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INTRODUCTION

Caesar's Last Campaign

THE VIOLENT death of Julius Caesar abruptly cancelled all his plans, beginning with the eastern campaign. The dictator was to have left Rome on 18 March 44 to rejoin his legions, which had already crossed the Adriatic. Three days earlier—the Ides of March, according to the Roman calendar—he was fatally stabbed by a group of conspirators. The historian Nicolaus of Damascus noted the striking contrast between Caesar's inert remains and the grandeur of his campaigns, real or imagined: "The corpse was still lying where Caesar fell, covered ignominiously in the blood of the man who had marched as far west as Britain and the Ocean and who was planning to march east against the realms of the Parthians and the Indians so that, when they were subjugated, sovereignty over all land and sea would be combined into one empire—this man's corpse was lying there, then, no one having had the courage to stay and carry it off."[1]

Nicolaus's *Life of Augustus*, written shortly after the death of the *princeps* in 14 CE, is the earliest account that has come down to us of Caesar's determination to march eastward for the purpose of resuming hostilities against the Parthian Empire, which extended from Mesopotamia to Central Asia. In 54–53, the Parthians had repulsed the attempted invasion of Mesopotamia by a great army led by the ambitious Marcus Licinius Crassus; some forty thousand men, legionaries and auxiliaries were annihilated by cavalry and allied forces on 9 June 53, on the plain of Carrhae (modern Harran, in Turkey, near the Syrian border). Crassus had foreseen neither the enemy's reaction nor its tactical

superiority. A few days after the massacre of his men he died, rather stupidly, in a skirmish. It is said that his head was brought to the king at the end of a banquet, a macabre scene described by Plutarch.[2] Several surviving legionaries were captured. The Parthians had taken possession of the military standards of seven legions as well, a mortal blow to the prestige of Rome in the East and the height of its humiliation there.

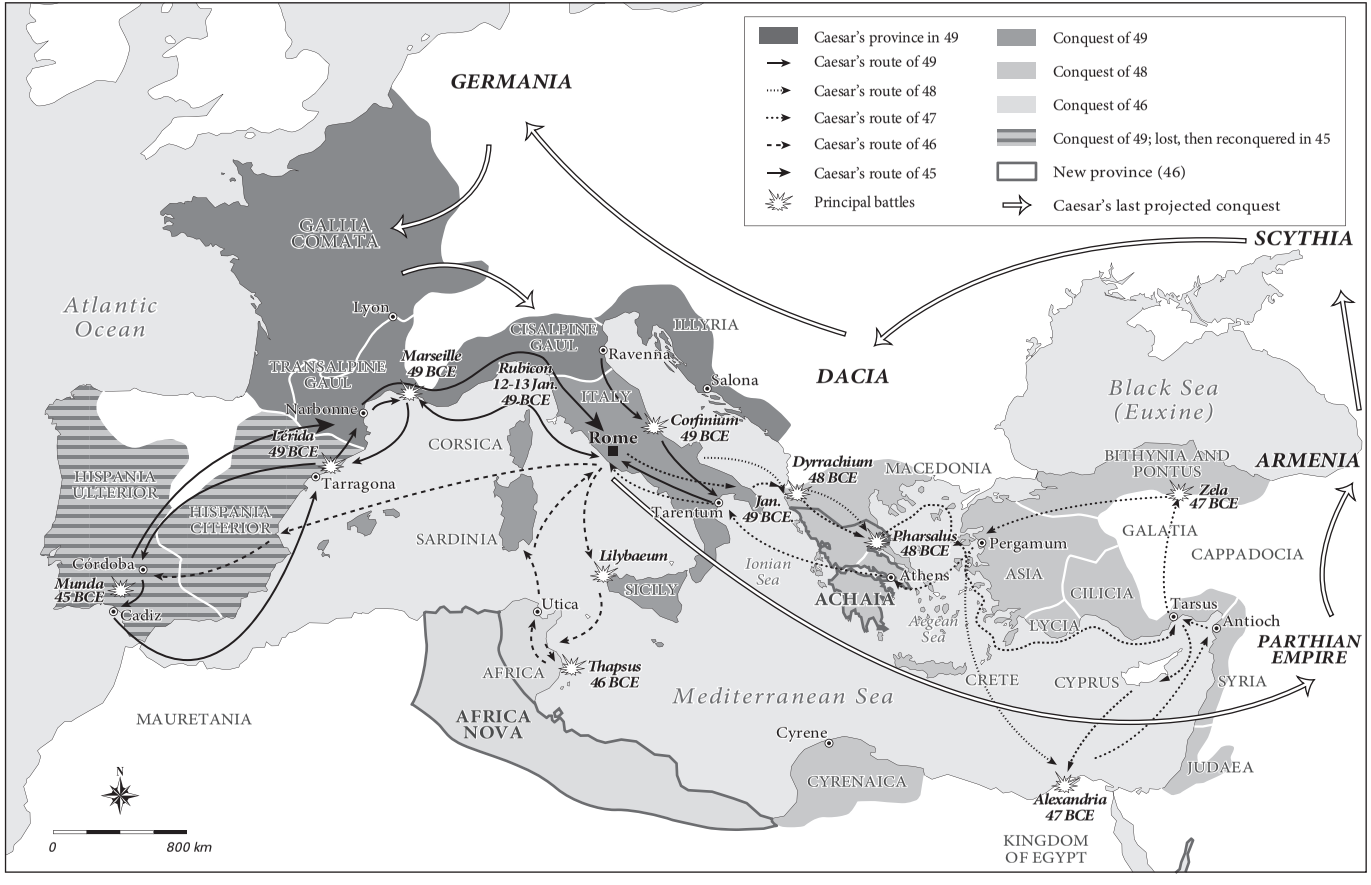
In the aftermath of Carrhae, the Parthians and their Arab allies repeatedly raided the Roman province of Syria and, in 51, arrived at the gates of Antioch, confident that the quality of their forces and the restlessness of the local population under Roman domination would enable them to prevail.[3] The civil war between Pompey and Caesar delayed the Roman response. Legionary soldiers stationed in Syria, commanded by Gaius Cassius Longinus (later one of Caesar's assassins), finally managed to contain the invasion, but defensive capabilities needed nonetheless to be reinforced if Roman authority were to be restored. In 50, when Caesar was still in Gaul, the Senate ordered him to commit two of his legions to the war against the Parthians. Pompey, now preparing for war, took advantage of this turn of events to undermine his rival by making sure that Caesar's troops remained in Italy, at his own service.[4] In sparing the Parthians the costs of a new war, Pompey assured himself of the support of the Parthian king, Orodes II. Indeed, when Caesar attacked, "the Parthians took the Pompeian side both because of their accord with Pompey in the Mithridatic War and also because of the killing of Crassus, whose son [Marcus Licinius Crassus Junior, a veteran of the Gallic campaigns like his brother Publius, who died at Carrhae] they had heard had sided with Caesar, and they had no doubt that he would avenge his father if Caesar prevailed."[5]

