

## **Two Ancient Accounts regarding Caesar's Will and Funeral: Plutarch and Suetonius**

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

*(Great Books of the Western World, volume 14, "Plutarch," the Dryden Translation, Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952, page 810.)*

After these things, they began to consider of Caesar's will, and the ordering of his funeral. [Mark] Antony desired that the will might be read, and that the body should not have a private or dishonorable interment, lest that should further exasperate the people. This Cassius violently opposed, but [Marcus] Brutus yielded to it, and gave leave; in which he seems to have a second time committed a fault. For as before in sparing the life of Antony he could not be without some blame [the other conspirators had wanted to kill Antony at the same time as Caesar, but Brutus thought it unjust], as thereby setting up against the conspiracy a dangerous and difficult enemy, so now, in suffering him to have the ordering of the funeral, he fell into a total and irrevocable error. For first, it appearing by the will that Caesar had bequeathed to the Roman people seventy-five drachmas a man, and given to the public his gardens beyond Tiber, the whole city was fired with a wonderful affection for him, and a passionate sense of the loss of him.

And when the body was brought forth into the Forum, Antony, as the custom was, making a funeral oration in praise of Caesar, and finding the multitude moved with his speech, passing into the pathetic tone, unfolded the bloody garment of Caesar, showed them in how many places it was pierced, and the number of his wounds. Now there was nothing to be seen but confusion; some cried out to kill the murderers, others tore away the benches and tables out of the shops round about, and, heaping them altogether, built a great funeral pile, and having put the body of Caesar upon it, set it on fire, the spot where this was done being moreover surrounded with a great many temples and other consecrated places, so that they seemed to burn the body in a kind of sacred solemnity. As soon as the fire flamed out, the multitude, flocking in some from one part and some from another, snatched the brands that were half burnt out of the pile, and ran about the city to fire the houses of the murderers of Caesar. But they, having beforehand well fortified themselves, repelled this danger.

There was, however, a kind of poet, one Cinna, not at all concerned in the guilt of the conspiracy, but on the contrary one of Caesar's friends... [He] came abroad and joined the people, when they were already infuriated by the speech of Antony. And perceiving him, and taking him not for that Cinna whom indeed he was, but for him that a little before in a speech to the people had reproached and inveighed against Caesar, they fell upon him and tore him to pieces.

This action chiefly, and the alteration that Antony had wrought, so alarmed Brutus and his party that for their safety they retired from the city...

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

(*Suetonius: The Twelve Caesars*, translated by Robert Graves, Penguin Books, 1957, reprinted 1989, pages 51-53.)

...Caesar's will, which he had drafted six months before, was unsealed and read in [Mark] Antony's house. From the time of his first consulship until the outbreak of the Civil War Caesar's principal heir had been his son-in-law Pompey... In his last will, however, he cancelled the bequest and left three-quarters of his estate...to Gaius Octavius [Octavian], afterwards Augustus,... At the close of the will he also adopted Gaius Octavius into the Caesar family, but provided for the possibility of a son being subsequently born to himself and appointed several of the assassins as guardians to the boy. Decimus Brutus even figured among his heirs in the second degree. Caesar left the general public his gardens on the banks of the Tiber for use as a recreation ground, and three gold pieces a man.

...[At the funeral] Mark Antony dispensed with a formal eulogy; instead, he instructed a herald to read, first, the recent decree simultaneously voting Caesar all divine and human honors, and then the oath by which the entire Senate had pledged themselves to watch over his safety. Antony added a very few words of comment. When the ivory funeral couch had been carried down into the Forum by a group of magistrates and ex-magistrates, and a dispute arose as to whether the body should be cremated in the Temple of Capitoline Jupiter or in Pompey's Assembly Hall, two divine forms [costumed actors] suddenly appeared, two javelins in their hands and sword at thigh, and set fire to the couch with torches. Immediately the spectators assisted the blaze by heaping on it dry branches and the judges' chairs, and the court benches, with whatever else came to hand. Thereupon the musicians and professional mourners, who had walked in the funeral train wearing the robes that he himself had worn at his four triumphs, tore these in pieces and flung them on the flames—to which veterans who had assisted at his triumphs added the arms they had then borne. Many women in the audience similarly sacrificed their jewelry together with their children's breast-plaques and robes. Public grief was enhanced by crowds of foreigners lamenting in their own fashion...

As soon as the funeral was over, the populace, snatching firebrands from the pyre, ran to burn down the houses of Brutus and Cassius, and were repelled with difficulty. Mistaking Helvius Cinna for the Cornelius Cinna who had delivered a bitter speech against Caesar on the previous day, and whom they were out to kill, they murdered him and paraded the streets with his head stuck on the point of a spear. Later they raised a substantial, almost twenty-foot-high column of Numidian marble in the Forum, and inscribed on it: 'To the Father of His Country'. For a long time afterwards they used to offer sacrifices at the foot of this column, make vows there and settle disputes by oaths taken in Caesar's name.

...Very few, indeed, of the assassins outlived Caesar for more than three years, or died naturally. All were condemned, and all perished in different ways—some in shipwreck, some in battle, some using the very daggers with which they had murdered Caesar to take their own lives.