

## **From dynasts to legitimate monarch: Caesar's dictatorship in the writing of Cassius Dio**

Jesper Majbom Madsen  
University of Southern Denmark

Caesar's considerable appetite for power, his quest for glory and his ambition to be first among the Romans was, not surprisingly, a theme in the works of later historians and other commentators in ancient Rome. In much of what ancient authors wrote about Caesar, the dictator comes across as a man who wanted supreme power at any cost and as someone who, when he won supreme power, behaved like a tyrant. Even if Caesar was mild, to Suetonius he was still a despot whose desire for power and glory made him elevate himself above his former peers who, in turn, were transformed into subjects. If we for a moment disregard writers such as Strabo or Velleius Paterculus, whose positive approach to Caesar should not be too readily ignored, our sources tend to see Caesar and his dictatorship as a step in the wrong direction—a move, so to speak, towards kingship and, perhaps, a form of tyranny. One noticeable exception is Cassius Dio, who is often neglected in studies on Caesar. Dio agrees with his fellow ancient historians and other men of letters that Caesar was overly ambitious and strongly committed to securing supreme power, and that the dictator's urge for glory and an elevated position in Rome was what brought him to his fall. Yet, unlike most ancient commentators, Dio sees Caesar's dictatorship as a necessary move in the right direction, one to ensure stability after at least a century of political chaos and civil war. To Dio, monarchy was the only viable form of constitution, and Caesar is seen as a saviour figure who took the first important steps to move Rome in that direction. Yet, Dio's Caesar was a child of his time, one where the political elite in Rome was too focused on its own glory to do what was in the best interests of the state. Caesar was therefore bound to fail. One question to discuss in this paper is the role Caesar fulfilled in Dio's quite personal account of Rome's political history. Another question is how we are to use Dio's analysis of Caesar's role in mid first century BCE in the study of Late Republican Rome.