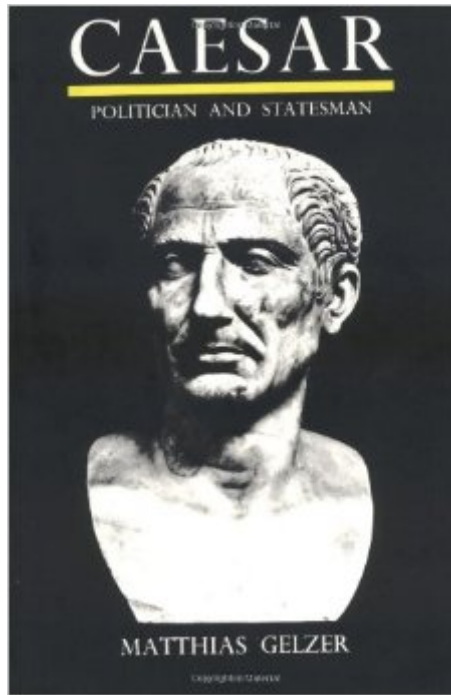


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# Caesar: Politician And Statesman



## Synopsis

In 1912 a young scholar published a slim volume investigating the social structure of the late Roman Republic, which was in due course to transform the study of Roman history. The author, Professor Gelzer, went on to hold the Chair of Ancient History at Frankfurt and to become the greatest German-speaking historian of the Roman Republic since Mommsen. In 1921 he published his *Caesar*, which has by now gone through six editions in Germany and is still the standard account, in any language, of Caesar and his age. It amply fulfills the author's intent "to give the educated public a lively picture of the complete political career of one of the great statesmen of the past." Based on a conscientious evaluation of the abundant source materials—primarily the writings of Caesar and his contemporaries—Professor Gelzer's portrait renders Caesar in heroic proportions, destined and determined from the beginning to overthrow a corrupt aristocracy. The sixth edition (1960), brought up to date and provided with full annotations by the author, is the basis of this translation, which for the first time makes the work available in English. With Professor Gelzer's approval, some minor errors have been corrected, both in the text and in the chronological table and the map at the end of the book, and an analytical index of names has been added.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In writing a Web biography of Julius Caesar, I read dozens of books trying to explain this chameleon man, probably the most famous Roman who ever lived. And after it all, I came back to this as my firm choice as THE book to read if you want a comprehensive, scholarly, yet still fascinating

excavation of everything we truly know about Caesar. Gelzer's book is a classic on everyone's list. First published in German in 1921, Gelzer labored and rewrote it over half a century, reading and rethinking all the time. It was finally translated into English in the 1960's. As he modestly concludes, "Much has been written about Caesar. The appearance of despotic rulers [Stalin, Hitler] of quite a different stamp has not always been favourable to the judgment passed on him. A fresh study of the sources has, on the whole, convinced me of the correctness of my interpretation." Gelzer makes those sources lucid, explaining contradictions, noting where a history is political rather than factual, smoothing out inconsistencies and providing copious notes for the reader who wants to learn more. There is a clarity and precision to his writing that is oddly restful, yet continually interesting, for which we must thank the readable translation by Peter Needham. In recent years, it has become fashionable to dismiss Caesar as a power-hungry megalomaniac, to psychoanalyze him, to portray him from every vantage point; but no one can deny his genius. Gelzer, unlike some modern biographers of Caesar, never strays from the facts; his thoughtful and precise narrative of every scintilla of truth remaining to us, takes you as close to the man as you are ever likely to get. About the true nature of Julius Caesar, every thinking reader must make up his own mind. Gelzer will give you the best tools to do so, while painting an unforgettable portrait of the failing Roman Republic.

If you are interested in the final years of the Roman Republic or Julius Caesar, this book is for you. I first read Anthony Everitt's *Cicero* (which I liked) and its brief discussions of Caesar were enough to pique my interest in further study of Caesar. After researching a bit, Gelzer's biography seemed to be the most lauded - and having read it - rightly so. The level of detail in this book is incredible. There are hundreds of footnotes indicating sources and often containing quotes in their original language which is as often Greek as it is Latin. Gelzer really shows us the genius and abilities of this most fascinating man - perhaps the boldest, most brilliant military commander in history - not to mention an equally talented politician! Caesar deserves our attention. If you can handle great detail and really want to know Caesar and his times, you will like this book.

Do not buy this book if you're looking for gossip about Caesar's [love] life or his romance with Cleopatra. You're not going to find any dirt or gossip about his private life; just a very sober, well argued and researched political biography. Along the way you'll hopefully come to appreciate just how remarkable Caesar's accomplishments were, given the obstacles he had to overcome along the way. Among the points which Gelzer makes is how completely different the ancient Roman Republic was compared to our modern ideas of a democratic republic. In fact, it was nothing more

than an oligarchy where leadership changed hands among a rich, and ambitious elite. By Caesar's time this political system was on its last legs and it was inevitable that a general leading an army was going to overthrow the whole system at some point. While it's true that Octavian (Augustus) deserves credit for creating the system of government which ruled the empire he inherited, it's also true that he wouldn't have been able to do this had Caesar not paved the way before him. Add to this the fact that he was able to do just about anything better than any of his contemporaries and you begin to see why he has continued to remain such a fascinating (and controversial) figure down through history.

Matthias Gelzer covers the life of Caesar, who I must admit I believe to be the greatest of all historical figures, very well. His insights and his speculations are all well founded as one would expect of a great scholar such as Gelzer. I read this book as part of a degree course and, although I don't necessarily agree with everything he has to say, all of it is interesting and worthy of, at least, discussion. I would rate this book far higher than the book on Caesar by Christian Meier, but Meier's book has some interesting points that Gelzer does not. Overall though, for a book on the life of Caesar, Gelzer is the best to be found at the moment.

Gelzer produced a fantastic work with this seminal masterpiece. This is scholarship and historical analysis of the very highest order - ranks alongside Theodor Mommsen. I've read no other work that measures up to Gelzer's biography of Rome's greatest citizen. His inspirational definition of what it is to be a politician versus that of Statesmanship is forever etched in my mind. Those seeking contemporary pseudo-psychology, 'opinions and soundbites' need to look elsewhere as this is not Plutarch at his most irritating. A perfect counter-balance to the anecdotal and condensed approach of Plutarch. Definitive and unsurpassed in its authority.

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