

## **Three Ancient Accounts of Caesar's Assassination: Nicolaus of Damascus, Plutarch, and Suetonius**

### **Nicolaus of Damascus (born c. 64 B.C.)**

*(They Saw It Happen in Classical Times, B.K. Workman, 1964.)*

The Senate rose in respect for his position when they saw him entering. Those who were to have part in the plot stood near him. Right next to him went Tillius Cimber, whose brother had been exiled by Caesar. Under pretext of a humble request on behalf of this brother, Cimber approached and grasped the mantle of his toga, seeming to want to make a more positive move with his hands upon Caesar. Caesar wanted to get up and use his hands, but was prevented by Cimber and became exceedingly annoyed.

That was the moment for the men to set to work. All quickly unsheathed their daggers and rushed at him. First Servilius Casca struck him with the point of the blade on the left shoulder a little above the collarbone. He had been aiming for that, but in the excitement he missed. Caesar rose to defend himself, and in the uproar Casca shouted out in Greek to his brother. The latter heard him and drove his sword into the ribs. After a moment, Cassius made a slash at his face, and Decimus [not Marcus] Brutus pierced him in the side. While Cassius Longinus was trying to give him another blow he missed and struck Marcus Brutus on the hand. Minucius also hit out at Caesar and hit Rubrius in the thigh. They were just like men doing battle against him.

Under the mass of wounds, he fell at the foot of Pompey's statue. Everyone wanted to seem to have some part in the murder, and there was not one of them who failed to strike his body as it lay there, until, wounded thirty-five times, he breathed his last.

### **Plutarch (c. A.D. 45-125)**

*(Plutarch: Selected Lives and Essays, translated by Louise Ropes Loomis, Walter J. Black, Inc., 1951, volume 2, pages 130-131.)*

Caesar went in and the Senate rose to do him honor. Some of [Marcus] Brutus's party then stood behind his chair, while others advanced towards him, as if to join Tillius Cimber in a petition on behalf of his exiled brother. They all began imploring Caesar together and following him to his chair. But on taking his seat he rejected their petition, and as they pressed more strenuously on him, he grew angry with one and another. Thereat Tillius took hold of his toga with both hands and pulled it down from his throat. That was the signal for the attack.

First, Casca struck him on the neck with his sword, a blow neither fatal nor deep, for naturally he was nervous at the start of so terrific a deed of daring. At this Caesar turned around and clutched and held the knife, and both cried out almost in unison, the injured man in Latin, "You damned Casca, what are you doing?" and his assailant in Greek to his brother, "Brother, help!" Thus the struggle began, and those who were in the plot were so shocked and horrified at what was taking place that they dared not fly or go to Caesar's aid.

or even make a sound. Those who were prepared for the murder bared their swords, so that Caesar was surrounded on all sides, and whichever way he turned to look he met stabs from blades aimed at his face and eyes. So driven back and forth like a wild beast, he was caught by everyone's hands, for everyone was expected to join in the sacrifice and take part in his death. For that reason [Marcus] Brutus too gave him one stab in the groin.

Some say that Caesar was defending himself against the rest, shouting and dodging this way and that, but on seeing that [Marcus] Brutus had drawn his sword, he pulled his toga over his head and sank, whether by chance or because his murderers pushed him there, against the pedestal on which Pompey's statue stood. It was bathed in his blood, so that it looked as if Pompey himself were presiding over this revenge on his enemy, who now lay at his feet panting under the rain of wounds. For they say he received twenty-three. And many of his assassins were wounded by one another as they persisted in stabbing at that one body so many times.

### **Suetonius (c. A.D. 70-140)**

*(Suetonius: The Twelve Caesars, translated by Robert Graves, Penguin Books, 1957, reprinted 1989, pages 50-51.)*

As soon as Caesar took his seat the conspirators crowded around him as if to pay their respects. Tillius Cimber, who had taken the lead, came up close, pretending to ask a question. Caesar made a gesture of postponement, but Cimber caught hold of his shoulders. "This is violence!" Caesar cried, and at that moment, as he turned away, one of the Casca brothers with a sweep of his dagger stabbed him just below the throat. Caesar grasped Casca's arm and ran it through with his stylus; he was leaping away when another dagger blow stopped him. Confronted by a ring of drawn daggers, he drew the top of his gown over his face, and at the same time ungirded the lower part, letting it fall to his feet so that he would die with both legs decently covered. Twenty-three dagger thrusts went home as he stood there. Caesar did not utter a sound after Casca's blow had drawn a groan from him; though some say that when he saw Marcus Brutus about to deliver the second blow, he reproached him in Greek with: 'You, too, my child?'

The entire Senate then dispersed in confusion, and Caesar was left lying dead for some time until three slave boys carried him home in a litter, with one arm hanging over the side. The physician Antistius conducted the post mortem and came to the conclusion that none of the wounds had been mortal except the second one, in the chest.