In the campaign that was to culminate in a decisive battle against Caesar at Pharsalus on 9 August 48, Pompey tried to enlist the active participation of the Parthians, but to no avail; Orodes, it was said, demanded Syria in exchange.[6] After his defeat, Pompey allegedly hesitated to take refuge with the king, notwithstanding that Orodes appeared for the moment to be the best placed to receive Pompey and the remnants of his army and to protect them in their weakened condition, so that they might regroup and set off again in larger numbers.[7] According to

Cassius Dio, no doubt relying on a source favorable to Pompey, this was a baseless rumor: The Parthians could not be trusted, because they had imprisoned Pompey's ambassador, and Pompey was forced to decide whether to take refuge in Egypt or in Africa.[8] However this may be, Pompey was killed in Egypt a few months after his defeat at Pharsalus.

Nothing any longer stood in the way of war against the Parthians, though Caesar's legionaries were exhausted from long years of fighting at home and abroad. In the summer of 47 he went to Syria and then to Cilicia, for the purpose of restoring order in those parts of the East under Roman control. A good number of Pompey's former allies asked for forgiveness. The dictator's shrewdness in granting clemency, on payment of a tribute, won their allegiance.[9] In Syria Caesar received the kings, sovereigns, and rulers whose states bordered Syria and Cilicia and the other Roman provinces, more or less powerful allies who were then incorporated into the *imperium Romanum*.[10] In the less urbanized regions of Anatolia, the Romans did not exercise direct control but practiced what might be called an imperialist form of hegemony dedicated to establishing a balance among competing political interests and to collecting taxes. The title of king was respected in the East; even the least formidable monarchs possessed a religious charisma that guaranteed the loyalty of their subjects and the obedience of nobles. It was altogether in Rome's interest to respect these traditions while at the same time supporting local rulers, even if from time to time it was convenient to impose ones of its own choosing. Furthermore, Caesar could count on the support of Antioch, a major city, and on that of the Jews, thanks to his excellent relations with John Hyrcanus II, high priest of the Temple of Jerusalem.

