

Julius Caesar's Scandalous Sex Life

<https://www.walksinsiderome.com/blog/julius-caesars-scandalous-sex-life/>

Ancient Roman attitudes towards sex were nothing if not direct. For example, it is from the Roman term for the sheath of one's sword that we have our word "vagina!"

Macho and militaristic, elite Roman culture revolved as much around a man's ability to demonstrate his sexual prowess as it did around political point-scoring against rivals by accusing rivals them of a lack thereof.

Since many powerful Roman politicians made a whole host of enemies, and it is from these rivals that we know about the history, this is why the emperors have come down to us as templates for erotic degeneracy and sadistic cruelty. (In the literature of the time, the two are often indistinguishable).

But how much of what we think we know is true?

In this article – and the forthcoming series – we'll be turning to "The Lives of the Twelve Caesars" by the first century AD court biographer Suetonius. If you've never heard of him (which few, to be fair, have), do make time to check him out. Lurid and scandalous, his biographies read like the Roman equivalent of a modern gossip magazine.

A lot of what he wrote might be fanciful and fictitious. But by adding historical context and comparing his anecdotes with those of other writers, we can at least get a feeling for the sexual attitudes of the authors if not for sexual acts of his subjects. We begin our series with the most famous Roman of all: Gaius Julius Caesar.

Julius Caesar's Scandalous Sex Life

Better known to history as the penetrated than the penetrator, sexually speaking Caesar was both. Nicknamed the "bald adulterer," Julius Caesar fit the Roman political stereotype perfectly by sleeping his way to power. As a young man he spent a considerable amount of time at the court of King Nicomedes of Bithynia, fuelling a series of rumors about an affair in which Caesar was the submissive party.

His return to Bithynia just a few days after leaving to "collect a debt" further fanned the flames.

Suetonius tells us that this was the only stain on Caesar's masculinity. But it was a stain that proved difficult to wash out and he would be reminded of it throughout his prematurely ended life.

One colleague, Bibulus, addressed Caesar as "the queen of Bithynia." During an assembly, a man named Octavius hailed his co-consul Pompey as "king" and Caesar as "queen". Even the great Cicero couldn't resist a poke, writing that it was on a Bithynian couch that Caesar—the son of Venus—lost his virginity.

He was just as badly behaved in the provinces, his *veni, vidi, vici* (I came, I saw, I conquered) mantra applying just as much to his sexual as to his military conquests.

While in Egypt he had a fling with another historical A-lister, Cleopatra, who forced their introduction by having herself smuggled into his palace wrapped in a carpet. (Check out this scene from HBO's wonderful series Rome for an idea of how this might have happened!) <https://youtu.be/CKyDjOIT0is>

Cleopatra clearly made an impression. Within nine months she gave birth to their son Caesarian; an unfortunate child who wouldn't survive the purges of Caesar's successor Octavian.

Their relationship would ultimately be cut short, however, when Caesar sustained 23 stab wounds on March 15 44 BC. Cleopatra's libido lived on, however, when she struck up a fertile relationship with Caesar's former right-hand man, Mark Antony.

Julius Caesar's behavior in Gaul didn't go unnoticed by his men either. During his military triumph celebrating his success there they chanted: "*Men of Rome, watch out for your wives, We're bringing the bald adulterer home. In Gaul he (F-word) his way through a fortune, Which he borrowed here in Rome.*"

With Caesar returning, there was good reason for men to lock up their wives (and, indeed, daughters). The bald adulterer had indeed slept his way through the rank and file of aristocratic Roman women, even seducing the wives of fellow consuls and political allies. But these weren't the only exploits his soldiers sang about on this triumphal occasion. They couldn't resist making reference to his submission to a certain Bithynian king (boys will be boys) and in the course of their banter also boomed out:

"Caesar might have conquered the Gauls but Nicomedes conquered him!"

Homosexual tendencies weren't frowned upon in Roman culture *per se*. Granted, they might earn you the derision of your macho-militaristic cohort. But, as long as sexual favors were given for the purpose of advancing your own political career, they could be overlooked. At least it showed some degree of interest in the proper, political values an upper class Roman should have.

This didn't exonerate Caesar in his colleagues' eyes. But, when Gaius Scribonius Curio, an orator and outspoken opponent of Caesar, called him "a man to every woman and a woman to every man", it at least took something of a sting out of the tail.

Written by [Alexander Meddings](#)