ". . . others can more readily admire than imitate."<sup>205</sup> Once again Caesar serves as a lofty example for Petrarch, one to be imitated but still set above the rest.

Next in Petrarch's discourse is the second quality of great military commanders: virtue. According to Petrarch, there are two kinds of virtue that a military commander should possess: one is the virtue of the body, meaning good strength and a sound mind, and the other is divided into four parts including kindness and friendliness, fortitude, justice, and temperance. Caesar is mentioned as an example of each virtue, with the exception of friendliness and kindness, but this does not seem to be a purposeful omission, since his explanation of fortitude states, "Among our own there comes to mind

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<sup>205</sup> *Sen.VI*, 1, 119.

Julius Caesar, mentioned often, and deserving to be still more,” implying that Petrarch was aware of how often he referred to Caesar but did not want to overuse his image.<sup>206</sup> Nevertheless, he still wanted to be sure his reader knew that Caesar deserved continuous discussion, though it was not practical to do so.

Petrarch indeed followed his own dictum here, since the previous statement was not the last use of Caesar’s example in this section of the letter. Following fortitude, Caesar receives great praise from Petrarch for being an outstanding example of mercy: “In this glory Julius Caesar outdoes all, for no one, if I remember Seneca’s words, used victory more liberally, claiming nothing for himself from it but the power of giving everything away.”<sup>207</sup> He also extols Caesar for his “gentleness, sweetness, and affability of mind,” with which he was able to win over the minds of men, and also for his great patience in enduring insulting words.<sup>208</sup>

Finally, Petrarch reaches his third and fourth qualities that great military leaders should possess: authority and good luck. Caesar, along with Petrarch’s other favorites, Scipio Africanus, and Pompey the Great, serves as an example of the advantage that good looks, noble blood, and eloquence provide to military commanders, and as an example of how good luck both in war and in life lead to success. Petrarch then concludes his letter by encouraging Luchino to make sure that he does not lack any of these qualities as he goes to fight in Crete.

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<sup>206</sup> *Sen.VI*, 1, 122.

<sup>207</sup> *Sen.VI*, 1, 123.

<sup>208</sup> *Sen.VI*, 1, 125.



This letter is noteworthy because it demonstrates not only Petrarch's high regard for Caesar, but also the utilitarian nature of Caesar's image. There are no traces of political argument in the letter to Luchino, and there are no references to Caesar as a representation of the Roman Empire. However, the abundant praise bestowed upon Caesar in the letter give clear indication that for Petrarch, one image of Caesar was made up of personal, moral characteristics, and that Petrarch believed this image strongly.

Petrarch repeats his praise for Caesar's leadership qualities in another letter, this one addressed to Francesco da Carrarra, Lord of Padua. This time however, the discourse focuses on administrative and civic leadership instead of military. One interesting declaration made is that a good lord will never consider public works as beneath him. Petrarch points out that Julius Caesar undertook many public works and, with specific reference to draining marshes, Petrarch tells Carrarra "Do not consider unworthy of you a project which Julius Caesar considered worthy of him."<sup>209</sup> In addition to this, Petrarch also describes how Caesar was continuously mindful of Rome's food supply and always provided the people with enough grain, even when he was away on military campaigns.<sup>210</sup>

But Caesar was not only conscious of Rome and her people; he was also modest instead of condescending in his manner of address. According to Petrarch, in letters and official documents, Caesar never referred to himself in the plural, or used the royal "we," but at all times used "I" instead. Addressing Carrarra Petrarch states:

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<sup>209</sup> *Sen. XIV, 1, 535.*

<sup>210</sup> *Sen. XIV, 1, 536.*

You never use the plural form, but always the singular, not only with superiors, but with equals and inferiors as well . . . It is good of you, and noble, to do this, and you imitate the greatest men, although you so do not in imitation but through your own instinct. Examine the letters of Julius and Augustus Caesar, of which you will find many in Josephus, and some in Suetonius, and in them never is “we” written or “we wish” or “we command,” but “I wish,” and “I command,” and the like.<sup>211</sup>

Petrarch’s attempt to praise and flatter Carrarra for his unconscious imitation of this Caesarian habit is quite telling. Caesar’s ability to address all men in the same manner demonstrates a humility that Petrarch obviously admired. This is yet another example of the moral characteristics which built up the image of Caesar in Petrarch’s mind.

Although Petrarch clearly admired Caesar for his personal mores, and despite that fact that he looked down on Caesar’s imperial status in his early years, during his old age Petrarch, like Dante, used Caesar as an image of imperial authority to argue in behalf of the Holy Roman Empire. Unlike Dante however, Petrarch did not face the disadvantage of exile, and was more well-known in political, ecclesiastical, literary, and intellectual circles that Dante had ever been. Due to his scrupulous organization and preservation, large collections of Petrarch’s letters – the personal and the formal – exist today. The letters prove that Petrarch had contact with a wide variety of people, and even communicated with the pope and the Holy Roman emperor. It is in some of his letters regarding the “two swords” that the image of Julius Caesar as Emperor appears. Petrarch consistently uses this image to argue for the peaceful coexistence of the Empire and the papacy as God’s ordained powers on earth.

One such letter in which Julius Caesar figures as an image centers on the debate over papal and imperial authority and the need for the papacy to return to Rome from

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<sup>211</sup> *Sen.* XIV, 1, 547.

Avignon. The letter, written from Venice and dated to June 29 sometime between 1366 and 1368, is addressed to Pope Urban V and pleads with him to move the seat of the papacy back to Rome.<sup>212</sup> As part of his attempt to persuade the pope that Rome should again be the seat of the papacy, Petrarch delves into a discussion of the two powers that he believes God ordained to rule the world, the Roman Pontiff and the Roman Emperor. He tells Urban how he has written to the Emperor many times, both to support and rebuke him, and that he is now writing to Urban to praise him for the reforms he has already accomplished as pope. A glorious supplement to these reforms, Petrarch contends, would be to return the papacy to its rightful location. Petrarch calls the pope and the Roman emperor the two lights of the city of Rome, and the two lights of the entire Roman world. He laments that Rome seems to have lost both of these lights, and he precedes to list for Urban the reasons that the papacy should leave France, including the deep history that the Church has in Rome and the loyalty that Urban, as an Italian himself, should feel for Rome and all of Italy. Petrarch acknowledges that such a task would not be easy and that he is aware of the resistance such a decision would receive, but he also reminds the pope that choosing to remain in Avignon could bring infamy and shame down upon his head. Encouraging Urban to face his difficulties and avoid infamy, Petrarch calls on him to rise up with determination, just as others before him: “You have read how Julius Caesar calls it a loss for him to run out of wars and is vexed to see the enemy in flight; how Titus, the son of Vespasian, complains of losing a day in which he had done nothing generous and noble as was his wont . . . Thus toil is the nourishment and the delight of generous spirits, not for its own sake, but for what can be achieved

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<sup>212</sup> *Sen.*VII, 1, 227. Urban V was elected Pope in 1362.

only through it.”<sup>213</sup> Again, Petrarch praises Caesar’s moral qualities, but this reference to Caesar perhaps also reminds the pope that if the temporal governors of this world can face difficulties with strength and determination, then the pope, the world’s spiritual governor, ought to do the same. It is a subtle and simple connection, but it nevertheless demonstrates Petrarch’s attempt to correlate the Holy Roman Empire and the papacy.

Petrarch shows his opinion that the papacy and the empire should jointly share the power to rule, and his belief that both are ordained of God to hold authority on earth several other times throughout the letter, stating at one point: “I hope, to be sure, for gratitude from posterity and at least for forgiveness from Your Holiness and from His Majesty. If, as I have said, such things have always been taken in good part by him, I am confident that they will be received still more kindly by you, inasmuch as the successor of Peter ought to be kinder than the successor of Caesar.”<sup>214</sup> In this interesting statement Petrarch asserts a difference that should exist between the temporal and spiritual powers: as the spiritual power on earth the pope should be more kind and forgiving than the emperor. This does not seem to suggest that Petrarch thinks one is better than the other, instead it suggests that he saw a place for both kinds of power, and a need for both in the world. This is later supported by a sentence in which Petrarch describes the pope and the Roman emperor as the “commanders of all,” again suggesting that he believed that two different powers existed, and both had a specific role to carry out. In a round about way,

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<sup>213</sup> *Sen.*VII, 1, 258. Petrarch recalls this quality of Caesar’s in another letter, quoting Lucan’s assertion that Caesar once stated “I’m ashamed to go where I am unopposed.” *Sen.* XII, 2, 469. (Lucan, *Phar.*2.466.)

<sup>214</sup> *Sen.*VII, 1, 258-259.

Petrarch was trying to remind or convince Urban that both the emperor and the pope share the power to rule on earth.<sup>215</sup>

The letter closes finally with an impassioned appeal to the pope, not unlike Dante's petitions to the people of Florence, which again evidences Petrarch's belief that the Empire and the papacy should share dominion over men on earth:

Finally, whatever you may choose, Rome rightfully and mournfully seeks only one thing: that if you desert her, you at least give back what she – no one knows better than you – is entitled to: her other spouse, her Caesar, whom Innocent VI, as they relate, your immediate predecessor, barred from her embrace by the constraint of an oath. O unworthy divorce, if one may speak the truth, and harmful not just to the couple but to all the neighborhood! You, O excellent Father, most devoted to the common good, remove this obstacle which only you can, and not only allow but enjoin Caesar to be in Rome, lest it appear that out of cruelty you do not wish to be there, and do not wish another to be there out of envy . . . when Rome is widowed of her spouses and deprived of her lights, human affairs will never go well nor will the bounds of Christendom have peace. If she gets one of them back, it will be well, but if she gets both, it will be excellent, glorious, and happy.<sup>216</sup>

With this Petrarch makes it clear that the emperor and the pope each hold a place in creating a stable and happy Christendom. Also, his statement that no one knows better than Urban that this is the case, is quite revealing and his accusation of envy between the pope and the emperor speaks volumes about this aged conflict. This letter does not only achieves its primary purpose, to encourage the papacy to return to Rome, but in the process it also subtly and forcefully reminds the pope of his equal relationship with the

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<sup>215</sup> *Sen.VII*, 1, 258. Petrarch states: "Consequently, you who are the commanders of all- I mean you and the Roman Emperor- you yourselves know with what determination you must rise up . . ." It is significant that Petrarch feels he must clarify for the Pope that by "you" he means both the Pope and the Roman Emperor.

<sup>216</sup> *Sen.VII*, 1, 261-262.