Nevertheless Caesar, who in the meantime had moved from Syria to neighboring Cilicia, could not stay long in the East. He had hoped to be able to begin preparing a campaign against the Parthians, but he still had to conclude the civil war against Pompey's sons and allies, in Africa to begin with and then in Spain. In the meantime, during his long absence from Rome, riots had broken out; he had to get back home as quickly as possible. Having sorted out the situation in Syria (which had been bled white by the Pompeian governor, Quintus Caecilius Metellus



MAP 1. Caesar's civil wars

Scipio), he entrusted the province to his cousin Sextus Iulius Caesar, probably his designated successor.[11] On his way back to Italy, at Zela in Pontic Cappadocia (as it should be called, rather than "Pontus"), Caesar easily defeated ("veni, vidi, vici") Pharnaces II, son of Mithradates VI Eupator and ruler of the Cimmerian Bosporus, who was trying to recover the North Anatolian regions that once belonged to his dynasty. Later, in a speech delivered in early 43 and reported by Cassius Dio, Cicero accused Mark Antony of having fomented the uprisings four years earlier. "He was chiefly responsible," Cicero allegedly said, "for the fact that the whole region of Pontus and Parthia was not subdued at that time immediately after the victory over Pharnaces. Owing to Antony's misdeeds, Caesar was obliged to come back here at once, before he could settle matters abroad, as [otherwise] he would have been able to do."[12] He was mainly concerned, then, with Rome's strategic position in the East—something of far greater consequence than mere propaganda or a grandiose desire to imitate Alexander the Great. This was grand strategy at its best.

The Romans were not unaware of Caesar's ambitions. These were confirmed in the summer of 46 when he celebrated a series of spectacular triumphs, dedicating four ceremonies to his victories in the four parts of the world: Gaul, Africa, Pontus, and Egypt. Chariots weighed down with booty and prisoners were paraded before the people. Conquered territories were personified, with paintings and gilded statuary portraying the Rhine, the Rhône, and the Ocean as captives.[13] Among the prisoners were a few more or less high-ranking figures, among them the orphaned prince Juba, son of the king of Numidia, who had been allied with Pompey; Arsinoë, Cleopatra's younger sister and queen of Egypt from 48 to 47; and above all, Vercingetorix, the Gallic chieftain who dared to defy Caesar and who had been brought to Rome following his defeat at Alesia in 52. By reason of their youth, Juba and Arsinoë were spared. Juba received a Roman education and a few years later was appointed king of Mauretania by Augustus; Arsinoë, as we will see, took refuge in Asia Minor. No pity was shown to Vercingetorix, strangled shortly after the ceremony. Other less prestigious prisoners were sent to their death in the arena.

In this way Caesar managed to thoroughly reinterpret the traditional Roman triumph, to the delight of the people but to the great dismay of his adversaries. He used these ostentatious and sensational ceremonies to advertise his military glory in a festive atmosphere, even permitting his soldiers to chant satirical couplets mocking the ambiguous sexuality of their commander. He also took posthumous revenge on Pompey, his long-standing rival, whose three triumphs in 61 had diminished his reputation. Nevertheless, if he stirred the imagination of the Roman people, he also created ill will among a number of senators—and all the more as the Spanish triumph he celebrated the following year, in October 45, was in fact a triumph over the Pompeians.[14] Care was taken in all these cases to present his victories as triumphs over foreign enemies, sidestepping the delicate question of civil discord.

Caesar spent lavishly on entertainments and stage plays performed "by actors of all languages." In an artificial basin dug near his gardens and filled with water, an ancient naval battle pitting "Tyrian" against "Egyptian" fleets was reenacted.[15] The Circus Maximus was the scene of a pitched battle involving a thousand men, sixty horsemen, and forty elephants.[16] Spectacles of this kind were meant to make the people forget the clashes between Roman armies. The display of strange animals, symbolizing Rome's hold over the barbarian world and the wild creatures that populated it, emphasized the greatness of the games' sponsor, particularly in the case of previously unknown species. Caesar's Egyptian triumph introduced a "spotted dromedary" (*kamēlopardalis*, probably a giraffe)—a final revenge on Pompey, who, in the entertainments he hosted during his second consulate in 55, had brought to Rome a rhinoceros and other exotic beasts.[17]

