

Mark Antony: A Revisit of the Civil War of 43-31 B.C.

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In such a night could any of us become a god. If only we all wished to lead such a life and to stretch out our limbs heavy with wine and recline. Then there would be no dread sword, no ships of war, and the sea at Actium would not roll over the bones of our comrades. And Rome would not have to loosen her hair in perpetual mourning for the triumphs won at her own expense. (Propertius 2.15.39-47)

I.

The adage that history was written by the victors holds very true to the image of Mark Antony in the Civil War with Octavian that would go on to establish the Roman Empire. Octavian would go on to become the victor, thus becoming the first emperor of Rome and therefore the memory of Mark Antony, Octavian's rival, would be obscured from history.

My study of Mark Antony will use three main ancient historians on the account of the Civil War: Appian, Cassius Dio and Suetonius. Modern historians through their discourse of the Civil War period as well as Mark Antony's own propaganda from coins will provide a different view of Antony in the Civil War of 43-31 B.C. My goal is to move away from the viewpoint that Octavian was *destined* to be the victor and thus the first emperor of Rome, and instead to provide Mark Antony's own perspective on the Civil War. The view of the Civil War from Antony is a problem because Appian, Cassius Dio, and Suetonius were not contemporary to the Civil War.

Antony's image, through the suppression of Octavian becomes evident in Cassius Dio's book on Roman history which presents a pro-Octavian stance, while Appian was more neutral to a pro-Antonian stance; while Suetonius sits in the middle. Mark Antony will be revisited in the time of the Civil War of 43-31 B.C. to shed problems of the

historians, and thus because of differing views, the coins that Mark Antony issued will provide the missing link to tell a story that happened more than 2,000 years ago.

II.

The most important historian in shaping the viewpoint of the anti-Antonian image was Cassius Dio. Dio was born in the year ca. 165 A.D. and died sometime after the year ca. 229. He came from the Roman province of Bithynia which is in modern day northern Turkey. Dio came from a senatorial family that had served Rome for several generations.¹ His father was Cassius Apronianus, the governor of Cilicia and Dalmatia. Cassius Dio lived through a turbulent time in Roman history that helped to shape his view of the empire as he compared the civil wars and his own life with the stability under Augustus' reign. In his lifetime, he saw nine emperors ascend to the throne of the Roman Empire, including Commodus (181-92) and Caracalla (211-217) who are considered some of the worst emperors Rome ever had. Cassius Dio lived through the civil war of 193-97, with Septimius Severus (193-211) as the last man standing at the end of the conflict which parallels to Octavian after Antony fled Actium in 31 B.C. Cassius Dio was a senator during the reign of Commodus and governor of Smyrna (modern day western Turkey) during the reign of Septimius Severus. He was also a Praetor in 194, Suffect Consul in 205 and finally shared the consulship with the emperor Severus Alexander in 229.

Appian, who came from Alexandria, Egypt was born in the year ca. 95 A.D. and died ca. 165. He did not come from a senatorial family like that of Cassius Dio, but he still must have achieved a lot in his life which enabled him to reach the upper echelons of

¹ Alain M. Gowing, *The Triumviral Narratives of Appian and Cassius Dio* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992) 19.

Alexandrian society.² Appian was a friend of the jurist Cornelius Fronto and a procurator under emperor Antoninus Pius. Fortunate for Appian, he lived in a time much different than Cassius Dio's, he lived during the reigns of Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, and the first years of Marcus Aurelius' reign: all in which saw stability through leadership.

Suetonius was born in the year ca. 69 A.D. to an equestrian family probably from Hippo Regius (modern day Algeria).³ Suetonius had the great fortune to fall under the arms of Pliny the Younger in which Pliny helped to catapult his career. He held the offices of *a studiis*, *a bibliothecis*, and *ab epistulis*. He was in charge of imperial correspondence under Trajan and Hadrian. His presence at the imperial court gave him access to imperial records that were not available to both Cassius Dio and Appian. He was dismissed from his last post, *ab epistulis* in 121/122 together with the Praetorian Prefect, Septicius Clarus.

All three of these men were very important in shaping the viewpoint of the Civil War between Antony and Octavian, but each of the men was completely different in many categories.

The most important issue to understand with all three of these historians was the fact that neither of the historians were contemporary to the time of the Civil War of 43-31 B.C. Suetonius was the closest one of the group and he was born a century after Actium in 69 A.D. Cassius Dio witnessed turmoil the likes of that Appian would not see in his lifetime nor Suetonius.

Taking the problems with the empire, coupled with the emperors who were nowhere near the caliber of an Augustus and it would not be surprising that Cassius Dio's

² Gowing, 13.

³ Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, translated by Robert Graves, and revised with an introduction by Michael Grant (London: Penguin Books, 1979) vii.

account of Rome's past would be much different than those of Appian or Suetonius.

Cassius Dio gives a positive portrayal of Octavian. We should not, however, discredit the historians, but only question and analyze what the three historians were accounting for.

The historian Alain M. Gowing in his book, The Triumviral Narratives of Appian and Cassius Dio, breaks down the accounts of Cassius Dio and Appian. According to Gowing, Cassius Dio's book of Roman history was eighty books, ten of which (books 41-50) account for the years 49-31 B.C. which is 12% of Cassius Dio's entire work.⁴ Dio's attention to this period is even more interesting, and considering that those eighteen years only account for 2% of the overall history in which Cassius Dio was writing about.⁵ Cassius Dio wrote a history of Rome that spans from the foundation of Rome to Dio's lifetime. To give an example of just how important Cassius Dio saw the conflict of the Civil War, books 72-80 which span Dio's own time which accounted for around 10% of the history are only accounted for around 5% of the overall version.⁶ What Gowing was trying to convey was that Cassius Dio's account of the period from 49-31 B.C. was by and far the most detailed of any period.⁷

Appian also showed the same care to the Civil War as Cassius Dio, but Appian's books are different in that the books cover the years 133-35 B.C. Appian's history comprised of civil wars, such as the struggles of Marius and Sulla; Pompey and Caesar; Antony, Octavian, and the tyrannicides; and then ending with Antony and Octavian.⁸ The idea of Appian's work was to show how the republic turned to a monarchy. Overall, his books numbered in five with 656 chapters. Gowing states that out of the 656 chapters,

⁴ Gowing, 34.