Roman emperor and the right both have to rule. Also, by using Caesar as an example he attempts to motivate the pope to take what he views as the correct form of action.

Another important portrayal of Julius Caesar in connection with the power of the Roman Empire is included in a letter that Petrarch wrote to Charles IV, Holy Roman Emperor, in March of 1361. Petrarch wrote the letter to expose a forgery that Charles had received, a document claiming to be a charter written by Julius Caesar and confirmed by Nero, which removed Austria from the Roman Empire and granted it independence. Charles, suspicious that it was a forgery, asked Petrarch to examine it and give his opinion. In no uncertain terms Petrarch confirms the document to be a forgery of the worst kind, for not only does he find the subject matter to be ridiculous, but by evaluating the vocabulary and style of the document he conclusively proves that it was not written by Julius Caesar. The evidence he raises as to why the document is most certainly a forgery reveal that Petrarch understood the nature of Caesar's rule quite well and also that he understood the difference between Caesar, the Roman Empire, and the titles associated with the Empire.

Petrarch's objection to the validity of the charter centers on the vocabulary used in the first line of the document. According to Petrarch, the document condemns itself as a forgery with an opening statement, "We, Julius Caesar, emperor, we, Caesar and worshipper of the gods, we, supreme Augustus of the imperial land . . .," which is proof enough of its falsehood. Petrarch states "Who anywhere is so stupid and ignorant of history as not to see already, even if blindfolded, that there are almost as many lies in this

as words?”<sup>217</sup> The first problem here is the use of the royal “we” which Petrarch insists Caesar never used when referring to himself. Petrarch’s proof of this exists in several letters written by Julius Caesar that Petrarch himself actually owned. Contrasting these letters with the speeches that Lucan and Suetonius invent for Caesar Petrarch argues that Caesar always referred to himself in the first person; this is abundantly clear especially since the letters Petrarch owns include several written to friends and a more formal epistle address to the Sidonian nation, and in all of these Caesar consistently uses the first person.

Petrarch’s next exception to the first line of this charter is that Caesar refers to himself as “Augustus.” Bestowing upon the forger a heavy insult Petrarch states “For who does not see that it is not only false but ridiculous that Julius Caesar should call himself Augustus? I thought indeed that to all children who had so much as touched the threshold of a school, it was known that this name began with his successor . . . None was unaware of this except this jackass [the forger] now braying so rudely.”<sup>218</sup> Petrarch lists historical references that support this idea, and proves that at least among the most educated it was understood that Caesar never used the titles of emperor or Augustus. This is significant because even though Petrarch knew this, he still used Caesar as an image to represent the Roman Empire. Also, it serves as further proof that because his name became a title, Caesar’s image became inseparably connected to that title.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> *Sen.XVI*, 5, 622.

<sup>218</sup> *Sen.XVI*, 5, 623.

<sup>219</sup> This is also evidence of the difference between medieval scholasticism and Renaissance humanism; through a humanist, critical, and textual study of Roman authors, including Caesar’s own works, Petrarch obtained a correct understanding of Caesar’s relationship to the downfall of the Roman

Tied to this problem, Petrarch also takes issue with the dating of the document, which apparently reads: “Given in Rome on Friday in the first year of our reign.”<sup>220</sup> Not only did the forger forget to add a day of the month to the date, but the phrase “of our reign” invalidates the authorship since, as Petrarch argued earlier, Caesar never used such terminology or titles to refer to himself. And here it is interesting that the specific point of contention for Petrarch is the word “kingship” or “reign” since he argues that even though Caesar wished to be called *imperator*, dictator, or pontifex, he never wished to be called king. Petrarch explains that the title of king was abhorred in Rome and so, although Julius Caesar held every honor that Rome could give, the title of king was certainly not among them. Petrarch shares with Charles his suspicion that Caesar’s aspiration to kingship was nothing more than an insulting rumor thrust upon him by his enemies.<sup>221</sup>

Other proofs that the document was clearly a forgery existed, according to Petrarch, in the mention of an uncle of Caesar’s who was invented for and existed only in the charter, as well as the fact that the document purportedly originated from Rome, which Austria lies north of, whereas the text states that the land spoken of lies to the east. But it is Petrarch’s interpretation of Caesar’s powers and the titles he used that is

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Republic and the establishment of the Roman Empire by Caesar’s successors. This understanding seems to have escaped medieval scholars, who generally, unlike humanists, treated classical texts almost as contemporary source and not as the distant past. See Nicholas Mann, *Petrarch* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 34-35.

<sup>220</sup> *Sen.XVI*, 5, 624.

<sup>221</sup> *Sen.XVI*, 5, 624. On this point Petrarch argues: “Therefore, could that man [Caesar], so eager for glory and so rich in prudence include among his titles something that brings infamy upon him? He certainly would no more call himself king or want to be so called than to be called buffoon, adulterer, pimp, or rather he would much less want to be called king; for all those are ugly and filthy, but ‘king’ was too hateful, dangerous, and unbearable in Rome.”



particularly important here, because despite the fact that Petrarch believed that Caesar was not a king and that he did not want to be called such, he still uses Caesar as an example of imperial rule, which is not often distinguished from monarchical rule in late medieval thought. This is further proof that Caesar's image served a utilitarian purpose and that he could be portrayed and interpreted many ways and used on behalf of many different causes.

Finally, one cannot discuss Petrarch's use of Julius Caesar without mentioning the *De Gestis Caesaris*, a biography of Caesar that Petrarch worked on until his death and, according to several sources, was the project he was working on when he died.<sup>222</sup> The biography was originally designed to be a part of a series of lives of famous men (*De Viris Illustribus*), but because of his great admiration for Caesar, he kept expanding the work until he separated it out to be a work of its own.<sup>223</sup> Not nearly as popular as Petrarch's poetry, treatises, and letters, the *De Gestis Caesaris* does not exist in any recent editions, and because it is only a basic biography, few Petrarch scholars pay much attention to it. And it is true that there is little new or revolutionary in Petrarch's recounting of Caesar's life; more than the text itself the importance of the work lies in its existence – the fact that Petrarch dedicated time and effort to writing such a biography,

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<sup>222</sup> Mann, *Petrarch*, 20, 26; see also Guido Martellotti, "Petarca e Cesare" *Annali della Scuola normale superiore di Pisa. Scienze fisiche e matematiche*. Vol. 16 (1947): 149-150. One of the stories is that Petrarch was found dead with his head resting on a manuscript of *De gestis Caesaris*. Martellotti here quotes a work entitled *Petrarque e l'humanisme* (I, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Parigi, 1907): "... gli amici lo trovassero al mattino con la fronte appoggiata sul libro aperto davanti a lui. L'opera che aveva occupato le sue ultime ore era la biographia di Cesare." This idea is quite poetic, but according to Martellotti it is not necessarily true. The biography is certainly one of the texts he labored on in his later years but it is difficult to prove that it was his last, especially since there is good evidence that he continued to work on the other biographies in his series of *Vitae*

<sup>223</sup> Dotti, *Vita di Petrarca*, 408.

and the favorable tone and portrayal of Caesar and praise for his good qualities contained within it, stand as further proof of Petrarch's admiration for him.

Although an analysis of the *De Gestis Caesaris* would take a good deal of space – more than is afforded in the present work – there are a few important points to be made. Because there is no obvious political purpose behind the work, other than to write a biography of Caesar, it does not merely use Caesar's image in its text, but the whole work in itself provides a solid idea of Petrarch's personal image of Caesar as an outstanding military commander, an efficient statesman, and a praiseworthy moral character. Baron argues that the *De Gestis Caesaris* “marks the first modern picture of Caesar as a great statesman and personality.”<sup>224</sup> The *De Gestis* then, represents the image that Petrarch developed with his portrayal of Caesar in the *Secretum*, the *Triumphs*, and a number of his letters.

Perhaps the best explanation of the *De Gestis* comes from historian Guido Martellotti. According to Martellotti, Petrarch's biography of Caesar demonstrates on one level Petrarch's belief in Empire as a divinely established form of government, however this is not the main point of the biography. Petrarch does not concentrate on arguing that Caesar was the divinely chosen founder of the Empire, instead he focuses on Caesar's character and how his actions prove his personal greatness. For Petrarch, Caesar's moral characteristics are the true reason he should be admired, since they are the reason he had the ability to found the Empire. In Petrarch's mind, Caesar's good qualities seem to free him from blame for the downfall of the Republic. Martellotti contrasts this with Dante, who portrayed Caesar as fated to rule Rome and so exonerated him for destroying the

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<sup>224</sup> Baron, *Petrarch's Secretum*, 164.

Republic. Martellotti also points out that even though in his later years Petrarch still did not entirely approve of Caesar's actions, the *De Gestis* still makes it plain that above all else Petrarch idolized Caesar for his personal moral qualities.<sup>225</sup>

Through examining images of Julius Caesar in the works of Dante and Petrarch, it becomes clear that the medieval image of Caesar as the founder of the Roman Empire carried over into the Renaissance, but that it was used specifically to support the power of the Holy Roman Empire and its right to temporal government. For both authors, Caesar served as a convenient representative of the ancient Roman Empire in discussions about the balance of power between the Church and the Empire, as well as the argument that imperial or monarchical rule is the best form of government. Also, in Petrarch we see the development of a new image for Caesar, a Caesar who is not merely a representative of Empire but who is a great moral character to be emulated. This new image focuses on Caesar the man and most likely results from Petrarch's humanistic approach to his studies. Together, Dante and Petrarch stand as key authors in understanding the historiography of Julius Caesar's image.

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<sup>225</sup> Martellotti, 157. Martellotti states: "Agl'inizi della sua formazione umanistica il Petrarca moveva da una posizione di decisa ostilita contro Cesare, a cui contrapponeva quale modella di virtu romane Scipione; poi nell'approfondirsi del suo stesso umanesimo egli era vinto dal fascino di Cesare, non piu adorato medievalmente quae creatore dell'impero, ma solo per l'eccellenza della sua personalita umana."

## **Chapter V**

### **The Early Renaissance: Salutati and Bruni**

Following in the footprints left by Dante and Petrarch, the humanists of the Quattrocento marched forward in the revival of the classics and the study of classical history. As one of the major figures in Roman history Julius Caesar continued to be discussed in scholarly writing and, just as in centuries before, Caesar served as a significant symbol in political writing and debates about tyranny. Although there are many humanists who mention Caesar or use him as an example in their works, Coluccio Salutati and Leonardo Bruni are central to tracing the image of Julius Caesar into Renaissance humanism. A close examination of works by both these men demonstrates once again that political background and experience played an important part in interpretation of Caesar. Also, Bruni and Salutati demonstrate that although Caesar's image remained dualistic (he was either the benevolent king or cruel tyrant) it was also more nuanced, especially as humanists more readily recognized Caesar's faults and more closely studied the classical sources discussing him.

