

1500 word commentary – Appian *Bellum Civile* 2.5.35

Appian of Alexandria was born circa 95 CE in Roman controlled Egypt (Welch 2019). We know relatively little of his life, but we do know that as a young adult he moved to Rome, where he acted as a barrister for a time, and that he later held a political appointment under Antoninus Pius. The primary piece of surviving work we have of Appian's is an extensive history called the *Ῥωμαϊκά*, or *Historia Romana*, which lays out a significant portion of Roman history and is divided up into several books centered around geographic location (eg. Italy, Gaul, Spain) or temporal period (eg. the war with Hannibal), and of which an important part is the *Bellum Civile*, an account of the Civil Wars of the late Republic. Broken down by *στασίARCHOI*, or roughly “factional leaders” (Welch 2019), the *BC* gives what is likely the most complete narrative for the period between Tiberius Gracchus and Octavian's War with Antony (Bucher 2000).

The excerpt in question for this paper – coming from a portion of Book 2, Chapter 5, section 35 – deals in particular with a moment from the civil wars that has endured in the public memory perhaps more than any other – Julius Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon. Appian is not the only author to discuss this event, although his peers are somewhat limited: Plutarch, Suetonius, Lucan, Vellius Paterclus, and Orosius (Rondholz 2009). While Lucan and Suetonius' accounts differ wildly from Appian's in content, Plutarch's account closely matches that which we have from Appian, and indeed Appian's account may very well be based on that of Plutarch's (Rondholz 2009). The most likely primary source for the event is Asinius Pollio, who was present according to Plutarch, though his own published histories have been lost (Rondholz 2009).

δρόμῳ δ' ἐλθὼν ἐπὶ τὸν Ῥουβίκωνα ποταμόν, ὃς ὀρίζει τὴν Ἰταλίαν, ἔσθῃ τοῦ δρόμου καὶ ἐς τὸ ῥεῦμα ἀφορῶν περιέφερετο τῇ γνώμῃ, λογιζόμενος ἕκαστα τῶν ἐσομένων κακῶν, εἰ τόνδε τὸν ποταμόν σὺν ὅπλοις περάσειε. καὶ πρὸς τοὺς παρόντας εἶπεν ἀνενεγκών: ‘ἡ μὲν ἐπίσχεσις, ᾧ φίλοι, τῇσδε τῆς διαβάσεως ἐμοὶ κακῶν ἄρξει, ἡ δὲ διάβασις πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις.’ καὶ εἰπὼν οἷά τις ἔνθους ἐπέρα σὺν ὀρμῇ, τὸ κοινὸν τόδε ἐπειπών: ‘ὁ κύβος ἀνερρίφθω.’ δρόμῳ δ' ἐντεῦθεν ἐπιὼν Ἀρίμινόν τε αἰρεῖ περὶ ἔω καὶ ἐς τὸ πρόσθεν ἐχώρει, προὔρια τοῖς ἐπικαίροις ἐφιστάς καὶ τὰ ἐν ποσὶν ἢ βίᾳ χειρούμενος ἢ φιλανθρωπίᾳ.

Let us break that down in sections. The excerpt begins with Caesar arriving at the Rubicon – with *δρόμος* in the dative (as required by the preposition *ἐπὶ*) acting as an indirect object in conjunction with *ἐλθὼν* (3rd person singular aorist participle), an implied subject “he” (meaning Caesar) and the direct object *τὸν Ῥουβίκωνα ποταμόν* – specifying that Caesar had come to the Rubicon river specifically (note the hellenisation of the latin *Rubico* also in matching accusative with *ποταμόν*). We also find an example of elision in the *δε* before *ἐλθὼν*. Following, we have an absolute clause, which acts to further define the aforementioned river: the relative pronoun *ὃς*, in this case referring to *ποταμόν*, works with dative participle *ὀρίζει* “acting as a division from” and *τὴν Ἰταλίαν*, in the accusative, to mean something like “a boundary of Italy”. Returning to the original phrase, we have *ἔσθῃ* (3rd singular aorist of *ίστημι*) and *δρόμος* in the genitive – *τοῦ δρόμου* – indicating a cessation of movement before *ἀφορῶν* (active participle “looking at”) *ἐς* (accusative taking preposition “in/into”) *τὸ ῥεῦμα* (lit. “that which flows”) – meaning one looking into a stream or river, but with shades implying an act of gazing into the moving water rather than at the aquatic body in general, perhaps as one might do in contemplation while watching a fountain, for example. In that contemplation, Caesar *περιέφερετο* (participle *περιφέρω* – this particular word has myriad meanings, but in this case most likely uses the concept of “turning over”

