

## Crossing the Rubicon. A Historiographical Study

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### Abstract

This paper contains a typological comparison of the extant accounts of Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon (Velleius Paterculus, Lucan, Plutarch, Suetonius, Appian, Orosius) and highlights interrelationships among the various accounts as well as patterns and *topoi* in the Rubicon myth. This episode has been dramatized by five of the authors as a point of transition from peace to war, although Caesar has set himself at fault much earlier by maneuvering to resign his command. Common motifs are the speed with which Caesar proceeds, his hesitation and pondering the consequences, and the connection of the crossing with a supernatural element. Caesar's nocturnal wanderings in Suetonius can be explained as a misinterpretation of Plutarch's account; the scene about the apparition with the reed pipe plays with generic markers to express the beginning of war. Finally, a conclusion can be drawn about Asinius Pollio as the common source. As a child of the Late Republic he might have been interested in mitigating his representation of the Rubicon scene by having Caesar hesitate, ponder the consequences, be under divine influence and act in self-defense, features that were exploited by his successors and turned into *topoi* of the Rubicon myth.

### Keywords

Rubicon, historiography, Asinius Pollio, Caesar, civil war

## 1. Introduction

Caesar's crossing of the river Rubicon in 49 BCE in the night from January 10th to 11th seems to hold a special fascination.<sup>1)</sup> Even non-classicists are familiar with his famous statement, *Alea iacta est*,<sup>2)</sup>—or at least with its modern translation, 'The die is cast'. It is widely assumed that this transgressive step of Caesar precipitated the civil war that led to the final destruction of the Roman republic. Caesar, however, had been moving in a legally gray area for quite a while<sup>3)</sup> when the senate had decided that he should leave his province by November 13th, 50 BCE.<sup>4)</sup> On January 7th 49 BCE Caesar was declared enemy of the state.

The river crossing is mentioned in six extant sources which are, in chronological order, Velleius Paterculus, Lucan, Plutarch, Suetonius, Appian and the late-antique Orosius.<sup>5)</sup> Four of these sources not only mention the Rubicon but present the circumstances of the transgression in detail. Caesar's decision to cross the small river is represented schematically as fatal and disastrous; the whole scene even serves to confirm the sources' overall presentation of Caesar's character.

Unfortunately, the sources that served as models for the authors named above are lost, such as the biography of Caesar by Gaius Oppius and the history by Asinius Pollio. Of Livy's book 109 the *periocha* has survived, but it does not mention the Rubicon or even the capture of Ariminum, which followed the crossing. Of course, given the extremely selective nature of the *periocha*, that is no proof that the crossing was not to be found in Livy's work. The fact that Orosius who depends heavily on Livy does mention the Rubicon, (strongly) suggests that it was in Livy.

<sup>1)</sup> The juxtaposition of river crossings with the legitimization of power acquisition has a long literary tradition. On the motif in Iranian epic and its reception in Latin literature, see Desnier 1995.

<sup>2)</sup> The Greek original Ἀνερίφθω κύβος (Let the die be cast) comes, according to Ath. 13.8, from Menander. Plutarch and Appian have Caesar quote the Greek; in Suetonius Caesar utters the famous words in Latin.

<sup>3)</sup> For the recent discussion of the terminal date for Caesar's command see Goldsworthy 2006, 367-77, Seager 2002, 191-3, Mitchell 1991, 237-9.

<sup>4)</sup> Cic. *Fam.* 8.11.3.

<sup>5)</sup> Vell. 2.49.4; Luc. 1.182-227; Plu. *Caes.* 32; *Pomp.* 60.; Suet. *Jul.* 31-3; App. *BC* 2.5.35; Oros. 6.15.2-3.

In what follows I compare the crossing of the Rubicon in the surviving sources and highlight *topoi* and interrelationships among the texts. Such a typological comparison has not yet been done. By juxtaposing various accounts, scholars have tried to explore historical details of the event.<sup>6)</sup> My aim is to interpret the presentation of Caesar's river crossing in connection with the literary genre of each given text and to explore the fascination that compelled five authors out of seven to dramatize this step, despite the fact that Caesar's maneuvering to resign his command over several months before was of much greater legal importance. This method enables me to explain the remarkable features of Caesar's nighttime wandering, including the apparition with the pipe reported in Suetonius, as well as to point out the attitude represented in the sources towards Caesar's self-representation in his *Civil War*. Furthermore, a tentative conclusion can be drawn as to how Asinius Pollio served as the common source of the texts discussed here, and how and why his presentation might have differed from the sources we have.