As in any discussion of humanism and Renaissance Italy, Florence again takes center stage in understanding the backgrounds of Bruni and Salutati and their depictions of Caesar. Although Coluccio Salutati was not a native Florentine, he was born in small commune, Stignano, part of the larger commune of Buggiano. Because of the town's location, Florence and Lucca constantly competed for control of the area, though the majority of the time it remained under Florentine control. Additionally, Salutati spent much of his career, thirty-one years, serving as the Chancellor of Florence. Thus, even though Salutati was not born and raised in Florence, Florentine politics played significant

role in his life and certainly impacted his scholarly views on political theory and classical history.

For example, shortly after Salutati's birth in 1331 the Ghibelline faction from Lucca attacked and took over the town, forcing all members of the Guelf faction in Buggiano, including Salutati's father, to flee elsewhere.<sup>226</sup> At the invitation of the Pepoli ruling family Salutati's father took his wife and children and settled in Bologna, which must have been quite beneficial to Salutati's education since Bologna had the largest university in Italy. Salutati's family remained in Bologna until 1350 when the Guelfs of Buggiano were allowed to return.<sup>227</sup> After returning to Buggiano Salutati made use of his education for the next sixteen years by working as a notary and secretary for various communes under Florentine control. He also began corresponding with a number of scholars and taking an active role in his local government.<sup>228</sup>

From 1367-1370 Salutati worked for the papacy, both as the chancellor of Todi, a papal territory, and in the papal chancery. Then, in 1370 he was, ironically, appointed Chancellor of Lucca. He did not hold the position long, however, and returned to Buggiano in 1372 after less than a year's service. After a short break Salutati returned to civic employ and in 1374 was elected to serve as the notary of elections in Florence.

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<sup>226</sup> We know from this that Salutati's father, Piero, was at least a well-known citizen in the town and a prominent Guelf; see Ephraim Emerton, *Humanism and Tyranny: Studies in the Italian Trecento* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925), 31.

<sup>227</sup> Florence had actually regained control of Buggiano and the surrounding area in 1339.

<sup>228</sup> Benjamin G. Kohl and Ronald G. Witt, eds. *The Earthly Republic: Italian Humanists on Government and Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979), 81-82.

Then, in 1375, he was appointed Chancellor of the Florentine Republic, an office he continued to hold until his death in 1406.<sup>229</sup>

During his time as Chancellor of Florence Salutati gained a great reputation for his logic, his command of language, and his ability to produce effective propaganda. As usual, during Salutati's time in office Florence was constantly embroiled in political debate, and continuously fought for its liberty from both the Holy Roman Empire and the papacy. As chancellor, Salutati proved to be an invaluable tool for the Florentine government. At one point the Duke of Milan even attempted to have Salutati murdered and declared that his logic was so sound and powerful that even a single letter written by Salutati was "worth a troop of horsemen."<sup>230</sup> Indeed, the fact that he managed to maintain his office in a political environment that was constantly changing demonstrates the strength of his reputation and the important place he held in Florentine government.

In addition to his political activity and civic life, Salutati also found time for writing, scholarship, and education, becoming one of the most famous Renaissance humanists, both now and in his own day. He remained in constant correspondence with other scholars and was always eager to learn. This is reflected in the numerous texts he wrote and his efforts to collect books and manuscripts; he even attempted to start a public library and encouraged the University of Florence to create a chair of Greek.

Another noteworthy aspect to Salutati was his strong religiosity. Throughout his career as a humanist he argued that a study of the classics was an essential part of a Christian education, and he often focused on religious topics in his own writing. In

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<sup>229</sup> Kohl and Witt, *The Earthly Republic*, 82-83.

<sup>230</sup> Kohl and Witt, *The Earthly Republic*, 83.

connection with his strong religious beliefs and his love for the intellectual world, Salutati also spent time writing about and debating the merits of the contemplative versus the active life. While the Church (and especially monasticism) viewed the contemplative life as the highest manner of living, Salutati argued that the active life was just as, if not more, serviceable and holy as the contemplative life. Both lifestyles, he believed, could lead a person to virtue and, he argued, both required some degree of action anyway. Salutati clearly practiced what he taught and his own life, and especially his combination of political and scholarly careers, reflected his principles.

Salutati's political career then, as a Chancellor for Republican Florence, as well as his skillful writing and knowledge of the classics, makes his portrayal and defense of Caesar all the more interesting. Salutati was not a supporter of the Holy Roman Empire, and he clearly defended the values of liberty and Republicanism that Florence held so dear. However, perhaps because of the great respect Salutati had for his intellectual predecessors, Petrarch and Dante, he did not view Caesar in a negative light. If Salutati wanted to defend Dante from those who criticized the placement of Brutus and Cassius in hell with Judas, then he necessarily needed to defend Caesar as well. In his treatise *De Tyranno*, Salutati defends Dante brilliantly, by defining tyranny in such a way that he exonerates Caesar while still condemning the tyrants of his own day.

*De Tyranno* is an essential text to gaining an understanding of the historiography of Caesar's image. Also, as a text centered on the concept of tyranny, *De Tyranno* serves as conclusive evidence of the important place that Caesar occupied in tyrannicide

debates.<sup>231</sup> Additionally, Salutati's specific reference to Dante's treatment of Caesar demonstrates that Dante's portrayal of Caesar was somewhat significant, and, at the very least, it suggests that there was some debate among the scholars of Salutati's time as to the meaning of tyranny and whether Caesar was a tyrant or not.

*De Tyranno* is organized into an introduction and five chapters that follow a logical progression. First Salutati addresses the definition of the word tyrant and why certain men are called tyrants. Then, after determining what the word means and what constitutes a tyrant the treatise discusses the lawfulness of killing a tyrant. Salutati next switches from a general approach to tyranny and focuses directly on Julius Caesar in order to ascertain whether he can rightly be called a tyrant. This discussion is followed by a chapter concerning whether the murder of Caesar was justified, and finally Salutati spends a chapter determining whether Dante was correct in placing Brutus and Cassius in the lowest level of hell. In this way Salutati constructs an argument about tyranny with Caesar at its heart. An examination of the content in each chapter reveals that Salutati's attitude toward Caesar was, like Dante's, positive, and that he viewed Caesar as a good king, not a tyrant.

First, in his definition of tyranny, Salutati carefully sets parameters which allow him to portray Caesar as a lawful ruler, not a tyrant. His first point is that the original Greek word for tyrant signifies bravery, and that kings were only called "tyros" because of their bravery in mind and body. However, he explains, the name tyrant eventually became reserved only for those kings who abused their power. Salutati also cites Saint

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<sup>231</sup> For the Latin text of *De Tyranno* see Francesco Ercole, ed., *Il Trattato "De Tyranno" a lettere scelte* (Bologna: N. Zanichelli, 1942).



Gregory's definition of tyranny, which argues that there are two kinds of tyrants: those who are tyrannical in character and those who are tyrannical in action. It is possible, Salutati argues, for a man who lacks power to be tyrannical in his thoughts and intentions. One is a tyrant who governs by despotic methods and rules without law, and who, whether he rules rightfully or because he seized the government, governs unjustly. Therefore, in Salutati's mind, a tyrant is defined either as someone who overthrows the government and seizes control unlawfully, or a legal ruler who governs unjustly.<sup>232</sup>

Having established the characteristics that constitute a tyrant, Salutati then questions whether it is lawful to kill a tyrant. Essentially he argues that because it is lawful for a private citizen to defend themselves from an armed assailant, even killing their attacker if need be, then it must be lawful for the people of a city or nation to protect themselves from the attacks of a tyrant, even resorting to assassination as necessity dictates. Salutati even laments the fact that tyranny often continues unchecked because the people fail to resist a tyrant's rule, and with examples from Roman history he demonstrates the ruinous effects of unlawful rule on a people.<sup>233</sup> This does not mean however, that Salutati unequivocally believes that tyrants should be killed; instead he qualifies his argument by asserting that tyrants can be removed only if their overthrow is accomplished without any tyrannical actions on the part of the removers.

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<sup>232</sup> Coluccio Salutati, *De Tyranno*. I. Few English translations of *De Tyranno* exist, however, in the present work all direct quotes will be taken from Emerton's translation found in: Ephraim Emerton, *Humanism and Tyranny: Studies in the Italian Trecento* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925).

<sup>233</sup> Salutati, *De Tyranno*. 2. In making this point Salutati also argues that there is a difference between those states which are independent and those who claim an overlord; if the majority of the people in an independent state declare their ruler a tyrant and do away with him, then their actions are justified by the will of the people. However, if the state is one which recognizes an overlord, they must obtain the consent of their overlord or their actions against a tyrant are unjust. Salutati uses examples such as the overthrow of the ancient Roman kings and the murder of Nero to support these ideas.

Additionally, in this chapter Salutati cites the *Policraticus* and John of Salisbury's discussion of tyranny and tyrannicide. According to Salutati's reading of the *Policraticus*, John's argument does not prove that it is always right for a tyrant to be killed, but it does prove that the murder of tyrants occurred frequently. He also believes that John "would not sanction laying violent hands upon a tyrant without due deliberation, nor would he think everyone authorized to decide whether a man be really a tyrant or not."<sup>234</sup> So, with the support of John of Salisbury, Salutati argues that a tyrant may be killed, but it must be done in a lawful manner, with the approval not just of the people, but also of their overlord if one exists because, he states, "It would be a presumptuous . . . act to rebel against a ruler while the rest [of the people] were willing to endure him . . . just as he who destroys a tyrant in a lawful way is to be loaded with honors, so he who unlawfully slays a ruler deserves the severest penalty."<sup>235</sup> Statements such as this reveal an interesting side to the man who served as Chancellor of the most Republican city in Florence. Salutati's belief that tyrannicide can be accomplished justly only if the people have the permission of their overlord shows that Salutati perhaps harbored some sympathy for imperial government. Mikael Hornquist points out that even though Salutati, in his work as Chancellor, often portrayed Florence as the defender of Italian liberty and Republican government, he also supported Florentine attempts to bring Tuscany under its jurisdiction and argued that people under the control of Florence were free in the sense that they had

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<sup>234</sup> Emerton, *Humanism and Tyranny*, 91-92.

