

REVIEW

RECEPTIONS OF JULIUS CAESAR FROM ANCIENT TO MODERN

Trine Arlund Hass and Rubina Raja, edd., *Caesar's Past and Posterity's Caesar*. Rome Studies: Archaeology, History, and Literature, 1. Turnhout: Brepols, 2021. Pp. 248; 52 figures. Paperback, €95.00. ISBN 978-2-503-59130-8.

This splendid volume offers fifteen papers that make interesting and useful contributions to our understanding of the figure of C. Julius Caesar, both in his own milieu and in subsequent reception stretching from the moment of his death up to recent years. Material culture, historiographical literature, and drama are amongst the things treated. This elegant, variegated volume arises within the context of two research projects financed by the Carlsberg Foundation and the Aarhus University Research Foundation: Danish–Italian excavation of the Forum Iulium and *Our Caesar: Danish Receptions of Gaius Julius Caesar*. The papers themselves are the result of a conference held in Copenhagen on 29–30 April 2019. The breadth of vision is welcome, as is the precision of focus that most of the authors bring to their task. Whether a person is interested in the issue of the memory of Caesar in Augustan Rome (Galinsky), the reception of Caesar as an orator (van der Blom), or the tortuous steps whereby Bernard Shaw's subversive *Caesar and Cleopatra* was itself subverted (Wyke), to cite a couple examples, there is much here that rewards reading and re-reading.

The volume opens with an introductory chapter that sets the stage by relating the genesis of this volume and offering a rationale for its production. The editors, Trine Arlund Hass and Rubina Raja ('The Man Behind the Sources: Caesar's Past and Posterity's Caesar', 1–9), stress the perennial relevance of the figure of Julius Caesar to Western civilisation, provide readers with the background history for this volume (e.g., it is the first in a new series entitled *Rome Studies*), and furnish brief syntheses of all the contributions. These fifteen contributions are apportioned among three sections that deal with Caesar and his immediate reception by contemporaries, the subsequent ancient historiographical reception of Caesar in the following centuries, and the reception of Caesar in medieval and modern times.

There are five contributions in the first part dedicated to Caesar in his milieu, exploring his relationship to the past, his interaction with the present,

and his efforts to shape his future image with posterity. The discussion of the historical Caesar commences fittingly with the contribution of Sine Grove Saxkjær ('The Role of the Romans' Early History in the Late Republican Period', 13–26), which has very little to say about Caesar himself, but does provide useful contextualisation for a key Caesarian text: the funeral eulogy for his aunt Julia (Suet. *Iul.* 6). Illustrating the plasticity of the Greek and indigenous Italic traditions regarding the origins of Rome and the regal period, Saxkjær concludes by exploring the relationship between *gens* and ethnicity as manifested in claims to divine descent and memories of local origin (e.g., the Caesii and Caecilii from Praeneste). Paolo Liverani ('Caesar and the Pomerium of Rome', 27–34) next revisits an old chestnut and makes sensible suggestions regarding Caesar's future plans for the city of Rome as a cosmopolis worthy of its position as the mistress of the Graeco-Roman world. In discussing Caesar's plans for the city, which involved both altering the course of the Tiber and extending the *pomerium*, Liverani reviews the conflicting evidence and boldly attempts to resolve philological and historical problems. While the reviewer finds these solutions largely unpersuasive, the contribution is certain to generate fresh debate and renewed critical scrutiny of the sources. In the following contribution Karl Galinsky ('Shaping Caesar's Past for Posterity: Caesar d.f. Augustus', 35–51) offers a nuanced reading of the reception of Caesar's heritage and the perpetuation of his memory in Augustan Rome. Building on the seminal lead of an article by Peter White,¹ Galinsky argues that the figure of Caesar was central to the 'new normal' (44) that Augustus incrementally established over the years. Working from the premise that the Forum Augustum was 'more than a museum' (36), Galinsky carefully, convincingly teases out the centrality of the figure of Caesar in the Forum of Augustus and elsewhere (e.g., the calendar of the Roman state). Subsequently, Rubina Raja and Jörg Rüpke ('Creating Memories in and of Urban Rome: The Forum Iulium', 53–66) offer a comprehensive review of the Forum Iulium and Caesar's imprint on the landscape of Rome via his monumental addition to political life at the heart of the ancient city. The construction of memory in its various guises, as regards both the *urbs* and the *imperator*, are the twin *foci* of this engaging contribution. Concerned with the meaning of Caesar's new monumental complex and the use of the Forum Iulium as a 'lived space' (60), the authors rightly and usefully emphasise the polyvalent use of this space and the meanings that might derive from such use. Last in this series, Carsten Hjort Lange ('The Invention of Civil War Writing: The (Curious?) Case of Caesar', 67–78) looks at the written monument left by the *imperator* C. Caesar, focussing on the *Bellum Civile*. The language of civil war (e.g., *seeditio*, *discordia*, *dissensio*, *bellum civile*) is examined preliminary to Caesar's