## 2. Caesar's Own Account

Caesar himself, in the *Bellum Civile*, does not mention the crossing of the Rubicon.<sup>7)</sup> His presentation of the events of January 49 is structured in blocks. The account starts with a 'Senate block', that contains the negotiations of the senate in the first week (1.1-6), followed by a 'Caesar block', where he describes a *contio* held in Ravenna, designed to win him the support of his troops (7.1-8.1). There follows a second 'Senate block' about the senatorial embassies (8.2-11.3), that leaves the impression that Caesar met the embassies before crossing the Rubicon; and a second 'Caesar block' containing his military advance through Arretium, Pisaurum, Fanum Fortunae, Ancona, Iguvium and Auximum (11.4-13). But in fact, according to the sources which deviate at least partly from Caesar's account,<sup>8)</sup> the imperator gave a speech to his troops in Ariminum, and the embassies had reached him after several stops in his advance, namely after the crossing of

<sup>6)</sup> E.g. Hohl 1952, Tucker 1988, Wensler 1989 and (most detailed) Bicknell and Nielsen 1998.

<sup>7)</sup> As Batstone and Damon (2006, 57) observe, it was in the interest of Caesar not to draw attention to his legal status.

<sup>8)</sup> D.C. 41.4.1; Suet. *Jul.* 31-3; Plu. *Caes.* 32.3-9; App. *BC* 2.5.35-6.

the Rubicon in Ariminum, after the occupation of Iguvium and after the capture of Auximum.

By combining similar events in blocks, the succession of action-reaction is reordered, so that the senate is presented as the acting, Caesar only as the reacting, party. By this suggestive chronology, the reader is induced to take the side of Caesar.<sup>9)</sup>

### 3. Meager Sources: Velleius and Orosius

Velleius Paterculus mentions the river crossing, but does not give many details:

ut deinde spretis omnibus quae Caesar postulaverat, tantummodo contentus cum una legione titulum retinere provinciae, privatus in urbem veniret et se in petitione consulatus suffragiis populi Romani committeret decrevere, ratus bellandum Caesar cum exercitu Rubiconem transiit. (2.49.4)

According to Velleius, Caesar crossed the river with his army, which suggests a large body of troops.<sup>10)</sup> Caesar is motivated by his realization of the inevitability of war, after all of his proposals for a compromise had been rejected by the senate. So in this account, too, Caesar is presented as the one reacting to the senatorial decisions—it is not surprising that Velleius, serving under Tiberius, adopts a Caesarian point of view.

Similarly terse is Orosius. He states only that Caesar crosses the Rubicon (*Caesar Rubicone flumine transmeato*) and that, according to Livy, he had five cohorts with him (5.16.3).

### 4. Unembellished Accounts: Plutarch and Appian

#### 4.1. *Plutarch*

Rather unembellished accounts of Caesar's crossing the Rubicon are those of Plutarch and Appian, whose stories are quite similar. They both have

<sup>9)</sup> On the analysis of Caesar's presentation and its effect on the reader see e.g. Müller 1972, 7-22 and Wensler 1989 with more literature.

<sup>10)</sup> Bicknell and Nielsen 1998, 163.

Caesar in Ravenna, showing himself in public before setting out for Ariminum. At the river he hesitates, considering the consequences of the step he is going to make. But then he makes his decision, speaks the famous words 'Let the die be cast', crosses the river and rushes on towards Ariminum.

Nevertheless, there are slight differences in the narratives. In his biography of Caesar, Plutarch reports that the general had a cavalry of three hundred men and one legion with him, having left the rest of his army on the other side of the Alps (32.1). Caesar understands that a swift surprise attack with a small force would be more successful than the time-consuming advance of a large contingent. Therefore he orders his leading officers to capture Ariminum, armed only with their swords, under the command of Hortensius (32.1-2). He spends the day in Ravenna in public, watching exercises of gladiators; in the evening he takes a bath and goes to a banquet. After some time, he excuses himself and asks his companions to await his return. To a few friends he had previously given the order that they should follow him, not all at once and on different routes (32.3). Caesar sets off in a hired cart for Ariminum, first heading in another direction, presumably in order to conceal the goal of his journey. When he reaches the boundary of Gallia Cisalpina, the river Rubicon, he slows down, feeling dizzy about the magnitude and daring of his undertaking (περιφερόμενον τῷ μεγέθει τῶν τολμωμένων, 32.4). He stops and considers his options silently, changing his mind several times. He also discusses the matter with those of his friends who are present, including Asinius Pollio, calculating the extent of evil for all mankind (ἀναλογιζόμενος ἡλίκων κακῶν... πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις) and how much posterity would speak about the enterprise (ὅσον τε λόγον... τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, 32.5). In the end, Caesar rushes to make the crossing with some kind of passion or urgency (θυμός), uttering 'Ἀνεπρίφθω κύβος', which Plutarch characterizes as the phrase that people usually use before desperate and risky undertakings. Afterwards, Caesar rushes on to Ariminum and takes it before daybreak (32.6).

