

Creditor of the ambitious

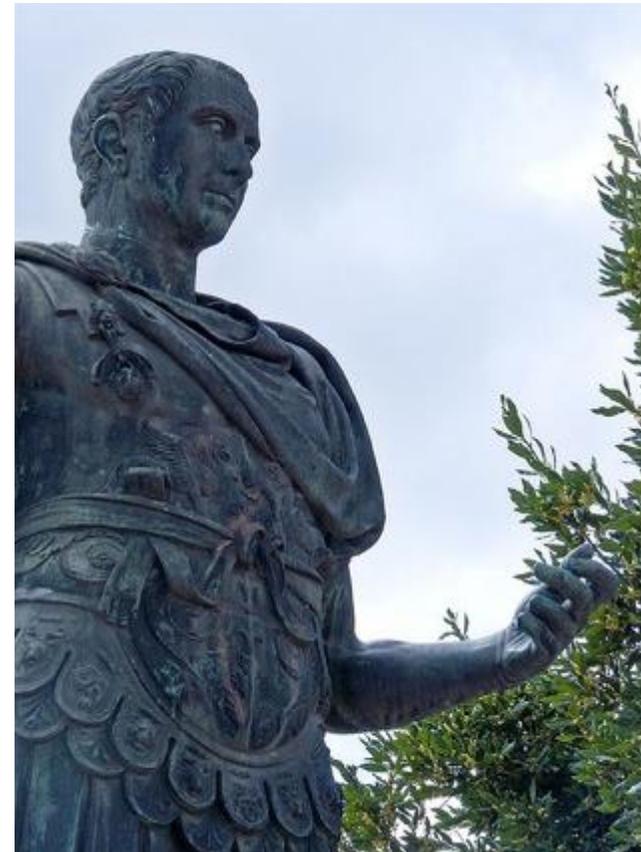
Initiating the Gallic Wars made Caesar one of the richest men in Rome. He strategically used the money, lending it to young, ambitious politicians who needed it to advance their careers. Thus, he secured their support in the senate and defied his enemies.

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Caesar becomes invincible

Caesar knew very well that he had made many enemies with his way of doing politics, which is why he went straight from consul to proconsul. The office of proconsul conferred to its holder legal immunity. Consequently, Caesar could not be prosecuted for actions performed in his previous office.



Caius Iulius Caesar, bronze statue at the Via Foro Imperiali, Rome.

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Caesar needs more money

To replenish his money supplies, Caesar asked for the provinces Gallia Cisalpina, Gallia Narbonensis and Illyria. He knew that the region held enough potential for armed conflict and war. In early 58 BC, Caesar got on his way to his provinces.



Roman provinces and local tribes in the area of what today are France and Belgium, late 1st century BC. Source: Wikicommons / Feitscherg / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.de>

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The domino effect

Thanks to the Helvetii, Caesar saw an opportunity to start a war against the Gauls. When the Helvetii tried to migrate to the Atlantic coast due to food shortage, he prevented them from doing so and attacked. The rest was a domino effect. Between 58 and 51/50 BC, Caesar destroyed the Gallic tribes one after the other. This brought Rome tremendous territorial gains and Caesar tremendous wealth.



Map of Gaul showing Caesar's campaigns in the year 51 BC. Source: Wikicommons / Cristiano64 / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>

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(Almost) invincible enemies

The tall and broad-shouldered Celts with their unruly blond hair were the one enemy the Romans feared the most, especially for their fearlessness and ferocity in battle. Just like the ancient Greeks they drove into battle on war chariots as you can see here on this coin reverse. Once you defeated an enemy like this, you were invincible. That is the message of this motif, which praises Caesar indirectly but no less memorably.



Denarius of L. Hostilius Saserna, 48. Obverse: Gallic warrior. Reverse: Biga with Gallic warrior.

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One last battle

Towards the end of this war, which turned out to be very successful for Caesar, he nevertheless met with one last unfaltering enemy, Vercingetorix. It took Caesar all his efforts to defeat the Gallic tribes united under Vercingetorix in the Battle of Alesia 52 BC.



Vercingetorix throws down his arms at the feet of Julius Caesar. Painting by Lionel Royer, 1899. Musée Crozatier, Le Puy-en-Velay. Source: Wikicommons.

