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CAESAR AND THE PIRATES: OR HOW TO MAKE (AND BREAK) AN ANCIENT LIFE*

Introduction

It is hard for biographers, ancient and modern alike, to resist the story of the young Julius Caesar's kidnapping by a band of pirates. Suetonius and Plutarch both include full versions of the tale, with specific details (Suet. *Iul.* 4; Plut. *Vit. Caes.* 1.4–2). Suetonius, for instance, writes that the kidnapping took place near the island of Pharmacusa (just off the coast of Asia Minor), while Plutarch, noting that too, also specifies that the ransom that freed Caesar came from the (nearby) city of Miletus. And while Suetonius writes that Caesar, after his release, launched a fleet, pursued the pirates, and punished them, Plutarch includes another phase in the story: having taken command of a fleet and set sail (again, from Miletus), Plutarch's Caesar captured nearly all the pirates but, instead of killing them right away, 'he himself went to Iuncus, the governor of Asia, on the grounds that it belonged to him, as governor of the province, to punish the captives'. When Iuncus postponed a decision on the matter (evidently hoping to make a profit out of the situation), Caesar returned to Pergamum, took the robbers out of prison, and only then crucified them himself.

Alongside such an elaborate story as this can be set some large gaps in the record for the young Caesar's life – what service he saw as military tribune, for instance, during the great war with Spartacus, goes unmentioned. And so one might ask why the pirate episode in particular was so remembered. Of course, ancient biographers were less interested in exhaustive accounts of the childhood and even young adulthood of their subjects; what counted were *res gestae*; and perhaps there were none from (say) Caesar's tribunate.[1] At the same

* I wish to thank referees for earlier versions of this article for very significant help, including detailed – and much needed – guidance on chronological matters. I am pleased to offer it as a tribute to Professor Ann Ellis Hanson, whose scholarship and teaching have shown me how to look for friends of Romans in the empire's provinces. All translations are my own.

[1] On the treatment of childhood in ancient biography, see especially C. B. R. Pelling, *Plutarch and History* (London, 2002), 301–38.

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time, the story of his kidnapping was colourful and dramatic. It could easily lend itself to embellishment, even outright rewriting. Plutarch has his Caesar writing poems and speeches to read aloud to the pirates, thereby demonstrating his educational attainments, a theme beloved of this author.[2] Polyaenus, in his *Stratagems* – of course, not a biographical text as such – goes even further in his telling of the tale (8.23.1), which initiates a long catalogue of Caesar's wiles. This crafty Caesar has no need even to raise a fleet against the pirates; instead, he orders that, along with the ransom from Miletus, the furnishings for a great feast be brought, as well as a pot full of swords and wine mixed with mandrake. Drugged by the wine, the pirates fell asleep, and so Caesar was able to have his revenge on them.

The opportunity to make a hero of Caesar was appealing, but some writers preferred to indulge, if only implicitly, in the irony of the future conqueror so demeaned – a captive for 'nearly forty days' as Suetonius puts it. Valerius Maximus, one of the earliest authorities for the episode, is in fact more explicit, including Caesar in his chapter on changes of fortune (6.9.15). While his Caesar had virtues that would make him divine, in his youth, travelling to Asia as a private citizen, 'he was captured by sea robbers off the island of Pharmacusa and ransomed himself for fifty talents. So Fortune willed that for a small sum the brightest star in the universe should be exchanged in a pirate galley.'

Ultimately, however, the story's greatest attraction, especially for biographers, was that it could show what Caesar was to become. This is especially clear in the history of Velleius Paterculus, who alone of writers other than Plutarch and Suetonius offers a major account of Caesar's early life (2.41–3). While Velleius remarks more than once that he has inadequate scope to treat Caesar's life (2.41.1, 42.1), he devotes a great deal of space to the story of the pirates, and Caesar's altercation with the governor of Asia in particular – ostensibly because this last was 'a sign of how great a man he would later turn out to be' (2.42.1). In this version, after the ransom was paid, Caesar (though a private citizen), collected a fleet, put the pirates to flight, captured some of their ships, imprisoned those men captured, and 'went straight to Bithynia, to the proconsul Iunius *Iun*cus – for the same man governed Asia *and Bithynia* – and sought his authorization for the execution

[2] Ibid., 77.

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of his captives'.[3] The timid governor grew jealous, refused, and said that he would sell the captives (into slavery); in the meantime, Caesar returned to the coast with 'unbelievable speed' and crucified all his prisoners before a dispatch from the proconsul could be received. It is Caesar's *speed* that is showcased here – and appropriately, since Velleius has already referred to it in his opening sketch of Caesar's character and will remark on it again later in the narrative (2.41.1, 51.2). While speed might have been a part of the story from the start, it took on added meaning after Caesar's *celeritas* had become proverbial through his later campaigns.[4]

Plutarch achieves something not dissimilar to Velleius' foreshadowing, but to greater effect. For the reader of this biography, Caesar's revenge on the pirates is the first of the many plans that, though laid down from the start by Caesar, dawn on their victims only too late – even though, here, Caesar has told his victims exactly what he plans to do! The tale foreshadows darker passages to come. Only a few chapters later, in a crucial section of the biography, Plutarch comments on the inability of Caesar's opponents in Rome to see what he was up to until it was too late: 'they realized…that no start to an affair ought to be considered small, which persistence can quickly make great, after contempt has allowed it to go unstopped' (4.3). Cicero, Plutarch claims (4.4), was

> the one who is thought first to have seen beneath the surface of Caesar's political programme and to have feared it, as one might fear the smiling surface of the sea, and who perceived how powerful a character was hidden in Caesar's agreeable and good-humoured exterior.

