

Mommsen holds, in 102 B.C.), of one of the oldest of the patrician or aristocratic families of Rome. The family was, however, closely connected by marriage with the great popular leader Marius, and Caesar himself in 83 married the daughter of Cinna, Marius' leading supporter. His sympathies were thus from the first with the popular party, and on the defeat of that party by Sulla in 82, he barely escaped with his life.

For several years after this Caesar served in the Roman army in Asia Minor, returning to Rome after Sulla's death in 78. At first he devoted himself to public oratory in the law courts, and in 76 went to Rhodes to study rhetoric under the famous teacher Molo. For several years after his return to Rome in 74 he busied himself in strengthening his position with his party, and soon came to be looked on as one of its leaders. The senatorial party was at this time supreme, and Caesar had to win his way to power gradually. He went through the various grades of office by which Roman citizens rose to the rank of Consul, being in succession Quaestor, Curule Aedile, and Praetor. In 63 he was elected Pontifex Maximus, becoming technically the head of the Roman religion. This success over the aristocratic party showed clearly that its power was waning, and that Caesar was now one of the leaders of the Roman state.

In 61, immediately after his Praetorship, he went to Spain as Proprætor or Military Governor. Here, in his first command, he at once showed his ability as a general, in quelling the rebellious native tribes. His manner of living at Rome (for he was not only one of the ablest but one of the most dissolute of men during the earlier period of his manhood), and the means by which he had obtained office and ingratiated himself with the people, had plunged him heavily into debt. But the Governor of a Roman province had plenty of opportunities for enriching himself at the expense of the provincials, and one year in Spain freed him from all his debts, as well as making him known as a brilliant commander.

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