In the meantime the situation on the eastern frontier was far from being stabilized. A veteran of Pompey's campaigns, the knight Quintus Caecilius Bassus, spread the false report that Caesar had been killed in Africa and that the Pompeians had made him governor of Syria.[18] A mutiny ensued in which Sextus Caesar met his death. Claiming for himself the rank of praetor, Bassus took command of the troops in Syria, establishing his base of operations in the wealthy city of Apamea. Quintus Cornificius, the governor of Cilicia (known also as a poet of the

"neoteric" tendency), was ordered to put down the rebellion, but Bassus was able to obtain the support of local tribal chieftains ("phylarchs") and vigorously resisted; the Parthians, taking advantage of his momentary absence from Syria, once again seized control of the province. Sallust, in the first letter to Caesar attributed to him, presciently warned that the only possible cause of the fall of Rome would be the recurrence of internal wars that, by killing so many of its citizens, would open the way to foreign potentates and barbarians.[19] The very next year Orodes threw his support in favor of Bassus's resistance, sending his son Pacorus at the head of a large army.[20] The campaign against the Parthians became crucial. Caesar, having at last vanquished the Pompeians and brought the civil wars to an end, could now at last prepare for his return to the East.

The Roman people craved further conquests and spoils, and the aristocracy, for its part, did not object to another expedition. It was necessary, they said, to defend the provinces, to avenge Crassus and the honor of Rome, and to subjugate a kingdom that aspired to be a rival empire. At this time Crassus's military abilities had not yet been called into question, as they were to be later, the unfortunate general being caricatured as a rich man consumed by ambition and devoid of strategic talent. To be sure, critics such as Cicero disparaged the Roman *imperatores*, more or less openly, for their dreams of glory. Nevertheless, when the Senate issued its decree authorizing the eastern campaign, there was no opposition. Cassius Dio, writing about the events of early 44, said that "a longing came over all the Romans alike to avenge Crassus and those who had perished with him, and they felt some hope of subjugating the Parthians then, if ever. [The senators] unanimously voted the command of the war to Caesar, and made ample provision for it."[21]

Nicolaus of Damascus did not exaggerate when he spoke of a campaign against the "kingdoms of the Parthians and the Indians"; an Indo-Scythian kingdom did in fact exist on the eastern border of the Parthian Empire. Crassus himself was precisely the sort of figure on whom Cicero had heaped scorn, imagining that his oriental conquests would far surpass those of his predecessors Lucullus and Pompey in the event, as

he confidently supposed, that his armies succeeded in reaching "Bactria, India, and the Outer Sea."[22] Nicolaus, a shrewd analyst of the geopolitical situation in the East, could hardly have been unaware that the new campaign he mentioned called to mind the exploits of Alexander, whom Caesar and several other generals of the Republic took as their model.

The king of Macedon, by putting an end to the Achaemenid Empire while uniting Europe and Asia under a single sovereign, haunted the imagination of young Roman aristocrats brought up on accounts of his adventures who marveled at the daring Alexander displayed during his Indian campaign. In 62 a Celtic king of the Boii brought "Indian" slaves captured in the North Sea and offered them to Quintus Caecilius Metellus, proconsul of Cisalpine Gaul.[23] For Cornelius Nepos, who relates this anecdote, it was proof that one could sail along the coast of the "Outer Sea" (the Ocean) from Frisia to distant India. The identity of these captives has been the object of a great deal of speculation, including the fanciful suggestion that they were Eskimos from North America or Greenland. There is nothing surprising about this; after all, more than one author was unable to tell India apart from Ethiopia.

To be sure, there were those in Rome who said that Alexander had distinguished himself on the battlefield only against Orientals, unskilled in the art of war, and could hardly have defeated either Roman legions or the fierce barbarians of northern and southeastern Europe. Roman conquests extended over a great arc that encompassed lands in the both the West and the East where he had never set foot. The myth of Alexander nonetheless had lost none of its power. Around 69, when he was a little more than thirty years old and posted to Spain as quaestor, Caesar went to Gades (modern-day Cádiz), an ancient colony bordering the Atlantic, westernmost extremity of what the Greeks called the *oikoumenē*, the inhabited world. Allied to Rome, Gades depended mainly on the sea for its livelihood and "fitted out the most and largest merchant-vessels;" its fishermen, according to Strabo, ventured forth as far as the shores of Mauretania.[24] Visiting the temple of Hercules Gaditanus (the Punic divinity Melqart), and seeing there a statue of Alexander, "he heaved a sigh, and as if out of patience in having as yet done nothing noteworthy at a time of life when Alexander had already

brought the world to his feet, he straightaway asked for his discharge, to grasp the first opportunity for greater enterprises in Rome."[25]

