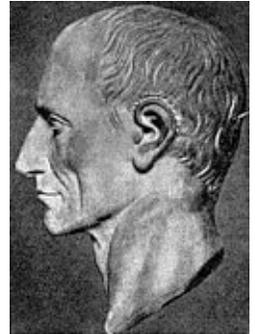




Caesar, Julius (ca. 100-44 B.C.E.)

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Julius Caesar.
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Roman politician, general, and writer, Caius Julius Caesar became one of the most powerful men of the ancient world. Throughout his maturity he was frequently reminded, sometimes derisively, of his youthful sexual affair with the king of Bithynia.

Caesar came from a family of patricians (noblemen), the Julii, which traced its ancestry all the way to the goddess Venus by way of the Trojan hero Aeneas. Caesar's youth coincided with a particularly turbulent period of civil strife between patricians and plebeians (commoners) grouped behind their respective leaders Sulla and Marius.

Although patricians, the Julii were not particularly wealthy and took the side of the people. Caesar's aunt had married Marius and in 84 B.C.E. he himself married Cornelia, the daughter of Cinna, another of Marius' few allies among the patricians.

When Sulla took power in 82 B.C.E., Caesar escaped the bloody purges that followed, even though he had refused Sulla's demand that he divorce Cornelia. He nevertheless found it advisable to leave Rome to do military service in Asia.

It is there that he had his first homosexual experience, of which his enemies would remind him repeatedly later in his career. Sent by his commander to the kingdom of Bithynia to take charge of a naval squadron, he dallied with king Nicomedes long enough that their liaison became scandalous, especially when he found an excuse to return to Bithynia soon after completing his mission.

Political and Military Career

Caesar then served in Cilicia, but returned to Rome upon the death of Sulla in 78 B.C.E. He embarked on his political career by prosecuting an old ally of Sulla who had enriched himself through extortion, but his oratory, the main tool for advancement in Republican Rome, was not up to that of the defendant's lawyer. He left for Rhodes to perfect this art in 75, but was captured by pirates. After raising his ransom, he caught and executed his captors as he had promised them he would do.

After warring in Asia against the king of Pontus, Caesar returned to Rome where he had been elected Pontifex (priest) in 73 and where he pursued his army career as a Military Tribune, an elected post.

In 69 B.C.E. he delivered eulogies on the death of his wife and of his aunt, Marius' widow, in which he reaffirmed his political position in favor of the popular party. That same year he was elected Quaestor for the province of Further Spain, the first echelon of the *cursus honorum*, the series of public offices culminating in the consulship. An anecdote from that period betrays Caesar's great ambitions. Coming upon a statue of Alexander the Great, while performing his duties, he bemoaned the fact that at his age, Alexander had already conquered the world, whereas he had yet achieved nothing of importance.

In the next ten years, Caesar's political maneuvers allowed him to occupy successively the positions of Curator of the Appian Way, Curule Aedile, Pontifex Maximus, Praetor, Governor of Further Spain, and finally, in 59 B.C.E., that of Consul. He relied on two of the most influential men in Rome, Pompey, an ally of Sulla who had rallied the popular party, and Crassus, an extremely wealthy man on the side of the nobles, who helped him finance the cost of his political obligations. He had married Pompeia, a relative of Pompey, in 67 B.C.E., but had been forced to divorce her following a complicated affair of suspected adultery and religious sacrilege.

In 59 B.C.E. Caesar brokered a deal to bring Crassus, Pompey, and himself to share power in what is known as the first triumvirate. To seal the alliance Caesar used his consular powers to grant lands to the veterans of Pompey's army and gave Pompey his daughter Julia in marriage, while he himself married Calpurnia, the daughter of the man who was to follow him in the consulship.

The bonus for former consuls was a governorship in which they could greatly enrich themselves. Caesar was awarded Cisalpine and Transalpine Gaul as well as Illiricum, but embarked on the conquest of the rest of Gaul, which he plundered and subdued by 52 B.C.E. (Caesar himself recounted his campaigns in his *Commentarii de bello Gallico*).

Civil War and Rise to Power

Caesar had used his riches to advance his goals in Rome all the while he was abroad. But after the death of Crassus in 53 B.C.E., Pompey slowly turned against him as the time to give up his command, in 49 B.C.E., approached. Civil war ensued, and Pompey was defeated at Pharsalus and pursued to Egypt where he was murdered.

In Egypt Caesar met Cleopatra and fathered a son. While in Alexandria, Caesar asked to see the embalmed body of Alexander the Great; we are left to wonder what part of this fascination rested on a resonance between the two men's sexuality.

After other military campaigns, Caesar finally returned to Rome where he had been named dictator. He embarked on an ambitious scheme of public works, vastly extended citizenship, and began to reorganize the government. He was extremely generous in forgiving his enemies, who, fearing that he would seize power for himself and overthrow the Republic, assassinated him on the Ides of March of 44 B.C.E.

References to His Same-Sex Sexual Relationships

Although Caesar married three times and had numerous adulterous relationships with women, he never denied or repudiated his relationship with Nicomedes. He even intervened on his behalf in the Senate, and suffered a rebuke by Cicero who alluded to their affair (Cicero would also write of it in several letters).

Caesar was addressed publicly as "Queen" or as "woman" on numerous occasions. He only once answered, in a surprising way, by saying that Queen Semiramis and the Amazons had once ruled large kingdoms. His enemies circulated many other anecdotes and satirical verses, the better known of which is Curio the Elder's statement that Caesar was "Every wife's husband and every husband's wife." Even his faithful soldiers sang ribald songs about Caesar and Nicomedes during the celebration of his Gallic triumph.

Two other accusations of homosexuality exist. The first was by the poet Catullus, whose father was a friend of Caesar's. He accused him of being a *cinaedus* or passive homosexual and implied a relationship with his adjutant Mamurra (in poems 29 and 57). After an apology, Caesar forgave the blemish it would bring to his name and invited the poet to dinner on the very same day.

The other, less believable accusation, is that his favorite nephew, Octavius, his heir who would later rule under the name of Augustus, had been adopted on condition that he submit to a sexual relationship.

However little or large a part same-sex love actually played in Caesar's life, his name would always be added to lists of famous homosexuals. Famous homosexual generals, such as the mignons of the court of Henry III, the Prince de Condé, Prince Eugene, and Frederick the Great, would often be compared to Caesar to excuse or to mock their proclivities. Eighteenth-century erotica, such as the *Monumens de la vie privée des douze Césars* (1780), would even provide illustrations of Julius Caesar's homosexual adventures.

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About the Author

Louis Godbout is a collector and amateur historian. He is a longtime member of the Archives gaies du Québec and has participated in the preparation of several exhibits in Montreal. He has also produced three multi-media lectures that reflect his varied interests: *Beaux enfants de Sodome*, on eighteenth-century sodomitical imagery; *Ébauches et débauches*, on gay French literature from 1859 to 1939; and *Le rideau rose*, on French gay and lesbian theater before 1969.