¹ P. White, 'Julius Caesar in Augustan Rome', *Phoenix* 42 (1988) 334–56.

conceptual handling of the representation of his own actions and those of his opponents in 49–48 BC. Teasing out the paradox of Caesar's depiction of his enemies as the barbarian 'other', Lange explores in careful and meticulous fashion what it meant for Caesar to write an account of the civil war that resulted from his refusal to be removed from his provincial command.

Another four contributions cover the subject of Caesar's reception from the principate of Tiberius through to Late Antiquity, exploring in particular historiographical appreciations of the figure of Caesar. Bridget England ('Caesar's Place in the Course of Tiberian Historiography', 81–93) deals with the memory of Caesar as transmitted by a writer who had *not* participated in the civil wars of the 40s and 30s BC. Comparing and contrasting the strategies of Velleius with those of Valerius Maximus and the Tiberian epigraphic record, England highlights the complex nature of Velleius' narrative: Velleius fails to refer explicitly to Caesar as a god and at times implies criticism of Caesar, but consistently compares him favourably to Pompeius Magnus. Overall, a narrative that is highly compressed and re-ordered, for rhetorical ends, emerges with clarity. Next Henriette van der Blom ('Caesar the Orator in Retrospect', 95–110) offers a characteristically thoughtful and stimulating piece that explores the imperial reception of Caesar's oratorical works. She concentrates on two case studies: the reception of the speeches that Caesar delivered in prosecuting the former governor of Macedonia, Cn. Cornelius Dolabella, and the reception of Caesar's oratory by Aulus Gellius. Teasing out the agendas involved in these instances of reception, van der Blom makes an excellent case for Romans' viewing oratory as complementary to their leaders' military achievements and provides a clearer image of how Augustus curated the public image of his adoptive father, the Divus Iulius. Then follows a contribution in which Jesper Majbom Madsen ('Between Dynast and Legitimate Monarch: Imperial Reflections of Julius Caesar', 111–26) compares the historiographical representations of Caesar by Plutarch, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio. Whereas Plutarch portrays Caesar as an Aristotelian tragic hero whose fatal flaw was his ambition, Suetonius more straightforwardly depicts Caesar as naturally inclined to tyranny and so ambitious that he was willing to flout the rule of law from the very start of his political career. In contrast to these biographical approaches, Cassius Dio, as an annalist focussed on institutions and the long-term course of Roman history, offers a detailed narrative that has greater depth and analytical power than those offered by Plutarch and Suetonius. Rounding out the discussion of this section is a piece in which Giuseppe Zecchini ('Julius Caesar in Western Late Antiquity', 127–34) deals with the reception of Caesar in historical and literary works composed by authors writing in Latin in the West in the fourth and fifth centuries AD (e.g., Jerome, Claudian, Flavius Merobaudes). Zecchini addresses four topics in reviewing these texts: the identity of Caesar as the first of the Roman emperors; the question of whether Caesar was a vindictive tyrant or merciful ruler; the

appreciation of Caesar's talent as a general; and Caesar's relationship to the barbarians of northern Europe. What emerges is a thriving, differentiated culture of elite memory that provided the basis for subsequent medieval treatments of Roman history.