It hardly matters that Caesar invented this story after the fact; it is no less revelatory for that. Gades was located near the Columns of Hercules, which is to say at the end of the world in the West; the statue of Alexander symbolized the desire to reunite the *oikoumenē*, from Spain to India. For the same reason, in 55 and 54, Caesar attempted to conquer Britain. The expedition met with little success, but it caused a sensation in Rome; it was said that he had gone there in the hope of finding pearls.[26] Possibly he was inspired by Pompey, who had displayed an enormous quantity of oriental pearls during his triumph in 61, as a result of which they became a fashionable accessory among the upper class; but the accounts of Alexander's conquests had certainly influenced him as well.[27] It also needs to be kept in mind that Caesar visited the Temple of Hercules in Gades not as a tourist, but for the purpose of asking the priests of the sanctuary about a troubling experience, having dreamt that he had slept with his mother. This type of dream was not unusual among the ancients; what is more, it was thought to be a favorable omen.[28] The priests set the young Roman's mind at rest, reassuring him that his destiny was to conquer the Earth, "our common parent."[29]

Later, in the spring of 47, after having helped Cleopatra win a dynastic war for the throne of Egypt, Caesar accompanied her on a tour of the Nile (she was pregnant with his child at this time), at the head of a fleet of four hundred ships. According to Suetonius, he meant to go as far as the borders of "Ethiopia" (sub-Saharan Africa), which is to say the first cataract, but his army had refused to follow him.[30] There is no reason to doubt the veracity of this account. The plan of his eastern campaign is telling in this regard.

A few weeks before his assassination, Caesar's enemies spread disturbing rumors. The details varied, but all of them accused the dictator of intending to make himself king. Some whispered that Caesar sought to found a kingdom and establish his capital at Ilium, the site of ancient Troy.[31] According to the most common version, however, this kingdom was to be centered in Egypt, for it was at Alexandria that the queen had given birth to his son Ptolemy XV, whom Alexandrians called Caesarion

("little Caesar" in Greek). After Caesar's murder in March 44, Cleopatra returned to Egypt and, following the death by poisoning of her brother and husband Ptolemy XIV, she publicly recognized her child as Caesar's; in Rome, Mark Antony declared to the Senate that Caesar had himself recognized the boy (though Caesar's will contradicts this).[32] Cleopatra seems to have stayed in Rome on two occasions, in 46 and then in 44; if so, she would have been there on the fateful day, the Ides of March, when Caesar was cut down and then, according to Cicero, took flight at once.[33] Caesar's liaison with the Egyptian queen was not the only one of its kind. He would soon be authorized, it was said, to take as many wives as he wished, in order to guarantee a male line of descent; his affairs included Eunoë, wife of his ally Bogud, king of Mauretania.[34] But Egypt was a still more important conquest, for its riches were to play a fundamental role in supporting the campaign against Parthia.

Caesar had nonetheless not forgotten Rome. Unlike his rival Pompey, who had launched a massive building program whose principal landmarks served mainly to emphasize his exalted status as a triumphant general, Caesar devoted himself to public works of civic utility. Additionally, he drafted bills providing for the enlargement of the city, endowing it with new facilities and embellishing it with spectacular monuments. Still more farsightedly, he drew up plans for draining the Pontine Marshes to the south of Rome; for digging a canal that would run as far as Fucine Lake in the center of the Peninsula; and for constructing a road that would connect the Adriatic Sea with the Tiber, crossing over the Apennines. If Rome were to be transformed into the center of a unified world, it would be necessary to create a road network linking the capital to the rest of the empire, not only for the purpose of improving communications but also in order to ensure that an expanding city would have an adequate supply of provisions. Similarly, the partial emptying of Fucine Lake and the draining of the wetlands through which the Apennine route passed would allow Caesar not only to put large tracts of land under cultivation but also, since the marshes were places of refuge for brigands, to offer traders and travelers greater protection.