<sup>235</sup> Emerton, *Humanism and Tyranny*, 92.

the privilege to live under Florentine law.<sup>236</sup> This imperialistic understanding of Florentine Republicanism can be seen here in *De Tyranno*, and with Julius Caesar as its main image.

Having established the idea that tyrannicide is justified if accomplished in a lawful manner, Salutati then progresses in his third chapter to determining whether or not Julius Caesar ought to be regarded as a tyrant. First Salutati begins by examining sources such as the *Policraticus* and the works of Cicero to show that general scholarly opinion agreed that Caesar was a tyrant.<sup>237</sup> However, Salutati also points out that Cicero attacked Caesar for being a tyrant just as often as he praised Caesar's good actions and characteristics, sometimes offering praise and criticism at the same time. This logic is essential to Salutati's eventual conclusion that although Caesar's rule could be defined as tyrannical, Caesar himself did not behave like a tyrant and therefore cannot rightly be called such. Cicero provides vital support here because, according to Salutati, even though Cicero disliked Caesar's dictatorship he still recognized and praised Caesar for the order he restored to the government and the reforms he set in action. This lends credence to Salutati's belief that Caesar was not truly a tyrant since his actions were not tyrannical.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Mikael Hornquist, "The Two Myths of Civic Humanism" in James Hankins, ed., *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 116-117.

<sup>237</sup> Cicero is indeed central to Salutati's arguments, Piccolomini even characterizes *De Tyranno* as an anti-Ciceronian tirade with Salutati trying to prove that he, as a modern scholar, can outsmart the ancient scholar Cicero. See Piccolomini, *The Brutus Revival*, 54-56.

<sup>238</sup> Salutati, *De Tyranno*.III. Salutati spends a good deal of time on Cicero, citing evidence from his letters and concluding that: "Cicero often refers to Caesar's generosity and good qualities and says that he supported his cause in the senate Nowhere in his writings can you find any unfavorable criticism of Caesar except in regard to the principate and the civil wars . . . as if this most ardent champion of liberty

Besides Cicero's praise of Caesar, Salutati also points to Cicero's feelings about Pompey as evidence that Caesar cannot rightly be called a tyrant. He also cites several places where Cicero espoused the belief that if Pompey had triumphed over Caesar, the results would have been no different. According to Salutati's interpretation of Cicero, Cicero argued that the question was not if one man should rule, but which of the two, Pompey or Caesar, the ruler should be. Salutati concludes that "it came to pass by the will of God that Caesar conquered," and that "No one will deny that he atoned for the horrors of civil strife, than which nothing can be more cruel, by his wonderful magnanimity."<sup>239</sup> Thus Salutati uses Cicero and draws his own conclusions to further justify his argument that Caesar was not a true tyrant, and concludes this chapter by stating: "Can a man raised to power constitutionally and through his own merits, a man who showed such a human spirit, not to his own partisans alone but also to his opponents because they were his fellow citizens – can he properly be called a tyrant? . . . Caesar was not a tyrant, seeing that he held his principate in a commonwealth, lawfully and not by abuse of law."<sup>240</sup>

With the idea that Caesar was not a tyrant proved, Salutati then questions whether the murder of Julius Caesar was justified. Of course, based on his prior argument that Caesar cannot correctly be called a tyrant, Salutati also asserts that Caesar's murder was unjustified: "Who will not say that his assailants, not lawfully, but by abuse of law, laid

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believed that the form of the state which Caesar represented inclined not to tyranny but to a republic," Emerton, *Humanism and Tyranny*, 97.

<sup>239</sup> Emerton, *Humanism and Tyranny*, 98-99.

<sup>240</sup> Emerton, *Humanism and Tyranny*, 98-99.

accursed hands upon the father of their country, the most righteous ruler on earth? . . .

Think over what has been said above about tyrannicide and you will readily conclude that those senatorial conspirators had no justification for the murder of the Perpetual Dictator.”<sup>241</sup> Interestingly, the evidences that Salutati uses to support this statement are the same that current historians use when debating the motives of both Caesar and his assassins, including the fact that all of the conspirators kept the offices to which Caesar had appointed them, they ratified all of his acts immediately following his death, and the fact that they killed him in spite of the clemency he had previously extended to many of them.<sup>242</sup> In fact, Salutati points out quite vehemently that not one of the conspirators ever refused a favor or office granted to them by Caesar. This condemns the conspirators then, since they obviously did not kill Caesar out of hatred for his tyranny or tyrannical actions.

Another important proof that Caesar’s death was unjustified consisted in the anger exhibited by the populous of Rome at his death:

And was it not proof of affection rather than of hatred that matrons threw upon the funeral pile the ornaments they were wearing together with the robes and amulets of their children, and legionaries and veterans gave the arms they had carried at the funeral service? Was not his tomb visited night after night by people of foreign nations as a token of the public grief? Who could say that subjects of the Roman Empire, always on the watch for their own advantage, would have shown such interest in the funeral of a tyrant hateful to all good men and thus have given offence to all these good people?<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Salutati, *De Tyranno*.IV; Emerton, *Humanism and Tyranny*, 101.

<sup>242</sup> For example, Syme points out that all of Caesar’s *acta* were ratified and survived his death, using it as part of his argument that the conspirators did not really plan a revolution, but instead only planned to remove an autocrat, see Syme, *Roman Revolution*, 98-99, 103. Likewise Gelzer and Grant point to the ratifying of Caesar’s acts and emphasize jealousy and hate as the main motives for the assassination; see Mattais Gelzer, *Caesar Politician and Statesman*, Peter Needham, trans. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968), 328 and Michael Grant, *Julius Caesar*, 254-257.

<sup>243</sup> Emerton, *Humanism and Tyranny*, 102-103.

Since the people of Rome attacked the homes of the conspirators, especially Brutus and Cassius, they obviously disagreed with the assassination which, by extension, meant that the conspirators did not act in accordance with the will of the people. Perhaps, Salutati states, if the people had desired the death of Caesar then his murder would be justified, but the anger displayed by the people of Rome after Caesar's murder proves that this was not the case.

For Salutati, the final, convincing evidence that Caesar's murder was unjustified lies in the events that occurred shortly after his death. Salutati highlights the chaos that occurred after the assassination, reminding his reader that destroying the rule of one did nothing but return the state to the civil wars and strife which existed before Caesar gained control of the government. The fact that Octavian had to reinstate the rule of one man in order to restore peace and stability to the Roman world is also evidence that Caesar's rule was not a tyranny but a necessary measure to restore peace to Rome. He concludes the chapter with a final, harsh condemnation of the assassins: "We may, therefore, conclude that the murderers of Caesar slew, not a tyrant but the father of his country, the lawful and benignant ruler of the world, and that they sinned against the state in the most serious and damnable way possible by kindling the rage and fury of civil war in a peaceful community."<sup>244</sup>

As if the numerous historical evidences cited were not enough, Salutati brings one more support into his treatise – Dante's placement of Brutus and Cassius in the lowest

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<sup>244</sup> Emerton, *Humanism and Tyranny*, 110.

level of hell.<sup>245</sup> For Salutati, the corresponding opinion of another “modern” author serves as a final endorsement to the argument that Caesar’s rule was lawful and his murder was unjustified. Dante’s placement of Brutus and Cassius along with Judas in the mouth of Satan signified to Salutati that all three men were traitors of the worst kind. And since the murderers of Caesar were among the worst betrayers of all it meant that Salutati was correct in arguing that Caesar was not an unlawful ruler or justly slain tyrant.

Salutati’s logic in this chapter is skillful, and his interpretation of Dante’s poem is intriguing. He interprets the colors of Satan’s three heads to represent the effects that betrayal had on the minds of Brutus, Judas, and Cassius: red for the “gnawings of conscience,” yellow or pallor for the fear of punishment, and black for the stain left on their souls by their offences. Not only does Salutati interpret the colors of the faces, he also ties each of them to the man placed in that particular head. For example, Judas is placed in the mouth of the red, or front, head, because his conscience ate at him until he realized his sin and hung himself. Cassius killed himself out of fear of punishment when he believed that Brutus had been defeated in battle with Octavian, therefore Cassius is placed in the mouth of the yellow head. And Brutus himself is placed in the mouth of the black head, since, as he was reputed to be the actual son of Caesar, his participation in Caesar’s murder made his sin especially atrocious.<sup>246</sup> This careful placement by Dante signifies for Salutati, the truth of the argument that Caesar was unjustly slain.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Salutati, *De Tyranno.V.*

<sup>246</sup> The idea that Brutus was Caesar’s actual son came from the knowledge that Servilia, Brutus’s mother, was one of Caesar’s mistresses. Although the suggestion appears in several ancient sources including Suetonius, Cassius Dio, and Plutarch, the chronology is against it – Caesar was only fifteen years old when Brutus is believed to have been born; see Syme, “Bastards in the Roman Aristocracy,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 104, No.3 (Jun. 15, 1960): 326. The vast majority

Another significant point which Salutati extracts from Dante is the support which Dante drew from Vergil and the *Aeneid*. It is no secret that Vergil's epic poem influenced Dante's *Divina Commedia*, and especially the *Inferno*, since Dante makes a journey through Hell similar to Aeneas's journey through the underworld. Salutati defends Dante's placement of Brutus, Cassius, and Judas in this lowest level of Hell by citing a passage from the *Aeneid* where Aeneas meets, in the lowest rungs of the underworld, those who took up arms and used deceit either to commit treason or betray their masters. Salutati cites Vergil as an authority and states that since Vergil placed betrayers in the lowest levels of Hell, Dante was right, theologically, morally, and poetically, to do so.<sup>248</sup>

Throughout the entire treatise Salutati goes to great lengths to portray an image of Caesar as generous, kind, and unjustly slain ruler. He does not object to the medieval idea of Caesar as the founder of the empire, and maintains that because he ruled by the will of the people Caesar was not a tyrant. This image follows in the footsteps of Dante and Petrarch, however it also differs because Salutati was not a supporter of the Holy Roman Empire as Dante and Petrarch had been. Why would a Republican Chancellor of Florence defend Julius Caesar? Perhaps *De Tyranno* was, as Piccolomini argues, merely a rhetorical exercise for Salutati to dispute with Cicero, or perhaps Salutati simply felt the

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of historians currently reject the notion; see Ramon L. Jimenez, *Caesar Against Rome: The Great Roman Civil War* (London: Praeger, 2000), 287.

<sup>247</sup> Emerton, *Humanism and Tyranny*, 111-113.