⁵ Ibid., 34.

⁶ Ibid., 34.

⁷ Ibid., 34.

⁸ Ibid., 36.

417 are devoted to the ides of March in 44 to the death of Sextus Pompey in 35.⁹ In terms of breaking down the numbers, the Civil War accounted for two-thirds of Appian's total work even though it was a nine-year period.¹⁰

Suetonius is useful since he wrote a biography much in the same manner as historians today. Suetonius was not concerned with chronological events;¹¹ however, he was looking into the character of the person as objectively as any historian could have been. Suetonius' Twelve Caesars chronicles the lives of Julius Caesar to the death of the emperor Domitian in 96 A.D. Most importantly for us, his chronicle of the life of Augustus was the most reliable. The reason was due to Suetonius having access to first hand documents since he had the privileges unlike Appian or Cassius Dio of reading imperial documents. The biography of Augustus was written before Suetonius was dismissed by the emperor Hadrian in 121/122.

III.

Before Suetonius, Cassius Dio, and Appian, Roman historiography was both chronological as well as narrative.¹² Contemporary with Suetonius was another historian, Tacitus, who was writing on imperial Rome. He wrote in an annalistic manner of year-by-year accounts¹³ whereas Cassius Dio, Appian, and Suetonius were more open and interested in personality.

We must be very careful in studying the sources used by the three historians. The main point, to understand first off, was that the three historians never regarded their work

⁹ Gowing, 37.

¹⁰ Ibid., 37.

¹¹ Suetonius, viii.

¹² Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius: The Scholar and his Caesars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983) 10.

¹³ Ibid., 9.

as translations or summaries of previous work.¹⁴ Both historians were indebted to their respective sources, which helped to shape their writing and of their respective accounts of Roman history. First and foremost, though, each historian was interpreting the history they were studying, whilst not copying the sources. However, the source question is of great importance since historians of antiquity did not cite their sources like modern day historians.

The problem in discussing the sources of both Cassius Dio and Appian is that historians do not know the identity of their sources.¹⁵ However, we can speculate to whom both historians used.

For Appian, it can be assumed that he used Asinius Pollio, whose book is lost. Pollio was a general under Julius Caesar; he was there at Pharsalus in 48 B.C. and after Caesar's murder, joined Antony's side. Messalla Corvinus was mentioned in Book five; Corvinus was a Republican at heart, as well as a historian, he was also a general in which he fought at Philippi, and was once allied with Antony until he switched sides to join Octavian. Appian only identified two sources, L. Scribonius Libo as well as Augustus' *Memoirs*.¹⁶ Gowing gives a great example to prove that Appian was using more than one source by detailing different anecdotes or explanations that Appian gives of Brutus' decision to murder Caesar:

Whether Brutus was ungrateful, or ignorant of his mother's fault, or disbelieved it, or was ashamed of it; whether he was such an ardent lover of liberty that he preferred his country to everything, or whether, because he was a descendant of that Brutus of the olden time who expelled the

¹⁴ Gowing, 39.

¹⁵ Gowing, 40.

¹⁶ Gowing, 41.

kings, he was aroused and shamed to this deed principally by the people...
(Appian, 2.112.469)

This account shows that Appian is not committing himself to one view; he rather lets the reader come up with their own decision. Appian is asking the reader, why did Brutus choose to murder Julius Caesar? Appian, in a way, was acting as a messenger to the readers of history. What was evident with the passage about the choice of Brutus was that Appian was using more than one source disregarding what was called Nissen's *Law*¹⁷ which the *law* states that an ancient historian would only use one source to compile a history and disregard any other sources; Cassius Dio also fits into the same category as Appian.

Cassius Dio, it is assumed, used Livy as his main source for compiling his history.¹⁸ Livy wrote his book entitled *Ab Urbe Condita* meaning "From the Foundation of the City," during the reign of Augustus. Cassius Dio makes it much clearer who he uses as sources, and even states that he not only has read *everything*, but was nonetheless selective in what he chose to assemble his history. Like Appian, Cassius Dio used Augustus' *Memoirs* as a main source. Cassius Dio also took an impressive amount of time in studying and writing his history. He claims that he spent ten years researching and twelve more years writing (Cassius Dio, 73.23.5). From this aspect, Cassius Dio, through all of his ten years of researching, would have used notes, excerpts, and his memory as he took the twelve years to write.¹⁹ He would not, however, have selected just a single source.

¹⁷ Gowing, 40.

¹⁸ Gowing, 40.

¹⁹ Gowing, 44.

It seems that Suetonius, with his various jobs at the imperial court would have given him a greater advantage over both Cassius Dio and Appian, while that may be true, we must be careful with that analysis. It cannot be proven, but only assumed that Suetonius used imperial documents to compile the life of Augustus.

Like Cassius Dio and Appian, the sources cannot be pinpointed exactly, but we can make assumptions. The sources for Suetonius are many, but it is hard to actually understand which sources he used for the Civil War to write about the life of Augustus because Augustus was just one of twelve biographies. The historians relevant to this paper are Livy, whom Cassius Dio also used. Another source, whom Suetonius used, was Gallus, who was a poet, general, and friend of Augustus as well as a friend to Virgil. Gallus actually fought against Antony in Egypt, and once Octavian came under complete control of Rome and its territories, Gallus became the first *praefectus* of Egypt. Horace is also cited under Andrew Wallace-Hadrill's book Suetonius: The Scholar and his Caesars, as a source used by Suetonius. Horace fell in favor with Maecenas whom Octavian trusted the most—behind Marcus Agrippa. Horace wrote numerous books, but his 17 poem book titled *Epodes* dates to the time in the 30's B.C. Virgil, behind Homer, is considered to be the most famous writer/poet of the classical world. He was a friend to Octavian and wrote his book, the *Eclogues* around the time of the Civil War.