Later, during the Gallic war, 'unobserved by Pompey', Caesar not only conquered Rome's enemy but subdued the Romans through the money he won (20.2). And as Caesar came to the final confrontation with Pompey, Plutarch writes: 'Caesar had from the very beginning formed his plan. Like an athlete, he had, as it were, removed himself from his antagonists and, in the Gallic wars, had increased his strength' (28.2).

[3] The italics here represent corrections to the transmitted text, made partially on the basis of Plutarch. For the correction of <*Iun*>*cum*, first proposed by Nipperdey, see especially A. M. Ward, 'Caesar and the Pirates II: The Elusive M. Iunius Iuncus and the Year 75/4', *AJAH* 2 (1977), 26–36; the other, less controversial, correction is Lipsius' '*Asiam eamque*' for '*Asiam eam quam*'.

[4] See, e.g., Cic. *Att.* 7.22.1, 8.9.4, 10.9.1; Cic. *Marcell.* 5; Suet. *Iul.* 57, using Velleius' same phrase, '*incredibilis celeritas*' (also at Caes. *B Gall.* 3.29 in reference to Caesar).

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Modern writers, too, have had a tendency to use the tale as a glimpse of what is to come. Gelzer, for instance, sees in the episode 'evidence of his [Caesar's] limitless audacity and self-confidence'. Meier finds an unusual 'self-sufficiency and arrogance'; there is 'bold efficiency' and 'such energy!' Kamm accepts Suetonius' report that Caesar had the pirates' throats cut before they were crucified, to spare them a long death, for his Caesar was of 'a merciful disposition'. Billows, in the most recent treatment of the episode, is content simply to repeat the ancient sources and writes: 'The pirates…were neither the first nor the last to underestimate Caesar.'[5] A more perceptive reading comes from Adrian Goldsworthy, who, in his own biography of Caesar, suggests that the tale of Caesar and the pirates 'in so many ways…encapsulates the legend of Caesar'.[6] Without analysing all the versions of it, Goldsworthy observes that in them, taken together, we see the man's sense of self-importance and self-confidence, his ability to charm, a good display or two of fearlessness, determination, speed of action, ruthless skill, and a final act of clemency.

Given all that, Goldsworthy also rightly argues that, before using the story as objective historical evidence, one needs to ask: how did it originate? Even a moment's reflection will suggest that it must have been with Caesar himself. Goldsworthy seems too diffident on this point.[7] It was only the young *nobilis* who could have made the flattering tale familiar back in Rome and allowed it – unlike so many other incidents from his early life – to enter the historical tradition (even if it took on additional layers of meaning later). And this need not be accepted simply *a priori*, as we shall soon see.

As Maria Wyke has observed, in an acute discussion of the episode and its recasting through the ages, the tale served Caesar's own interests.[8] Yet if we accept that the tale does instance Caesar's well-known skill in celebrating his achievements, further questions arise. How much of it was true? In what context was the story first disseminated, and how exactly did it enter the later tradition? In the next section of this article these questions are explored – and, while

[5] M. Gelzer, *Caesar: Politician and Statesman*, trans. P. Needham (Cambridge, 1968), 24; C. Meier, *Caesar*, trans. D. McLintock (London, 1995), 109; A. Kamm, *Julius Caesar. A Life* (London, 2006), 34 (relying on Suet. *Iul.* 74.1); R. Billows, *Julius Caesar. The Colossus of Rome* (London, 2009), 64–5.

[6] A. Goldsworthy, *Caesar. The Life of a Colossus* (London, 2006), 76.

[7] Contrast the view set forth by G. Ferrero, *The Greatness and Decline of Rome*, i (New York, 1909), 129.

[8] M. Wyke, *Caesar. A Life in Western Culture* (London, 2007), 74.

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some of the answers must be tentative, I will at least suggest something of how an ancient life story could be made (and also broken). I will then turn to a related matter: if we detach the story of 'Caesar and the Pirates' from what was to come and think harder about it in its original historical context, we glimpse more of what Caesar actually was up to the in the 70s BC. The focus, in other words, is less on the Caesar of later history and legend than on a young Roman noble on the make. Tatum, in his recent work *Always I Am Caesar* has applied this sort of contextualization to other episodes of Caesar's biography, and I will show that it is a profitable method to use here.[9]

Caesar and the pirates: the formation of the tradition

Of the three chief sources for Caesar's early years – the works of Suetonius, Plutarch, and Velleius – the last is especially valuable because it is early (written *c.*AD 30) and because it dates Caesar's encounter most precisely, to around 74 BC. It was then that King Nicomedes IV of Bithynia, with whom Caesar had developed the important relationship of *hospitium* (guest-friendship) several years earlier, died.[10] By his will, Nicomedes had left his kingdom to Rome; the Senate accepted the bequest and the task of organizing it as a province was added to the *provincia* of Iunius Iuncus, already governor of Asia.[11] Now, as we have seen, Plutarch reports a similar story about Iuncus; since he is most unlikely to have relied on Velleius, their similar stories must derive from an early and detailed tradition, one that remembered such specifics as the identity of Iunius Iuncus. (Plutarch is, however, seriously discrepant on chronology, a matter taken up in the appendix below.[12]) Valerius Maximus, also a Tiberian author, does not significantly contradict this tradition, and locates the episode off Pharmacusa – as does Suetonius, who almost certainly did not rely on Valerius for this, again suggesting that both of these authors depended

[9] W. J. Tatum, *Always I Am Caesar* (Malden, MA, 2008).