<sup>248</sup> See Emerton, *Humanism and Tyranny* 114. This evidence lends further strength to Salutati's argument when one considers that the medieval world viewed Vergil as a meaningful authority, and even as an inspired poet, since they interpreted Vergil's *Fourth Eclogue* to be a prophecy about the birth of Christ. This connection to Christianity allowed scholars to give more credence to Vergil's writings and accordingly he was referred to as a high and reliable authority.



need to defend the greatness of Dante.<sup>249</sup> Whatever the case maybe, the Salutati's focus on Caesar's image at least acknowledges its importance to tyrannicide debates, and created an idea that fellow humanist Leonardo Bruni, also a Florentine Chancellor, later argued against.

After his death in 1406, Salutati's own portrayal of Caesar was highlighted and questioned by one of his former students, Leonardo di Ceccho Bruni d'Arezzo. Like Salutati, Leonardo Bruni was an important contributor and central figure in Renaissance humanism whose work was, like Salutati's, heavily influenced by the political situation of the Renaissance Florence. Bruni is often viewed as representative of an intermediate stage in humanism between Petrarch and Erasmus, and it was Bruni who firmly entrenched the revival of classical literature and classical languages as a key feature of humanism.<sup>250</sup> Bruni played a significant role in translating Greek texts and making them available in the west (including Demosthenes, Xenophon, and Plutarch) and he developed the tradition of translating *ad sententiam*, or according to the sense of words and phrases, the method of translation still used today.

Like Salutati, Leonardo Bruni was not native to Florence, but his association with Florence and Florentine politics began in his youth. Born in Arezzo in 1370 Bruni resided there as a child and experienced the continued conflict between the Guelf and Ghibelline parties, particularly when Ghibelline exiles from Arezzo, with the help of a French army, attacked the city in 1384 and succeeded in taking it from the Guelfs. Bruni and his father

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<sup>249</sup> Piccolomini, *The Brutus Revival*, 56.

<sup>250</sup> Gordon Griffiths, James Hankins, and David Thompson, introductions and trans., *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni Selected Texts* (Binghamton, New York: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies in conjunction with The Renaissance Society of America, 1987), 9.

were arrested at this time, suggesting not only that his family were members of the Guelf party but also that his father was a person of some importance in the community. Fortunately, their imprisonment did not last long, since the Ghibellines lost control of the city the following year when Louis of Anjou decided to take his French army and leave Italy. As part of his departure, Louis sold Arezzo to the Florentines, removing it from Ghibelline domination. For Arezzo, subjection to Florence was a necessary evil because even though it freed the Aretine Guelfs from Ghibelline rule, it also placed them in subordination to the Republic of Florence. However, in Bruni's young mind it perhaps also associated Florence with liberation from both domestic and foreign tyranny, foreshadowing Bruni's later depictions of Florence as the symbol of Republican liberty.<sup>251</sup>

In 1390 Bruni left Arezzo and moved to Florence where he continued his education under the tutelage of Coluccio Salutati, then Chancellor of Florence. During this time Bruni began to focus on the ancient Greek language and translation, and in the early 1400s he began to compose his first written works, the *Laudatio* and the *Dialogues*. After working as a lawyer for a time Bruni moved to Rome in 1405 and began to work as a papal secretary, a job that he held for ten years and the tenure of four popes. This job had a major impact on his political perspectives his own intellectual development. At the time that Bruni began his work negotiations were taking place to end the Great Schism and the Pope found an able assistant in Bruni, who understood the political and historical

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<sup>251</sup> Griffiths, Hankins, and Thompson, *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, 22-23.

issues surrounding the schism and used his literary skills to help the Pope to effectively convey his positions.<sup>252</sup>

Also during Bruni's residence in Rome the city experienced its own revolutions and wars, as the pope, the king of Naples, and the people of Rome battled each other for the political upper hand. In particular the people of the city challenged the prince-like status held by the pope, while the papacy struggled to maintain its power.<sup>253</sup> Interestingly, despite his celebration of Florentine, republican liberty, Bruni remained loyal to the papacy throughout the affair, although he did not shy away from blaming both sides for the problems arising from the matter. In early 1406 the issue was finally resolved as the people of Rome relinquished supreme political authority to the pope. Bruni continued over the following years to help the papacy bring the rest of the Papal States firmly under their control. However, despite his loyalty to the papacy and the years he spent in the pope's service, Bruni still held true to his cherished republican ideals, leaving the position once to serve as chancellor of Florence from November 1410 to April 1411. He returned to papal service however, in 1411 and served nearly four more years until the

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<sup>252</sup> Griffiths, Hankins, and Thompson, *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, 25-26.

<sup>253</sup> The popes had always held some degree of political power in Rome but it rose to new heights during the Babylonian Captivity, when Rome, in an attempt to induce the papacy to return to Rome, granted one of the French popes, John XXII (1316-1334) the titles and offices of Senator, Captain, Rector, and Syndic, which gave him supreme political authority in the city. And although John delegated his civic authority to King Robert of Naples, he still began the tradition of papal and civic authority residing in one individual. Following John, Benedict XII (1334-1342) decided that the pope should directly appoint all municipal officers, which further enhanced the secular authority of the papacy. From that time forward, even after the papacy returned to Rome in 1367, the Pope continued to appoint government officials. It was this authority that Cola di Rienzo rebelled against when he tried to re-establish the Roman Republic (the failure of this rebellion was mourned by Petrarch), and it was again challenged during Bruni's time in Rome; see Griffiths, Hankins, and Thompson, *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, 27-28.

Council of Constance deposed the schismatic popes in 1414, after which he again returned to Florence.<sup>254</sup>

In 1427 Bruni was appointed to be the Florentine chancellor and this time, like Salutati before him, Bruni held the position until his death in 1444. For the remainder of his life in both his work as chancellor and his personal scholarly pursuits Bruni addressed the political challenges of his day and remained a staunch supporter of republican liberty, often portraying republican government as the preferable alternative to monarchy. Bruni, along with Ptolemy of Lucca, was one of the first humanists to interpret history in favor of republicanism instead of monarchical or imperial ideals, and this certainly influenced his opinion of Julius Caesar. In fact, during the later years of his life and his service as chancellor Bruni composed a history of Florence (*Historiae florentini populi*) that boldly disputed the medieval legend of the city's foundation by Julius Caesar in order to distance the city from any association with ideas of monarchy and empire. Instead, Bruni re-wrote Florentine history to portray the city and its people as playing a central role in the fight against tyranny and monarchy.<sup>255</sup>

Through his works, Bruni made an important contribution to historiography as well, especially in the way that classical history was understood. Throughout the Middle Ages Roman history “had acquired a thick crust of the false and fabulous. The lives of Roman emperors and the heroes of the republic, the origins of cities and kingdoms, the

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<sup>254</sup> Kohl and Witt, *The Earthly Republic*, 129.

<sup>255</sup> Kohl and Witt, *The Earthly Republic*, 129. See also: Leonardo Bruni, *History of the Florentine People*, James Hankins, ed. and trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

fame of philosophers and poets had grown dim in the murk of legend.”<sup>256</sup> With the newly discovered classical sources of the fourteenth and fifteenth century humanists such as Bruni and Salutati began to dispel legends and search for the truth about classical history. Following in Salutati’s footsteps Bruni developed such excellent textual criticism and historiography that B.L. Ullman went so far as to call Bruni the first modern historian.<sup>257</sup>

Once again following in the footsteps of Salutati, Bruni also became what Hans Baron termed a “civic humanist,” or a humanist who believed that civic participation was part of a learned man’s duty, whereas other humanists believed in a contemplative, solitary life lived apart from society.<sup>258</sup> During Bruni’s lifetime Florentine politics were still dominated by the Guelf ideology of liberty from the Empire and loyalty to the Pope. Bruni himself was a staunch supporter of Florentine liberty and tried to remake the history of Florence in support of this ideology. He traced the Guelf and Ghibelline conflicts back to conflicts between partisans of Caesar and Cicero and also forcefully argued that Caesar was not the founder of Florence, thus ridding the city of its ties to imperial Roman government. In fact, when the Guelf party wanted a new set of statutes they turned to Bruni to compose them.<sup>259</sup> It is fair to state then, that Bruni’s own political values influenced his interpretation of classical history, especially his interpretation of

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<sup>256</sup> Griffiths, Hankins, and Thompson, *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, 13.

<sup>257</sup> Griffiths, Hankins, and Thompson, *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, 13. Ullman is quoted thus: “He [Bruni] searched widely for source material, his critical judgment of the sources was sound, he sought for underlying causes, he tried to see events in proper perspective, and he was, therefore, the first modern historian.”

<sup>258</sup> See Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni*; see also Lauro Martines, *Power and Imagination: City-States in Renaissance Italy* (Baltimore: John’s Hopkins University Press, 1988), 198-199.

<sup>259</sup> Griffiths, Hankins, and Thompson, 18.

Caesar. It is clear that his portrayal of Caesar as a tyrant and founder of the Empire was a perfect fit for the independent political ideology of republicanism.

Addressing the issues raised by *De Tyranno* and the portrayal of Julius Caesar found therein, Leonardo Bruni, composed his own work discussing tyranny, *Ad Petrum Paulum Histrum Dialogus*.<sup>260</sup> In this work, often simply called the *Dialogues*, Bruni imagines a discussion between Niccolo Niccoli, Roberto Rossi, Coluccio Salutati, and himself. The dialogue, or disputation begins when Niccolo, Roberto, and Leonardo go together to visit Salutati, and Salutati scolds them for not practicing the art of disputation as often as they should. Salutati then proposes that they should practice together, and so the group embarks on a dialogue in which many topics are disputed, including tyranny and tyrannicide. In their brief discussion of this topic Bruni, through the voice of Niccolo, confronts and directly opposes Salutati's conclusion that Dante was right to place Brutus and Cassius in the lowest level because Caesar was not a tyrant. By opposing Salutati's portrayal of Caesar, Bruni puts forth his own depiction, demonstrating again the flexibility of Caesar's image and the influence that intellectual and political background had on the ways in which authors interpreted Julius Caesar.