Plutarch also mentions that Caesar is said to have had a dream the night before, in which he was sleeping with his own mother (32.6). According to Suetonius, Caesar had this dream during his quaestorship in Spain; there he is told that his mother represents the land that he was to subject.<sup>11)</sup>

<sup>11)</sup> *Jul. 7... quando mater, quam subiectam sibi vidisset, non alia esset quam terra, quae omnium parens haberetur.* In Plutarch, the relationship between the dream and Caesar's

The river crossing comes up again in Plutarch's life of Pompey (*Pomp.* 60.1-2).<sup>12)</sup> There Caesar, when he has made up his mind finally to cross the Rubicon, is compared to a man throwing himself into an abyss. In addition to what we learn in *Caes.* 32.6, Plutarch here provides the information that Caesar uttered his famous words in Greek.

#### 4.2. *Appian*

Appian's version is quite similar to Plutarch's and might depend on it. Although in *BC* 2.34 he mentions only 5,000 legionaries, three chapters earlier he also names an additional 300 cavalry (2.32). These are the soldiers Caesar has with him after leaving the rest of the army on the other side of the Alps. However, it is not said directly that, after Caesar has sent a small group in advance, these soldiers are with the general when he crosses the Rubicon. Caesar does not send his officers alone to Ariminum. Rather they are accompanied by their bravest troops. They are dressed as civilians and have orders to take the town from inside by surprise. In the evening Caesar attends a banquet in Ravenna, but excuses himself with indisposition. He sets off towards Ariminum; his cavalry follows. At the Rubicon he stops, gazes at the stream and considers the evil that will result from his crossing in arms. Then he says to those present that not crossing the river would cause distress for him, but crossing it, for all mankind. Like someone inspired (οἷά τις ἔνθους) he adds the familiar phrase 'Ἀνερρίφθω κύβος' and crosses in a hurry; he rushes on and takes Ariminum before daybreak.

Appian's account is not as detailed as the synthesis of the two Plutarchan accounts. The events in Ravenna are abbreviated. Though Appian's Caesar attends a banquet, he does not leave with the promise to be back. He also sets course directly towards Ariminum, while in Plutarch he first takes another route. Appian's Caesar appears a bit more direct. His plan to take Ariminum by betrayal, however, involves more stealth than the plan described in Plutarch. The aim seems therefore not so much to establish

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hesitation is not clear; if he had been less doubtful without the dream, or if the dream is psychological and displays his worries about the significance of the step he is going to take. Pelling (1997, 15) takes the dream in Plutarch as an ἐνύπνιον rather than as an ὄνειρος.

<sup>12)</sup> It is not problematic for my interpretation that the crossing is described in two different *Lives*.

a more negative or positive attitude towards the character of Caesar than in his predecessor; Appian's account is rather consistently simplified. The Rubicon scene also differs slightly. In the narrative sections, Caesar does not confer with his friends, and he does not consider the 'evil for all mankind' that would derive from his crossing, but the resulting evil in general (λογιζόμενος ἕκαστα τῶν ἐσομένων κακῶν, εἰ τόνδε τὸν ποταμὸν σὺν ὅπλοις περάσειε, 35). He contrasts in a pointed sentence the consequences for himself personally versus those for all mankind, before rushing over the stream (ἡ μὲν ἐπίσχεσις, ὃ φίλοι, τῇσδε τῆς διαβάσεως ἐμοὶ κακῶν ἄρξει, ἡ δὲ διάβασις πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις, 35). So Appian's predecessor, Plutarch, sharpens the contrast of general vs. personal evil: he has Caesar ponder on general evil, and expresses the personal consequences for the leader by means of the comparison with a man facing an abyss. The consequences for Caesar in particular appear thereby to be more prominent in Plutarch.

Nevertheless, the two authors present similar accounts of Caesar's river crossing in terms of vocabulary as well as in structure and content. These similarities suggest, as has been argued, that both authors are dependent, directly or indirectly, on one common source, most likely Asinius Pollio.<sup>13)</sup> Both Plutarch and Appian emphasize the speed with which Caesar proceeds; they stress the audacious character of Caesar's enterprise, his hesitation and his hazardous attitude when he finally decides to cross the Rubicon.

## 5. A Different Story: Suetonius

### 5.1. *Caesar's Nocturnal Wanderings*

Deviating in many points is the "abgeschmackte Mirakelgeschichte"<sup>14)</sup> in Suetonius' biography of Caesar. In Ravenna Caesar, in order to avoid suspicion about his intentions, attends a public show and inspects plans of a gladiatorial school he intends to build; in the evening he goes to a

<sup>13)</sup> For Pollio being the common source, see e.g. Hohl 1952; Bicknell and Nielsen 1998, 140-7 and Morgan 2002 with further bibliography. For Plutarch using Pollio, see also Pelling 2002, e.g. 1-45; 65-91. I will return to this below.