[10] Death of Nicomedes dated to 74 BC: Eutr. 6.6.1. *Hospitium*: Gell. *NA* 5.13.6 (cited below), with J. Osgood, 'Caesar and Nicomedes', *CQ* 58 (2008), 687–91.

[11] Two good discussions of events in Bithynia at this time are given by R. Kallet-Marx, *Hegemony to Empire. The Development of the Roman* Imperium *in the East from 148 to 62 B.C.* (Berkeley, CA, 1995), 299–301; and T. C. Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic* (Oxford, 2000), 559–62.

[12] Not least because the whole question has recently been reopened by L.-M. Günther, 'Caesar und die Seeräuber: Eine Quellenanalyse', *Chiron* 29 (1999), 321–37.

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on an early tradition. Suetonius, it should also be noted, while giving a *shortened* version of the tale, does not significantly undermine the Velleius/Plutarch tradition.

Two conclusions emerge. First, by the Tiberian period at the latest, almost all of the essential details concerning 'Caesar and the Pirates' had already certainly entered the tradition: kidnapping off Pharmacusa, ransoming, Caesar's subsequent revenge, and the encounter with Iunius Iuncus.[13] Second, no source suggests that radically different versions of the story were available. Indeed, the most economical hypothesis is that a full version of the story was established early and broadly commanded acceptance, even if smaller details could, and did, fluctuate. But when, exactly, did this early story take shape?

The earliest biographies, or quasi-biographies, of Caesar were almost certainly written by his friends Balbus and Oppius soon after his death.[14] Balbus, who urged Hirtius to complete the unfinished *Gallic War*, seems to have produced a work that covered at least the last part of Caesar's life.[15] Oppius, who functioned as Caesar's secretary, gave the Dictator an encomiastic treatment that was probably arranged, at least in part, not chronologically but by topic – like a Roman *laudatio*.[16] Keeping this in mind, and recognizing that Suetonius and Plutarch were familiar with the work of Oppius, we can suggest that Oppius is a good candidate for having written an early, detailed account of 'Caesar and the Pirates' (including the clash with Iuncus) of fundamental importance for the later tradition, including perhaps Velleius.[17] Even for Oppius, the tale might have been most significant for illustrating qualities of the Caesar 'to come'.

But where would Oppius, or any other early writer for that matter – even Velleius, supposing he worked independently of a (quasi-) biographical source – have got the story? There was little documentary evidence available, although it was not altogether non-existent. In particular, copies of speeches that Caesar gave at a young age survived,

[13] Note that the annalist Fenestella also treated the episode: Peter *HRRel* fr. 30. (The only other ancient source, the late *De viris illustribus*, appears to depend on Suetonius.)

[14] The classic discussion of the tradition for Caesar's early life is H. Strasburger, *Caesars Eintritt in die Geschichte* (Munich, 1938), still valuable as a pioneering study in the need to contextualize biographical episodes, but not always convincing on points of *Quellenforschung*. Various papers by Pelling, collected in Pelling (n. 1), give a better sense of the development of the biographical tradition of Caesar (and others).

[15] Hirt. *B Gall.* 8 *praef.*; Suet. *Iul.* 81.

[16] Plut. *Vit. Pomp.* 10.5, *Caes.* 17.5–6; Suet. *Iul.* 53, 72. The key analysis is G. Townend, 'C. Oppius on Julius Caesar', *AJPh* 108 (1987), 325–42.

[17] Cf. Pelling (n. 1), 13.

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were demonstrably of interest in later years, and did preserve useful information. Suetonius' notice that Caesar spoke on behalf of the *lex Plautia*, for instance, may well ultimately derive from the published version of that speech (from which Gellius quoted). Suetonius himself quoted from the *laudatio* that Caesar gave for Aunt Julia, Marius' wife. Also of value was the extant prosecution of Dolabella, and a speech *For the Bithynians*, to be discussed below.[18] Oppius, who, after all, did serve as Caesar's secretary, might have been familiar with the speeches.[19] Moreover, he could also rely on living memory, and even stories that Caesar himself told him.

Whatever sources Oppius used, whether speeches or oral tradition, it must be that he, along with any early biographer of Caesar, ultimately depended on Caesar himself for the pirate story. There was no other creditable witness – at least for what happened initially. Nor do we have to accept *a priori* that the story is essentially Caesar's. For the full 'Caesar and the Pirates', it must be noted, does not just celebrate our young hero; it also blackens the governor Iunius Iuncus, blaming him, by name, for a refusal to punish Caesar's captives and, what is more, imputing to him base motives for his inactivity. In other words, a story was fixed into memory that involved not just Caesar but also Iuncus – an otherwise obscure figure. Why, and how, should he have been remembered too? The obvious answer is that Caesar denounced the man back in Rome, in a way that drew a contrast with his own success.