The topic of tyranny is first raised by Bruni in Book I of the *Dialogues*, during an exchange between Salutati and Niccolo concerning the current state of the liberal arts. In this discussion Salutati chides the others for saying that the liberal arts had fallen in their own day, and for forgetting to mention Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio as exceptions to

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<sup>260</sup> For the Latin text of the *Dialogues* see Eugenio Garin, *Prosatori Latini Del Quattrocento I Coluccio Salutati, Leonardo Bruni Aretino, Francesco Barbaro* (Milano: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1952), 44-98. For the purposes of the current work the English translation of Griffiths, Hankins, and Thompson, *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni: Selected Texts*, will be used.

that rule. Salutati praises Dante for his literary expertise and style, and tells Niccolo that he is quite displeased that the men who represent Florence and her glory have been ignored by him.<sup>261</sup> Responding to this assertion, Niccolo tells Salutati that he finds many faults and errors in Dante's work, proving that he was not as great as people often made him out to be: "For to begin with Dante, to whom you do not prefer even Vergil himself, do we not often see him erring in such a way that he seems to have been utterly ignorant? . . . And he describes Marcus Cato, who perished in the civil wars, as a very old man with a long white beard – an obvious display of ignorance, since he died in Utica in the forty-eighth year of his life and in his prime."<sup>262</sup> But not only does Niccolo criticize Dante for ignorance, he also directly attacks Dante's position on Brutus, Cassius, and Caesar, stating:

However this is of little weight; what is more serious and intolerable is his damning with the greatest penalty Marcus Brutus, a man distinguished for justice, discretion, magnanimity – in short for every virtue – because he slew Caesar and plucked from the robbers' jaws the liberty of the Roman people. But for driving out a king he placed Junius Brutus in Elysian Fields. And yet Tarquin had received the kingdom from his forefathers, and was king at a time when the laws permitted that there be a king; whereas Cesar had taken possession of the commonwealth by force of arms, and when the good citizens had been slain he had taken away his country's liberty. Therefore if Marcus is wicked, Junius must necessarily be more wicked; but if Junius is to be praised for driving out a king, why should Marcus not be exalted to heaven for cutting down a tyrant?<sup>263</sup>

In this section of his imagined dialogue Bruni voices direct opposition to Salutati's conclusion in *De Tyranno* that Dante was correct in placing Brutus and Cassius as traitors

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<sup>261</sup> Kohl and Witt, *The Earthly Republic*, 72.

<sup>262</sup> Kohl and Witt, *The Earthly Republic*, 73.

<sup>263</sup> Kohl and Witt, *The Earthly Republic*, 73.

in the lowest level of Hell. Bruni has Niccolo point out a contradiction he sees in Dante's work, namely the fact that Dante placed Junius Brutus, who was instrumental in driving Tarquin the Proud from Rome and establishing the Republic, in the Elysian Fields while Marcus Brutus receives the greatest punishment possible for also driving out a tyrannical ruler, Julius Caesar.<sup>264</sup> Essentially, Niccolo calls into question the vast difference between the placement of Junius and Marcus Brutus when their deeds in life were so similar. It is clear from this that Bruni did not share Salutati's opinion of Caesar but instead he viewed Caesar as a tyrant.

Bruni also criticizes Salutati further by suggesting that Caesar was not a lawful ruler and therefore Brutus was justified in killing him. This directly opposes the assertion in *De Tyranno* that Caesar was a lawful ruler and therefore not a tyrant. This insult is also made worse by Bruni's comparison of Caesar with Tarquin the Proud and by the assertion that Dante should have placed Junius Brutus in Hell for driving out a lawful king, whereas Brutus should not be punished for killing an unlawful ruler. This is especially interesting when one considers that the driving out of Tarquin was usually considered to be a political victory for Rome because it was only after the last king was driven out that the Republic which made Rome great was established. It is substantial, then, that Bruni, despite his strong Republican beliefs, is so determined to depict Caesar

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<sup>264</sup> The comparison and connection between Marcus and Junius Brutus dates back at least to Plutarch, see Piccolomini, *The Brutus Revival*, 56-57.



as a tyrant, that instead of praising Junius Brutus he is willing to defend Tarquin as a lawful ruler in order to discredit Caesar, Dante, and Salutati.<sup>265</sup>

Finally, Bruni finishes his argument by drawing on religion for support, further criticizing Dante and Salutati. In the dialogue Bruni, using the classic rhetorical tool of *praeteritio*, has Niccolo state: “I shall pass over that which I am ashamed, by Jove, was written by a Christian; because he thought the same punishment should be inflicted on the betrayer of him who troubled the world and on the betrayer of Him who saved,” referring of course, to the placement of Brutus and Cassius in Hell with Judas.<sup>266</sup> Such a statement hints at Bruni’s Republican sentiments; he does not hold the same political philosophy as Dante, and does not believe that the empire and the church are the two powers ordained to rule the world. Instead, he views Caesar as the founder of the Empire which destroyed the Republic, and cannot abide the idea that the men who betrayed Caesar should be equal to the man who betrayed Jesus Christ.

To Bruni’s credit, he does allow Salutati a response in the dialogue, in which Salutati chides Niccolo for his remarks about Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio thus:

How I should wish, Niccolo, that you were kinder to your fellow citizens; although I realize there was never any one so universally approved that he did not find an opponent. Vergil had his Evangelus, Terence his Lanuvius. Nevertheless with your leave I shall say what I feel: those whom I just named seem to me more tolerable than you, for each of them opposed one person, not his fellow citizens, whereas you have proceeded to the point of contention where you attempt to overthrow three, and you fellow citizens at that.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Of course although Bruni does not praise Junius, he doesn’t criticize him too harshly either, but the fact that he is willing to defend Tarquin over Caesar (or at least argue that their destroyer should be treated equally) is quite telling about his image of Caesar.

<sup>266</sup> Kohl and Witt, *The Earthly Republic*, 73.

<sup>267</sup> Kohl and Witt, *The Earthly Republic*, 75.

By allowing Salutati to chide Niccolo for his harsh criticism of his fellow Florentines, Bruni gives him some reprieve. But it is not until Book II of the *Dialogues* that Salutati's character is allowed to defend himself and his arguments about Julius Caesar. In fact, Book II begins with Coluccio's defense of the portrayal of Caesar found in *De Tyranno*.

Book II of the *Dialogues* has engendered much scholarly debate, because it appears that Bruni contradicts himself by allowing Salutati to defend Dante and his treatment of Julius Caesar, and by having Niccolo's character defend Dante as well. Some scholars explain this contradiction by arguing that Bruni composed Book II long after Book I, and by that time his position on the issue had changed.<sup>268</sup> Other scholars however, such as David Quint, argue if read in the proper manner the two Books show no contradiction – Bruni maintains the same position throughout.<sup>269</sup> Based on close examination of the text and Bruni's treatment of his characters and their words, it does indeed appear that Bruni, although he appears not to, does in fact maintain the same opinion and portrayal of Caesar throughout the two Books.

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<sup>268</sup> For example, according to Griffith, Hankins, and Thompson, the contradiction in the *Dialogues* is strong evidence that the two parts of the *Dialogues* were not composed at the same time, because “no self-respecting rhetorician would have written himself into such a corner,” see Griffith, Hankins, and Thompson, 55. However, if the dialogue was composed at two different times why did Bruni not go back and revise the first section to be consistent with the first? Hans Baron's answer to this questions asserts that there is reason to suspect, based on some hand-written marginal notes in a manuscript of Salutati's *De Tyranno* that criticize Salutati's defense of Dante and state that Bruni was better informed since he harshly criticized Dante in his *Dialogus*, that an earlier manuscript of the *Dialogues* existed, in which Bruni harshly objected to Dante's admiration for Caesar. Baron then argues that Bruni later amended the dialogue so that Dante was reformed from his imperial leanings, see Baron, *Humanistic and Political Literature in Florence and Venice at the Beginning of the Quattrocento Studies in Criticism and Chronology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), 132-133.

<sup>269</sup> David Quint, “Humanism and Modernity: A Reconsideration of Bruni's Dialogues,” *Renaissance Quarterly* Vol. 38, No. 3 (Autumn, 1985): 423-445. In this article Quint provides a fairly detailed look at the scholarly debate surrounding the *Dialogues* and offers his opinion that whether the two Books were composed simultaneously or not they can still be read as a cohesive whole, both arguing in favor of republican liberty.

Book II begins with the same men, Bruni, Salutati, Roberto, and Niccolo, joined by another friend, Piero Sermini. They decide to visit Roberto's gardens and during their walk they begin to praise Florence for its magnificence and beauty. This sparks a discussion of the things that make Florence great, all agree that it is the independent, republican nature of Florence that makes it great. Piero thanks Bruni for his work, *Panegyric to the City of Florence*, and comments on how well Bruni portrays and praises Florence, and particularly its politics. Piero then points out that in praising Florence however, Bruni was forced to "cast great odium upon the Caesarian faction" which was naturally opposed to Florentine, republican independence.<sup>270</sup> Piero then explains that it was necessary to expose the crimes of the Caesarian party and mourn the loss of liberty caused by the establishment of the Empire, since this glorifies Florence's republican origins.

Salutati enters the conversation at this point and agrees with Piero that it was indeed necessary for Bruni to criticize the emperors in order to praise Florence (a notoriously anti-imperial city), and Piero replies by quoting Lactantius and wondering why ". . . Julius Caesar is exalted to the skies, since he was the parricide of his fatherland."<sup>271</sup> Coluccio then tells Piero that he ought not to trust Lactantius as a source, especially when there are other, more reliable sources available. Then he launches into a defense of Caesar:

But to speak for myself, I could never be led to believe that Caesar was the parricide of his fatherland. It seems to me that I discussed this matter carefully enough in the book I wrote, *On the Tyrant*, where I concluded

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<sup>270</sup> Kohl and Witt, *The Earthly Republic*, 76.

<sup>271</sup> Kohl and Witt, *The Earthly Republic*, 76.

with good reasons that Caesar did not rule wickedly. And so I shall never think Caesar was a parricide, nor shall I stop exalting him to the skies for the greatness of his deeds.<sup>272</sup>

Although it is brief, this statement does give Salutati's character a brief chance to defend his belief that Caesar was not a tyrant. And since Bruni, as the author here, has put these words in Salutati's mouth, it appears that he is contradicting the opinion he put forth in Book I. However, this is not the case; Bruni does not let the argument end with praise of Caesar but instead adds another criticism, this time from Salutati's own mouth, to make Salutati's defense of a little weaker. Salutati states: "Nevertheless, if I had to exhort my sons to virtue, or ask God for it, I should certainly wish them to resemble Marcellus or Camillus rather than Caesar; for they were not inferior in war, and in addition to this military virtue they had moral purity. I do not know if Caesar did; but those who describe his life say the contrary."<sup>273</sup> By mentioning Caesar's faults with regards to moral purity, Salutati's praise and defense of Caesar is not as strong as it otherwise could be, and Bruni manages to maintain a negative image of Julius Caesar.

