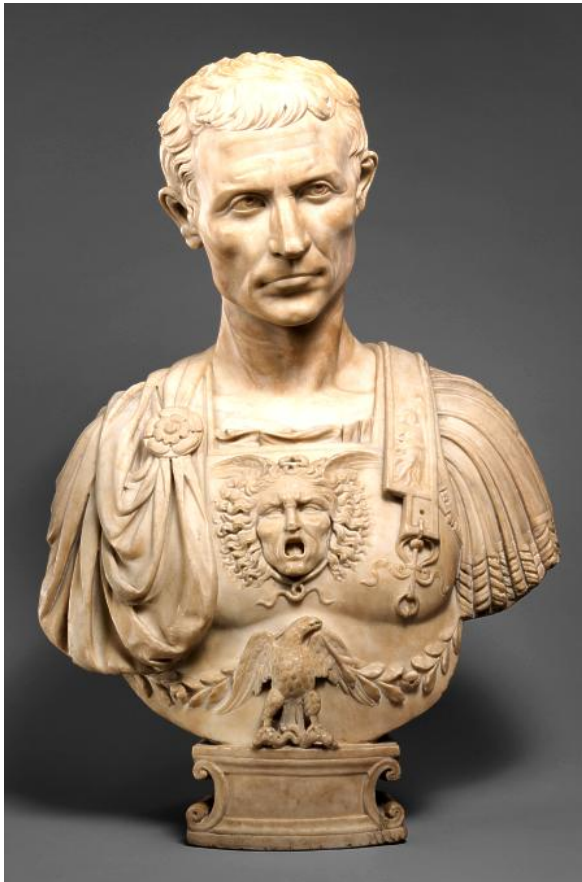


The Ides of March

Hey Jules, don't be afraid...

Attributed to the Bard William Shakespeare, the time of year in this spotlight was destined to become a precursor of foreboding: "Beware the Ides of March," a soothsayer said to Julius Caesar in the play. From another source the famous historical exchange went like this:



Caesar (jokingly): *The Ides of March are come.*

Seer: *Aye, Caesar, but not gone.*

Picture the scene: the well-to-do swanning around in togas, slaves in tow; chariots running over plebs at random in the streets; centurians rolling dice; senators whispering and plotting overthrows behind closed doors while sharpening their daggers – this was ancient Rome on the 15th March 44 B.C. Jolly Julius was sauntering on his merry way to the Theatre of Pompey, blissfully unaware that he was soon to be the star of the show as he was stabbed by no less than 60 conspirators; including his former mate Brutus to whom he commented with his dying breath: "Et tu, Brute?" And so, the Ides, for Caesar at least, turned out to be the last and worst day of his life. Maybe as well as the bucket, he also kicked off a new trend, because it wasn't always like that.

Prior to Jules messing with it, the ancient Roman calendar was complicated. Rather than numbering days of the month from the first to the last, some bright spark decided it was better to count backwards. He was probably trying to prove he was smarter than the average Roman; seeing as he understood his own calculations, whereas it was doubtful many others could. There were three fixed points in any month – the Nones, the Ides and the Kalends. Not wishing to declare my ignorance, I won't go into how this worked in detail, except to say that it was confusing. The Ides fell on the 13th for most months, but the 15th in March, May and October. The earliest calendar had the Ides coinciding with first full moon of the new year – the Roman new year, that was – and unless I'm wrong, this made their New Year's day April 1st. Need I say more?

The Ides of every month were considered sacred to the Roman god Jupiter, and to commemorate the occasion the Flamen Dialis, Jupiter's high priest, would lead an "Ides sheep" in a procession along the Via Sacra. Unbeknown to the dim woolly, its final destination was the arx (whatever that was?); and here it was dutifully sacrificed. So, if it was a pretty cruddy time for Caesar and the sheep; it wasn't much better for a chosen senior citizen when the Ides of March came around. While everyone else was partying and having a right Roman Bacchanalian romp, this poor old guy was dressed up in animal skins; then he was beaten as he was driven from the city. It is thought that this was a symbolic expulsion of the old year in preparation for the new. Those ancient Romans sure knew how to add injury to insult.

If the monthly sheep and the March geriatric were innocent victims, it is doubtful Julius Caesar was. When eventually everyone had got used to the screwy calendar, along comes this self-confessed new broom (he also just happened to be the Pontifex Maximus of Rome, and high priest of Vesta to boot) and totally changes everything. Then, would you believe, he declared New Year's Day to be January 1st – how ridiculous! Not content with taking away the reason for missing birthdays, anniversaries and dental appointments; Jules' calendar shake-up was also claimed to have triggered the civil war. Wow! Small wonder he ended up with no friends.

As a bit of posthumous consolation for being assassinated, 4 years after Julius Caesar's death his successor, Octavian, rounded up 300 senators and others unlucky enough to get caught; then executed them to avenge Caesar. This, and a series of further executions, was regarded as a religious sacrifice and was carried out on...

Yes, you've guessed it – the Ides of March.

A Season of Happiness - helping you towards a better lifestyle

For a look at some informative articles on a variety of subjects just return to the web page



Whereas every effort has been made to be accurate and fair-minded, comments and opinions expressed on this website are based on personal experience and do not necessarily reflect the views of the wider community or those groups and institutions mentioned. A Season of Happiness and its staff accept no responsibility for any outcome based on suggestions offered. What works for us may not work for you. Please bear this in mind.