IV.

It is important to bring forth evidence of how Cassius Dio was writing the Civil War in a pro-Octavian stance, and there are two great cases in which his pro-Octavian stance is most evident. The two such instances are: the battle of Philippi and the proscriptions. Both are very troubling when assessing his account. In contrast to Cassius

Dio, Appian will be used as the alternate source to give a more neutral to pro-Antonian stance, and then it will be up to the reader to decide.²⁰

The most important question when assessing Cassius Dio and Appian: what was their purpose? Anyone who has studied the Civil War knows that Octavian was not the greatest general, and in fact held nothing to his adoptive father Julius Caesar. However, when reading Cassius Dio's account of the battle of Philippi, Dio seems to go out of his way to excuse Octavian for his poor generalship. First off, Cassio Dio presents the reader of a tale in which Octavian was told by his physician to stand in battle though he was very sick, "...the physician who attended Caesar (Octavian) dreamed that Minerva commanded him to lead his patient, though still in poor health, from his tent and place him in the line of battle—the very means by which he was actually saved." (Cassius Dio 47.41.3) Dio then goes on once the battle had started, "Brutus forced Caesar, because of his sickness, to yield ground..." (Dio 47.45.2) and then Cassius Dio concluded the first battle, "As for their mutual successes and reverses, the whole camp of Caesar and Antony and everything within it was captured, and Caesar's dream found a most striking confirmation in this circumstance, for if he had remained where he was he would certainly have perished with the rest..." (Dio 47.46.2)

Cassius Dio's account shows the pro-Octavian stance at the battle of Philippi by stating because of Octavian's poor health (at least that is what Cassius Dio wants you to believe) was the reason why Octavian was forced back by Brutus, and thus the entire camp was then destroyed. If Octavian did not take the brave step of standing in battle with his troops, he would have been in bed, and thus would have met his end by the

²⁰ What concerns this discussion is Appian and Cassius Dio, therefore Suetonius, though not forgotten, does not concern the paper for section IV, he will have a section to himself in VI.

hands of Brutus' men. Even though the Caesar-Antony camp had been destroyed because Octavian had been pushed back, but only because of *poor health*, and as Gowing states, to this convoluted reason, victory was achieved since Octavian was with the army and so he survived.²¹ It is as if to say the outcome of the battle depended on Octavian, and therefore Cassius Dio was absolutely wrong in his assessment. Cassius Dio has yet to even mention Antony.

The battle of Philippi is most troubling, and it gets worse with Cassius Dio's account of Antony, who was by and far—a far greater general than Octavian could have ever have dreamed. Since Octavian lost the first battle (unless you are in Dio's corner where the loss was actually a victory) Dio's account of Antony was less than flattering, "...while Antony vanquished Cassius, who was by no means his equal in warfare." (Dio 47.45.2) So even though Antony won his battle against Cassius, since Octavian was pushed back by Brutus, Dio *could not* but say that Cassius was no equal in combat thus that was the reason why Antony beat Cassius. Dio essentially was not giving Antony credit for his victory, but merely diminishes any recognition for his victory.

Appian's account was far different; he was concerned as well as interested in the confrontation between a commander and his troops.²² Thus was the reasoning for a better stance on Antony and critical of Octavian.

The most significant understanding between Appian and Cassius Dio was that Dio omits Antony's strategy of creating a causeway:

Antony, fearful of the delay, resolved to force them to an engagement. He formed a plan of effecting a passage through the marsh secretly, if

²¹ Gowing, 111.

²² Ibid., 108.

possible, in order to get in the enemy's rear without their knowledge, and cut off their avenue of supply... (Appian 4.109)

Appian was very careful in describing the problem with Philippi, and Antony, understanding that if Brutus and Cassius were to continue to avert a pitch battle, then the Antonian-Octavian camp would eventually be starved out, "Brutus and Cassius did not wish to engage, but rather to continue wasting the enemy by lack of provisions, since they themselves had abundance from Asia..." (Appian 4.108)

While Antony was trying to outflank Cassius by constructing the causeway, Antony had another plan in part with the construction, he knew eventually that Cassius would catch on and thus advance into battle...exactly what Antony wanted to happen. Antony does not get this treatment nor credit from Cassius Dio.

Appian would go on to describe the battle in great detail, describing not only the political and military aspects, but the topography as well. As for the discussion on Philippi, both Cassius Dio and Appian had different approaches and concerns. Cassius Dio was omitting aspects unfavorable to Octavian, and glosses over Antony's achievements. Appian on the other side of the discussion, was interested in the military aspect of Philippi, and thus he concentrates, and rightfully so, on Antony as a general. Appian devoted more space to his writings on Philippi, fifty-two chapters, while Dio wrote fourteen.²³

V.

²³ Gowing 210.

The proscriptions,²⁴ when passed in late November of 43 when the second Triumvirate was formed brought about a terror not witnessed upon Rome since Sulla. Octavian, when writing his own *Res Gestae*, did not even hint to the proscriptions, he just left it out as if it never happened. Which is why the discussion of the proscriptions is the greatest example of the two differing views of Octavian and Antony by the writings of Appian and Cassius Dio: Gowing states “In fact, no one episode in their *Histories* reveals more clearly the contrasts in their portrayals of the triumviral period.”²⁵

Just to give some background on the proscriptions, when the second triumvirate was formed, all three triumvirs created a list called the “proscriptions”. The proscriptions were a list, to think of it in modern day, it can be likened to America’s Wild West “wanted dead or alive,” in the triumvir’s case; however, their enemies were just wanted dead. Those on the list were deemed enemies, mostly the deaths were of noble citizens and senators, and the most famous was Antony’s worst critic, Cicero.