A final six contributions explore the reception of Caesar in the medieval and modern periods, ranging from works of Florentine civic humanism to post-modern archaeological investigation. The series commences with a contribution in which Marianne Pade ('Should They Rot in Hell? Fifteenth-Century Discussions of Brutus and Cassius—and Caesar's Murder', 137–50) investigates Caesar's reception in Italian texts (composed in Italian or Latin) ranging from Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* to Per Candido Decembrio's *Comparison of Caesar and Alexander*. The principal focus is Caesar's reception in early fifteenth-century Florence, with especial attention given to the influence of civic humanism (e.g., Leonardo Bruni, Colluccio Salutati) and the renewal of Greek studies in the West (e.g., Guarino Veronese, Pier Candido Decembrio). What emerges is Caesar's relevance to contemporary political discourse in Italy as well as a clear sense of how philological activity provided a basis for political theory. Next, shifting from Florence to London, Miryana Dimitrova ('Lurking in the Jacobean Shadows: Historicity and Topicality of the Character of Julius Caesar in Ben Jonson's *Catiline: His Conspiracy*', 151–66) offers insight into Caesar's reception in early modern English drama by looking at the depiction of Caesar in the second of Ben Jonson's two plays to deal with Roman antiquity. Taking what is at first sight unpromising material, Dimitrova meticulously sets it within its context, thereby revealing a wealth of rewarding insights. Comparing the cool-headed political expediency of Caesar with the intemperate emotionality of Catiline, she goes on to explore the relationship of James I to Caesar (e.g., the *Basilikon Doron* discussed at pp. 161–2) and the metatheatrical implications of this play. Providing an intriguing counterpoint is the following piece in which Trine Arlund Hass ('A Bad Tyrant Born to Command: N. F. S. Grundtvig's Representation of Caesar in the *Handbook of World History* (1833)', 167–82) looks at the foundational figure of Grundtvig and his seminal contribution to Danish education and national identity through the lens of this treatment of Caesar. Writing universal history from a theological and nationalist perspective, Grundtvig adopted a *presentist* approach to render the Roman past accessible to young readers (e.g., labelling Cato the Elder 'the old police commissioner'), but there are also elements of *historicist* analysis to be found in his work (e.g., Caesar's failure as an autocrat).

Moving slightly back in time to consider the German view of Caesar, Thomas Biskup ('Ancient Contemporary History and Enlightened Philosophy of History: Caesar and Voltaire as Models for Frederick the Great's Historiography', 183–98) provides insightful discussion of Caesar's reception by the Prussian ruler Frederick the Great. Although devoid of Latin, Frederick II engaged intimately with the Enlightenment culture of his day and thus knew

Caesar through the medium of French literature. However, Frederick was interested in Caesar not as the first emperor nor as a source of military tactics, but rather as the historiographical model informing the accounts that he wrote of the four wars that he fought between 1740 and 1779. Next Maria Wyke ('Lessons in History: Bernard Shaw's Discomforting Caesar', 199–212) engages in a detailed, nuanced examination of the genesis, production, and reception of Shaw's play *Caesar and Cleopatra*. The result is a bracing, welcome antidote to the usual focus on the Shakespearean tragedies. Wyke traces the history of the play from its initial composition in 1898 through to the 1951–2 dramatic revivals by Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh and the 1992 screening of the restored 1944 cinematic version. Shaw's Caesar is altogether a different creature from the tragic figure of Shakespearean drama, which makes his play's subversion by its performative linkage to Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* all the more intriguing an instance of reception history. In conclusion, illustrating how historicism has made the material remains an intrinsic part of our dramatic imagination, Nikoline Sauer ('The Forum of Caesar: A Historiographical Review', 213–41) provides what is a relatively complete overview of the history of the archaeological site of the Forum Iulium and the relevant scientific literature. Covering the site's history from the late Bronze Age to the present, this contribution contextualises the work currently being undertaken by a joint Italian–Danish team. The site's prehistory, its development by Caesar and Augustus and maintenance by their successors, and its subsequent re-use from Late Antiquity to the twenty-first century are all nicely illustrated by maps, photographs, and citation of the material remains.

