

Brutus, Marcus Junius (85 B.C.-42 B.C.)

Encyclopedia of World Biography, Edition 1 1998

- **Born:** July 12, 100 BC in Rome, Italy
- **Died:** March 15, 44 BC in Rome, Italy
- **Nationality:** Roman
- **Occupation:** Emperor

Brutus, Marcus Junius (85 B.C.-42 B.C.)

BIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

Marcus Junius Brutus (85-42 BC) was a Roman statesman and one of the conspirators who assassinated Julius Caesar. Brutus's contemporaries admired him for his political integrity and intellectual and literary attainments.

The father of Brutus took part in the unsuccessful attempt of M. Aemilius Lepidus to overthrow the government of L. Cornelius Sulla and was killed by Pompey in 78 B.C. Brutus's mother, Servilia, was the niece of the reformer M. Livius Drusus and half sister of M. Porcius Cato the Younger. She became notorious as the mistress of Julius Caesar. After the death of his father, Brutus was adopted by his uncle and took the name Quintus Caepio Brutus. But Cato exercised the dominant influence over him in his youth. Under Cato's direction Brutus began his philosophical studies in Rome and continued them in Athens.

Brutus may have been the Q. Caepio who had been engaged to Julia, daughter of Julius Caesar, until Caesar broke the engagement a few days before the marriage in 59 B.C. in order to give her to Pompey. That same year the informer P. Vettius named Brutus as a member of a plot to murder Pompey. But Vettius's story lacked credibility and was ridiculed in the Senate. In 58 Brutus accompanied Cato to Cyprus, where he earned the confidence of prominent Cypriots. On his return to Rome he abused that confidence by lending money to the Cypriot Senate at the extortionate rate of 48 percent and by using force to exact its payment. Elected quaestor for 53 B.C., Brutus refused to join Caesar's staff in Gaul but went to Cilicia with his father-in-law, Appius Claudius Pulcher.

In Rome after 52 Brutus joined in attacks on Pompey, but as the civil war approached, he chose the senatorial side, accepting appointment as legate to P. Sestius in Cilicia in 49. Cato persuaded Brutus to bury his differences with Pompey and fight with him in Greece.

After the Battle of Pharsalus Brutus requested and readily received pardon from Caesar. He later met Caesar at Tarsus in Cilicia and accompanied him on his triumphal campaign in Asia. Back in Rome Caesar continued to show Brutus favor, appointing him governor of Cisalpine Gaul in 46 and choosing him over Cassius for the important post of city praetor for 44.

The Conspiracy

Brutus's reasons for joining the conspiracy against Caesar were complex: the persuasiveness of its chief organizer, Cassius; the martyrdom of Cato, whose daughter Brutus had married in 45 B.C.; consciousness of his descent from L. Junius Brutus, who slew the last king of Rome; and Stoic dogma, which declared the murder of a tyrant not only just but obligatory. At the time no one accused him of acting out of personal antagonism. It was Brutus's personality and idealism which gave the conspiracy its force and direction, and Brutus insisted that action be taken against Caesar alone. The death of the dictator, he naively believed, would automatically restore liberty and the republic.

After the death of Caesar the conspirators soon found themselves outmaneuvered by Antony. Although the Senate voted them amnesty on March 17, 44, and Brutus was allowed to address the people, he and Cassius left Rome in April in the face of mounting hostility. Eventually Brutus was assigned the province of Cyprus, and Cassius, Cyrene. At the end of August both men went to the East.

Building a Base of Power

Establishing himself at Athens, Brutus conscripted troops, requisitioned money on its way to Rome from Asia, seized arms, accepted illegally the governorship of Macedonia, took over the province of Illyricum, and defeated Antony's brother Gaius, sent out to check him. In February 43 the Senate recognized Brutus's position in Macedonia, Illyricum, and Greece. After the defeat of Antony at Mutina the Senate voted Brutus and Cassius command over the entire East.

But fortune soon changed for the worse. When Octavian seized the consulship in August 43, one of his first acts was to revoke the amnesty given to the assassins of Caesar. When Antony, Octavian, and Lepidus formed the Second Triumvirate to avenge Caesar, Brutus left Greece to join forces with Cassius in Asia and prepare for war. From Asia the two men returned to Europe and met the forces of Antony and Octavian at Philippi in October 42. In the first engagement Brutus overran the camp of Octavian, but Cassius in a fit of despair after being defeated by Antony committed suicide. Brutus rallied his legions, but he too was defeated in a second battle and took his own life.

Brutus's Philosophy and Character

Brutus was eclectic in his philosophical beliefs, following the teachings of the Academy and the Stoics. He wrote treatises on virtue, on duties, and on patience which were much admired. He was also a powerful orator and pamphleteer. He composed partisan tracts against Pompey and in praise of Cato and Appius Claudius. In the 50s Cicero and Q. Hortensius, the leading orators of the day, cultivated Brutus. Cicero thought so highly of his talents and learning that he dedicated two treatises on oratory, the *Brutus* and *Orator*, to him. There survives a small part of the extensive correspondence between Brutus and Cicero, dating from the period after the death of Caesar.

Shakespeare's portrayal of Brutus as the "noblest Roman of them all" is highly idealized. Steadfast and determined in large matters, he was petty and cruel in small. For all his admiration of Brutus, Cicero found him obstinate, aloof, and arrogant. The narrow moral and patriotic

idealism in which he cloaked the murder of Caesar ensured the futility of the deed. Brutus, in fact, acted in defense of his own class and a system which was already dying. He was the last of the republicans, and when he fell, the republic fell with him.

FURTHER READINGS

The chief ancient sources for Brutus are Cicero, Plutarch, and Appian. Max Radin, *Marcus Brutus* (1939), is a popular biography marred by occasional factual errors. S. A. Cook, F. E. Adcock, and M. P. Charlesworth, eds., *Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 10 (1934), gives a balanced and penetrating assessment of Brutus as a politician and statesman. For a less charitable view see Sir Ronald Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (1939), which stresses Brutus's personal and political motives in murdering Caesar.

Clarke, M. L. (Martin Lowther), *The noblest Roman: Marcus Brutus and his reputation*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981.

Norman A. Doenges

Source Citation:

"Brutus, Marcus Junius (85 B.C.-42 B.C.)." *Encyclopedia of World Biography*. Detroit: Gale, 1998. *Gale Biography In Context*. Web. 4 Jan. 2011.

Document URL

<http://ic.galegroup.com/ic/bic1/ReferenceDetailsPage/ReferenceDetailsWindow?displayGroupName=K12->

[Reference&prodId=BIC1&action=e&windowstate=normal&catId=&documentId=GALE%7CA148412620&mode=view&userGroupName=mlin_s_ccreg&jsid=8e13ef91b34b7385c3b55180fa899e73](http://ic.galegroup.com/ic/bic1/ReferenceDetailsPage/ReferenceDetailsWindow?displayGroupName=K12-Reference&prodId=BIC1&action=e&windowstate=normal&catId=&documentId=GALE%7CA148412620&mode=view&userGroupName=mlin_s_ccreg&jsid=8e13ef91b34b7385c3b55180fa899e73)

Gale Document Number: GALE|A148412620