Dio shows his most important attempt of criticizing Antony while excusing Octavian:

These acts were committed chiefly by Lepidus and Antony; for they had been honored by the former Caesar for many years, and as they had been holding offices and governships for a long time they had many enemies. But Caesar seems to have taken part in the business merely because of his sharing the authority, since he himself had no need at all to kill a large number; for he was not naturally cruel and had been brought up in his father’s ways. Moreover, as he was still a young man and had just entered politics, he was under no necessity in any case of hating many persons

²⁴ To avoid confusion, once the Proscriptions was instituted when the Second Triumvirate was formed between: Antony, Octavian, and M. Aemilius Lepidus on 27 Nov. 43 B.C., though the proscriptions were before the battle of Philippi, I have chosen to discuss the more important of the two last.

²⁵ Gowing, 247.

violently, and, besides, he wished to be loved. A proof of this is that from the time he broke off his joint rulership with his colleagues and held the power alone he no longer did anything of the sort. (Cassius Dio 47.7.1-3)

This statement was an absolute distortion of assessing Octavian and Antony. Antony was not innocent by any means, but for Cassius Dio to conclude that Octavian was innocent due to the fact he never used the proscriptions once he became the sole ruler of Rome was wrong in every sense. This was by and far the greatest example of the gross misuse of Cassius Dio's pro-Octavian stance and his anti-Antonian stance. This passage presents the opinion that Cassius Dio held his opinion of Octavian as Augustus, and he consistently superimposes the one upon the other with no apparent attempt to suggest that Octavian could or did behave differently from Augustus.²⁶ Octavian had everything to gain with the proscriptions, but for Cassius Dio to mention it was not in Octavian's character because as Augustus he would not sanction the proscriptions was to just ignore the political arena of that time. After Julius Caesar's death in 44, Rome was left wide open to either return to the Republic or establish sole rule...where do you think Octavian was of this mindset?

Cassius Dio continues with the assault on Antony:

But Antony killed savagely and mercilessly, not only those whose names had been posted, but likewise those who had attempted to assist any of them. He always viewed their heads, even if he happened to be eating, and sated himself to the fullest extent on this most unholy and pitiable sight.

(Cassius Dio 47.8.2)

Cassius Dio was trying to present Mark Antony in the worst possible light stating he "killed savagely and mercilessly...He always viewed their heads..." The assessment that

²⁶ Gowing, 258.

Cassius Dio was displaying of Antony's image as some barbaric brute that enjoys slaughtering noble men and then admiring the handy work by looking at the heads of the slain regardless if he was *eating*. The imagery was extremely vivid, yet Cassius Dio only mentions Antony, while letting Lepidus off lightly, and excusing Octavian; Cassius Dio's greatest example of his pro-Octavian/anti-Antonian stance.

Appian in book IV chapter II, the first sentence speaks very clearly, "As soon as the triumvirs were by themselves they joined in making a list of those who were to be put to death." Appian was establishing, unlike Cassius Dio that the proscriptions were by the hands of *all* the members of the triumvirate. There was no deviation, Appian would keep using the word "they" to describe the proscriptions. Appian also states something that was much different from Cassius Dio, what was the purpose of the proscriptions? Appian states, "So the triumvirs were short of money because Europe, and especially Italy, was exhausted by wars and exactions...By now, too, some were proscribed because they had handsome villas or city residences." (Appian 4.2.5) Cassius Dio only mentions that it was a purge of the senators who were a threat as well as the knights. Appian, as well, mentions the death of senators and knights, "The number of senators who were sentenced to death and confiscation was about 300, and of the knights about 2000." (Appian 4.2.5) Never, does Appian excuse Octavian for taking part in the proscriptions.

VI.

Suetonius deserves a section to himself. Mainly, due to his approach, since he was writing a biography on Augustus. Suetonius shines as a writer who was approaching the subject of Augustus not as a flatterer but to reveal the character of not just Augustus but his subjects in general. The fact that Suetonius was using Antonian propaganda suggests

that Octavian did not completely destroy all instances of Mark Antony's propaganda, and because of that a great deal of it survived where Octavian's personal character suffers badly.²⁷ I am going to show the instances in which Suetonius was using Mark Antony's propaganda.

According to Mark Antony, Suetonius states, "...that Augustus' great-grandfather had been only a freedman, a rope-maker from the neighborhood of Thurii; and his grandfather, a money-changer." (Suetonius, *Aug.* 2) It's very clear that Mark Antony was looking to discredit Octavian's family and thus lineage since only because of Julius Caesar that the Octavii were rewarded patrician status. Antony was very shrewd in his propaganda to do anything to diminish Octavian since Octavian himself was claiming to be the heir of Julius Caesar. Antony was stressing to Romans to remember where he really came from.

In (*Aug.* 4) Suetonius continues, "Mark Antony likewise tried to belittle Augustus' maternal line by alleging that his great-grandfather Balbus had been born in Africa, and kept his first perfumery and then a bakehouse in Aricia," Suetonius then sites Cassius of Parma who was loyal to Antony, "Your mother's flour came from a miserable Arician bakery, and the coin-stained hands of a money-changer from Nerulum kneaded it."

Antony was even blatant in stating, "...that Julius Caesar made him submit to unnatural relations as the price of adoption," Suetonius then adds Antony's brother Lucius' statement, "...after sacrificing his virtue to Caesar, Augustus had sold his favors

²⁷ M.P. Charlesworth, "Some Fragments of the Propaganda of Mark Antony." (In the *Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 3/4: The Classical Assoc., 1933) 172

to Aulus Hirtius in Spain, for 3,000 gold pieces, and that he used to soften the hair on his legs by singeing them with red-hot walnut shells.” (Suetonius *Aug.* 68)

Antony then moved to the next best charge against Octavian, his military record.