much like one may do with an object one is examining in one's hands) τῇ γνώμῃ (dative γνώμη, in this case likely "mind") – all together giving the concept of a person mulling over various ideas, which continues thusly: λογιζόμενος (aorist participle λογίζομαι "counting") ἕκαστα ("each and every" with the implied additional connotation of doing so with exacting detail) τῶν ἐσομένων κακῶν – a genitive plural clause, with the adjective κακῶν "evils" being used in place of a noun, modified by the future participle of εἶμι, to denote "future evil [things] which will be" based on the subsequent phrase as signposted by the following word εἰ "should". τόνδε modifies τὸν ποταμόν to mean the specific river previously mentioned (as opposed to any old river in general) that Caesar περάσειε (3rd singular optative of either περαῶ "cross over" or possibly πειρῶ "pierce through"). The former root is most likely given the context of literally crossing a river, but when we consider that the Rubicon was earlier defined as the border (ὀρίζει) of Italy proper, and with the inclusion of σὺν ὅπλοις ("while bearing weapons" or, more colloquially "under arms"), the latter interpretation of "piercing through an inviolable border" shouldn't be entirely discounted either. Also important to note is the relationship between future ἐσομένων and optative περάσειε – that one event will happen should another event also happen.

The action then shifts with Caesar ἀνενεγκών (aorist participle "recovering") and εἶπεν (3rd aorist εἶπον "said") πρὸς (accusative taking participle "to/towards") τοὺς παρόντας (accusative plural participle παρειμι) "those [people] who are present". Curiously, this is where Plutarch mentions Asinius Pollio by name (ὧν ἦν καὶ Πολλίων Ἀσίνιος - *Caes* 32.5), but there is no mention of him in Appian's text. Next, an either/or clause is introduced using ἢ μὲν... ἢ δέ, stating that ἐπίσχεσις (per White "hesitating") τῇσδε (see τόνδε above) τῆς διαβάσεως (genitive διάβασις "crossing place") – together "this specific ford" – would be the ἄρξει (3rd future ἀρχή "beginning") κακῶν (as before, "evil [things]") ἐμοὶ ("to me", meaning Caesar); the alternative – that is, διάβασις – would see κακῶν (repetition omitted, but implied) πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις "to all men" (dative construction, rather than accusative, because "all men" are in this case gaining the myriad evils rather than simply being acted upon).

Then, in perhaps the core of the excerpt, Caesar οἷά ἔνθους ("in such a manner" with ἔν+θεος "in god" together to mean "in a divine way" or usually "divinely inspired") and ἐπέρα (3rd aorist περαῶ or πειρῶ, as detailed above) σὺν ὀρμῇ (dative construction modifying the immediately preceding action, implying variously "force", "violence", or "eagerness"). In doing so he "utters the common phrase" (τὸ κοινὸν τόδε ἐπειπὼν): 'ὁ κύβος ἀνερρίφθω.' We understand this today most commonly as "the die is cast" from Suetonius' *iacta alea est*, but the Greek is closer to "let the die be cast", and is allegedly a quote from Menander, an Athenian playwright from circa 300 BCE – though much of his work exists only in fragmentary form today – which would explain Appian's reference to the phrase as "common" (τὸ κοινὸν). After crossing, Caesar's course (δρόμῳ) took him ἐπιών (present participle ἐπεμι "imminently") to seize (αἰρεῖ) the town of Ἀρίμινόν (a hellenisation of *Ariminum* – modern Rimini) which lay at the far end of the *Via Flaminia* and as such offered a direct route to *Roma* herself. There, Caesar had previously sent men (ἐς τὸ πρόσθεν ἐχώρει τοῖς ἐπικαίροις) in order to ἐφιστάς "set up" φρούρια "garrisons" τὰ ἐν ποσὶν "at intervals". The excerpt finishes with another and/or clausal construction, this time using ἢ... ἢ – with Caesar χειρούμενος (active participle χειρουμεῖ "overcoming" or "subduing") his foes (implied subject) either through force (ἢ βίᾳ) or through kindness (ἢ φιλανθρωπίᾳ).

If we take it all together, one possible translation looks a little like this:

When his course had come to the Rubicon river, which is the boundary of Italy, he stopped and, while looking into the flowing waters, recounted in his mind each and every possible

evil should he cross the river in arms. Then, recovering himself, he said to those present: "Friends, hesitation at this crossing will beget evil unto me, while crossing will beget evil unto all men." Thus speaking, he leapt with eagerness as though divinely inspired stating "the die has been cast!" His course then immediately made for Ariminum, where his men had earlier advanced on and seized, and there he set garrisons at regular intervals – subduing his opponents through force or benevolence.

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