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Caesar's Crossing of the Adriatic Countered by a Winter Blockade During the Roman Civil War

Ian Longhurst

During the Roman Civil War that broke out in 49 BC between Julius Caesar and Pompey naval operations played a critical role. In order to confront Pompey's army quickly in the Balkans, a major amphibious crossing of the Adriatic was undertaken by Caesar's army. The text of Caesar's *Civil War* and other sources, including Lucan's epic poem *Pharsalia*, pose problems for understanding the campaign. This paper identifies and corrects a number of key points from the texts and reconstructs a new narrative that enhances our understanding of events. The most significant problem is the identification of Caesar's landing place for his army with Palaeste, when it can be shown that he probably landed inside the Gulf of Valona.

Key words: Julius Caesar, Roman Civil War, Lucan, Pharsalia, amphibious warfare, Gulf of Valona, Aulon, Adriatic, Oricum, Illyricum, Albania

During the Roman Civil War between Julius Caesar and Pompey (49–45 BC) naval operations played a critical role. Pompey had been forced out of Italy by Caesar's highly experienced legions in 49 BC and needed time to train his own numerically superior troops in the Balkans. If Pompey's huge superiority in war galleys could prevent Caesar crossing the Adriatic in the winter of 49–48 BC, as they surely could in the following summer, he would have that time. Hitherto this naval campaign has been incomprehensible and neglected because the detailed account in Caesar's writings has been misinterpreted by textual scholars, in ignorance of the difficulties of amphibious operations and the limitations of war galleys. This paper identifies a number of key problems that allow a narrative to be proposed that provides a more coherent description of the course of events.

The principal source for the campaign is Caesar's own commentary, published after his death in 44 BC. This is supplemented by the account in books 13–17 of the Roman historian Appian's *Roman History*, published some time before AD 162, and the Greek historian Cassius Dio's account in book 41 of his *Roman History*, written about AD 200.[1] The text of Caesar's *Civil War* has had a complex history, however, and for this reason there have been many attempts to examine errors and inconsistencies within it. Appian is less accurate than Caesar but he does include material not in Caesar.

1 Caesar's work is *Commentarii de Bello Civili*, or *Commentaries on the Civil War*, published in three books, hereafter *Civil War*. The five books of Appian's work (written in Greek, known in Latin as the *Historia Romana*) that deal with the civil wars are usually referred to in English as *Civil War*, books 1–5. Cassius Dio's *Historia Romana* was similarly written in Greek.

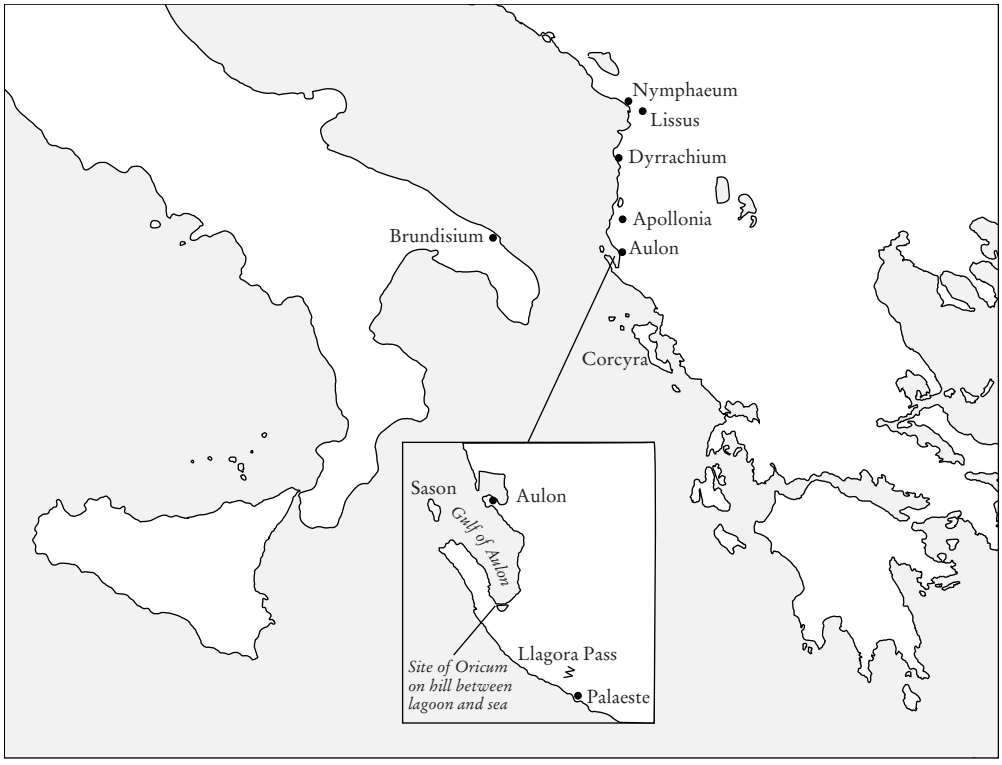

Figure 1 Map of the Adriatic showing the principal places referred to in the text

Caesar's text tells us that he weighed anchor on 4 January 48 BC.[2] It is generally inferred that Caesar was writing at about the time of the events he describes, so this was before the substantial reform of the calendar that he effected in 46 BC.[3] The date based on his reforms, known as the Julian calendar, is 6 November 49 BC. Appian, writing more than a century later, says that Caesar was held back until the first day of the new year, after the winter solstice,[4] and Dio says, 'When the winter was about half gone.' The effects of changes to the calendar give rise to many problems of chronology as we cannot be certain to which calendar they refer, or if they simply follow what Caesar said.

The fundamental problem in understanding this campaign arises from Lucan's epic poem of the Civil War, *Pharsalia*, written between AD 61 and AD 65. It was written with an overtly poetic and political purpose and includes many elements which are either inaccurate or entirely fictional. Lucan (5, 460) has Caesar landing his army at Palaeste (modern Palasë, figure 1). If this is the specific place, it renders Caesar's entire naval campaign incomprehensible, as it trivializes every conceivable problem encountered in amphibious warfare. In fact Caesar's landing was inside the gulf of Aulon (Valona/Vlorë). The following model narrative fits a landing at the gulf of Aulon logically into the related events.

2 Caesar, *Civil War* 3.6.
3 Gardner, *Caesar: The Civil War*, 28.
4 Appian, *Civil War* 2.54. Dio, *Roman History* 41.44.

A model narrative of the naval campaign

At the time that Caesar ordered the assembly of a fleet of merchant ships and an army of 12 legions at Brundisium (Brindisi), he probably aimed to sail across to Salona (Solin, near Split). Caesar gives some details on the siege of Salona by Pompey's forces, implying the city figured prominently in his planning.[5] However, when Caesar arrived at Brundisium he found only five legions and a grossly insufficient fleet to take his whole army across in one lift to Salona.[6] It is likely that Bibulus, Pompey's naval commander, had a rough understanding of these limitations and drew most of his galleys out of the water for the winter, thinking that Caesar could not cross at that time of year, especially as Caesar was expected to be politically busy in Rome.[7] Caesar heard that Pompey's galleys were mainly in Corfu, being laid up for winter. Understanding the importance of initiative and speed in warfare, Caesar abandoned his old plan for a new plan.