<sup>14)</sup> Hohl 1952, 246.

crowded banquet as usual (31.1). After sunset, he secretly sets out with a small company. After extinguishing his torches,<sup>15)</sup> Caesar gets lost, and it is not until dawn that a guide can be found who leads him back to the road on foot, using very narrow bypaths. When he reaches the boundary of his province, he stops and considers the next step he is going to take. Then he addresses those next to him, saying that once the bridge has been crossed, war will be inevitable (31.2). While Caesar is still hesitating, a figure bigger and more handsome than human appears sitting under a tree, playing a reed pipe. Shepherds and soldiers gather around the apparition to listen, at which point the apparition snatches the trumpet from one of the military trumpeters, rushes to the river, blasts loudly the signal for battle and crosses. Caesar, with the request to follow 'where the signs of the gods and the iniquity of his enemies call' (*quo ostenta deorum et inimicorum iniquitas vocat*) and adding *alea iacta est* (32), takes his troops over the river. On the other side, he welcomes the *tribuni plebis* who had been driven from Rome; then he begs tearfully, tearing his tunic from his chest, for the loyalty of his soldiers (33).

The small force ordered to take Ariminum mentioned in Plutarch and (probably) in Pollio is missing here. Moreover, Caesar spends his day in public slightly differently, and it is explicitly said that he is doing so to hide his true intentions. As in Plutarch, Caesar leaves the banquet at sunset, but together with a small group. Then Suetonius' narrative takes a completely different direction: Caesar gets lost and does not reach the Rubicon until daybreak. None of the other sources that have come down to us mentions this story. Bicknell and Nielsen reconstruct Pollio's account of the Rubicon scene based on the congruents in Plutarch and Appian, whom they regard as sources independent from each other.<sup>16)</sup> Since neither of them mentions Caesar's nocturnal wandering, Bicknell and Nielsen think it is unlikely that it was in Pollio. Plutarch and Appian emphasize, as already mentioned, the speed of Caesar's advance: they have him leave Ravenna at sunset, cross the Rubicon during the night and arrive at Ariminum around dawn.

<sup>15)</sup> *luminibus extinctis* is usually understood in the sense of 'when his lights went out' (Loeb); but the extremely secret nature of his journey suggests that Caesar extinguishes his lights on purpose.

<sup>16)</sup> For the comparison between Suetonius and a reconstruction of Pollio's history based on the accounts of Plutarch and Appian, see Bicknell and Nielsen 1998, 147-56.

Bicknell and Nielsen take for granted that Caesar found his way to the river without difficulty in Pollio's account, and that Suetonius, being familiar with it, must have deliberately chosen a different version.<sup>17)</sup> According to Bicknell and Nielsen, Suetonius here draws on Livy's 109th book as the model for Caesar losing his way.<sup>18)</sup> Since Livy, writing under Augustus, would not have dared to make up such an embarrassing story, they argue, Caesar must really have lost his way between Ravenna and Ariminum. Pollio, on the other hand, concealed that proof of his leader's and his own incompetence.<sup>19)</sup> Nicolaus of Damascus, however, another contemporary of Augustus, negatively portrays Caesar in order to enhance Augustus in his biography,<sup>20)</sup> so there is no reason why the same should not be true for Livy.

It is more likely that Suetonius followed Plutarch and—whether indirectly or even directly—Asinius Pollio in their narrative but misinterpreted it. Plutarch says that Caesar did not take a direct route towards Ariminum but first went off in another direction. There is no hint in the text whether he did so intentionally or not, but taking into account the prior descriptions of his attempts to hide his plans, it seems logical that his setting out in the wrong direction was a calculated means of deception. Suetonius follows Plutarch by having Caesar extinguish his torches in order to conceal his departure. But then Suetonius interprets Caesar's choosing the wrong way as an accident and embellishes his narrative with an errand that took all night long. In this episode he might have seen an excellent means of creating dramatic tension.

## 5.2. *The Apparition with the Reed Pipe*

After Caesar was guided back to the Rubicon, he became doubtful about his enterprise; but the description of his wavering is not as detailed in Suetonius as in Plutarch. Caesar stops, realizes the consequences of his undertaking and says to his companions: *etiam nunc regredi possumus; quod si ponticulum transierimus, omnia armis agenda erunt* (32.2). Suetonius is the

<sup>17)</sup> Bicknell and Nielsen 1998, 149-50.

<sup>18)</sup> Bicknell and Nielsen 1998, 151.

<sup>19)</sup> Bicknell and Nielsen 1998, 151-2. That Pollio did indeed criticize Caesar is demonstrated by Suet. *Jul.* 30 and 56.4; for the latter see Pelling 2006, 19-20.

<sup>20)</sup> Toher 2003.

only author who mentions the *ponticulus*; although the Rubicon is indeed a small river, the 'little bridge' here functions rather as a contrast to the enormous consequences the river crossing will bear than as a mere geographical detail.