It will, at this point, be useful to list two contemporary parallels (not entirely perfect) for the allegations concerning Iuncus. Both are found in the *Fifth Verrine* of Cicero, concerning the Sicilian governor's military operations. Throughout this part of the prosecution, the orator emphasizes Verres' total inactivity in this realm, in spite of the real threat that piracy posed to Sicily; worse still, at times (Cicero alleges) Verres went so far as to risk subverting the safety and security of the province in exchange for personal enrichment. Hence, when after a trial held in Sicily by the praetor the slaves of Leonidas were convicted of fomenting rebellion, Verres is said, in exchange for a bribe, to have let them go (*2 Verr.* 5.10–14). Even more relevant to the discussion here, when captured pirates did come under Verres' control, he is said (again in exchange for a payment) to have let their captain escape,

[18] *Lex Plautia*: Suet. *Iul.* 5 and Gell. *NA* 13.3.5. *Laudatio* for Julia: Suet. *Iul.* 6.1. Extant prosecution of Dolabella: see esp. Gell. *NA* 4.16.8.

[19] Oppius' secretarial work: e.g. Cic. *Q. Fr.* 3.1.8, 13; Gell. *NA* 17.9.1–5.

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and, instead of beheading all the pirates, as was customary, he sold some (*2 Verr.* 5.63–73).

Cicero's charges in the *Verrines* – and there surely were others like them made at other extortion trials or in speeches before the Senate – suggest the topicality of piracy around the time of Caesar's encounter.[20] They further show how a charge of the sort made against Iuncus was a matter of public interest. What they cannot prove, of course, is that Caesar actually did memorably arraign Iuncus at some point after the episode with the pirates. However, another piece of evidence is available that at least seems to point to less than harmonious relations between the two men – and also, more surely, to Caesar's interest in promoting his own deeds at this time.

Aulus Gellius, in a chapter of his *Attic Nights* (5.13) concerning what order of precedence should be shown in meeting the needs of relatives by blood and marriage, clients, and *hospites*, includes a quotation from the preface of Caesar's speech *For the Bithynians*:

> In view either of my guest-friendship with King Nicomedes or my relationship to those whose affairs are being discussed, Marcus Iuncus, I could not shrink from this duty. For neither should the remembrance of men be so obliterated by their death as not to be retained by those very close to them, nor can we, without the greatest disgrace, forsake clients, having established the custom of rendering them aid, even in preference to our kinfolk.

This precious passage – in addition to revealing Caesar's relationship of *hospitium* with Nicomedes and *clientela* with other unknown Bithynians – unfortunately does not show under what circumstances Caesar addressed Iuncus, except that it was after Nicomedes' death. Dahlmann suggested that Caesar prosecuted Iuncus *repetundarum* (for extortion) after the latter's return from Asia.[21] Münzer, by contrast, argued much more persuasively that Caesar gave the speech before Iuncus while still actually in the east, in an effort to help his old connections.[22] At this time, members of the royal family risked losing everything – and it may be no coincidence that the other, tantalizingly brief fragment of the speech seems to concern financial matters.[23] Whatever the speech's circumstances, the fragment does suggest that

[20] See further below.

[21] H. Dahlmann, 'Caesars Rede für die Bithnyier', *Hermes* 73 (1938), 341–46, accepted by Gelzer (n. 5), 29 and n. 4.

[22] Münzer *RE* s.v. Iuncus (4), accepted and strengthened by Ward (n. 3), 29–31.

[23] Quoted by Iul. Rufin. *RhL* p. 40.23. For the dispersal of the royal property, note Fest. p. 320 Lindsay.

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Caesar at some point locked horns with Iunius Iuncus over the fate of the Bithynians – perhaps even at the same time that they discussed the fate of the pirates. Its publication also shows how Caesar was promoting his own achievements in the east.

The account of Iunius Iuncus in later authors could therefore very well be another example of what Amy Richlin has aptly called 'fossilized invective'.[24] Of course, it might be true. Given the origin posited for it here, however, and its similarity to the sort of allegations one encounters in the *Verrines*, it can no longer be treated as straightforward evidence for Iuncus' total indifference, ineptitude, or worse, as it frequently has been.[25] Indeed, the fact was that, by the time Caesar had any quarrel with Iuncus over the pirates, the governor was overstretched.[26] In charge of Asia, he also faced the difficult task of organizing Bithynia; rebellion there was a real possibility, not least because (as was clear to all, including scheming politicians back in Rome) a new war with King Mithridates of Pontus was imminent. If Iuncus deferred a decision on captives safely in custody, it could have been because he had more pressing tasks at hand, and perhaps was planning to pass the matter on to a delegate. He might also have thought the young *privatus* was acting beyond his rights, and even rebuked him – which would have supplied another reason for Caesar to criticize Iuncus later. Yet Caesar still carried on with his plans to punish the pirates. He had a good reason for doing so (as we shall shortly see), separate from his own aggrieved pride.

First, though, if the appearance of Iuncus in the tradition helps to confirm that it was Caesar who put the story into circulation, can we go further and suggest in what context? It would have made very little sense for Caesar himself to start telling the story only later in life, however attractive biographers found it. On the other hand, before Pompey's celebrated war of 68 BC, pirates were a hot topic in Rome.[27] Other kidnapping stories were making the rounds – the praetors Sextilius and Bellinus were said to have been captured, and also the

[24] A. Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus. Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor* (New Haven, CT, 1983), 86.

