

RETHINKING THE CULTURAL SETTING OF CAESAR'S
"I AM CAESAR, NOT *REX*": A NOTE*

by

JACK W.G. SCHROPP

ABSTRACT: This short paper deals with a well-trodden topic, Caesar's avoidance of embracing the title *rex*. At the centre stands his famous saying "I am Caesar, not *rex*", which was explained mainly by Roman domestic policy. However, this point of view helps only partly to understand his reasons for refusing the title; in the following lines I propose that Caesar's dismissal of the title *rex* may also have been affected by his political experience with eastern and western foreign kings on the outskirts of the Roman Empire.

When Caesar returned from the *Feriae Latinae* in the Alban Hills and arrived at Rome on January 26, 44 BC, the crowd welcomed him as king. He, however, rejected their praises by alluding to the *cognomen* *Rex* of the Marcii family: "Caesarem se, non regem esse" (Suet. *Iul.* 79, 2; CASPARI: *Regem*)¹. Most modern scholars see behind the pun a veiling of his true intentions to become king in

* I wish to thank the journal's Editor Jakub PIGOŃ for helpful comments. Translations of Livy's *History of Rome* and of Cicero's *Letters to Friends* are taken from the Loeb editions of F.G. MOORE 1943 and D.R. SHACKLETON BAILEY 2001 respectively.

¹ For an introduction to the topic, see KRAFT 1952/1953: 39–58; DOBESCH 1966: 71–103; RAWSON 1975; and now LUKE 2012; for the bigger picture in the 40ies, JEHNE 1987; MEIER 2014; regarding the wordplay, DEUTSCH 1928; and on the title *rex* in general, SIGMUND 2014. Furthermore, it is not unusual for Caesar to make a self-reference; we know of at least three other statements where he did so. The first "Quid times? Caesarem vehis!" (Flor. II 13, 37) was uttered during his attempt to reach Brindisi with a little boat in 48 BC. The second "se Caesarem esse fidemque praestaturum" (*Bell. Hisp.* 19, 6) was expressed during his siege of Ategua in 45 BC; cf. TSCHIEDEL 2012: 43, n. 24. The third came after the battle of Pharsalos: "Hoc voluerunt; tantis rebus gestis Gaius Caesar condemnatus essem, nisi ab exercitu auxilium petissem" (Suet. *Iul.* 30, 4). This particular form of self-display of Caesar invalidates the assumption that his saying in the Suetonian Life was a fabrication by Suetonius himself; for that and with further literature, see SIGMUND 2014: 347 with n. 263.