Pompey's army was dispersed in winter quarters leaving his main supply base of Dyrrachium (Durazzo or Durrës) potentially vulnerable to a surprise attack. Caesar planned to land his army on the coast of Illyricum (Albania), as near as he could to Dyrrachium, march on the city and seize Pompey's supplies. Caesar, with few warships, put all his available troops, some five legions, on board merchant sailing ships and waited for westerly winds from a passing depression. Two further legions arrived before favourable winds appeared and these infantry were distributed across the ships. Being very difficult to embark, the horses and their cavalry troopers from these two legions were left behind and would eventually land with Mark Antony.[8]

With the arrival of a favourable wind Caesar headed for Acroceraunia (Cape Linguetta), which he made on the following day. After ascertaining that no great number of Pompey's galleys were in the gulf of Aulon, he began landing his troops near Aulon itself, rather late in the day. A convoy of Pompey's grain ships escorted by 18 of his galleys were inside the gulf, in the Pasha Liman lagoon, which was the harbour for Oricum. Seeing this invasion fleet, the grain ships were sunk and the galleys escaped to Dyrrachium, taking news of the invasion. Caesar's ships were probably delayed on the final approach by the morning easterly Bora wind which would aid their departure the following day. With some difficulty and a great deal of time Caesar's troops were ferried ashore in small boats and Caesar ordered a night march south to Oricum, though some troops were also sent north. Only after this march were the cohorts and legions reconstituted from the mixed units on each ship. Oricum surrendered.

5 Caesar, *Civil War* 3.9.

6 Caesar at *Civil War* 3.2 says that he had shipping for 15,000 men and 500 horses. At first sight this is hard to reconcile with his other statement that he had seven legions (3.6) and 500 horses (3.2), but it is well known that Caesar's legions were below theoretical strength: IX Hispania had only 3,500 men, and I Germania is thought also to have had 3,500 when raised (Kelsy, *Caesar's Gallic War*, 22). At 3.89 Caesar implies that at Pharsalus his cohorts averaged 275 men which implied a legion of 2,750 men. Caesar's statement about 15,000 men therefore possibly relates to Caesar's original plan for a journey to Salona, a passage of 340 km where the troops would require more space than on a passage to Aulon, when only one night was spent at sea.

7 Caesar, *Civil War* 3.2.

8 Mark Antony landed 800 cavalry with four legions (*Civil War* 3.29).

Each sailing ship, once it had disembarked its troops, made its own independent way back to Brundisium as quickly as it could. They were aided in leaving the gulf by the easterly early morning Bora wind that tends to die away during the day. The main wind at sea allowed the ships to sail back to Brundisium.

The enemy galleys at Corcyra (Corfu) set out at dawn on the day after the landing. Some 30 or so ships in Caesar's fleet had not managed to leave the gulf before the Bora died out. Bibulus then arrived from Corcyra and burnt these ships, killing all the crews.

Bibulus recognized that Caesar had only half his army and that the rest was expected to follow shortly. Needing to maintain naval supremacy inside the gulf, Bibulus turned the island of Sason (Sazan) into a forward base where his galleys loaded supplies and rested crews. Sailing ships brought supplies from Corcyra and elsewhere to this island. Meanwhile, Caesar marched on Dyrrachium, trying to reach the city before Pompey. He failed and a stalemate between the two armies ensued.

Calenus, in charge of Caesar's ships at Brundisium, waited for the rest of Caesar's army to arrive and then boarded them and sailed again for Acroceraunia and the gulf. Calenus had few, if any, escorting galleys, as all 12 that went over with Caesar were still with him at Oricum. Bibulus's blockade of the gulf of Aulon separated Caesar's warships from the merchant ships, which they ought to have escorted. At sea, Calenus received a message from Caesar that Bibulus's galleys were stationed in numbers inside the gulf.[9] This was totally unexpected. Caesar had calculated that once his legions were ashore Bibulus would not have been able to maintain a blockade along a hostile coast.[10] Being unable to land, Calenus turned back, though one ship carried on and was captured inside the gulf and its crew killed.

From bases at Corcyra, Sason and Dyrrachium Pompey's galleys attempted to stop the rest of Caesar's army crossing in merchant ships. Galleys were not built for prolonged operations in winter and these conditions took their toll on Bibulus, who died. The fact that Pompey did not appoint a replacement overall naval commander was probably a crucial mistake.

The stalemate, though stable for some months, threatened to turn to Caesar's disadvantage in the spring. On land the opening of the campaigning season would see Pompey able to concentrate an overwhelming superiority of troops and especially of cavalry against Caesar.[11] At sea with calmer weather, Pompey's galleys could guarantee the blockade and keep Caesar's army divided and vulnerable. Caesar desperately needed the rest of his army before the end of winter. He needed the ships only to transport the army and was prepared to sacrifice these ships, on a one-way trip. He

9 There is a very tiny bay, Grama or Grammata Bay, on the forbidding west coast due south of Oricum, which has many ancient inscriptions, including one dated to 44 BC (Anamali, *Corpus des inscriptions latines*, no. 222) suggesting that many people must have embarked or landed there contemporary to these events. It was far too small for any substantial use but for out-going messengers it may have been ideal.

10 Few historians distinguish between the risk Caesar *thought* he was taking, from the actual risk.

11 The movement of large armies was restricted by the amount of fodder available to the horses and mules so campaigns usually only started after the grass began to grow. Caesar, being unable to carry large numbers of horses across the Adriatic, therefore had every incentive to fight a winter campaign.

gave orders for the sailing ships to wait for favourable weather and then, taking the army, sail for the sandy shore north of Aulon, which Caesar controlled. There the ships were to be run aground and the troops disembarked. These ships were bound to be destroyed by either the weather or Pompey's galleys and the owners, masters and crew of these ships were not prepared to see their livelihoods face such certain destruction. Calenus and Mark Antony tried to talk them around but failed.

Caesar's orders presented Mark Antony with two technical problems. The merchant ships available included large Mediterranean seagoing vessels that were not designed for beaching.[12] They had wineglass-shaped hulls designed to minimize leeway. If beached, they would heel over. This was not a problem for the men, but the horses would certainly panic and few could be extracted without broken legs. Specialist horse-transport vessels were needed.

The second, more crucial, problem was that many of his ships would beach in more than 2 metres of water. His soldiers would drown or be stranded within a few hundred metres of land. The boats carried by the sailing ships were smaller than Pompey's galleys but might have ridden the waves better than galleys. If the surf was too much for the ships' boats, specialist ferries or landing craft were needed. Mark Antony therefore needed good seagoing shallow-draught flat-bottomed vessels to ferry the soldiers between beached ships and shore. Such vessels were best built with symmetrical ends, to avoid the need to turn around and be exposed to beam seas. The Mediterranean shipwrights were busy building warships and were not skilled in building large flat-bottomed craft, but expert shipwrights on the Atlantic coast of Gaul were producing vessels, called *pontones* by Caesar, that were useful.[13] They were much larger than the sailing ships' boats and probably derived their design from ferries serving offshore islands and river estuaries.[14] They might have carried horses on the way over, but their ferry function was more important.[15] These vessels would eventually be retained by Mark Antony at Lissus (Lezhë, 3 miles from Nymphaeum) for the contingency of taking Caesar back to Italy.[16]

The prospect of the rest of the army at Brundisium joining Caesar became so remote that one story has some troops electing to march around the Adriatic to Caesar.[17] None are known to have made it. Caesar decided that he, and he alone,

12 The only clear indication of the size of the ships is that two of them carried about 200 soldiers each: Caesar, *Civil War* 3.28.