[25] And not only by biographers of Caesar; see, e.g., P. De Souza, *Piracy in the Greco-Roman World* (Cambridge, 1999), 40–1.

[26] As suggested by, e.g., Kallet-Marx (n. 11), 300 and Brennan (n. 11), 559–61.

[27] Full discussion in de Souza (n. 25), 99–178; also note the recent discussion by M. Tröster, 'Roman Hegemony and Non-state Violence: A Fresh Look at Pompey's Campaign against the Pirates', *G&R* 56 (2009), 14–33.

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daughter of M. Antonius (*c.*99 BC), who fetched a large ransom.[28] As we have already seen, Cicero made much of piracy throughout his *Fifth Verrine*. One *coup de théâtre* of the trial was Cicero's own discovery – or at least allegation – that Verres was actually sheltering in his own house in Rome a pirate captain, whom Cicero had arrested.[29] Nor should we forget the triumph of Servilius Isauricus in 74 BC, perhaps the year that Caesar left Rome and was kidnapped. Having fought a great campaign against the Cilician pirates (in addition to his operations in Isauria), Isauricus displayed the captured captains in chains and then executed them, to the acclaim of the Roman people, Cicero insists (*2 Verr.* 5.66). Furthermore, let it be recalled that Caesar served under Servilius at the start of the latter's command.[30] It was also in 74, as another war with Mithridates loomed, that Antonius (Creticus) was granted his '*imperium infinitum*' to suppress piracy throughout the Mediterranean.[31]

All this attention that piracy was receiving would have made the story of the young Caesar, his kidnapping, and swift action – along with Iunius Iuncus' alleged inaction – relevant in the late 70s BC. It is most likely that Caesar began telling some version of the tale soon after he returned to Rome. And it should not be forgotten that, according to Plutarch (*Vit. Pomp.* 25.4), Caesar was the only Senator who spoke on behalf of the *lex Gabinia* that gave Pompey his command over the pirates in 67 BC. That would make much more sense if Caesar was by this time perceived to be something of an 'expert' on the problem of piracy; this occasion would have provided a perfect opportunity to rehearse the whole tale (as it is excavated from the main sources) and make it more familiar.[32] A copy of the speech might even have been preserved.

There has been much speculation throughout this section, but some more substantive points have emerged. We have shown that a key episode of Caesar's early life must be treated with more caution than it usually has been by biographers. While there clearly was some

[28] Cic. *Leg. Man.* 33; Plut. *Vit. Pomp.* 24.6; App. *Mith.* 93.
[29] Cic. *2 Verr.* 5.76.
[30] Suet. *Iul.* 3.
[31] Cic. *2 Verr.* 2.8, 3.213; Livy, *Per.* 97; Vell. Pat. 2.31.3–4.
[32] Caesar's status as 'expert' would be greater if, as has been suggested, the C. Iulius of *SIG*[3] 748 was Caesar serving as Antonius' legate in 73 BC. However, the suggestion cannot be verified: see Broughton *MRR* 3.105. One might also note that, if Velleius' story of Caesar's fear of the pirates while crossing on the Adriatic after his time in Asia (2.43.1–2) is authentic, it – or something like it – would have been no less out of place in a speech on behalf of the *lex Gabinia*.

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encounter with the pirates, it is almost certain that later biographers such as Plutarch and Suetonius only knew Caesar's version of it, as preserved in earlier accounts such as that of Oppius. The various versions of the tale, then, while shaped by each author's own priorities, are ultimately best taken as evidence for Caesar's talent at self-praise, and also denigration. Whereas later episodes in Caesar's life were much more a matter of public record, susceptible to various treatments from the start, here we have to recognize that we are dealing with fossilized encomium – ultimately Caesar's, perhaps Oppius' too – and (most likely) invective.

Caesar and the clients: the formation of a noble

Having examined the formation of the historical tradition, we can consider more fully what happened in Asia. Even if the pirate story is essentially Caesar's, there is no reason to reject out of hand what the ancient sources report about Caesar's own doings aside from the encounter with Iuncus: after Caesar's capture, companions and slaves of his raised a ransom, he was freed, he launched a fleet straightaway from nearby Miletus, and successfully captured some of the pirates – whom he ultimately crucified. Moreover, we can flesh this out with some evidence that has not made it way into any of the standard modern biographies of Caesar.[33]

It should be noted first that, while Caesar may have been an ordinary noble in Rome, in Asia he was more than that, for his own father had served as governor of the province, perhaps around twenty-five years before Caesar's meeting with the pirates.[34] An inscription even survives showing that the elder Caesar was approached by one Crates, an ambassador from Priene, just a few miles from Miletus, perhaps when that man was lodging a complaint of abuses by *publicani*.[35] Thus, when members of Caesar's entourage showed up in the coastal towns of Asia asking for help, it is quite likely that aid would have been

[33] While the main purpose of Günther (n. 12) is to re-examine the episode's chronology, she is right to highlight the importance of setting the episode within its geopolitical context too. My discussion here owes much to Günther, even if the focus is different.