Suetonius was discussing the Sicilian War with Sextus Pompey:

...although on the eve of the battle he (Octavian) fell so fast asleep that his staff had to wake him and ask for the signal to begin hostilities. This must have been the occasion of Mark Antony’s taunt: ‘He could not face his ships to review them when they were already at their fighting stations; but lay on his back in a stupor and gazed up at the sky, never rising to show that he was alive until his admiral Marcus Agrippa had routed the enemy.’

(Suetonius, *Aug.* 16)

This was exactly the opposite of what Cassius Dio was doing, where Dio was excusing Octavian at Philippi for poor health, Suetonius was very clear branding Octavian in this instance as a coward. This passage may concern a different war but the passage was clear of Suetonius’ intentions as Octavian as a poor general. Of course, Suetonius was using Antony’s propaganda but the fact that Suetonius was inserting this into his discussion of the Sicilian War and Octavian as a general; it had to have spoken volumes as to what Suetonius thought of Octavian as a general. Octavian, with the Sicilian War owed the victory to Marcus Agrippa who was a very able and competent general; unlike Octavian.

A minor note from (*Aug.* 10) about Mutina, when Octavian went to fight Antony before the establishment of the second triumvirate, “According to Antony, he (Octavian)

ran away from the first of these²⁸ and did not reappear until the next day, having lost both his charger and his purple cloak.”

One of the most important pieces of propaganda was the back and forth pushing over Antony and Octavian’s choice for their association with divinity, Antony countered Octavian over “The Feast of the Divine Twelve” when Rome had a food shortage and Suetonius uses a well-known anonymous lampoon:

Those rogues engaged the services
Of a stage manager;
So Mallia found six goddesses
And six gods facing her!

Apollo’s part was lewdly played
By impious Caesar; he
Made merry at a table laid
For gross debauchery.

Such scandalous proceedings shocked
The Olympians. One by one
They quit and Jove, his thunders mocked,
Vacates the golden throne.

I do not take my father’s line;
His trade was silver coin, but mine
Corinthian vases –

He took a beating twice at sea,
And threw two fleets away.
So now to achieve one victory
He tosses dice all day.
(Suetonius, *Aug.* 70.)

This was one way Antony could counter Octavian’s propaganda of Antony posing as Dionysus: Antony could turn around and remind everyone of “The Feast of the Divine Twelve,” where Octavian dressed up as Apollo and held a great banquet when there was

²⁸ Referring to the beginning of the Mutina campaign. Mutina took three months according to Suetonius (Aug. 10), but Antony was stating that Octavian ran from the first battle, but Suetonius gives Octavian credit as a decent commander in the second battle.

a severe food shortage. Of course, at the end of the lampoon was the line "He took a beating twice at sea..." once again taking any chance to discredit Octavian as a general.

Suetonius is thus a very important historian because he walks a fine line between his stance on Octavian. I like Suetonius because he was showing the differing views of Octavian/Augustus. He seems to be somewhere in the middle of Cassius Dio and Appian.

VII.

What I have tried to stress is the point that the image of Mark Antony has been obscured by ancient historians for various reasons that I have showed. Which historian is right? It is hard to tell by the evidence. There are issues with all three historians. Whilst some writings of Mark Antony as well as propaganda survived enough for Suetonius to discuss and even enter into the biography of Augustus, the true viewpoint of Antony is lost. What survives the best is coinage. Even something that is as small as a coin can tell a story that happened over 2,000 years ago. The coins Mark Antony issued can be thought of as Antony's diary on the Civil War.

This next section will give the viewpoint that was not found in Cassius Dio, Suetonius, or Appian. The coins I am going to discuss were issued by Mark Antony from 43-31 B.C. What survives is very limited, on the other hand, very useful. The coins I will be discussing will be broken into three areas: Mark Antony's association with Dionysus and Heracles, pietas, and military issues concerning valor. We must be careful, though, that the coins are propaganda, but it will show the side of Mark Antony that we do not get anywhere else. We get the viewpoint straight from the horse's mouth as the saying goes.

A way in which Mark Antony was able to legitimize himself in the East, after he was given the eastern portion of the Roman territories after Philippi, was by associating

himself with Eastern gods. Antony was very careful in his selection of Dionysus as a political move,²⁹ though historians can now look at the decision as problematic in hindsight, but regardless, at the time of 42 B.C., the choice seemed like the right one.

Antony was neither the first man, nor even the first Roman to associate himself with Dionysus. The most famous man to associate himself with Dionysus was Alexander the Great of Macedon. Even a Roman had used the image of Dionysus, and that man was none other than Pompey the Great. Pompey chose Dionysus and Heracles (whom Antony would also show a divine link to) for the reason of using the image as a metaphor for the splendors of his military victories in the East.³⁰ I feel that Antony, using Pompey the Great as the standard of a champion of the Roman Republic because after the death of Julius Caesar, the option of becoming a monarch was to tread on very shaky ground. This was why Antony chose Dionysus who also appealed to Antony on two fronts: first, he chose Dionysus to portray himself in the same manner just like Alexander the Great had done 300 years before Antony; secondly, Dionysus appealed to Antony because the god was very passionate, generous, had a love of wine, elegant parties, worldly women, and flashy affairs.³¹ This would be another aspect that would be associated with Antony; the image as lover of women, life, and wine, with disregard for anything else. The most important reason why Antony was fashioning himself as the new Dionysus was that Dionysus was also seen as a conqueror from the East, a promoter of civilization, a lawgiver, and lover of peace.

²⁹ Kenneth Scott, "Octavian's Propaganda and Antony's *De Sua Ebrietate*" in *Classical Philology* (Vol. 24 No. 2, April 1929) 133.

³⁰ Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, trans. by Alan Shapiro (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1990) 44.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 46.



Antony associated himself with Heracles through one of his sons, Anton. The image on the left is a ring that Antony gave to his soldiers. It shows the strength and power associated with Heracles. A way in which to identify Heracles is the club he is holding with his left hand.