13 Caesar, *Civil War* 3.29, *pontones, quod est genus navium Gallicarum*, 'pontoons, which is a type of Gallic ship'.

14 This speculation is based on the operational requirement and the medieval derivation of the word pontoon from descendants of this type of vessel. Caesar's description (*Gallic Wars* 3.13) of the ships of the Veneti shows that a sophisticated Atlantic tradition of shipbuilding existed that was wholly different to the Mediterranean tradition. Both pontoons and punts are vessels that normally have flat bottoms and they are often symmetrical lengthwise. This feature was very useful for river ferries by avoiding turning. Casson, *Ships and Seamanship*, 169, n7, writes that these *pontones* reappear in *Civil War* 3.40 as the 30 *naves onerarias*, transport ships, at Lissus.

15 I assume they had an internal ramp and a drawbridge at the bow and stern for horses to be walked from ship to shore.

16 Caesar, *Civil War* 3.29 and later at 3.40; there they are called *naves onerarias*, vessels of burden, i.e. merchant vessels.

17 Appian, *Civil Wars* 2.59. Presumably not many legionaries were included, though it is possible Appian misdates this expedition for one which happened later. Gray-Fow *Qui Mare Teneat*, n74.

could overcome the objections of the owners and sailors of the merchant ships. He may have felt that because he was consul, he could personally coerce and cajole these civilians much more effectively than Calenus, as Appian says 'no one else could bring them so easily'.[18]

So in secret Caesar tried to get back to Italy in a small ship. He expected to evade the blockading galleys at night by waiting for a westerly wind that forced them away from the lee shore. However, the headwind and difficulties of rowing in waves in the river mouth proved too severe and, with the rowers exhausted, Caesar was forced to turn back at dawn for fear of being spotted.[19] Since this was a civil war, information flowed freely between the two sides and Pompey's forces heard of this escapade and tightened the blockade.

Facing an impasse Caesar relaxed his orders to Calenus and Mark Antony, telling them to come across even if they had to go north of Dyrrachium or south of Corcyra.[20] The destination was to be a natural harbour not blocked by Pompey's galleys. Caesar's existing army would have to march to meet the reinforcements, evading Pompey's army on the way. Caesar quietly made preparations for a long march by leaving a number of galleys and troops at Oricum. However, at least one copy of Caesar's new orders to Calenus was intercepted. Libo, one of Pompey's naval commanders, realized that the new orders broke the naval stalemate. With 50 of Pompey's galleys, Libo sailed for Brundisium and captured the small island off the harbour, hoping to prevent the fleet from leaving.[21] While Libo held the island, he stopped any movement of Mark Antony's army by sea.[22] He also prevented supplies entering Brundisium, potentially forcing some dispersion of that army[23]. Almost as important, he had transferred the decisive military theatre away from the presence and energy of Caesar.[24]

However, lacking easy access to water and full support from Pompey, who was too remote to coordinate all his naval forces, Libo was forced to withdraw.[25] If Pompey had appointed an overall naval commander, Libo might have been properly supported and may have succeeded in holding the island.

18 Appian *Civil Wars* 2.56.

19 Lucan, especially, and others in antiquity were remarkably fascinated by this attempt. As Caesar does not mention this episode we know little of it and rely on Appian *Civil Wars* 2.57.

20 Caesar controlled a long coastline which was impossible for Pompey's galleys to entirely blockade against small boats slipping across with messages.

21 I suggest later that Caesar, *Civil War* 3.23 and 25 have been wrongly ordered.

22 Gray-Fow *Qui Mare Teneat*; 162 misunderstands that in war being on the strategic offensive while being tactically defensive is the strongest possible position, which Libo achieved while he held the island in Brundisium harbour. If Pompey could not hold Brundisium's inner harbour against Caesar, Libo could not have taken it, even temporarily, against Antony.

23 When Libo captured one grain ship and destroyed other merchantmen (Caesar, *Civil War* 3.23), these must have been supply vessels in the outer harbour, mostly empty, waiting for favourable winds to depart, probably for Sicily.

24 One could construct a scenario where this is the time when Caesar tries to get back to Italy.

25 Caesar, *Civil War* 3.23 claims to quote a despatch from Libo to Pompey that he, Libo, did not need the support of the rest of the galley fleet, implying an unjustified arrogance by Libo. In truth, Libo needed sailing ships to provide water. More galleys would have made Libo's water supply problem worse.

While Libo was at Brundisium, messengers from Caesar successfully got through to Italy. With Libo gone, Calenus and Mark Antony, with the new instructions, were free to sail and they now came to an agreement with their sailors on a suitable destination, which would preserve their ships. The reinforcements duly sailed for the harbour of Nymphaeum (Shëngjin, or St Giovanni di Medua) another natural harbour, about 50 kilometres north of Dyrrachium and presumably of some size in antiquity.[26] We do not know when they landed but scholars have assumed 25 January in the Julian calendar and 27 March in the Roman calendar.[27] However, this landing had two military disadvantages. For Caesar, his army would be divided, with Pompey's united army in between and because of the longer passage to Lissus some of the reinforcements would have to be left in Brundisium. The ships would have to return a third time. Nevertheless, all but two of the ships landed their troops successfully and got away safely back to Brundisium. Despite Pompey's army being between Mark Antony and Caesar, Pompey failed to prevent them joining. The period when the naval conflict took centre stage was over.[28]

After their failure to stop Mark Antony, Pompey's admirals revised their strategy. First they destroyed Caesar's warships in the harbour of Oricum and raided Lissus.[29] Laelius, one of Pompey's admirals, then retook the island off Brundisium and successfully reimposed the blockade of the port, preventing further reinforcements for Caesar.[30]

Discussion and analysis

Creating a model narrative allows us to test certain hypotheses and to identify particular problems with previous interpretations of events. Some of these issues are now discussed.

1 Problems with the accuracy of Lucan's *Pharsalia*

Lucan, writing a hundred years after the event, had an agenda. He changed facts to exaggerate the element of luck in Caesar's career, the *fortuna caesaris*.[31] Almost certainly Lucan wanted to represent the coming of the emperor-system as chance and to delegitimize not only the current emperor, Nero, a descendant of Mark Antony, but the whole system.

Lucan's account of naval matters is not credible.[32] He was more interested in the emotional effect of naval warfare than its technical accuracy. At the time of writing,

26 Silting made it quite small in the Admiralty chart of 1878, no 1463, but it could certainly have been bigger in antiquity.

27 Chronological table in Kraner and Hofmann, *C. Iulii Caesaris commentarii de bello civili* .

28 After Pompey defeated Caesar at Dyrrachium, naval considerations may have played a decisive role but if they did, they left no record. Caesar retired to Thessaly and Pompey had a choice of objectives, one of which was crossing back to Italy. Pompey failed to exploit his preponderant naval power and followed Caesar into Thessaly.

29 Caesar, *Civil War* 3.40.

30 Caesar, *Civil War* 3.100. I suspect that Caesar's 'at the same time' (*eodem tempore*) had a very much looser meaning in antiquity than in a world of clocks. At the very least this blockade must have persisted long enough for merchant ships to bring up water.

31 Lintott, 'Lucan', 492

32 Grainger, *Hellenistic and Roman Naval Wars,* 172

the last naval encounter, Actium, was beyond human memory and so while Lucan and his intended audience would have been familiar with soldiering they would have little knowledge of naval warfare and so he could more freely fictionalize sea crossings.[33] None of Lucan's narrative statements can therefore be taken as accurate without some form of corroboration.[34]

Neither Lucan, nor his audience, would have expected the poem to keep to more than the bare bones of historical fact, which is how the Iliad was perceived at the time. Poetry is not history. As with of much of ancient history, personality plays an exaggerated role in the interpretation of this campaign. Consciously or not, the choice of Palaeste beautifully fits Lucan's purpose of maximizing personalities by minimizing physical problems. Lucan's geography is generally poor and while scholars have no problem recognizing that Thessalia (Thessaly) as a location in or adjacent to Epirus is an error,[35] there is a reluctance to acknowledge that Palaeste should be given no more credibility than Thessalia.