[34] See especially J.-L. Ferrary, 'Les gouverneurs des provinces romaines d'Asie Mineure (Asie et Cilicie), depuis l'organisation de la province d'Asie jusqu'à la première guerre de Mithridate (126–88 av. J.-C.)', *Chiron* 30 (2000), 175–9, for discussion of the key piece of evidence, *I. Priene* 111.

[35] See again the fragmentary inscription, *I. Priene* 111, esp. lines 113–23.

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furnished at least in part out of loyalty to the elder Caesar for his assistance, or because of local knowledge of the family's importance. Furthermore, when Caesar then asked for ships to pursue the pirates, again it is likely that remembrance of the elder Caesar figured in Miletus' willingness to assist. (Caesar's own initiative here, in turn, probably owed something to his earlier experience on the staff of M. Thermus, during which he was sent to Bithynia to fetch a fleet.[36])

However, in helping Caesar – with ransom money and with ships – the Milesians also knew that there were potentially *new* benefits to be won for themselves. The recent uprising of Mithridates had made this clear: in a calculated fashion, Sulla had dramatically rewarded (and punished) communities of Asia, based on the loyalty that they had shown Rome.[37] After that, cities scrambled to impress powerful Romans. So the Milesians would furnish ships, and captains to man them, even if not strictly required, in the hope of securing valuable relationships with Roman commanders and their legates – who were also Senators back in Rome.[38] In the final war with Mithridates, which broke out almost certainly in 73 BC, we happen to know that Milesians furnished at least two biremes (with crew), the *Parthenos* and the *Athena*, to the Romans, and honoured the legate C. Valerius Triarius on Delos afterwards – precisely the sign of such a relationship.[39] A few years earlier, when Gaius Verres showed up and demanded a ship with no official authority – he was a legate in Cilicia, not Asia – the Milesians still complied (or so, at any rate, Cicero maintains).[40]

Sulla's recent actions were important but, as Ernst Badian has shown in a classic discussion, provincial communities had long been eager to secure Senatorial patrons in Rome – and Senators to acquire clients – and that is also important background here. Patrons facilitated diplomatic relations between Rome and the client state. The patron might entertain the community's envoys in Rome or introduce them in the Senate; he would support their pleas or use his influence to

[36] Suet. *Iul.* 2.1. But note Günther (n. 12), 333, suggesting that much of the initiative lay with the Milesians.

[37] F. Santangelo, *Sulla, the Elites and the Empire. A Study of Roman Policies in Italy and the Greek East* (Leiden, 2007), 50–66 and 107–33, gives a good discussion.

[38] Requirement for Milesians to furnish ships: Cic. *2 Verr.* 1.89–90. The rewards to be won were famously documented by a senate decree of 78 BC (the so-called *S.c. de Asclepiade Clazomenio sociisque*) furnishing benefits to three ship captains for their service to Rome in recent warfare: one of the three is from Miletus. The text has been re-edited in A. Raggi, '*Senatus consultum de Asclepiade Clazomenio sociisque*', *ZPE* 135 (2001), 73–116.

[39] *IDélos* 1855–56.

[40] Cic. *2 Verr.* 1.86–90.

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obtain a favourable settlement in any disputes that arose – precisely as Caesar seems to have done for the Bithynians, before Iuncus.[41] At the same time, clients could offer valuable services to their new patrons. They might provide a character witness in an extortion trial, for instance, or give him a place of refuge, or lend him artwork to enhance an aedileship.

From Miletus, evidence survives of a powerful family of the late Republican and early Imperial periods, numbering among its members one C. Iulius Apollonius, *stephanephoros* (eponymous magistrate) in 58/7 BC, honoured as *heros* after his death, and his son, C. Iulius Epicrates, *stephanephoros* in 40/39 BC.[42] On a statue base from Miletus, the latter is called 'friend of…Augustus' and is celebrated for winning privileges for the city (including recognition of the asylum of Miletus' great temple of Apollo, just up the road at Didyma); he served as high priest in the imperial cult of the Assembly of Asia.[43] Another significant member of the family is known, Iulius Apollonius' father and the grandfather of Iulius Epicrates: perhaps not a Roman citizen, he may simply have remained Epicrates, son of Apollonius, as he is called in one inscription (the family, in typical fashion, alternated names over the generations).[44] He served as *stephanephoros* in 83/2 BC.

What had this important family of Miletus done to win Caesar's favour (indicated by the grant of citizenship, perhaps first to C. Iulius Apollonius)? The likeliest answer is assistance to Caesar at the time of his kidnapping; once the young noble reached a position to help them, he did, by bestowing the grant of citizenship.[45] An additional piece of evidence, frequently mentioned by epigraphers but ignored by Caesar's biographers, would seem to clinch the connection: Polyaenus, in his largely fanciful version of the pirate story, does report that Caesar was helped by a Milesian named Epicrates.[46] How

[41] E. Badian, *Foreign Clientelae (264–70 B.C.)* (Oxford, 1984), 154–67. Further bibliography in Osgood (n. 10), 690 n. 19.

[42] See now especially P. Hermann, 'Milet unter Augustus: C. Iulius Epikrates und die Anfänge des Kaiserkults', *MDAI(I)* 44 (1994), 203–36 (whence *SEG* 44.939–42), with revisions of earlier known epigraphic material. Lists of *stephanephoroi* can be found at *Milet.* I 3, nos. 122–8.

[43] See also K. J. Rigsby, *Asylia. Territorial Inviolability in the Hellenistic World* (Berkeley, CA, 1996), 177–8.