Then the mysterious *ostentum* appears. Several attempts have been made to find a satisfying explanation for this story. Already Leopold von Ranke suggested a metaphorical interpretation: "Man wird wohl nicht irren, wenn man darin einen Mythos erkennt, durch welchen der Gehorsam, den Cäsar bei seinen Truppen fand, gleichsam symbolisch dargestellt wird".<sup>21)</sup> Again, Bicknell and Nielsen come up with an attractive but speculative theory.<sup>22)</sup> Drawing a parallel with the Phye anecdote in Herodotus (1.60.4-5), they suggest that the *ostentum* was actually a charade put up by Caesar, in order to motivate and persuade his soldiers to follow him across the Rubicon. Pretending to believe in the appearance of a divine entity himself, Caesar even made a great dedication to the superhuman piper. Suet. *Jul.* 81.2 mentions the dedication of a herd of horses, chronologically coinciding with the river crossing. Bicknell and Nielsen interpret this herd as the dedication to the impersonated god. They identify the apparition as Romulus-Quirinus, since after Munda a bust of Caesar was placed in the temple of Quirinus (Cassius Dio 43.45.3).

This theory cannot, of course, be proven. The point of the story seems to be the replacement of peace with war, represented by the reed pipe and the trumpet.<sup>23)</sup> When the mysterious figure appears, he is sitting and playing the reed pipe, clearly a bucolic scene. For the reed pipe the word *harundo* is used, a generic marker.<sup>24)</sup> There is no other place in Latin literature where *harundo* is used to express the contrast between war and peace, but its synonym *avena* appears twice in this context. Ovid, in *Tr.* 5.10.25-6, describes a distorted pastoral scene in Scythia: *sub galea pastor iunctis pice cantat avenis, proque lupo pavidae bella verentur oves*. The piper is armed for fight; the sheep fear war, not wolves. Warrior and shepherd are merged

<sup>21)</sup> von Ranke 1883, 328.

<sup>22)</sup> Bicknell and Nielsen 1998, 152-6. They follow the suggestion already made by Butler and Cary (1927, 85) that if the story about the piper was true, it must have been arranged by Caesar.

<sup>23)</sup> Bicknell and Nielsen (1998, 155) mention this substitution without elaborating the identification of *harundo* ~ peace, *tuba* ~ war.

<sup>24)</sup> *TLL* s.v. E.g. Verg. *Ecl.* 6.8; Prop. 2.34.68; Ov. *Met.* 11.154; Sil. 14.471; Nemes. *Ecl.* 1.3.

into one and the same person: in the realm of the barbarians, the separation between war and peace is abolished.<sup>25)</sup> The second passage in which *avena* is explicitly opposed to *tuba*, is Mart. 8.3.19-22, *at tu Romano lepidos sale tingue libellos: / agnoscat mores vita legatque suos. / angusta cantore licet videaris avena, / dum tua multorum vincat avena tubas*. Here, *avena* represents not bucolic or pastoral poetry in particular but small genres (*angusta*... *avena*, 21), while *tuba* stands for the great warlike genre of epic (*aspera uel paribus bella tonare modis*, 14). Hence, when Suetonius' apparition puts aside the reed pipe, snatches a trumpet and blasts the signal for attack, it symbolizes the transition from peace to war which results from the crossing of the Rubicon.

Caesar's remark, *eatur quo deorum ostenta et inimicorum iniquitas vocat*, might serve as a reflexive annotation.<sup>26)</sup> Already when crossing the Rubicon, Suetonius has Caesar anticipate what the Plutarchan Caesar concludes when he gazes at the dead on the battlefield of Pharsalos (*Caes.* 46.1): τοῦτ' ἐβουλήθησαν, εἰς τοῦτό μ' ἀνάγκης ὑπηγάγοντο, ἵνα Γάϊος Καῖσαρ ὁ μέγιστους πολέμους κατορθώσας, εἰ προηκόμην τὰ στρατεύματα, κἄν κατεδικάσθην. Suetonius takes the general's statement up again after his Pharsalian battle and has Caesar confirm: *hoc voluerunt; tantis rebus gestis Gaius Caesar condemnatus essem, nisi ab exercitu auxilium petissem* (*Caes.* 30.4).

## 6. An Epic Crossing: Lucan

The last text describing the crossing of the Rubicon is Lucan's *Bellum Civile*. The poem chronologically precedes the other sources except for Velleius Paterculus. Since it is the only non-historiographical and hence is the least historical text, it assumes a special status; therefore it has been delayed to this point of the discussion. Further, despite Lucan's demonstrable use of Livy and Caesar elsewhere in his poem,<sup>27)</sup> the narrative has nearly nothing in common with the other sources.

In Lucan's epic, the actual narrative starts with the crossing of the Rubicon.<sup>28)</sup> In 1.183-232, Caesar rushes across the Alps and reaches the little

<sup>25)</sup> For the contrast of the *galea* and the idyllic scene see Luck 1977 *ad loc.*

<sup>26)</sup> On the terminology see Hinds 1998, 3.

<sup>27)</sup> Masters 1992, 15 with further bibliography.

