

Caput II – Caesar’s Rubicon and Caesar’s Rome

When Caesar led his army across the **Rubicon flumen**, the **Rubicon River** ¹ in 49 BCE; he told the soldiers he was fighting for the liberties of the State. Caesar argued his case by pointing to legal irregularities. Tradition holds the date of crossing occurred during the night of **ante diem III Idus Ianuarius**, **four days before the Ides of January** (our era: January 10-11)

By crossing the **Rubicon**, Caesar challenged the Senate’s authority. He had held two, five-year appointments as governor of Gaul. Having successfully subdued Gaul, no further reason existed to extend his appointment

When Hannibal raged across the northern reaches of the Italian peninsula; he caused fright. In response, the Senate declared the **Rubicon** the legal northern boundary of the Republic. ² Caesar was required by law to disband his army prior to crossing the river otherwise; his act was treasonous; ³ **iacta alea est**, **The die is cast**. ⁴

Unsaid, many thought Caesar’s personal power was a threat to the State. What plans did Caesar have for Rome?

Caesar wanted Rome to be a city adorned. He wanted to erect a temple to Mars. It was to be greater than all similar edifices. A theatre was to be built on the down-slope of the Tarpeian rock. The Republic’s existing laws were to be reviewed, with the intent, ‘...*only the best and most essential to be retained*.’ **Marcus Varro** ⁵ was to gather libraries of Greek and Latin books which were to be opened to the public. The Pomptine Marshes and Lake Fucinus were to be drained, a road was to be built from the Adriatic, across the Apennines to reach the Tiber River. Regarding warfare, the Dacian tribes, who had occupied Pontus and Thrace, were to be put right. Concerning the Parthians, no battle for now, their mettle to be tested. **talia agentem atque meditantem mors praevenit**, **All these enterprises and plans were cut short by his death**

February, of our three-month series commencing in January, continues with two pen-portraits that highlight Caesar’s life.

Caesar’s Rubicon

Dein post solis occasum mulis e proximo pistrino ad vehiculum iunctis occultissimum iter modico comitatu ingressus est; et cum luminibus extinctis decessisset via, diu errabundus tandem ad lucem duce reperto per angustissimos tramites pedibus evasit. Consecutusque cohortis ad Rubiconem flumen, qui provinciae eius finis erat, paulum constitit, ac reputans quantum moliretur, conversus ad proximos: etiam nunc, inquit, regredi possumus; quod si ponticulum transierimus, omnia armis agenda erunt. Cunctanti ostentum tale factum est. Quidam eximia magnitudine et forma in proximo sedens repente apparuit harundine canens; ad quem audiendum cum praeter pastores plurimi etiam ex stationibus milites concurrissent interque eos et aeneatores, rapta ab uno tuba prosilivit ad flumen et ingenti spiritu classicum exorsus pertendit ad alteram ripam. Tunc Caesar: eatur, inquit, quo deorum ostenta et inimicorum iniquitas vocat. **iacta alea est!**

Suetonius, *Divus Iulius*, 31-32

Caesar’s Rome

Nam de ornanda instruendaque urbe, item de tuendo ampliandoque imperio plura ac maiora in dies destinabat: in primis Martis templum, quantum nusquam erat, extruere repleto et conplanato lacu, in quo naumachiae spectaculum ediderat, theatrumque summae magnitudinis Tarpeio monti accubans; ius civile ad certum modum redigere atque ex immensa diffusaque legum copia optima quaeque et necessaria in paucissimos conferre libros; bibliothecas Graecas Latinasque quas maximas posset publicare data Marco Varroni cura comparandarum ac digerendarum; siccare Pomptinas paludes; emittere Fucinum lacum; viam munire a mari Supero per Appennini dorsum ad Tiberim usque; perfodere Isthmum; Dacos qui se in Pontum et Thraciam effuderant, coercere; mox Parthis inferre bellum per Armeniam minorem nec nisi ante expertos adgredi proelio. **Talia agentem atque meditantem mors praevenit**

Suetonius, *Divus Iulius*, 44

- Footnotes:**
- ¹ **Rubicon flumen**, the **Rubicon River**. Name of river derived from the Latin adjective **rebeus**, -a, -um, either the colour **red** or **reddish**. Refers to the dissolved iron in the river’s water
 - ² For a fuller account of **cisalpine Gaul** and **transalpine Gaul**, see: December 2023 blog
 - ³ When Caesar crossed the Rubicon with his army he committed treason, which precipitated a Civil War. Ultimately, Caesar won and was appointed **dictator perpetuo**, **dictator for life**. Our era’s sense, “*Crossing the Rubicon*” has come to mean, “*Passing a point of no return*”
 - ⁴ **iacta alea est**, **The die is cast**. Die is singular for the plural noun, dice. Our era’s sense, “*An event or decision has occurred that cannot be changed*”
 - ⁵ **Marcus Terentius Varro**. 116-27 BCE. Roman polymath and prolific author. Recognized as Rome’s greatest scholar. Often referred to as **Varro Reatinus**, to distinguish from **Varro Atacinus**