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Gold swamps the capital

The profit Caesar made by selling tens of thousands of war prisoners was enormous. Added to that was the booty from plundered cities, sanctuaries and tribal treasures. Modern estimates suggest that Caesar's fortune after his Gallic proconsulate was no less than 1.2 million sesterces. Gold flowed to Rome in such large quantities that gold prices in the capital dropped by 25 per cent.



Modern sculptures by Reinhard Dachlauer in front of the Frankfurt Stock Exchange. The bull symbolises rising stock prices, the bear falling ones. Photo: Wikicommons / Eva K.

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Gold money for Caesar's soldiers

As a reward for his legionaries Caesar minted part of the gold into coins like the one you see here. That the gold coins were worth 25 denarii each facilitated the logistics of the disbursal. After all, each common legionary was to receive a premium of 5,000 denarii and each centurion a premium of 10,000 denarii.



Aureus of C. Iulius Caesar, 46. Obverse: Female head. Reverse: Priestly utensils.

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Debtors aplenty

While, not long ago, Caesar had asked for money from Crassus, the successful general was now being asked for money in turn. Caesar strategically employed his fortune for alliance building with friends as well as enemies. The advantage: He could rely on his debtors' support in the senate in order to push his own agenda.



Caius Iulius Caesar, statue by Nicolas Coustou, 1696. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo: Wikicommons / Marie-Lan Nguyen.

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Caesar's 'investments'

Caesar's large-scale strategic investments are also topic in his biography 'The Parallel Lives'. Here Plutarch writes: 'Caesar [...] now sent his Gallic wealth for all those in public life to draw from in copious streams, and [...] freed Curio the tribune from many debts, and [...] gave Paulus the consul fifteen hundred talents [...].'



Ta sage instruction sert de riche couronne
A Trajan, esleué par dessus tous humains.
Si les grands te portoient au cœur & dans leurs mains,
Vertu viuroit au lieu de Venus & Bellone

Plutarch, illustration taken from the French translation of 'Vitae Parallelae' by Jacques Amyot, 1565. Source: Wikicommons.

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Caesar obliges the aristocracy

During the Gallic Wars Caesar welcomed many young men of noble descent as officers to his ranks, thereby binding their respective families to him. The mint master of this coin, Decimus Iunius Brutus Albinus, came from such a family. He is the addressee of Caesar's famous last words, 'you too, Brutus'.



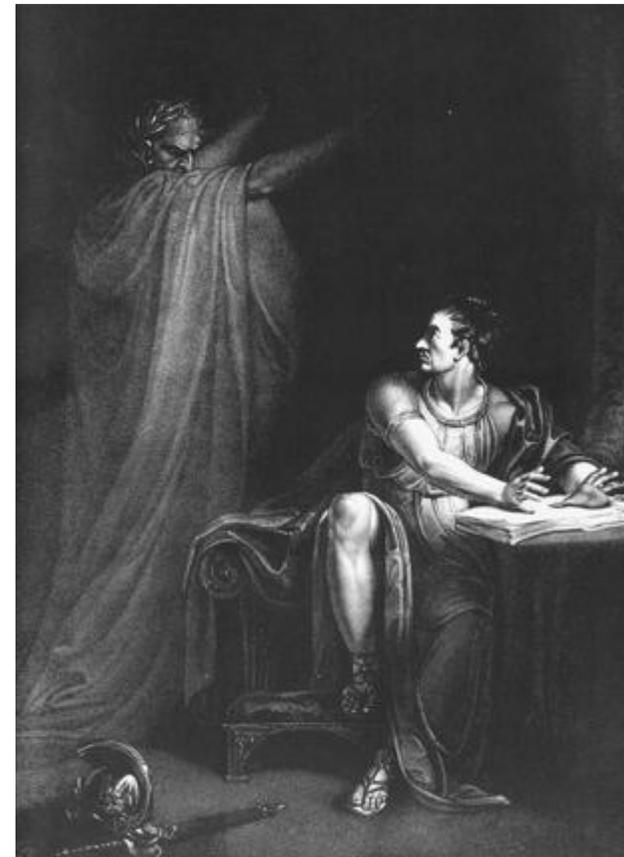
Denarius of D. Iunius Brutus Albinus, 48. Obverse: Mars. Reverse: Gallic trumpets and shields.