Attractively produced, this volume is by and large quite successful in what the editors and their contributors undertook to do. It offers a useful review of various aspects of the reception of Caesar and is certain to stimulate further work and debate. Before addressing that, however, perhaps a few words should be dedicated to a couple of problems that are in evidence. One issue is that of philology. Neither the re-reading of Plutarch's description of Caesar's projected canals (Liverani, p. 31) nor the detection of a reference by Velleius Paterculus to the *commentarii* of Caesar (England, p. 85) are, in the reviewer's considered judgement, successful. It is a basic principle of philology that texts must make sense and that they are to be athetised if they do not do so. Liverani has performed a useful service by drawing attention to a text that belongs to the latter category, even if he bravely attempts to extort meaning from a sentence that—as transmitted—links the Aniene river to the projected Corinthian canal. England, by contrast, offers a reading that is completely divorced from context and therefore, while coherent on its own, stands in marked contrast to what the surrounding text indicates as the most natural understanding of Velleius' words. Another issue that arises in this collection is that of comprehensive coverage. The contribution by Sauer claims to be a 'historiographical review' (which it is not), and it also makes the implicit claim

to being complete (which it is not, by virtue of significant omissions). In a similar vein, but to a lesser degree (perhaps), other contributions likewise overlook important contributions to (or topics in) the areas that they cover. For instance, England quite inexplicably omits any reference whatsoever to the fundamental work of Eleanor Cowan on Velleius Paterculus, and Saxkjær oddly makes no reference to Erskine's monograph on Troy in the imagination of Greece and Rome. As regards subject, it seems somewhat odd that Biskup made no use of the marvellous bust of Caesar in Egyptian green slate that was once in the possession of Frederick and is now to be seen in the Berlin Pergamonmuseum. So, too, it seems very strange that Pade's discussion of the Florentine reception of Caesar has nothing to say whatsoever about the Pazzi conspiracy to eliminate all of the Medici in late fifteenth-century Florence.

With that said, it bears repeating that this volume is largely successful and a worthy addition to the conversation on Caesar. Indeed, there are a number of contributions that nicely lend themselves to use in the classroom when teaching undergraduates (e.g., Lange, Madsen, Dimitrova, and Wyke), just as there are others that are certain to prove extremely useful for graduate seminars (e.g., Raja and Rüpke, Hass, Biskup, and Sauer). Part of their utility, it is to be remarked, lies not only in providing reliable discussions, but also in provoking further thought and debate. So, for instance, Lange (75) in a felicitous contribution highlights a fundamental problem inherent in Caesar's representation of the war dead at Pharsalus: an inflated casualty figure of 25,000 that stands in marked contrast to the 6,000 claimed by no less a witness than the Caesarian commander Asinius Pollio. The reviewer would observe that Caesar's battlefield judgement *hoc voluerunt* that was reported by Pollio is consonant with this literary strategy of rendering the enemy a distinct and unassimilable 'other'. Similarly, Zecchini in a magisterial survey draws our attention to Caesar's silence over civil war, as opposed to the conquest of Gaul. That, to this reviewer's mind, strongly suggests that the *alpha*-class of manuscripts represents what was the mainstream text of Caesar *c.* AD 400. Others will surely have similar reactions to this excellent collection of essays. In the end all of the contributions compel us to re-think what we believe that we know and contribute in some way to advancing the discussion, thereby making this volume particularly welcome.

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