<sup>28)</sup> For a recent discussion of the scene see Radicke 2004, 170-8 with further bibliography.

river Rubicon. There the personified Patria appears and tries to prevent the crossing (183-92). Caesar, first stunned with fear, reacts with a prayer and carries the standards across the river (192-205). He is compared to a lion throwing himself onto the spear of the hunter.

Then the scene seems to start anew, as Lucan gives a description of the Rubicon: usually a small river, but due to rain and melting Alpine snow it has turned into a rapid stream (213-20). The cavalry place themselves diagonally across the current, forming a cordon for the infantry. Having reached the other side of the river, Caesar states that he is leaving peace and laws behind and following Fortuna (223-7). He rushes on and takes Ariminum before dawn (228-32).

In keeping with Caesar's characterization as a lightning bolt in 1.151-4, his destructive speed is prominent in the Rubicon scene. Caesar rushes across the Alps (*iam... cursu superaverat Alpes*, 183); when he starts the civil war, it is described as *moras solvit belli* (204); he carries the signs across the river in a hurry (*per amnem / signa tulit propere*, 204-5); after the crossing he pushes his army forward (*rapit agmina*, 228) and moves faster than a missile whirled by a Balearic slingshot or a Parthian bow (*et torto Balearis verbere fundae / ocior et missa Parthi post terga sagitta*, 229-30). Caesar's stay in Ravenna is not mentioned.

### 6.1. *A Second Hannibal*

Already in the opening lines of the passage Caesar, having mastered the Alps, is styled a second Hannibal, a characterization probably modelled after a declamatory *topos*.<sup>29)</sup> His motivation, *ingentesque animo motus bellumque futurum / ceperat* (184-5), resembles that in Velleius Paterculus. The *ingentes motus* as well as the *ingens imago* (186) of Patria are opposed to the small river Rubicon.<sup>30)</sup> And in fact, the Rubicon is just a brook. But Lucan claims in 204 (*tumidumque per amnem*), in the ecphrasis, and in the crossing of the army (213-22), that in that time of year rain and melt water have turned it into a huge, rapid torrent. But the origin of the Rubicon is located not in the Alps but in the Apennines, whose snow is not melted by

<sup>29)</sup> Radicke 2004, 123, 171-2. For an overview of the places where the Hannibal motif appears, see Masters 1992, 1 n. 1.

<sup>30)</sup> *parvi Rubiconis ad undas* is framed by two lines beginning with *ingentes/ingens* (184-6). See Narducci 1980, 175 n. 3, Masters 1992, 1.

south winds either in November or December. Hence the physical danger deriving from crossing the river is fictional: Lucan's Rubicon is adapted to the world of epic. The cavalry breaking the current for the infantry resembles Hannibal crossing the Po in Livy (21.47.4-5), where the Punic general builds a cordon for the infantry with his elephants.<sup>31)</sup> Moreover, the verb describing Caesar's crossing of the Alps as well as of the Rubicon is the same, *superare*.

## 6.2. *Two Crossings?*

In the *Pharsalia*, the river crossing seems to happen twice. The first time Caesar transfers the standards after his encounter with *Patria*, *tumidumque per amnem / signa tulit propere* (204-5). But after the ecphrasis and the crossing of the troops, it is said: *Caesar, ut adversam superato gurgite ripam / attigit* (223-4). This 'double crossing' has been interpreted as the description of one scene from two different views, i.e., that of Caesar and of his soldiers.<sup>32)</sup> Another explanation could reflect a problem with the block technique of the Rubicon scene. It consists of three blocks: an epic block (the appearance of the personified *patria* and Caesar's prayer), a 'pseudo-realistic' block (ecphrasis and the military crossing technique), and a second epic block (Caesar's words after the crossing). Lucan did not manage to harmonize the blocks completely, which led to the repetition.<sup>33)</sup>

## 6.3. *The Encounter with Patria*

In the first epic block, Caesar and his troops encounter an apparition, as later in Suetonius. It is the personification of *patria*, who tries to prevent the invasion into Italy.<sup>34)</sup> Thus, Lucan describes Caesar's breach of law—leaving

<sup>31)</sup> Radicke 2004, 175.

<sup>32)</sup> Görler 1976.

<sup>33)</sup> Radicke 2004, 175-6, following Syndikus 1958, 28, 134. Masters (1992, 3) claims that there is no repetition at all and that the ablative absolute *superato gurgite* suggests that Caesar is already across and that his crossing is passed over.