It was not radical or uncommon for a member of the Roman aristocracy to trace one's family back to Greek gods or heroes.³² Antony chose to trace his family origin to a relatively unknown son of Heracles, named Anton. Mark Antony issued this coin (next page) in 42 with the depiction of Anton. It can be understandable why he chose Heracles since Antony was giving coinage out to his soldiers to pay them, the propaganda would be before the army's eyes. The name Heracles was used as a link for Mark Antony to



legitimize himself since Octavian had Julius Caesar; all the more reason why Mark Antony had to use some obscure link to show divine lineage. However, Pompey had used the very same idea of associating himself with Heracles.³³ It is important to remember, nonetheless, that Mark Antony had to reach out and find some obscure link to associate himself with a god.

The main focus, however, will be on Mark Antony's association with Dionysus, because it would prove most troubling for Antony, and would forever create a fog over the real Antony vs. the associated principle of Antony through Dionysus. The fact that a very influential and great Roman historian of the 20th century was writing of Antony as a *drunkard...effeminate and a coward*,³⁴ as Sir Ronald Syme wrote in his book, The

³² Zanker, 44.

³³ Ibid., 44

³⁴ Ronald Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939) 150.

Roman Revolution; it shows the masterful suppression of Antony at the hands of the victorious Octavian.

Antony, himself, issued a pamphlet called *De Sua Ebrietate* (in English, *on his own drunkenness*). Antony issued his *De Sue Ebrietate* before the battle of Actium as a reply from Octavian's discriminating propaganda as Antony as Dionysus. Since the pamphlet has been lost to historians, the only part that survives is through the words of Pliny. It seems likely that Antony was writing to the people of Rome.³⁵ Mark Antony was explaining or at least trying to explain his intention in the East by associating himself with Dionysus, and that he was not a drunk.

This coin dates to around 39 B.C., celebrating the marriage of Antony and Octavian's sister Octavia. On the otherside is Dionysus holding a thyrsus, which is a



defining mark of Dionysus. A thyrsus is a staff that is covered in ivy vines and at the top of the staff sits a pine cone. This coin shows how Antony was using the image and associating himself with Dionysus.

After the Perusine War and the Sicilian War, Octavian emerged as the sole power in the West. Antony had his clientela in Rome, but it was not simply good enough because Octavian sat in Italy whilst Antony was in the East. Octavian, therefore, had the greatest advantage over the two. Octavian even shined in building projects in Rome.³⁶

³⁵ Scott, 139.

³⁶ The construction of buildings from 43-31 B.C. was nothing like what had been constructed under Julius Caesar and Pompey. The only importance concerning building projects for this paper, were the buildings constructed in Rome; however, since Octavian won the Civil War, any building projects were reconstructed by Octavian under his mass of buildings projects as the sole ruler of Rome. Two examples of building projects of Antony (or more from his men) during the Civil War concern the temple of Saturn in the Forum, and the temple of Apollo. One of Mark Antony's men, Munatius Plancus, who celebrated a triumph, *ex Gallia* in 42 B.C., embarked on the important project of constructing the temple of Saturn in the Forum.

VIII.

Pietas was something that was very important to Romans. It was a sign of pride, duty, devotion, and patriotism. *Pietas*, was first issued on denarii in the year 108/7 B.C. by the moneyer M. Herennius.³⁷ There are two main ways to show *pietas*: filial piety and civic piety. In Herennius' case, it was filial piety that interested him. He depicted the head of *Pietas* and on the obverse, depicted the Catanaean brothers: Anapias and Amphinomus, who, to Herennius, exemplified the devotion of filial piety by rescuing their father from the eruption of Mt. Etna.³⁸ On the other hand, civic piety was a way to legitimize oneself in loyal service to Rome, and therefore Mark Antony chose the latter after 43 B.C.

Before Antony entered into his coinage of civic piety, after the Ides of March, Mark Antony was left in a most dire spot. Antony had to find a way to stay established in



Rome. In April of 43 B.C., he issued this coin to

legitimize himself as the head of the Caesarian party.

The issue was due to the possibility of the emerging

threat of the young Octavian who crossed the Adriatic

Sea from Greece once Octavian had made it known he was the heir of Caesar. Antony is

depicted on the left and the reverse side is the portrait of the slain Julius Caesar. It was

Caesar who had first taken the radical move to have his own portrait depicted on coinage.

(continued from note 36) Another Antonian, C. Sossius, who celebrated a triumph *ex Iudaea* in 34 B.C., had planned to rebuild the temple of Apollo in the *Circa*. (Zanker, pp. 65-66.)

³⁷ Benedict J. Lowe, "Sextus Pompeius and Spain, 46-44 B.C.": A. Powell and K. Welch (eds.) *Sextus Pompeius* (Classical Press of Wales/Duckworth, 2002) 78.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 78.

This was also Mark Antony's first known coin with his name on the coin as well as his portrait.³⁹



This next coin states **Marcus Antonius III VIR**, and struck in the year 41. It was important for Antony to stress republican values and traditions.

One way in stressing republican values was by

showing himself as an augur. With the association of being an augur, it was a way to show that Antony was thinking of a pro-Republican stance as well as civic piety. This coins marks a dramatic attempt of family piety as well by stressing the words on the coin to the right: **PIETAS-COS**.⁴⁰ Antony was showing family piety by the marking of **COS** which means Consul, which his brother, Lucius Antonius held the year the coin was struck in 41 B.C. Antony also stresses the stork on the right coin which was an emblem of family piety.⁴¹ Lucius Antonius, the consul of 41 B.C. led an uprising against Octavian. Whether or not he was leading the charge on his own behalf or from the word of his brother, Mark Antony, is a question that will be discussed. The significance of the Perusine War was that Italy was fighting back against Rome for the last time.⁴² Octavian, after Philippi, was charged with the settlement of the veterans in Italy.⁴³ The main issue was over the land that was owed for the army, and Octavian had to confiscate lands for the veterans to keep the army happy and to prevent a revolt. L. Antonius, the consul of that year, who was concerned over his brother living in the East and thus concerned over

³⁹ David R. Sear, *The History and Coinage of the Roman Emperors 49-27 BC* (London: Spink 1998) 81.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 157-158.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁴² Syme, 208

⁴³ Emilio Gabba, "The Perusine War and Triumviral Italy" in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, Vol. 75, 1971, 139.