[44] In the list of *stephanephoroi*, Iulius Apollonius is called 'Apollonius, son of Epicrates'. This establishes the relationship – but also shows that the elder Epicrates might have been given Roman citizenship by Caesar, perhaps along with his son: cf. Günther (n. 12), 330 n. 25.

[45] Caesar also confirmed, in 44 BC, the asylum rights for Apollo of Didyma: this is attested by *IDidyma* 391 AII 7–10; cf. Rigsby (n. 43), 177.

[46] It should be noted, however, that Polyaenus calls Epicrates an οἰκέτης (slave) of Caesar, impossible for a man who was *stephanephoros* in 83/2 BC. Polyaenus may simply have been

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Polyaenus could have known this is hard to say – perhaps he was drawing on a local tradition. But even were Polyaenus' mention of Epicrates a coincidence, which seems unlikely, what does remain very likely is that Miletus received Caesar's later recognition – shown by the grant of asylum for Apollo – for help rendered at this time. That is, a relationship was formed between Caesar and the Milesians around the time of the kidnapping.

For the fact was that Caesar was busily accumulating clients at this time, as a young Roman noble would.[47] There was the mission to Bithynia to fetch a fleet for M. Thermus, which Caesar parlayed into a relationship of *hospitium* with the royal family. There was his subsequent defence of the Bithynians, mentioned above – which was publicized through a written copy of the speech, which included the words 'nor can we without the greatest disgrace forsake (our) clients'. There was the prosecution in the extortion court of Cn. Dolabella in about 77 BC, by which Caesar cultivated connections in Macedonia. And, soon after Dolabella's trial, Caesar represented a Greek in a proceeding against C. Antonius.

The evident determination of Caesar to build his base of foreign *clientelae* sheds light on a further aspect of what happened in Asia. While one can imagine that the young Roman was eager to see justice done to the pirates who had caused him trouble, he also knew that they were an ongoing nuisance for the communities of *provincia Asia*. To punish the pirates in a spectacular way therefore allowed Caesar to show the province that he was concerned for its well-being.[48] Fresh in his mind would have been the recent example of Servilius Isauricus, under whom Caesar had briefly served – and who also apparently displayed his pirate captives in his own province before returning to Rome and executing them.

There was, according to Suetonius, an immediate sequel to the episode of Caesar's kidnapping that confirms the conclusion reached

confused, or there may have been a misunderstanding of the Latin *familiaris*, or we should emend to οἰκεῖος. But this should not destroy the value of the testimony, recognized by a number of scholars, including C. Fredrich at *Milet.* I 2, no. 111; G. Bowersock, *Augustus and the Greek World* (Oxford, 1965), 8; E. Rawson, *Roman Culture and Society. Collected Papers* (Oxford, 1991), 457 n. 59; P. S. Freber, *Der hellenistische Osten und das Illyricum unter Caesar* (Stuttgart, 1993), 119; Hermann (n. 42), 204; Günther (n. 12), 329–30.

[47] See especially Osgood (n. 10) for what follows; note also L. Canfora, *Julius Caesar. The Life and Times of the People's Dictator* (Berkeley, CA, 2007), 9–13.

[48] Note, however, that Caesar returning to his captives *ad mare* in Velleius' version indicates a place of detention other than Plutarch's Pergamum, and one of the coastal cities may indeed be a likelier candidate: see Günther (n. 12), 335–6.

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here (*Iul.* 4.2). Sometime after Caesar had arrived on Rhodes (where he had intended to study with the rhetorician Apollonius Molo), when the final war with Mithridates broke out, allies of the Pontic king started harassing areas adjacent to Rhodes;

> so that Caesar would not seem to be idle when the allies of the Roman people were in danger…he crossed over to Asia and, levying a band of auxiliaries and driving the king's prefect from the province, held the wavering and hesitant states in their allegiance'.

This, in essence, is exactly what he had done before with the pirates, and it may even be that he relied on some of the same forces (especially the Milesians). While no doubt nerve-wracking, the outbreak of war with Mithridates, like attacks by pirates, furnished enterprising individuals and communities – whether a young noble on the make such as Caesar or provincial towns, such as Miletus, eager to parade their loyalty – with opportunities. Precisely because they were not yet obliged legally to take action, to do so would bring distinction, and it was important for them to draw attention to their achievements, as Caesar presumably did again.

Conclusion

The story of Caesar's victory over the pirates has often been treated by biographers, from Velleius Paterculus to Matthias Gelzer, as a straightforward reflection of the man's audacity and energy. Audacious and energetic Caesar certainly proved to be. Yet, since the tale surely originated with him, it should also be recognized as an example of Caesar's gift for self-advertisement. It would have been especially topical in the later 70s and early 60s BC. Later, however, it could take on additional meanings, and lent itself to rewriting, or redeployment, depending on an author's purposes.

What has not been emphasized, in lives of Caesar both ancient and modern, is that the encounter that Caesar evidently did have with the pirates off the coast of Asia Minor also furnished him with a chance to develop *clientelae* in the area. Such *clientelae* were useful to any Roman Senator, and Caesar was avidly acquiring them at this time. In contextualizing the episode more fully, we are thus able to see in it not just youthful derring-do but a small, yet significant, step in the young man's efforts to acquire useful connections and advance his reputation, both in the provinces and ultimately back in Rome.