Bruni's dialogue then takes an interesting turn when Roberto asks Coluccio to continue the discussion and defend Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio against the charges leveled at them the previous day by Niccolo. Salutati humbly refuses, explaining that he knew Niccolo was only arguing in order to spur Salutati to praise them, and he refused to fall into such a trap. Therefore, Salutati suggests that now Niccolo should defend the three he censured the day before, and Niccolo accepts the challenge, revealing that he really was pretending the day before and he does indeed hold Dante and the others in

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<sup>272</sup> Kohl and Witt, *The Earthly Republic*, 77.

<sup>273</sup> Kohl and Witt, *The Earthly Republic*, 77.

high esteem. Niccolo then embarks on a discourse to answer all his previous criticisms, beginning with Dante, and again it seems that Bruni contradicts himself. Upon close examination, however, it is clear that Bruni's portrayal of Caesar remains consistent.

Niccolo begins by praising Dante for his imagination and eloquence, two qualities he deems absolutely necessary for a great poet. He comments on Dante's impressive knowledge of history, and, interestingly, argues that Dante was not ignorant of historical realities but had to alter them in his poem in order to communicate certain ideas. Niccolo states:

Do you not suppose that Dante, the most learned man of his age, did not know how Caesar had attained power? That he did not know liberty was abolished and a diadem placed on Caesar's head by Mark Antony while the Roman people groaned? Do you think he was ignorant of the great virtue with which all histories agree Brutus had been endowed? . . . No, Dante was not ignorant of this; but in Caesar he represented the legitimate prince and the just, worldly monarch, in Brutus the seditious, trouble-making criminal who sinfully slays this prince . . . since Caesar had ruled, whatever the manner, and since Brutus together with more than sixty noble citizens had slain him, the poet took from this material for invention.<sup>274</sup>

Through Niccolo then, Bruni is able to praise Dante, but he still retains his image of a tyrannical Caesar by arguing that Dante knew the true nature of Caesar's rule but chose to use him as a political image anyway. As examined earlier in this work, when placed in context with his other works it is clear that Dante did support the Empire and so glorified its founder, and that his use of Caesar in the *Inferno* was more than just a poetic image but it was also an expression of his own political beliefs. So although Bruni redeems

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<sup>274</sup> Kohl and Witt, 86.

himself here from criticizing Dante, he still remains opposed to Salutati's belief in an unjustly slain Caesar.<sup>275</sup>

It is clear, then, that throughout his dialogues Bruni consistently portrays Caesar as an unlawful ruler and the murderer of the Republic, an image significantly influenced by his own Florentine, republican background. Although at times it may appear as if he grants Caesar a reprieve, in reality he criticizes those who, like Salutati, praise Caesar. Bruni's arguments also suggest that he connects Salutati's depiction of Caesar to medieval ideas, while showcasing his own portrayal of Caesar as more modern and humanistic. It is interesting however, that despite his negative opinion of Caesar and his understanding of the Roman Republic, Bruni still upholds the medieval image of Caesar as the founder and first ruler of the Roman Empire, the only difference is that Bruni interprets this negatively; Caesar's association with imperial rule is not a positive characteristic.

Other evidence of Bruni's negative interpretation of Caesar is found another of his works: the *Laudatio Florentinae Urbis*, or *Panegyric to the City of Florence*. Composed by Bruni in the early Quattrocento to praise the city he so deeply admired, the *Laudatio* reflects Bruni's belief that it was republican government and political ideals that made Florence great. It praises both the city of Florence and her people, and attempts to create

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<sup>275</sup> Quint explains that not only does this oppose Salutati but it can also be read as a slight against Salutati's knowledge of the classics, stating: "Niccoli flatly contradicts Saultati's assertion earlier in the dialogue that Caesar was not a wicked ruler and indeed should be the object of unending praise . . . moreover, Niccoli suggests that only ignorance of the classical sources . . . could make one advocate the cause of Caesar . . . Niccoli may protest too much and this seeming defense of Dante may insinuate that the poet was the victim of the deficiencies of classical learning in his age, the deficiencies which Niccoli had attacked in the first dialogue." Quint goes on to explain that in a sense it seems that Bruni groups Salutati not with his own generation of humanists but instead with the earlier generation of Dante and Petrarch. See Quint, 437-439.

a solid, republican background for the city. A close study reveals that Leonardo Bruni's image and interpretation of Caesar was without doubt opposed the image of Caesar found in Salutati's *De Tyranno*.

Divided into four parts covering the city itself, the citizens of Florence, the historic successes of the city, and the superiority of Florentine government and law, the *Laudatio* is meant to praise and give honor to the city of Florence and by extension to republican ideals of government. Florence is described throughout the entire *Laudatio* as a noble, virtuous, beautiful city, full of people who embody all the best of the Roman republican, classical heritage. The whole document bleeds republican sentiment and sharply condemns monarchy and imperialism. Caesar and the emperors who followed him are portrayed as the destroyers of the Roman republic and therefore the enemies of Florence, conclusively indicating that Bruni's image of Caesar is opposed to that of Salutati, Dante, and Petrarch.

Bruni's criticism of Caesar appears in the second part of the *Laudatio*, in which Bruni glorifies the citizens of Florence and the Roman heritage they possess. Bruni ties the Florentines to the Romans who Bruni describes as the most distinguished, powerful, and excellent nation in the world.<sup>276</sup> It was not unusual to connect the roots of a family or city to ancient civilizations and heroes, in fact during the Middle Ages Florence claimed Julius Caesar as its founder, since a heritage that could be traced to the Romans also implied a link to the Trojans, one of the great ancient civilizations. Connection to Julius Caesar was even better, because Caesar claimed direct descent from Iulus, the son of the great Trojan prince Aeneas. However, in the *Laudatio* Bruni turns the traditional

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<sup>276</sup> Kohl and Witt, *The Earthly Republic*, 149-150.

Florentine association with Julius Caesar on its head in an effort to disconnect Florence from imperial Rome.

Instead of claiming Julius Caesar as the founder of Rome, Bruni prefers to place the foundation of Florence during the time of the Republic, the time when he believed Rome was at its height. Bruni states:

Accordingly, this very noble Roman colony was established at the very moment when the dominion or the Roman people flourished greatly and when very powerful kings and warlike nations were being conquered by the skill of Roman arms and by virtue. Moreover, the Caesars, the Antonines, the Tiberiuses, the Neros – those plagues and destroyers of the Roman Republic – had not yet deprived the people of their liberty. Rather still growing there was that sacred and untrampled freedom that, soon after the founding of the colony of Florence, was to be stolen by those vilest thieves.<sup>277</sup>

Bruni quite nonchalantly places the foundation of Florence as a Roman colony during the period of the Republic, and in no uncertain terms he condemns the emperors as villainous thieves who destroyed the Republic and deprived the people of their liberty. But this is not all; Bruni continues to explain how the history of Florence is tied to the downfall of the Roman Republic:

For this reason I think something has been true and is true in this city more than in any other; the men of Florence especially enjoy perfect freedom and are the greatest enemies of tyrants. So I believe from its very founding Florence conceived such a hatred for the destroyers of the Roman state and underminers of the Roman Republic that it has never forgotten to this very day. If any trace of or even the names of those corrupters of Rome have survived to the present, they are hated and scorned in Florence.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> Kohl and Witt, *The Earthly Republic*, 151.

<sup>278</sup> Kohl and Witt, *The Earthly Republic*, 151.



Not only does Bruni claim that the foundation of Florence occurred during the time of the Republic, but he also argues that Florence has always been the enemy of tyranny and the defender of Republican liberty.<sup>279</sup> Such an argument further severs the city from any connection to the Empire and monarchical government. Bruni also draws further support for this argument from the Guelf and Ghibelline conflicts; according to Bruni, the struggle between Guelf and Ghibellines stems from the classical struggle between the Caesarian party and supporters of Cicero, thus portraying Caesar as the image of imperial tyranny and Cicero as the image of republican liberty.<sup>280</sup> Bruni asserts that even though by the Quattrocento the factions had different names, it was the same struggle that had existed during the civil wars, and that Florence, a consistently Guelf city, has always fought on the side of the Republic.

Bruni does not treat Caesar specifically until near the end of the second section of the *Laudatio*, first Bruni discusses the horrors inflicted upon Rome by emperors such as Caligula, Tiberius, Domitian, and Nero. He refers to the emperors in general several times as monsters and tyrants, continually emphasizing the ruin that the Empire brought upon the Republic and the people of Rome. Then, finally, Bruni addresses Julius Caesar

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<sup>279</sup> Bruni's argument about the foundation of Florence is somewhat justified, but by no means concrete. Current scholarship still debates about the origins of the city, and there is simply not enough evidence on either side of the argument to prove conclusively whether Caesar founded Florence or not. However, evidence does suggest that Julius Caesar at least planned to drain the land where Florence now stands and that those plans were most likely carried out by Octavian and the other Triumvirs in 41 B.C. Also, Fiesole is mentioned consistently in accounts of Cataline's defeat, and Florence never is, suggesting that it was not yet in existence. However, on the other hand, Florence is not included in Pliny's list of Augustan colonies, suggesting an earlier foundation. Thus the evidence does not exclude Florence from foundation by Caesar, but it does not conclusively prove it either. For a detailed analysis of the evidence and the topic see Colin Hardie, "The Origin and Plan of Roman Florence," *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 1/2, Part 1 and 2 (1965): 122-140.

<sup>280</sup> Gordon Griffith, James Hankins, and David Thompson, trans. *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni: Selected Texts* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies in conjunction with The Renaissance Society of America, 1987), 17.

and his role in the downfall of the Republic lamenting “O Gaius Caesar, what manifest crimes have you visited upon the city of Rome!”<sup>281</sup> Although this expression sounds as though a list of Caesar crimes is to follow, instead Bruni stops himself, stating:

But I will remain silent on this topic, for there are some who are irate that Lucan, a very learned and wise man, wrote the truth concerning those crimes. Perhaps they do so not without good reason, for although you [Caesar] displayed many and great vices, these were sometimes overshadowed by many great virtues. Hence the safest course is not to discuss you at all.<sup>282</sup>

This gives an interesting nuance to Bruni’s portrayal of Julius Caesar. Although he wants to discredit and disparage Caesar, he feels that it would be better to avoid the subject of Caesar all together since Caesar did possess some good qualities. Perhaps Bruni simply felt that it would not be wise to malign a figure so well-represented in the writing of other humanists, or perhaps he himself felt conflicted about unequivocally depicting Caesar as a tyrant, but whatever the case may be, he still supports the image of Caesar as the destroyer of the Republic by mentioning Lucan and his representation of Caesar.