Caesar's oriental expedition had more than the conquest of a rival empire in view. Writing a few years after Nicolaus of Damascus, Velleius Paterculus tells us that Caesar contemplated at least two major campaigns. Velleius mentions this important detail in his summary of the early life of Octavian, the future Augustus. Octavian, then nineteen years old, was waiting for Caesar in Epirus, at the Greek city of Apollonia (modern-day Pojan, in Albania), where he had been sent in advance of accompanying Caesar in the wars against the Dacians and the Parthians.[35] We will soon become acquainted with Octavian. For the moment let us concentrate on those aspects of Caesar's campaign that amount neither to a repetition of Crassus's campaign nor to a mere readjustment of eastern borders. Instead, we are given to consider a grand strategy consisting of two elements, a Balkan campaign in the first instance, and a second campaign in the East—which is to say a war against the king of the Dacians, Burebista, to begin with, and then another one against Orodes. Appian describes the expeditionary force in some detail, saying that sixteen infantry units and ten thousand cavalry were already stationed on the other side of the Ionian Sea.[36] Later, apparently having realized that this was not an army large enough to accomplish its purpose, he says that it included six legions in addition to "all the other archers and light-armed troops stationed with them, a large force of cavalry, and a full supply of all the corresponding equipment."[37]

Several sources mention Orodes, but they are silent in connection with Burebista, even though for forty years he dominated the geopolitics of the Balkans. With Burebista, the Dacians entered into history. As part of a large ethnic group, the Thracians, of which they constituted the northern branch, they were related to the Getae, who by the fourth century BCE had created a network of diplomatic and commercial relations with the neighboring communities. In Burebista's time, the Getae and the Dacians seem to have formed a single *ethnos*. Pompeius Trogus, in a digression on the history of the Balkans, recounts the occupation of this territory by the Celts, their subsequent withdrawal to Gaul, the origins of the Pannonians, and the "progress of the Dacians thanks to the King Burobustes."[38]

Strabo gives a brief portrait of Burebista, mentioning the "great power" that he had managed to acquire in the space of only a few years, having subjugated the neighboring Celtic and Germanic peoples.[39] His state, divided into four regions, pursued an aggressive foreign policy marked by incursions into the Balkans, proceeding southward into Macedonia and Illyria and northward into the Celtic strongholds of the Boii and the Taurisci. The king had established his residence at Sarmizegetusa Regia, a city noted for its Hellenistic architecture and situated in the heart of a region rich in gold and salt deposits.

During this period, the federated peoples under Burebista were able to raise an army of two hundred thousand men.[40] The sovereign had profited from Roman victories in the East, which weakened the Greek cities on the Black Sea and eliminated the powerful king of Pontic Cappadocia, Mithradates VI Eupator. Nevertheless the Romans had not succeeded in imposing their control over the western sector of the Black Sea. In 61 the proconsul of Macedonia, Gaius Antonius (nicknamed Hybrida, uncle of Mark Antony), had been attacked by the Bastarnae, a Germanic tribe that may have been part of the coalition led by the Dacians/Getae.[41] Still today Romania celebrates Burebista's exploits; under the regime of Nicolae Ceauşescu, he was honored above all for having unified the country and assuring the continuity of the Romanian people down through the centuries.

The Romans considered the Dacians a threat, for their Celtic allies would constitute a formidable adversary in the event they were able to act in concert, as in the case of most of the peoples who lived beyond the Alps, and who accordingly were regarded as potentially dangerous—hence Caesar's visit to Illyria, as proconsul in 54, in the midst of the Gallic Wars. During this same period, he reinforced the Alpine arc with a network of fortifications, consolidating Roman control of a strategic line of defense as far to the east as Emona (modern-day Ljubljana), from which roads led on to the Nauportus and Sava River Valleys, held by the Taurisci confederation; additionally, with the founding of Salona and Narona, he took further steps to colonize the Adriatic. Strabo says that Caesar had prepared to make an expedition against Burebista when he reigned over the Getae.[42] According to a tradition passed on by the first

historians of the Gothic nation (Cassiodorus and Jordanes, writing in the sixth century of our era), Burebista subjugated the "Goths"—probably peoples of the Eurasian steppe who had conducted raids on Germanic territories. In this account Burebista was said to have been stronger than Caesar, "the first to have claimed for himself command over all the Romans, who had conquered the entire world and who had subdued every kingdom . . . and [who] nonetheless, in spite of repeated attempts, was unable to subdue the Goths."[43]