Octavian alone with Lepidus in Italy. L. Antonius found another ally with Mark Antony's wife Fulvia. They allied to oppose Octavian and his policy. Emilio Gabba, who discussed the Perusine War, stated that L. Antonius was supported by the senatorial class and even more so by Italy's middle class.⁴⁴

The Perusine War was seen as a struggle for freedom, in Nursia, a monument was erected for the fallen men who died in the Perusine War, with an inscription that they had died in the cause of freedom.⁴⁵ It cannot be clear whether Fulvia and L. Antonius were acting alone or with help from Mark Antony. My feeling is that the two were acting in only of interest for Mark Antony, but not in accordance with him.⁴⁶ Even though Octavian finally achieved victory when both surrendered, the most important aspect was that Octavian was not liked by all, and in fact not cared for as Cassius Dio would like you to believe.

This image depicts Mark Antony as an augur on the left side of the coin holding a lituus,⁴⁷ like that of a Thyrsus for Dionysus, a lituus was an identifying mark of an augur.



An augur was a priest and was a *very* republican office, which was why Antony chose very carefully. An augur's job was to interpret the will of the gods or by taking auspices which was interpreting omens. The augur dates

back to Romulus and Remus' time where the two brothers disputed the selection of where to build the new city. Romulus and Remus tested their ability to interpret omens and

⁴⁴ Gabba, 147.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 146.

⁴⁶ I am not to assume that Fulvia was jealous of Antony in the East (that assessment seems to gloss over Fulvia's character who was very ambitious). She took a great risk along with L. Antonius, and must have cared about Antony's position in Italy and therefore took a preemptive strike against Octavian and the growing concern over the confiscation of land was a way in which both received help from those who opposed Octavian in Italy.

⁴⁷ The lituus staff can be identified by a "question-mark" like symbol on left coin.

where Remus saw six eagles, Romulus saw twelve eagles and thus the Palatine Hill was then selected. Antony's depiction in the priestly robes of an augur emphasizes the importance which he placed on the possession of this religious office.⁴⁸ Antony would continue with this trend right down to Actium. Antony's issuing of coins with the inscription of augur suggests that he was stressing his adherence to republican traditions in the face of Octavian's revolutionary drive towards an autocratic system of government for the Roman world.⁴⁹ However, Octavian's ultimate irony was that after Actium, he would quickly change his ways very similar to Antony and the pro-Republican image.

IX.

The view of Antony during the Civil War years from Cassius Dio survives intact, whereas Appian's history beyond 35 B.C. is lost.⁵⁰ This presents a problem later on since Appian does not describe Antony's remaining years and eventual downfall at Actium and after he flees to Alexandria, Egypt where he commits suicide.



The start of the civil war in my view begins when the second triumvirate was formed on 27 November 43 B.C. The second triumvirate was formed between Antony, Octavian, and Lepidus. Marcus Aemilius

Lepidus had been a general under Julius Caesar as was Antony. The coin indicates for the first time that Mark Antony was a member of the triumvirate with the indication on the coinage with **III VIR**. Once again Antony was depicting himself as the heir of Caesar, though it would not be too long until Antony could no longer make that claim.

⁴⁸ Sear, 170.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 170.

⁵⁰ Gowing, 95.



This next coin shows Antony once again bearded and dates to the spring-summer of 42 after the proscriptions in which senators unfavorable to Antony, Octavian, and Lepidus were marked out for death. This coin was significant for a couple of reasons. The first was to show that Antony was mourning the death of Julius Caesar by not shaving.⁵¹ The portrait on the left clearly shows Antony with a beard. The next important aspect about the coin was the depiction of the sun god Sol on the reverse side of the coin. This would mark the intentions of the coming campaign against Brutus and Cassius, whom had now fled to Macedonia. Sol was an Eastern symbol and shows not only that Antony and the triumvirs would seek a campaign in Macedonia but in other places in the East.⁵² It also gives a hint as to Antony's awareness of the East, and the depiction of an Eastern symbol.

The battle of Philippi was one of Mark Antony's greatest triumphs of his military career. Before the battle began however, Antony's brother, Gaius Antonius, who was the governor of Macedonia at the time when Brutus and Cassius fled from Rome, was captured and murdered by Brutus and Cassius. Now, Antony, was avenging two deaths and all the more reason for Antony to be at his militaristic best.

Once the battle took place Antony quickly marched on Cassius' army and drove him off to the north east in a state of confusion. Cassius, thinking Brutus was killed in battle, later committed suicide. However, Octavian's army was defeated by Brutus when Brutus attacked Octavian's camp, and the only reason Octavian survived, according to Pliny, was from hiding in the marsh.

⁵¹ Sear, 81.

⁵² Ibid., 86.

The second battle of Philippi was a battle that by the graces of luck struck Antony. Brutus had every advantage besides losing Cassius. He had the best position, he could get supplies, Antony would have had a much harder time receiving supplies since they had to be shipped from Italy and that was no easy task with unpredictable winds. Brutus offered battle to Antony, though the reasoning was puzzling why he chose to fight? Brutus could have seen Antony as weak and figured he could easily defeat him...it was one of history's mysteries why Brutus chose to fight? The second battle saw the complete end of Brutus' army by the hands of Antony. In the end Brutus knew he had been defeated as Antony's army with help finally from Octavian encircled the army. Brutus escaped but later committed suicide.