<sup>34)</sup> Most likely the apparition is modeled after the rhetorical 'fatherland prosopopoiia' as suggested by Lebek (1976, 117); parallels are e.g. Cic. *Planc.* 12, 92; Cic. *Catil.* 1.17-8, 27-9. Radicke sees a parallel to the female apparition encountered by Drusus in Suet. *Cl.* 1.2 and D.C. 55.1.4, especially because of the verbal reminiscence *tendere ultra / ποῖ δῆτα ἐπέιγῃ*. For more possible models see Masters 1992, 1 n. 4.

his province together with his army—in a way appropriate to the epic *Stilhöhe*, when the goddess says: *quo tenditis ultra? / quo fertis mea signa, viri? si iure venitis, / si cives, huc usque licet* (190-2). Although it is said that the *imago* appears to Caesar (*visa duci... imago*, 186), interestingly she does not address Caesar himself, but the army collectively. Probably the vocative *viri* refers to the soldiers excluding their general. Caesar's mind is already attuned to war (184-5) and addressing him might be useless anyway.<sup>35)</sup>

Caesar, in his answering prayer, stresses his own person, as if to draw attention to himself:

|                                                               |     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| o magnae qui moenia prospicis urbis                           | 195 |
| Tarpeia de rupe Tonans Phrygiique penates                     |     |
| gentis Iuleae et rapti secreta Quirini                        |     |
| et residens celsa Latiaris Iuppiter Alba                      |     |
| Vestalesque foci summique o numinis instar                    |     |
| Roma, faue coeptis. non te furialibus armis                   | 200 |
| persequor: en adsum victor terraque marique                   |     |
| Caesar, ubique tuus—liceat modo, nunc quoque—miles. (195-202) |     |

It seems as if he has to remind the deities he invokes, among them Roma (in emphatic last position), that he is her soldier, too, not just his men, who had been addressed earlier. These deities—Jupiter the Thunderer, the Phrygian Penates, Quirinus, Jupiter Latiaris, the hearth of Vesta and Roma herself—are the protectors of the city under names that represent the Julian-Claudian dynastic theology, i.e. protectors still to come at the time the narrative takes place. Caesar not only claims not to bring destruction to Rome (200-1), but his invocation is an anticipation of history.<sup>36)</sup>

He ends with an exculpation: *Ille erit, ille nocens, qui me tibi fecerit hostem* (203). This might be, as in Suetonius, an allusion to Caesar's *dictum* after the battle of Pharsalus (Suet. *Caes.* 30.4: see above), passed down by Pollio.<sup>37)</sup> As Grimal points out, Caesar does not say *...est, qui...fecit* but...

<sup>35)</sup> Differently e.g. Masters (1992, 1): "...in her appeal to Caesar", and Radicke (2004, 172): "...und gebietet ihm Einhalt".

<sup>36)</sup> Grimal 1968, 57-8.

<sup>37)</sup> Radicke 2004, 174.

*erit, qui... fecerit.*<sup>38)</sup> The employment of the future marks Caesar's sentence as a self-reflexive metapoetical statement.<sup>39)</sup> Even *en, adsum Caesar* may function as such a sign-post here: Caesar is not yet the enemy of his fatherland, but that is what he will become, and after the battle of Pharsalus, he will state this as a fact.<sup>40)</sup>

Having reached the other side, Caesar speaks again. His words pick up on the breach of law the crossing means (*iura relinquo*, 225; *procul... foedera sunt*, 26) and his determination to wage war (*utendum est iudice bello*, 227). The Menander quotation 'The die is cast' does not appear in Lucan. But the sense—again accommodated to the epic *Stilhöhe*—is implied in *te, Fortuna, sequor* (226) and perhaps in *credidimus fatis* (227; *fatis codd.: satis his* Housm.), if one reads the perfect as expressing present tense here ('I put trust in fate as I used to before').<sup>41)</sup>

## 7. Conclusion

Lucan's account of the Rubicon crossing is the most literary of our surviving versions. It is highly metapoetic, and the scene is adjusted to the epic genre. The breach of law the crossing implies is expressed by the appearance of the personified *patria*; using a self-reflexive allusion, Caesar tries to

<sup>38)</sup> Grimal 1968, 60.

<sup>39)</sup> A parallel would be Seneca's Medea crying out, when she performs her revenge: *Medea nunc sum* (910). With this metapoetic statement she confirms that now she has succeeded in living up to her literary reputation. For a discussion of the Senecan Medea's self-awareness see Schiesaro 1997.

<sup>40)</sup> To whom does *ille* refer? Possible candidates would be Pompey or Cato (Grimal 1968, 60). But given the metapoetic nature of the scene, there might be an additional interpretation. Masters (1992, 1–10) sees Caesar as a part of Lucan the poet who in creating the civil war is waging war, a war that is *nefas*. The apparition functions as a literary *revocatio*. Moreover, he points out the metapoetical notion of rivers in Lucan in his discussion of the Sisoris crossing, another *tumidus amnis* in book 4 (65–70). But he does not apply this notion consistently to the crossing of the Rubicon. The narrative of the epos starts with the crossing of the Rubicon, this act marking the outbreak of the civil war. Since the *Bellum Civile* is an epic poem on the topic of the civil war, Caesar has to enter its world of epic by crossing an epic stream—hence the transformation of the Rubicon. Would Lucan possibly have Caesar, who in his own account elides the transgression, accuse the poet (*ille*), who presents him as opening the war in spite of the intervention of *Patria*?