Pharsalus, as the name of the landing place in Caesar's text, was probably in the text from the beginning. The landing place and Pharsalus were both fairly obscure places, connected solely by this campaign and it is possible that the two simply became conflated. Caesar himself could very easily have misremembered one obscure place name for another in the same campaign. The suggestion that Lucan's use of Palaeste is merely a scribal error seems unlikely. Lucan is known to have visited Greece and may have seen the landmark zigzag path of the Llagora Pass, up the Strada Bianca, a white-sided ravine, from a passing ship. He may simply have wanted a name from approximately the right geographical area that fitted with his poetic purpose.

The centrepiece of Lucan's fifth book is Caesar's attempt to leave his army and sail back to Italy. Caesar, in a small boat in a storm, is a better subject for poetry than the technicalities of naval warfare. Lucan wants a simple emotional story where Caesar and would-be Caesars are antiheroes. Lucan eliminates the entire narrative of the naval campaign so he can put the delay in the arrival of Caesar's reinforcements down to the ambition of Mark Antony. If Caesar could land at Palaeste, Mark Antony ought to have had no trouble joining him. Lucan has Caesar say to Antony that he had gone before (*prior ipse*),[36] ignoring the historical reality that Calenus had already tried and failed to repeat Caesar's landing, on Caesar's order.

2 The strategic objective was Dyrrachium

There is no doubt that Caesar's strategic objective was Dyrrachium. Caesar wanted to use surprise to capture this city. Logic suggests that he should have landed his army, as near to Dyrrachium as possible, provided it was safe to do so. If Caesar landed near Oricum it was because he could not land any nearer Dyrrachium. Apart from a few offshore sand banks, the coast either side of Dyrrachium was far more hospitable

33 The Romans had conducted naval operations within human memory, such as the invasion of Britain, but there is no suggestion that they had encountered any opposition at sea, beyond perhaps a few pirates in the Red Sea.

34 On the other hand, Lucan's incidental facts are valuable e.g. 5.521 refers to *alga* as soft bedding. He certainly means eelgrass (*zostera marina*). It is difficult to imagine how else we could learn that this material was so used in Roman times.

35 Bourgery, 'La geographie dans Lucain'.

36 Lucan, *Pharsalia*, 5.488.

than at Palaeste. Caesar could have landed nearer Dyrrachium, north of the city, where Mark Antony landed. However, the fleet needed to get back to Brundisium to pick up reinforcements, which was time consuming from north of Dyrrachium. The longer sea passage would also have added significantly to the weather risk and Pompey's galleys at Dyrrachium could easily have contested landings there.

There is no reason to suggest that Caesar's fleet was blown, or drifted, off course. Caesar's text seems self-congratulatory about his destination. Caesar successfully took across 12 galleys, only four of which had complete decks, there is no suggestion that his fleet was scattered or damaged in its passage, this suggests he did not encounter severe weather.[37] The remarkably conspicuous landmarks of Acroceraunia and the modern Strada Bianca, near Palaeste, are both visible far out at sea, and would imply that Caesar was able to accurately navigate to his chosen destination.

3 Caesar needed a large natural harbour to land his army

No one would sensibly plan to land an army at Palaeste. This coast, according to the *Mediterranean Pilot*, 'has ever been dreaded of becoming a lee shore as a southwest gale blows direct onto the land',[38] and it faces directly into the prevailing wintertime southeast winds and coastal currents.[39] Nor could a fleet making for Palaeste hope to escape Bibulus' galleys, if it was spotted from Corcyra on its approach.

Caesar's crossing of the Adriatic in the Civil War has been interpreted without sufficient consideration of the immense difficulties of amphibious operations. Even if Caesar held a harbour, the large fleet would have taken so long to get in and out that they would surely have been caught by the enemy fleet. The fleet therefore had to disembark the troops using small boats through surf on to open beaches. Caesar needed seas both rough enough to deter large oared galleys, but calm enough for small rowed boats to land through surf. Caesar's Adriatic crossing was made even more difficult because the fleet had to immediately return to get the rest of the army. If Caesar lost his ships, even after they had disembarked his army, he would have lost the war. Yet wind direction limited the possible route of sailing ships. We can assume that the civilian masters and crews were not used to sailing in close convoy and the fleet would naturally scatter over a considerable area, despite the best efforts to keep the fleet together. They would require much more sea room than a fleet of standardized galleys, both because of their variety and because they would take each other's wind if too close.

The approach and retreat from the landing beaches was no easy task, but could be accomplished on different tacks so that something less than a 180° turn was required.[40] Sailors would fear being trapped, wrecked or stranded on a lee shore, but an offshore easterly wind would set up the fleet as easy prey to Pompey's galleys.

37 Both Lucan and Caesar would surely, for different reasons, have mentioned any storm. Many historians are vague in expressing the view that Palaeste was not the original objective, e.g. 'the huge convoy drifted far to the south during the night': Jiménez, *Caesar against Rome*, 129.

38 Description of coast for 32 (sea) miles from Cape Linguetta to Port Palermo, *Med. Pilot* 1880.

39 *Med. Pilot* 1880, 15. The current is generally about half a mile an hour but greater near the coast and with southerly winds.

40 It matters whether we think Caesar's vessels were square or fore-and-aft rigged. I suspect that larger square rigged ships were used. We know that two could carry about 200 soldiers each, surely with enough space on board to sleep when on the longer passage to Lissus (Caesar, *Civil War* 3.28).

The wind, local geography and the presence of the enemy could easily have trapped and destroyed the fleet on the coast of Epirus.

Caesar could only land his troops in a natural harbour of some considerable size.[41] There is only one suitable destination that seamen would have willingly taken the fleet and that is the gulf of Aulon. Caesar could not afford to let his fleet stay too long and would have aimed to disembark his army at the earliest opportunity, in the mouth of the gulf. The lack of suitable landing beaches on the western side of the gulf means he must have landed near Aulon.[42]

4 Beaching of Mediterranean merchant ships was destructive

Caesar wrote, 'Having obtained a favourable wind they should not let slip the chance of sailing, and they would be able to set a course either to the shores of the Apolloniates or (unnamed place) and run their ships ashore there.'[43] We do not know where the unnamed place was but if Palaeste played any role in this whole narrative it might have been here, when the ships were deemed disposable and Caesar was desperate. As most enemy galleys were now in the bay of Aulon, rather than at Corfu, an adverse coastal current could hold them up even if they ventured out. Had Calenus done what Caesar wanted his ships, if not destroyed by the weather, would have been destroyed by Pompey's galleys. Caesar *could* have beached his ships near Palaeste, but many of his soldiers would have drowned; he would never have got his sailing ships away again and most of his horses would have had broken legs. Caesar's *navis eicere* shows that he was getting desperate enough that he was prepared to sacrifice all the transport ships to get the rest of his army across. Appian understood this point, which is why he has Caesar tell his troops 'not to mind what happened to the ships, because Caesar did not want ships but men'.[44] Clearly Appian's Caesar understood that *navis eicere* entailed the destruction of the ships. As we have seen, the ships' crews and owners must have vetoed this plan, as the orders were not obeyed.