Bruni continues on to say that he will pass over any discussion of Augustus as well, since like his adoptive father Augustus had some virtues that somewhat redeem him from his vices. However, in stating this Bruni again using *praeteritio*; by describing the things that he won’t say he is able to say them. For example, Bruni explains that he won’t call to mind all of Augustus’s cruelties and immoral acts, or his treachery to the Senate, but in listing these things he has then managed to say them. Bruni also call Augustus’s successors monsters and declares that none of the Julio-Claudian emperors could be

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<sup>281</sup> Kohl and Witt, *The Earthly Republic*, 153.

<sup>282</sup> Kohl and Witt, *The Earthly Republic*, 153.

redeemed from their vices by virtues, since none of them possessed any. Finally, Bruni concludes by stating that even though he will not discuss the many vices of Augustus and Caesar, he “. . . cannot forget, nor do I think that I should not be angry, that you paved the way for so many evils and outrages that your successors perpetrated with every kind of iniquity and cruelty.”<sup>283</sup>

The image of Caesar found in the *Laudatio* then, is clearly that of a wicked tyrant who overthrew the Republic and paved the way for the empire, which stole liberty from the people. Indeed, Bruni is rather harsh, blaming all the sins of Caesar’s descendants, including Augustus, on Caesar himself. Although Bruni avoids an in-depth discussion of Caesar, and although he does admit that Caesar possessed some virtues, he still clearly portrays Caesar as the founder of the Empire which ruined Republican liberty. By reconstructing the history of the foundation of Florence, Bruni strengthens his image of Caesar as the destroyer of the Republic and places this image in direct opposition to earlier portrayals of Caesar as the glorious founder of God’s ordained government on earth, the Holy Roman Empire.

A close examination of Caesar’s representation in the works of Bruni and Salutati reveals that the use of Caesar as a symbol moved into humanism and the Renaissance it remained consistent in some ways but also altered in others. Both Salutati and Bruni continue the medieval image of Caesar as the founder of the Empire, and both also continue the tradition of Caesar as a utilitarian image to represent and argue for various causes. However, Bruni and Salutati add more nuance to images of Caesar; Salutati by criticizing Cicero’s commentaries on Caesar and Bruni by seeking to tear down the

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<sup>283</sup> Kohl and Witt, *The Earthly Republic*, 154.

medieval tradition of Caesar as the founder of Florence. Bruni and Salutati also serve as an effective representation of the influence that an author's intellectual and political background can have on interpretation of Caesar. Bruni's republican fervor led him to condemn Caesar as the destroyer of the Republic. For Salutati, however, despite his republican sentiments his intellectual background and his respect for Dante, as well as his desire to prove himself able to debate with Cicero, led him to defend Dante's image of Caesar.

This raises a final issue that a study of Caesar's image in Bruni and Salutati highlights: a growing complexity in images of Julius Caesar. Caesar seems to be quite problematic for both Bruni and Salutati; Bruni found himself forced to admit that Caesar did have some virtues, and likewise Salutati had to deal with the fact that Caesar did seize control of the government unlawfully. However, both authors find ways to qualify these problems and still support their own portrayals of Caesar. Also, Dante and Petrarch's images of Caesar pose a significant problem for Bruni and Salutati, neither want to fully oppose Dante and Petrarch, their great forbearers, but at the same time their Republican sentiments suggested that Caesar was the destroyer of the Republic. Both Bruni and Salutati recognize this complexity, and use logic and analysis to address these issues and qualify their assertions. Thus in the works of these two men we see not only the impact that the revival of the classics and the increasingly chaotic and competitive political environment had on how Caesar was portrayed, but also more straightforward acknowledgement of the complex character of Julius Caesar.

## **Conclusion**

At the end of a study of the use of Caesar's image from Late Antiquity through the early Renaissance there are several important conclusions that can be drawn. Most important is the fact that due to the time, political situation, and context in which authors lived, as well as the knowledge they had access to, images of Caesar ranged from those of a great hero to depictions of a power-hungry tyrant. The fact that Caesar became a powerful symbol and example for various causes is evident in the works of the authors examined in the chapters above. Also, it is further evident that those images of Caesar were usually tied directly to a specific topic of discussion so that his representation in the work fit the author's focus. This is why Caesar is the great conqueror of Gaul in the writings of Ammianus Marcellinus, the Roman general who almost did not defeat the Britons in Geoffrey of Monmouth, proof that all tyrants come to a bad end in John of Salisbury, the glorious founder of the Roman Empire in Dante and Petrarch, and the destroyer of Republican liberty in the writings of Bruni.

In an important sense, Caesar's image is indicative of both the evolution and continuity in thought that occurred between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. From Late Antiquity onward Caesar was viewed as the first emperor and he was consistently used to represent the Roman Empire. The image of Caesar as an emperor or king remained constant throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, as even humanists like Bruni still discussed Caesar in imperial terms. Somehow, despite the discovery and use of different sources, as well as new emphasis on textual criticism and writing accurate history, Caesar still remained connected to the Roman Empire and a

representation of the Empire. However, Caesar's image also represents differences between medieval and Renaissance thought. From Petrarch onward images of Caesar grew more complex, and Caesar was examined more often as a historical person, rather than just a persona representing the Empire. Caesar also gained an increasingly significant place in history and political discussions; he was no longer simply whatever the author needed him to be.

This is not to say, however, that Caesar's image did not maintain its flexible nature. In fact, as Yavetz points out, from the time of Petrarch forward, scholars, writers, and historians developed a love-hate relationship with Caesar. According to Yavetz, this occurred "Because he [Caesar] was not extreme in any one respect, every writer could see in him what he wished and be right."<sup>284</sup> This problem still exists, to a certain degree, today. Modern historians certainly have the advantage over earlier scholars in terms of the sources available to them to reconstruct Caesar's life, however, the debate still rages over who and what Caesar really was.

Another conclusion to be drawn is that the influence of classical portrayals of Caesar is paramount to understanding later images of the dictator. Not only did classical texts serve as a source for information about Caesar and his life, they also provided the contexts from which later authors were able to create images of Caesar to fit their own agendas and ideas. The ties forged by Vergil between Caesar and the glorious destiny of Rome enabled later authors such as Dante to create the image of a divinely appointed Caesar. Suetonius also contributed to the imperial image of Caesar by placing Caesar as first in his series of imperial biographies, thus suggesting that he was the first emperor.

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<sup>284</sup> Yavetz, *Julius Caesar*, 183.

Also, medieval and Renaissance authors found in Suetonius an ample number of anecdotes about Caesar to use as exempla in their own writings, creating an often contradictory idea of Caesar. In essence, the work of Suetonius allowed for a wide interpretation of who Caesar really was. Lucan's *Civil War* also contributed to later portrayals by depicting Caesar as a power-hungry general who caused the bloody, gruesome civil wars. This enabled later authors such as Bruni to portray Caesar as a justly slain tyrant and an enemy to republican government.

During the early Middle Ages Caesar factored into written works only in connection with a particular topic, such as the conquest of Britain or Gaul. However, by the Late Middle Ages and the writings of John of Salisbury and Thomas Aquinas there are two main developments evident in Caesar's image: his association with the Roman Empire and the death of the Republic is strengthened, and his use in political discussions. This also foreshadowed more complex images of Caesar, where he is not simply used to represent the Roman Empire but also examined for his own personal qualities. For example, Petrarch uses an image of a Caesar who is not only a representative of Empire but who is also a great moral character to be emulated.

In the works of Dante and Petrarch, it is clear that the medieval image of Caesar as the founder of the Roman Empire carried over into the Renaissance, but we find that image used specifically to support the power of the Holy Roman Empire and its right to temporal government. For both authors, Caesar served as a convenient representative of the ancient Roman Empire in discussions about the balance of power between the Church and the Empire, as well as the argument that imperial or monarchical rule is the best form

of government. Likewise, in the works of Bruni and Salutati Caesar's image continues to be central to political discussions and governmental debate. However, Caesar's image is more complex for Bruni and Salutati, since each have access to more sources than before but do not want to contradict the great Dante and Petrarch. Both, in a sense, return to a Suetonian portrayal of Caesar, criticizing and praising him, using him as both a positive and negative image.

Inspired and informed by classical representations of Caesar, scholars such as Thomas Aquinas, Dante, Petrarch, and Bruni not only perpetuated classical interpretations of Caesar, but each created their own version of the dictator as well. Over time, as these versions overlapped and influenced each other, contributing to the growth of a mythic Caesar, far removed from the historical man, but useful in discussing and debating the issues of the author's own days. In so doing, these scholars reflect an idea offered by Norman Cantor in his work, *Inventing the Middle Ages*. Cantor states:

Partly because of our learning and partly because of different intellectual assumptions we employ about human behavior, we are more impressed with the ambivalence and ambiguity about things medieval. That quality of complexity and contradiction makes the medieval world much closer to our own than was even dimly imagined a century ago. It allows medievalists to find in the Middle Ages the mirror image of themselves or parallel manifestations to trends and happenings in the twentieth century. Our profound learning about the high Middle Ages has provided the opportunity for provocative image making of a medieval past that conforms to our current emotional and public needs.<sup>285</sup>

Just as Cantor insists that modern historians have created a medieval world which fits their perspectives and understanding, it can be said that medieval and Renaissance intellectuals did the same with Roman history and particularly Julius Caesar. Throughout

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<sup>285</sup> Norman F. Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages: The Lives, Works, and Ideas of the Great Medievalists of the Twentieth Century* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991), 27-28.



medieval writing Caesar's image constantly adjusts to fit specific discussions and represent ideas important to the political and public needs of the day. Caesar's image is significant, then, not for what it tells us about Caesar himself, but instead for what it reveals about the people, places, and times employing the image.

Since the time of his death, Caesar's persona has passed through many stages of depiction, and, as a new collection of essays asserts, Caesar has been relevant in many different time periods and for many different reasons.<sup>286</sup> As Yavetz points out, Caesar himself was concerned about his image, so perhaps we should be concerned about it too.<sup>287</sup> An examination of the use of Caesar as a symbol in Medieval and Renaissance writing demonstrates that history is often written to reflect one's own day and that powerful examples can be found in figures from the past. The ever-elusive persona of Julius Caesar will no doubt continue to be used as a symbol and comparison point for historians, classicists, politicians, and scholars, building upon already established interpretations of Caesar as well as contributing new ideas to highlight the political and public needs of the day.

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<sup>286</sup> Wyke, ed., *Julius Caesar in Western Culture*, xiv.

<sup>287</sup> Yavetz, *Julius Caesar*, 64.

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