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Will the plan work out?

Do not, however, mistake Decimus Brutus for the leader of the conspiracy – that was the considerably older Marcus Iunius Brutus.



Brutus and the ghost of Caesar, copperplate engraving by Edward Scriven after a painting by Richard Westall, 1802. Source: Wikicommons.

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Exploiting past victories

The Gallic Wars became the most prominent theme in the coinage of Caesar and his followers. Take for instance the depiction of a trophy of Gallic weapons: Far from being purely decorative, the motif presented the clever politician as almost invincible leader and favourite of the gods. After all, a victory was considered proof of the leader's close ties to the Roman pantheon. In the civil war, during which this coin was issued, Caesar advertised his position by referring back to his Gallic victories.



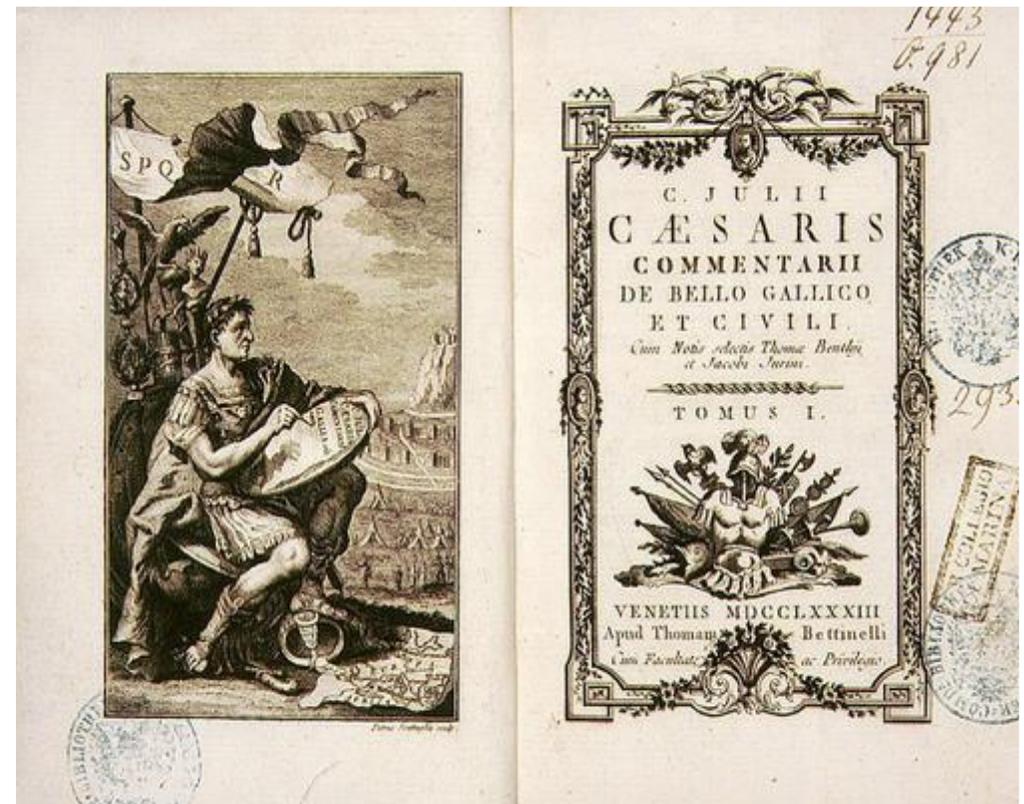
Denarius of C. Iulius Caesar, 48/7. Obverse: Female head. Reverse: Trophy of Gallic weapons.

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A war report from the general himself

It certainly was not a coincidence that Caesar's own commentary on the Gallic Wars was published just at the time of his next candidature for consul.



Caius Iulius Caesar, *Commentarii de Bello Gallico*, 1783 edition. Source: Wikicommons.

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Rubicon

When Caesar crossed the Rubicon, he did it because his way to the top was irreconcilable with the values and traditions of the longer-established senators. It was a question of the power of money versus the power of family relations. And money would be the winner in this game. Caesar ended the civil war victorious and sole ruler of the Roman Republic. And not even his assassination would change anything about the fact that a return to the old system had become impossible.



Caesar crossing the Rubicon. Reproduction of an unknown painting.
Source: Wikicommons / Wolpertinger.