Beaching a ship was easy; floating it off was the problem. Beaching a ship on a falling tide was certainly common practice around much of the North Sea and ships were often built flat-bottomed for the purpose. Caesar himself describes the ships of the Veneti of Brittany as being much flatter bottomed than Roman ships and that they had less to fear from being beached by the tide.[45] Vessels could be loaded or unloaded at low tide, often directly on to carts, and floated off on a subsequent high tide.[46] This

41 Caesar's soldiers would have been heavily encumbered. Transfer from ship to boat and boat to land was not simple even in a flat calm. Each boat would make many trips. Landing the men was trivially simple compared to landing the horses, which must have numbered 500.

42 The ancient city of Aulon was somewhat to the north of the present city of Valona/Vlorë (see Hammond *Epirus*; 700, map 18) and lay between the lagoon and the sea. The harbour of ancient Aulon, meaning channel, was inside the lagoon. Caesar could have landed at ancient Aulon and not at its harbour.

43 Caesar, *Civil War* 3.25.

44 Appian, *Civil War* 2.58. Appian may well be quoting from an intercepted message from Caesar himself.

45 Caesar, *Gallic Wars* 3.13.

46 The adoption of the wineglass hull is associated with the movement away from inland ports to new harbours on the sea such as Alexandria, Thessalonica, and Nea Paphos. Flat or rounded hull profiles were more suited to smaller vessels working in river deltas and estuaries.

is what Caesar means when he landed in Britain. Around Albania tides are less than half a metre. The projecting stern of Mediterranean galleys was partly designed for amphibious operations, including landing troops on beaches, but even galleys were not normally beached on military operations, but only to be cleaned and dried.

Extrapolating from galleys or northern ships to Mediterranean sailing vessels is wrong. No doubt the very smallest Mediterranean sailing ships could be beached, but there is good reason to believe that the larger ships with lead sheathing, some easily weighing 150 tonnes, were incapable of being easily refloated.[47] These and other ships tended to have a wineglass hull shape, to minimize leeway, but this would mean that they were likely to heel over when beached.[48] The weight of the ship would bear mostly on the beach under the keel, either digging the ship into the beach or wrecking the ship.[49] The leverage of masts and spars and the possible shifting of cargo or ballast could also exacerbate the problems of a heeled over ship.

Beaching a sailing ship does not, by itself, solve the problem of getting the troops onto land.[50] On the flat coast where Caesar wanted the ships to run aground, the ships might ground around half a mile from shore.[51] Wading through a cold winter sea would soak the soldiers and their gear, food and bedding and reduce their capacity for fighting.[52] Even a metre of water could prove lethal to many heavily burdened soldiers. In Caesar's invasion of Britain, the ships were probably flat-bottomed and grounded in water shallow enough for the soldiers to leap over the side successfully, but the water was still deep enough to be troubling.[53]

We should probably take 1.5 metres as the maximum draught of any ship for directly landing troops onto a beach. We do not know the size of Caesar's ships but we should assume a range of sizes, as there is no doubt that he was short of capacity and would collect everything available. Most scholars suggest a draught of 3 metres,[54] but the largest ships, when heavily laden, could have drawn about 5 metres.[55]

I suggest the *pontones* were Mark Antony's solution to this problem. Lucan also supports this argument where he states, 'Soon the ships gathered speed, and the breakers followed in their wake, till they sped along with favouring wind and tide

47 Drawing a ship out of water gave protection against ship-worm on the one hand and scrapped away the lead sheathing on the other, making beachable and non-beachable ships archaeologically distinguishable categories.

48 Wilson 'The economic influences', 217.

49 Archaeology of wrecks of this period shows that ships were liable to have their wineglass keels ripped off. Pomey, 'Les conséquences', 54.

50 Caesar, *Civil War* 3.28, clearly shows that on one occasion troops could successfully land from a beached ship. However, this ship had failed to keep up with the fleet and was probably among the smallest in the fleet.

51 *Med. Pilot* 1880, 248 reports the 5-fathom line, in places, is nearly 2 miles from the coast.

52 Mean February sea temperatures are about 14 °C on the landing beaches, *Med. Pilot* 2008, 24.

53 Caesar, *Gallic Wars* 4.24.

54 Wilson, 'The economic influences', 226, states 'water was deep enough (2–3 metres) to allow medium to large cargo ships to dock'.

55 Polybius 4.40.8 states that *large* ships required a pilot in the Sea of Azov because this sea was so shallow. Trajan's harbour of Portus was dug to a depth of nearly 7 metres and the harbour at Ostia to 6 metres. Although the Romans tended to over-engineer their works, digging to 6 and 7 metres when the requirement was only 3.5 metres seems wildly excessive, even for Romans.

and grappled with their anchor-flukes the sands of Palaeste.'[56] A ship driving directly on to the beach would have no need to use anchors, but ships sitting some way off the shoreline certainly would.

5 Reinforcements, surprise and weather prediction all limited Caesar's options

Winter was a better time for Caesar to attempt his invasion than summer because larger sailing ships could cope with rough weather better than galleys. In winter, the winds were changeable, easterlies being three times as common as westerlies.[57] Caesar might have to wait to get across, but once there his ships had a good chance of getting back safely. The stronger the wind, the greater the advantage of sailing ships over galleys.

On average 60 depressions a year which form in the northern Adriatic, Po Valley or north-west of the western Mediterranean move into the Ionian Sea; the vast majority of these continue moving roughly east.[58] These depressions are much smaller than Atlantic depressions and mainly occur in winter. They make for rapid changes in wind direction, which inhibited long sea passages, but probably aided communication across the Strait of Otranto. There is increasing realization that the ancient literature, which speaks of a complete cessation of sailing in winter, was far from true.[59] Experienced seamen at Brundisium would have had a reasonable prospect of being able to forecast the winds for the journey across the Adriatic and back. The normal operation of the Roman empire surely demanded constant communication across this strait, all through the winter. Indeed, communication across this straight by sail was probably easier in winter, than in summer because of a lack of easterly winds in the summer.[60]

Sailors would have had an empirical knowledge that at Brundisium winds would change over a period of a few days. A depression in the Tyrrhenian Sea would normally give favourable winds for a crossing from west to east at Brundisium. When the depression was in the Ionian, or Aegean, the reverse course was possible. The weather recorded at Brindisi airport in 2015 illustrates the potential for variation within a very general pattern.[61] After a period of SE/SSE winds of 23–29 mph, on the first day of the winds slackened to 6–8 mph in the early morning with a variable direction, from mid-day to midnight winds were mainly SSW and 10–14 mph. The second day had mostly weak winds of 2–6 mph when the wind direction switched round to NNW. From early on the third day, winds mainly of 20–22 mph of W/NW direction continued until evening. Winds of a consistent N direction succeeded for two full days going from about 22 to 17 mph over this period. On the sixth day, winds still of a northerly direction slackened to 8 mph. This particular depression was rather weak when in the Ionian Sea but strengthened in the Aegean and as it went further east and become a severe storm when it hit Lebanon.