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Finally, two larger methodological points. The first is a more familiar one, albeit neglected in some quite recent studies: ancient biographies – like other sources – must be read critically, for what appears to be objective testimony may well only represent a fossilization of earlier encomium, or invective. The second is this: we should try as fully as possible to contextualize individual episodes in a biographical source, for such episodes can prove to have a significance that the more teleological biography has a tendency to suppress.

Appendix: the date of the episode

The ancient sources are in conflict over when the kidnapping took place in Caesar's career. Suetonius firmly places it within the following sequence of events:

(a) Caesar's service in the east under Thermus and Servilius Isauricus, including the journey to Bithynia;
(b) his return to Rome after the death of Sulla;
(c) prosecution of Dolabella;
(d) journey for Rhodes, at the start of which, during winter sailing, the kidnapping takes place;
(e) Caesar's assistance to the allies at the outbreak of the Third Mithridatic War;
(f) return to Rome for military tribunate.

Since (c) took place in 77 BC (or perhaps early 76 BC), and (e) almost certainly occurred in spring 73 BC (see below), this would give a time-frame for the kidnapping of 77–73 BC. Velleius places (d) before (f), and also clearly dates the episode to the period at which Iuncus was in Bithynia, after its annexation. If Eutropius (6.6.1) is correct that Nicomedes died in 74 BC, then, after allowing time for news of that to reach Rome, the Senate to make a decision, and the decision to be relayed to Iuncus, we should assign the kidnapping to later in 74. This would fit within Suetonius' framework and, if we accept Suetonius' notice of winter sailing, we could specify the date as the winter of 74/3 BC.[49] (It now seems clear that the Third Mithridatic War did not break out until the spring of 73 BC, which would pose no problem for this date; the magistrate who took over from Iuncus in Bithynia, M.

[49] As Kallet-Marx (n. 11), 300, has argued.

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Cotta, perhaps left Rome for his assignment around the same time as his consular colleague Lucullus, who still appears to have been in Rome in the summer of 74, if not later.[50]) But if less value is placed on Eutropius' testimony, a date of winter 75/4 BC for the kidnapping is still not impossible.[51]

Plutarch, notoriously, assigns a different sequence to the events of Caesar's early life. To use the same letters as above:

(a) Caesar's journey to the east, including the visit to Nicomedes;
(d) kidnapping by the pirates, followed by study with Apollonius on Rhodes;
(b) return to Rome after the death of Sulla;
(c) prosecution of Dolabella.

This would date the kidnapping to between 81 and 78 BC. Scholars have almost unanimously rejected Plutarch's chronology here, not just because it contradicts the more detailed testimony of Velleius and Suetonius but also because it is harder to fit in Caesar's military service under Thermus and Isauricus *and* study with Apollonius all before the return to Rome after Sulla's death and the prosecution of Dolabella. Further, as Pelling has shown, it is entirely typical of Plutarch to reorder and reinterpret material. Here, as Pelling argues, Plutarch's order allows him to group together Caesar's 'early foreign adventures' and to attribute Caesar's success in rhetoric to his study in Rhodes, 'a theme which alike suits Plutarch's Hellenism and his interest in education'.[52]

More recently, Günther has tried to argue that Plutarch's date for the kidnapping should be accepted.[53] Her argument is that we must recognize the independent value of Polyaenus, since he knows of Caesar's Milesian connection Epicrates. Because Polyaenus notes that the episode took place while Caesar was sailing to Nicomedes, this would mean that Nicomedes was still alive at the time of the episode; since Plutarch also envisions Nicomedes as alive (although, in his

[50] On the date of the outbreak of the war – long a subject of controversy – see now conveniently Brennan (n. 11) 559–62, building on the key articles by B. McGing, including 'The Date of the Outbreak of the Third Mithridatic War', *Phoenix* 38 (1984), 12–18. On Lucullus' presence in Rome, see Cic. *Clu*. 90, 108, 136–7, with seminal observations by A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Foreign Policy in the East, 168 B.C. to A.D. 1* (Norman, OK, 1984), 165 n. 25.

[51] This is the date proposed in Ward (n. 3) and is commonly accepted.

[52] Pelling (n. 1), 93. See also W. Steidle, *Sueton und die antike Biographie* (Munich, 1951), 13–15.

[53] Günther (n. 12).

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version, Caesar meets the pirates *after* seeing him), we should respect Plutarch's date. However, given how fanciful Polyaenus' account is in other respects, and given that he could be drawing in part on recollection precisely of Plutarch, we need not put much value on his claim that Nicomedes was alive at the time of the kidnapping. Far more decisive is Günther's inability to explain why Velleius so clearly shows Caesar clashing with Iunius Iuncus in Bithynia (i.e. after Nicomedes' death). To call this 'Iuncus-Element' a 'Fremdkörper', as Günther does, is only to restate the problem.[54] Nor is it easy to explain why Suetonius should have gone so far astray.

It is therefore much easier to dismiss Plutarch, and Polyaenus, on the date, whereas rejecting Velleius and Suetonius creates new, insoluble problems. The dating of *c.*74 BC, and perhaps the winter of 74–73 in particular, stands.

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[54] Günther (n. 12), 326–7 n. 14, is not successful in detaching Iuncus' Bithynian and Asian commands.

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