Burebista's attitude toward the Romans was no different than that of Orodes. A Greek inscription found in Bulgaria memorializes Akorniōn, the royal ambassador who negotiated the alliance with Pompey in Macedonia.[44] Burebista may have been one of those "friendly" kings whose goodwill not only signified submission to the Roman people, but also implied a personal bond with Pompey himself.[45] In his speech at Caesar's funeral, Antony accused Pompey of "setting up a kingdom of his own" in Macedonia.[46] But neither Getae nor Dacians figure in the list of Pompey's troops at Pharsalus ("barbarians with disordered ranks and discordant tongues," in Lucan's phrase)—evidence that Burebista, like Orodes, had preferred neutrality.[47] The Thracians had furnished Pompey with auxiliary units, however, albeit in rather small, even token numbers: King Cotys IV, of the Astaean dynasty, sent five hundred horsemen under the command of his son Sadalas, while the homonymous Cotys VI, of the Sapaean dynasty, sent his son Rhascupolis (or Rhescuporis), who came from Macedonia with two hundred men; Sadalas was pardoned.[48] Caesar well knew that clemency was useful in dealing with kingdoms of lesser importance, but not with empires or with kingdoms aspiring to become empires. Moreover, in his address to the troops before the battle, he instructed them to concern themselves solely with the Italian forces, since their allies were only "prisoners from Syria and Phrygia and Lydia, always ready to flee or be someone's slave."[49] There was no need, then, to pay attention to their harassing tactics; after victory was achieved, however, it would be necessary to massacre them, to set an example.

The situation in the Balkans was critical, every bit as dangerous as the "powder keg" of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Pompey's

surviving soldiers found shelter in Dacian communities, an embarrassment to Caesar's commanders, who had been pursuing them. In the meantime the Dalmatians had occupied sixty cities; Caesar's former lieutenant, Publius Vatinius, who in 45 had been granted proconsular authority, managed to reconquer twenty of them by the end of the year.[50] In the Cimmerian Bosporus, Caesar installed on the throne the powerful and "most friendly" Mithridates of Pergamum with responsibility for protecting the Roman provinces against the depredations of barbarians and enemy kings.[51] In this way he hoped to guarantee dynastic continuity, but in his absence the political balance of the region remained precarious.

The Balkan powder keg exploded in 45, when Mithridates was killed in battle by Asander, formerly ruler of the Bosporan kingdom, who had earlier vanquished Pharnaces. The Scythians and the Sarmatians, who seem to have formed part of the king's army, played an important role; Asander in any case now became the undisputed master of the Bosporus, subjecting the peoples of the hinterlands to his will.[52] Rome eventually recognized his royal title, but at the moment of Caesar's death he threatened to upset the geopolitical stability of the region around the Black Sea. At the same time, Suetonius tells us, it was necessary "to check the Dacians, who had poured into Pontus and Thrace."[53] This largely explains why Caesar wished to do battle with the Dacians before the Parthians and to march against Burebista. If he were to succeed where Crassus had failed, he would have to consolidate his existing alliances and create a network of new ones in southeastern Europe. This was no simple matter, for the hinterlands were unfamiliar territory and certain legends, such as that of the existence of a canal connecting the Adriatic with the Black Sea, were still current.[54]

None of these possible reasons for Caesar's campaign would appear to justify it as a *bellum iustum*, a legitimate—indeed, a legal—war. Appian gives a better idea of his motivations and, at least in the case of the Parthians, the actual cause of war: "[Caesar] began to devise a great campaign against the Getae and the Parthians. He intended to take the initiative in making plans against the Getae, a rough and war-loving neighbor, and to wreak vengeance on the Parthians for breaking their

agreement with Crassus."[55] The only motive given for war against the Getae is their proximity to the Roman province of Macedonia; the threat posed by these barbarians required no further explanation. As for the Parthians, it was not the death of Crassus that justified war but the violation of certain pacts whose details are unknown to us. It may be that these were accords negotiated by Crassus and Mithradates III, the rival brother of Orodes II who had sought Rome's help and whom Orodes had had executed a year before the attempted Roman invasion and its tragic outcome at Carrhae.

Suetonius and Plutarch, writing at the time of the emperor Trajan's campaigns against the Dacians and the Parthians, provide additional information about the geopolitical context of the dictator's last campaign. Suetonius speaks of measures "for the protection and extension of the Empire." After mentioning the necessity of containing the Dacians, he adds that the campaign against the Parthians was to pass through Lesser Armenia and that Caesar did not wish to risk a battle with them until he had learned everything he needed to know about the strength of their forces and their preparations.[56] It was a fraught time. The assassination of Sextus Caesar had complicated the situation in Syria. Further to the east, Caesar's legions could not pass through Greater Armenia, for after Carrhae the young king Artawazd II, son of the great Tigran II (Tigranes in Greek and Latin), had broken all ties with Rome and sealed a matrimonial alliance with Parthia, his sister having married Orodes's son, the crown prince Pacorus. The only possible route went through the friendly kingdom of Cappadocia, governed by Ariobarzanes III, who had ruled over Lesser Armenia since 45 with Caesar's blessing.