The main weather risk for Caesar was if a depression in the Tyrrhenian Sea enticed him across to Epirus but the depression weakened and did not move. His ships

56 Lucan, *Pharsalia* 5.460.
57 *Med. Pilot* 1880, 6.
58 *Med Pilot* 2008, 31.
59 Beresford, *The Ancient Sailing Season.*
60 See the wind rose in the Straight of Otranto. *Med. Pilot* 2008, 32.
61 Data for 1–6 Feb. 2015 from the website of Brindisi airport, adjacent to the port.

would then remain wind-bound off Valona and the sea state would cease to deter Bibulus. Calm weather, rather than a gale, was the greatest threat to Caesar. Gales at Brundisium are very rare and gale force winds are only expected 10 days a year at Valona.[62] Even in January the swell in the Strait of Otranto is less than 0.1 metres 17 per cent of the time.[63]

On the Albanian coast, a local katabatic wind, the Bora, would help push the ships away from land into the more general wind pattern. This wind, mentioned by Caesar, occurs when the cold high-pressure air over the mountains rushes down the coastal mountainsides to displace the warmer air over the sea. This gusting wind is more likely at night and early morning with passing coastal depressions.[64] At Aulon, on average in November, the easterly winds blow 34 per cent of the time at 7 a.m, but blow only 9 per cent of the time by 1 p.m.[65] Once outside the bay of Aulon almost any wind would render Caesar's ships safe from Bibulus' galleys and they would have plenty of time to return to Brundisium.[66] In the event 30 ships failed to get away with the Bora and were burnt by Bibulus' warships.[67]

Caesar judged that inaction carried more risk than setting sail at that time of year. An absolute requirement for Caesar's success would have been his willingness to listen to the professional advice of mariners. Caesar's plan was also only workable if he knew that few of Bibulus' fleet were already inside the gulf. Somehow, Caesar must have known the whereabouts of Bibulus' fleet.[68]

6 Caesar's text explicitly points to the bay of Aulon

There are *two* important facts when Caesar says, '*Ceraunorum saxa inter et alia loca periculosa quietam nactus stationem*' (between the rocks of the Ceraunian range and other dangerous places, he came upon a calm anchorage).[69] He could not be *between* the rocks at Palaeste, but at the mouth of the gulf of Aulon he had mountains to the east, west and south with the rocky island of Sason behind him. At Palaeste the waters could not be calmer than on the passage over as any waves generated by the westerly wind would not dissipate until they reached land. In the gulf of Aulon, given a southerly or westerly wind, precisely the winds to bring the fleet over, the sea would be far calmer in the gulf, than on the way over. Caesar personally gives us the precise location where he landed his army but modern scholars have overlooked this location in preference to Lucan, who gives a name.

62 *Med. Pilot* 2008, 44, 55.

63 *Med Pilot* 2008, 21.

64 Especially in the southern Adriatic. The Bora in the northern Adriatic is very dangerous to sailing ships (*Med. Pilot* 1880, 7).

65 *Med. pilot* 2008, 46. Including SE and NE winds in these easterlies alters these numbers to 42 per cent and 25 per cent.

66 Sailing ships could certainly sail at 90° to the wind without bother and when under way were difficult for galleys to board or ram.

67 Gray-Fow, *Qui Mare Teneat*, 160, misinterprets the location of these ships, which were close inshore to where the Bora is localized and wrongly blames Calenus when Caesar had the warships.

68 Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 41.44 implies that the mainland opposite was rather carelessly guarded by Bibulus.

69 Caesar, *Civil War* 3.6.

On this coast anchorages are few because the deep waters come close inshore.[70] There was, though, an anchorage near modern Valona, where Caesar almost certainly disembarked. How many of his ships chose to actually anchor is a moot point. His ships were not intended to stay long and anchoring could dangerously delay their departure if Bibulus approached.

Caesar says of the opposing forces:[71]

> At Oricum were stationed Lucretius Vespillo and Minucius Rufus, with 18 Asiatic ships, which they commanded on the order of Decimus Laelius, and at Corfu Marcus Bibulus with a 110 ships. The former, lacking confidence, did not dare to come out of port, although Caesar had brought as an escort 12 warships in all, four of which had a deck, while Bibulus, with his ships obstructed and his rowers dispersed, did not meet him quickly enough, because Caesar was sighted at the mainland before report of his arrival could reach those areas in any way.

This shows that Caesar's fleet was clearly within striking range of ships in Oricum but beyond the striking range of Bibulus' galleys at Corfu. This would not have been true for a landing at Palaeste. On a clear day a fleet at Palaeste could potentially be seen from the 900-metre peak on Corcyra. The fleet at Corcyra was vastly better placed to engage landings at Palaeste than the ships at Oricum. Conversely, the carrying of a message, by sea or land, about the sighting of the fleet at dawn off Acroceraunia could not reach Bibulus until after midday. His chance of reaching the safe waters of the bay of Aulon during the remaining daylight hours was nil. Only the most foolhardy admiral would launch a fleet of galleys of diverse nationalities, in winter, in anything but the calmest weather, especially with the prospect of a night-time battle. He would have waited until dawn before starting.

The ships at Oricum did have the opportunity to engage, while Bibulus at Corcyra did not. Caesar's text therefore only makes sense, if his army disembarked inside the gulf of Aulon and not at Palaeste.

7 If Caesar landed at Palaeste, his reinforcements could not have been stopped

Translators who accept the Palaeste emendation then have a major problem in how to translate the following sentence from Caesar's account:

> *hoc confecto negotio a Sasonis ad Orici [Corici, Coryci, Coricy] portum stationes litoraque omnia longa lateque classibus occupavit*
>
> With this operation accomplished, he [Bibulus] occupied with his squadrons the anchorages and all the shorelines far and wide from the port of Sason to that of Oricum.[72]

Clearly any coastal blockade must include Palaeste or the narrative becomes incoherent and there have been various unsuccessful attempts to emend one or other of these place names. This is an example of Brown's view that emendations to the

70 Most of the gulf is 20–28 fathoms (36.6–51.2 metres) deep. Unlike the Veneti (see Caesar, *Gallic Wars* 3.13), the Romans would have used cables rather than chains, which needed to be about five times the depth to get a firm horizontal grip on the bottom.

71 Caesar, *Civil War* 3.7.

72 Caesar, *Civil War* 3.8.

text cause further emendations.[73] Even Damon's recent version emends '*Sasonis*' of the archetype text to '*Salonis*',[74] suggesting Caesar had a rhetorical motive by implying that Pompey had overreached himself. If Caesar did write '*Salonis*' this sentence is devoid of historical value as it was physically impossible for galleys to maintain a blockade along any exposed coast in winter. In a much later age galleys, even in calm weather, were 'ill-advised to be found out of port at night time, in winter'.[75] The visibility from the mast head of these later galleys was theoretically about 13 kilometres,[76] much less than available when in harbour from the land. Ancient galleys were not so different in these respects. As Caesar reports, Pompey's galleys did not venture far from port.[77] When Caesar tells us that merchant ships brought up wood and water but even so the fleet became short of water at one point, he is telling us that Bibulus' galleys did not and could not sail freely along the coast. Further a blockade of a long coastline should imply a dispersal of galleys into a string of harbours along that coast but Caesar tells us that Bibulus was reinforced by Libo[78] implying a concentration at one place and when Antony eventually landed at Nymphaeum there were no galleys waiting for him.

Damon partly justifies her emendation by saying that Sason blocks the entry to Oricum, so that the later is automatically blockaded from Sason. So why was Oricum mentioned? Damon has forgotten Caesar's galleys at Oricum. Sailing ships when under way were nearly invulnerable and could have sailed straight past Sason. Bibulus needed galleys off Oricum to keep Caesar's galleys away while he engaged any sailing ships deep inside Valona Bay. Damon also partly justifies her emendation of '*Sasonis*' to '*Salonis*' by legitimately arguing that the sense in the Latin, here translated as 'far and wide', strongly suggests an area much greater than the gulf of Aulon. But 'far and wide' might apply not to the actions of the galleys against ships but against Caesar's troops. On all three sides of the gulf the roads and paths necessarily come down to the top of the beach in places. Galleys stationed offshore at various points could fire on and gravely interfere with the movement of troops and civilians around the bay by forcing long diversions.[79] As wood and water were probably available all around the bay one can envisage situations where skirmishes were also occurring all around the bay in order to obtain, on the one side, or deny, on the other side, wood and water for the galleys. For Caesar and the soldiers on land the galleys did appear disposed 'far and wide'. Even so this explanation is of a subjective experience and one feels Caesar should have given us an objective statement. Though perhaps mechanical transport has vastly expanded our modern view of the distances the expression 'far and wide' requires, compared with Caesar's audience.