This coin shows Mark Antony still bearded which suggests that the coin was struck after the second battle of Phillipi on 23 October.⁵³ Antony had just defeated the tyrannicides but at this time the issues had not yet been ordered to change the face to a shaven Antony.⁵⁴ Three important letters flank Antony on the left of the coin **IMP** which means that Antony was hailed as Imperator. The title Imperator in these instances was hailed to a general who had just defeated an enemy on the battlefield. The coin to the right shows the continued sign of things to come for Antony with the depiction of the temple of the god Sol.

⁵³ Sear, 86.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 86.



Imperator.

The most important aspect to notice about this coin was that Mark Antony was now beardless and dates to late 42-early 41.⁵⁵ Though it is hard to make out it has the letters **IMP** again stating



Mark Antony in this coin was depicted as the victor of Armenia and this coin was minted in the autumn of 34 to celebrate his victory.

Antony held a mock Roman triumph through the streets of Alexandria, Egypt. He summoned all to hear a speech proclaiming that his children were to receive eastern lands along with Cleopatra holding onto Egypt. There were two damning consequences for Mark Antony during what historians would call the “Donations of Alexandria”: the first was that Cleopatra was declared, “Queen of Kings and Queen of Egypt” but the worst of all was that she would rule with Caesarion, the son of Julius Caesar and Cleopatra. Armenia was a victory for Antony considering that his previous Parthian campaign a couple years prior was a disaster. The conquering of Parthia would have been extremely beneficial to Mark Antony but it was not to be and one of the problems was that Mark Antony did not secure garrisons in Armenia. However, in 35 B.C. Antony did achieve victory and as I have shown he was depicting himself as the victor of Armenia. Antony had hoped to continue into Parthia but Mark Antony would have much more important pressing issues to deal with.

⁵⁵ Sear, 86.



This next coin depicts a departure away from Antony and a turn to portraying his army. Why would Antony go in this direction? Very possible that Antony went in this direction because he was having

defections in his army and to reassure his soldiers for the coming final conflict with Octavian since these coins would go to pay the individual men of the navy and army.⁵⁶ Antony honored twenty-three legions in all and each coin came with an inscription of the name of one specific legion (example of the coin on the left **LEG VII**). Antony had become more unpopular in Rome than ever and it was reaching its most vital point when this coin was issued in 31 B.C. Antony was still portraying himself as a triumvir though Lepidus had been sent into exile by the hands of Octavian when Sextus Pompey was driven out of the west in 36. Octavian was now in control of the west by himself, and the date had come and gone in 33 for the renewal of the triumvirate and Octavian never used the title again.



The image of the Battle of Actium, especially from Cassius Dio represents the Battle of Actium as a complete failure by Antony. Yet this coin, which

was minted after Actium, with the inscription of **IMP IIII**, stating that Mark Antony was hailed as Imperator for the fourth time. Antony would not have had this coin issued if Actium was such a miserable failure as Dio and other historians claimed it to be. The face of Mark Antony is also interesting to note. The image is of Jupiter Ammon with the ram

⁵⁶ Sear, 230.

horns. Antony had fused both a Roman deity which was Jupiter and Ammon with the Eastern deity. Alexander the Great did the same thing proclaiming he was the divine son of Zeus Ammon, fusing both Greek and Egyptian Gods together.

X.

In the end Mark Antony lost everything. He fled back to Alexandria where he was eventually hunted down after the battle of Actium. Before he could be killed by Octavian, Antony committed suicide. Cleopatra followed suit. Ptolemy Caesar or Caesarion, called by both names was eventually hunted down and killed by Octavian's men removing any threat since Antony had proclaimed that Caesarion was the true heir of Caesar. Antony's son, 14 year old Antyllus was found in an unfinished temple to Mark Antony, and was dragged out and killed. Octavian, however, spared the lives of the three children between Mark Antony and Cleopatra: Alexander Helios, Cleopatra Selene, and Ptolemy Philadelphus. Antony's lineage would continue on eventually leading to three emperors: Gaius (Caligula), Claudius, and Nero. While Caligula and Nero were not quite the best emperors Rome had to offer, Claudius turned out to be a great emperor in my view.



After Antony was gone, Octavian went on a binge of destroying the image of Mark Antony. The image on the left is from Octavian's temple of Apollo on the Palatine. The relief is of Apollo on left and Hercules on the right. A battle is taking place at Delphi, moreover it was to see who would control Delphi. However, one can look at it as Octavian vs. Antony. Since this relief was in the temple of Apollo, who do you think would win? Octavian was offering subtle hints that would turn

to a lasting effect for the image of Mark Antony. Apollo would win every time, thus stating that Octavian, since he was associating himself with Apollo, was the reason for the victory. *My God is better than your God.*

Suetonius even states in his biography of Augustus whom the title Octavian will take in 27 B.C that Octavian, when assuming the role of Pontifex Maximus or Chief Priest in 12 B.C., destroyed somewhere close to 2,000 Greek and Latin documents.⁵⁷ Octavian assumed the role of Pontifex Maximus quite some time after Actium, and the fact that one of his first jobs as Pontifex Maximus was to suddenly destroy around 2,000 documents? That should raise a red flag. Those documents must have been very important in terms of being dangerous to Octavian. Why else would he destroy them?

As historians we must always be critical of the sources we read. Should we discredit Suetonius, Cassius Dio, and Appian for their accounts? Absolutely not, because they were writing during a time in which the empire was all they knew. Let me stress to you that these men were not contemporary to the Civil War period, but their accounts are still very important to ancient Roman historians. There was no one that these three could have gone to to tell them stories about the old Republic of Rome; Suetonius, Cassius Dio, and Appian, all had to rely on their sources. That is why, looking at the coins of Mark Antony, it is extremely vital to understand what Antony's view was like during the Civil War. Antony was establishing a pro-Republican look with issues of coinage of civic piety. What is incredible is that something as small as these coins can offer so much information to tell a story that was suppressed over 2,000 years ago.

⁵⁷ Suetonius, Aug. xxxi.

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