<sup>41)</sup> Radicke 2004, 176–7.

exculpate himself. In keeping with the decorum of epic, Lucan is the only author to describe the actual act of crossing in a way which evokes the Livian Hannibal's elephant cordon, and to illustrate the danger deriving from the swollen stream.

Suetonius, too, plays with generic terms, opposing the *harundo* to the *tuba*. Like Lucan, he has a superhuman entity appear. The apparition does not try to prevent Caesar from crossing, but on the contrary leads the hesitating general across the river. Deviating from the other sources, Caesar gets lost on his way to the Rubicon in Suetonius, which might be based on a misinterpretation of Plutarch and/or Pollio. Caesar reaches the river after dawn and takes Ariminum during daylight. Plutarch and Appian offer less embellished reports than Lucan and Suetonius, while Plutarch gives an especially detailed account of the steps Caesar takes from his stay in Ravenna to the capture of Ariminum.

As different as all of these sources may be, there are certain motifs that can be found in all (or almost all) of them. First, there is the speed with which Caesar proceeds. The topic is most prominent in Lucan, due to Caesar's characterization as a lightning bolt, and also Plutarch and Appian stress the general's intention to make a quick surprise attack.<sup>42)</sup> The order of events in these two authors is: departure from Ravenna at sunset, crossing the Rubicon during the night, taking Ariminum before dawn. In Lucan, Caesar rushes over the Alps and without long delay at the river proceeds towards Ariminum. This speed is already an integrated part of Caesar's own self-representation.<sup>43)</sup> The exception here is Suetonius, who delays Caesar's advance by his nocturnal wandering, the apparition and the general's harangue after the crossing.

Vital elements in all of the sources are the breach of law and the consequences of the crossing, Caesar's doubts and the hazardous character of the enterprise, which is sometimes illustrated by a comparison or a simile. The decision-making is accompanied by a *dictum* by Caesar.

Lucan marks the legal dimension of the crossing by the apparition of Patria. His Caesar, in fact, does not show scruples, but is terrified by the

<sup>42)</sup> Caesar's hesitation before crossing the river does not particularly serve his characterization in Plutarch's biography. According to Pelling (2002, 328), it is even "out of character". It dramatizes the scene instead and emphasizes the significance of Caesar's decision.

<sup>43)</sup> Stadter (1993) uses the exemplary chapters *Civ.* 1.66-70 to demonstrate how Caesar's narrative technique suggests his *celeritas*.

encounter with the goddess. When he transfers the standards, he is compared to a suicidal lion throwing himself into the spear of the hunter. Caesar does not quote the Menander line about throwing the dice, but states that he is following Fortuna—this attitude is consonant with his portrait elsewhere in Lucan. Suetonius introduces the piper to end Caesar's hesitating. Caesar identifies the apparition as a divine *ostentum* and, as in Lucan, claims to be forced to his illegal act by his enemies. Plutarch describes Caesar's hesitation at great length; the general confers with himself as well as with his friends. In his *Life of Pompey*, Caesar is compared to someone throwing himself into an abyss, a comparison that expresses the same suicidal notion as Lucan's lion simile. Appian offers an abbreviated version of Plutarch. While in the latter Caesar says nothing else except the *dice-dictum*, Appian concentrates Caesar's pondering process in a statement.

The last thing all of these sources (save Velleius Paterculus and Orosius) have in common is the connection of the river crossing to a supernatural element. Both Plutarch and Appian say that Caesar makes up his mind like someone inspired; in addition, Plutarch mentions Caesar's prophetic dream about his having intercourse with his mother. Suetonius has the piper appear and blast a superhuman signal of attack. In Lucan, a personified Patria tries to prevent the crossing.

It is impossible to decide definitely in the surviving texts about Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon from which source they are derived. But it can be assumed that Asinius Pollio's account was used by Lucan, Plutarch, Appian and Suetonius, the latter two likely only via Plutarch. From Sulla's time on, the heartland of Italy had been a demilitarized area.<sup>44)</sup> An invasion was inconceivable, not so much for juristic but for historical reasons. Sulla with his march against Rome in 88 BCE had initiated ten of Rome's bloodiest years. Asinius Pollio, as a child of the late Republic, was very aware of that, and presumably tried in his account to mitigate Caesar's transgression by having Caesar hesitate, consider the consequences, blame his adversaries, be under the influence of supernatural powers and act in self-defense. These narrative devices developed into *topoi* of the Rubicon scene in Pollio's successors and underwent variations, emphasis or restraint, were exchanged by or merged with other models. The dramatic potential of the

<sup>44)</sup> See Rotondi 1966 on the *Lex Cornelia de provinciis ordinandis*, 81 BCE.

Rubicon scene as a point of transition was recognized and exploited. Therefore, presumably, the crossing of the small river gained such popularity in literature and was stylized as the beacon for the civil war, although Caesar had already set himself at fault much earlier by holding on to his command.

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