Military logic dictates that Sason and Oricum were not both destinations for Calenus. The military point is that Oricum could not be blockaded, by galleys in

73 Brown, *The Textual Transmission*, p. 67.

74 Damon, *Studies on the Text of Caesar's Bellum Civile*, 211, but '*Salonis*' is in the *editio princeps* or first edition printed at Rome in 1469.

75 Gardiner, *The Age of the Galley*, 210.

76 Ibid., 213 n22.

77 Caesar, *Civil War*, 3.25.

78 Caesar, *Civil War*, 3.15.

79 Polyaenus, *Strategica* 8, 23, 13 has an anecdote of later in the campaign where harassing fire from galleys forced troops, on the march, to carry their shields on the right.

winter, except by occupying Sason. Provided the place names are not emended, the sense comes through. Damon seems to think that because Sason was not mentioned by Caesar elsewhere, unlike Salonis, it weakens the likelihood that Sason was in the original text. In my opinion the reverse is true. Sason was special from a naval point of view. The elder Pliny said it was a haunt of pirates, while Polybius tells us galleys and sailing ships might normally anchor alongside each other there.[80] In this campaign Sason played the same role with respect of the gulf of Aulon as Brundisium island would later play with respect to Brundisium harbour in both this and the next civil war.

Bibulus needed to keep galleys on station inside the gulf, so Sason became a forward operating base for enforcing a very localized blockade. In calm weather the galleys could screen the entire coast. In rough weather the only times Calenus was likely to cross, the galleys could still dominate the calm waters inside the gulf and prevent a repeat of Caesar's landing. No galley fleet could have prevented Calenus from beaching his ships at Palaeste or near Apollonia. When Rhodian galleys tried to tackle Mark Antony's crossing at sea they lost all 16 decked ships to the weather and Rhodians were regarded as the best Mediterranean seafarers.[81]

Galleys were not built to operate independently for long durations at sea, nor in winter, and the cold nights would be debilitating for the crews. These cold nights are what probably killed Bibulus.[82] We are told that Bibulus brought wood and water from Corcyra to supply his galleys,[83] but few, if any, galleys had fireplaces and this wood was surely used on Sason. Sason provided a 'temporary anchorage, on the north-east side',[84] where Bibulus' galleys could take water and food from his merchant ships coming from Corcyra. Bibulus could never have maintained a blockade in the gulf for more than a few days without occupying Sason.[85] Sason also offered a superb lookout; from its peak the horizon was about 65 kilometres away, giving Bibulus plenty of warning of an approaching fleet.

When Calenus and Caesar separated, Caesar's plan must have assumed that once his army was ashore, Bibulus would not have been able to maintain a blockade inside the gulf of Aulon with Caesar's army occupying the shore because of a lack of water. We are told that Calenus set sail with reinforcements but was warned off by a message from Caesar. Bibulus must have done something to surprise Caesar, which would almost certainly be written down in Caesar's account. The occupation of Sason by Bibulus is the only candidate for such a surprise. The destination of Calenus was inside the gulf of Aulon because one of his ships did try to cross and

80 Pliny *Natural History* 3.152 and Polybius 5, 110.

81 Caesar, *Civil War* 3.27. Caesar was not a witness to the change of fortune he reports. At Shëngjin the *Med. Pilot* 2008, 182, says 'Gales from this (SW) direction are unknown.' There is no obvious reason why these galleys could not have anchored in the good anchorage south of the harbour.

82 Caesar, *Civil War* 3.18.

83 Caesar, *Civil War* 3.15.

84 *A Handbook of Macedonia*, 491.

85 The difficulty for galley fleets to maintain a blockade along hostile shores is illustrated by the failure of Pompey's fleet to hold Brundisium island (Caesar, *Civil War* 3.23–24). Though as Caesar, *Civil War* 3.100, shows, galleys could do so when supplied from sailing vessels.

was taken off Oricum.[86] If Calenus was aiming for the gulf of Aulon surely he was trying to repeat Caesar's successful landing destination.

I feel sure that the above Latin sentence once, but no more, contained logistics information to back up the above argument. There is an adage that armchair generals talk strategy and real generals talk logistics. Caesar was a real general and would have recognized, if reluctantly, the outstanding administrative feat of Bibulus in maintaining a large fleet of galleys for many winter months off Oricum. But it is in the nature of administration and logistics to be written out of history by armchair strategists. This administrative feat, more than the burning of 30 ships, ought to have related to the *negotium confectum*, especially as this probably involved commercial incentives for supply from sailing ships. Similarly the 'far and wide', *longa lateque*, makes more sense if it referred to the area from which sailing ships supplied the blockading galleys. But one cannot speculate more than this.

8 Two sets of orders

Caesar ordered Calenus to land the reinforcements by running his ships aground on to the sandy coast near Apollonia that he, Caesar already controlled. This did not happen. Caesar's text has a significant lacuna here but Appian records Caesar's orders differently.[87] This is evidence of two sets of orders, where the less restrictive orders come after, and in response to, the failure of the reinforcements to arrive under the first orders.

Appian's record of Caesar's orders to his soldiers comes chronologically after the failure of Caesar's attempt to get back to Italy. Appian says Caesar sent a messenger telling his soldiers to 'sail *to any place where the wind might carry them*, and not to mind what happened to the ships, because Caesar did not want ships but men'.[88] There is a subtlety that should not be lost from Appian's account. Appian is claiming to report Caesar's message, the very message that my model supposes Libo intercepted. Intercepted letters in a military campaign are far more likely to enter the historical record, than messages which arrive safely. Libo's attack on Brundisium surely belongs after Caesar changed his orders and Mark Antony sailed soon after he had rebuffed Libo.[89] If Libo had the opportunity, he might have been able to organize an effective transport of water and tried again, as was to occur later.[90] We cannot know the time interval between the two captures of the Brundisium island by Pompey's forces but the logic of war suggests a shorter interval than all current chronologies.

86 Caesar, *Civil War* 3.14.

87 Caesar, *Civil War* 3.25: *sive ad Labeatium* was added by Peskett (1966) on the authority of Kraner and Hofmann (1906) but the latest Oxford Classical Text edition by Damon omits *ad Labeatium*.

88 A messenger could get through much more easily than Caesar because of the length of coast controlled by Caesar, whereas Caesar himself could not be inconspicuous for more than a few hours. Appian *Civil Wars* 2.58.

89 I suggest that Caesar, *Civil War* 3.23 and 25 have been wrongly ordered, probably because Caesar in expunging the account of his attempt to get back to Italy oversimplified events. The addition of *sive ad Labeatium* in order that Mark Antony's landing place does not contradict Caesar's orders is not helpful.

90 Caesar, *Civil War* 3.100.

9 Bibulus' terror tactics were rational

Bibulus often gets a bad press for his attack on Caesar's ships left behind after his main fleet had returned to Brundisium.[91] No scholar has seen his killing of the crews of Caesar's ships as rational or appreciated the difficulties of an aggressive use of a fleet of a coalition of states of lukewarm allies who used different languages. A central feature of this civil war is that most Roman allies had little enthusiasm for either side.

When Bibulus kills all the crews of the ships he captures, he is not being pointlessly vindictive; he is seeking to deter the remaining crews from aiding Caesar. Burning the ships deterred the owners. Bibulus' terror tactics were entirely rational, neutrality was not allowed.