Plutarch, for his part, is at pains to demonstrate Caesar's ambition (*philotimia*) and great accomplishment (*megalourghia*). Having defeated all his domestic enemies, Caesar now found himself in competition with himself, for "he planned and prepared to make an expedition against the Parthians; and after subduing these and marching around the Euxine by way of Hyrcania, the Caspian Sea, and the Caucasus, to invade Scythia; and after overrunning the countries bordering on Germany and Germany itself, to come back by way of Gaul to Italy, and so

to complete the circuit of his empire, which would then be bounded on all sides by the ocean."[57]

Caesar, in other words, sought to give Roman conquest its fullest possible extent, for the territory of its empire was meant to coincide with the inhabited world. No doubt it was expected that this project would occupy Caesar and his legions for several or more years. A few weeks after Caesar's death, Cicero (who had no tender feelings for the dictator) said that he would never have come back from such a campaign.[58] After all, he was fifty-six years of age, worn out from long years of war and suffering from epilepsy. But this last visionary ambition was perfectly in accordance with the personality of a man "who seemed to be completely unconquerable [for] he was said never to have been defeated in the three hundred and two battles he [had] fought up to that time in Asia and in Europe."[59] Why Plutarch does not mention the preliminary campaign against the Getae is more perplexing, though the passage I have just quoted from *The Life of Caesar* does not contradict other sources. Nor can the circular itinerary it describes fail to recall the achievements of Alexander the Great.

In Rome and throughout Italy, Caesar assumed the extraordinary office of dictatorship. A few weeks before his assassination, having been given the title of "dictator in perpetuity"—the expression *dictatura perpetua* should probably be understood as signifying an open-ended dictatorship, rather than a dictatorship for life—he appointed Marcus Aemilius Lepidus for a second time as commander of the cavalry (*magister equitum*), in effect making Lepidus his right-hand man. The senatorial session of 15 March was intended to confirm Caesar's status in the provinces and, above all, to deliberate on an unprecedented matter. In February, the sacerdotal college of the quindecemviri (whose dean, Lucius Aurelius Cotta, was Caesar's maternal uncle) had been directed to consult the Sibylline Books, the obscure oracular responses conserved in the temple atop the Capitoline hill, the heart of Roman civic religion, dedicated to the divine triad of Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva. Cotta announced the finding of the priests, that only a king could conquer Parthia; in order to bring his eastern campaign to a successful conclusion, then, Caesar ought to acquiesce in this prediction and allow

himself to be named king, in disregard of an ancient tradition.[60] The month before, in late January 44, the Senate had decided, again after deliberation, to grant Caesar not only divine honors but also the title *Divus Iulius*. All the more strongly, then, having refused the title of king, did the dictator refuse to be divinized in life.

No matter. The plot had already begun to take shape. One member of the conspiracy, Decimus Brutus (a distant cousin and former lieutenant of Caesar, who had appointed him governor of Cisalpine Gaul for the year 43), played a key role. He convinced the dictator not to postpone the Senate session on the Ides of March, arguing that it was a way of respecting the response of the Sibylline Books without contravening ancestral custom (*mos maiorum*). Caesar should therefore allow the senators to proclaim him king of the provinces beyond Italy, authorizing him to wear a diadem outside the Peninsula.[61]

What was being proposed was not a return to the monarchy of Romulus, of course, much less a monarchy of the Hellenistic type; even his most loyal supporters would not have countenanced that. And yet in agreeing to assume a perpetual dictatorship—a deliberately ambiguous formula—Caesar had broken a political taboo. In the eyes of his enemies, he had to be eliminated not only because he sought to establish a monarchy, but also because he envisaged an empire whose center would no longer be the city of Rome. There can be no question that these rumors exerted considerable pressure on the course of events, accelerating the plotters' timetable: A triumph in the East would lead to an irresistible increase in Caesar's prestige. The eastern campaign was forestalled by Caesar's death, of which it was one of the causes. In the meantime, he had assembled a very large and experienced army. Most of his soldiers were already stationed beyond the Adriatic, in the province of Macedonia, where they awaited the arrival of their general. Among these soldiers was Caesar's young heir, Octavian.

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