10 How and why did Caesar's galleys reach Oricum?

Caesar refers to his warships being at Oricum.[92] These warships surely came over with Caesar's own invasion into the Gulf of Valona, though one historian has them come over with Antony and then sail to Oricum.[93] Basing these galleys at Oricum would not make any sense if the follow-up landings were to be at Palaeste. In view of the success of the initial landings, it would be reasonable to assume that the follow-up landings would be in the same place. If Caesar had landed at Palaeste and these warships had made their way independently to Oricum, why had they not met and been destroyed by the 18 enemy warships at Oricum?

When under way, large heavily built sailing ships were nearly invulnerable to boarding attacks from galleys.[94] An example of triremes defending themselves behind a screen of merchant ships carrying a complement of soldiers is reported elsewhere in the literature. Caesar's galleys could therefore be protected effectively by being dispersed among the merchant ships because a galley was very vulnerable to being rammed itself, when ramming a merchant vessel.[95] For this reason, the separation of Caesar's galleys from his merchant ships when Bibulus occupied Sason was a significant setback

Most galley-to-galley warfare involved boarding. Provided Caesar's galleys never left the company of his legions they could receive an infinite replenishment of fresh soldiers, delivered by small boats in the calm waters of the gulf. Events at Brundisium show that small boats could play a significant role in galley warfare in a flat calm, in constricted waters.[96] Protected by the fleet of merchant ships and the beach, Caesar's galleys and boats could hold their own against Pompey's galleys. When Caesar says the 18 galleys 'dare not attack' he is being serious and accurate. Caesar's 12 galleys could easily have been crushed by Pompey's 18 at Oricum, without the protection

91 Gray-Fow, *Qui Mare Teneat,* 144, 'a dull, unimaginative man' and Gray-Fow, 'The Mental Breakdown of a Roman Senator'.

92 Caesar, *Civil War* 3.39.

93 Pitassi, *The Roman Navy*, 173.

94 Polyaenus, *Strategica* 6.16.3, gives an example of triremes defending themselves behind a screen of merchant ships with soldiers in the merchant ships.

95 While the circumstances are very different, we hear of galleys hiding behind merchant ships in Thucydides (7.41).

96 Caesar, *Civil War* 3.24. Thucydides (7.40) attaches the same significance to small boats in fighting inside the harbour of Syracuse.

of the army, merchant ships and small boats. They were far too small a force for independent action. The presence of Caesar's galleys at Oricum is most explicable if those warships had never left the company and support of Caesar's army, which therefore must have landed in the gulf of Aulon and not at Palaeste.

11 Appian and Dio both support a landing in the bay of Aulon

Neither Appian nor Dio corroborate Lucan's Palaeste. Appian says Pompey's ships at Oricum were guarding some grain ships which were sunk to prevent them falling into Caesar's hands.[97] If Caesar was marching from Palaeste his soldiers ought not to have presented any threat to these ships. They only needed to be towed out of bowshot from the land to be entirely safe. It is likely that when Pompey's galleys saw Caesar's fleet inside the bay they expected a naval encounter and sank the cargo ships to free their war galleys from an impossible encumbrance.

Appian also says, 'The ships were driven by the winds to the Ceraunian Mountains and Caesar sent them back immediately.'[98] This implies that the ships were sailing at about 90° to the wind in both directions or the change in wind direction was perfectly predicted. Both possibilities suggest the fleet was under perfect control and reached its intended destination. Using this text to suggest the fleet was hampered by bad weather is problematic as it is then difficult to explain why the weather caused no apparent problems for Caesar's or Pompey's galleys.

Appian describes the night march from the landing beaches to Oricum as over a 'rough and narrow path'.[99] The soldiers, carrying a lot of gear, would have landed near the mouth of the gulf and made their way to the head of the gulf. The path from the mouth of the bay of Valona (Aulon), near Valona, to the head of the gulf of Valona, is described as 9 miles (14.5 kilometres) long of which four miles are along the shore, then the path 'rises high above the water. Path is a mere series of ledges along the cliff'.[100] In modern times, it was said to take seven hours to walk from Oricum to Valona.[101] This is a good fit to Appian's description. In contrast the path from modern Palasë to the head of the gulf is 17 miles long, ascending the Llogara Pass at 1,994 feet (608 metres)[102] by a 'zigzag ledge of the most forbidding kind', with valleys along the way adding at least another 1,000 feet (305 metres).[103] This just looks too long and impractical for an army marching at night that was still wet from landing in the surf, especially as there was no moon that night.[104]

Appian also states that on this night march Caesar's force was split into several parts 'because of the difficulty of the terrain'. Appian is probably making a false

97 Appian 2.54. According to Caesar, *Civil War* 3.39, at least two merchant ships were presumably captured intact as they were available later for use in defending his warships at Oricum. Or perhaps they came over with Caesar's galleys.

98 Appian 2.54.

99 Appian2.54.

100 *A Handbook of Macedonia,* 174–5.

101 Hammond, *Epirus*, 130.

102 The pass on the modern road is said to be at 1,027 metres. Presumably the nineteenth-century path clung to the side of the valley.

103 Hammond, *Epirus*.

104 Almost exactly two synodic lunar months before this eclipse; http://www.eclipsewise.com/solar/SEprime/-0099--0000/SE-0047Jan04Pprime.html

deduction from a correct fact. The merchant ships would arrive and disembark their troops in a haphazard manner. The troops would be hopelessly disordered on the landing beaches, especially after nightfall. It surely made sense to send the troops south and only form up the units in the morning.

Dio refers to Caesar crossing to the 'Ceraunian Headlands, as they are called, the outermost point of Epirus near the mouth of the Ionian Gulf' (the peninsula on the west of the bay of Aulon).[105] Without Lucan no one would interpret Dio to imply a landing at Palaeste. Fleets navigated by landmarks, and this headland was remarkably conspicuous because it was so high near the cape. No sailing fleet would head for Acroceraunia on the way to Palaeste because of the adverse coastal current. A fleet rendezvous off the headland at the entrance to the bay of Aulon made military sense, prior to a landing inside the bay.

Another potentially relevant source is Strabo's *Geography*, which gives a list of harbours along this coast. 'Panormus, a large harbour in the centre of the Keraunian Mountains' is identified as the naval station of Oricum, that is to say the lagoon harbour of Oricum.[106] While there is some doubt on the identification of the various harbours, there is nothing in Strabo or in the modern topography to suggest that there had ever been a harbour of any kind at Palaeste.

Conclusion

A vast number of books have been written about Julius Caesar but it is remarkable how few words have been given to this naval campaign, especially considering the attention paid to the land campaign.[107] Despite Caesar's detailed narrative, Lucan's amendment has meant the naval campaign has been obscured and made virtually incomprehensible. While there may be errors in the model campaign narrative given above, in broader terms the campaign history is clear. The geography of the gulf of Aulon and Bibulus' initial failure to guard it gave Caesar an option for using merchant ships for a winter campaign that a lesser, or more patient, general would not have seen. Bibulus' occupation of Sason came very close to defeating Caesar's plan and probably would have defeated Caesar, if Libo's occupation of Brundisium island could have been sustained.[108]

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105 Dio, *Roman History* 41.44)

106 Roller, *The Geography of Strabo,* 310, 316.

107 Especially Veith, *Der Feldzug von Dyrrhachium.*

108 An interesting question is why did Pompey not attempt to hold Brundisium Island after he evacuated the port? At least a partial answer is that Pompey's naval superiority was not as great at that time. In addition perhaps the experience of using Sason as a base was necessary before the utility of Brundisium island could be recognized.

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