

## THE LUCA CONFERENCE\*

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AN ARTICLE by J. F. Lazenby<sup>1</sup> rightly insists on the close connection between Roman politics and the Gallic campaigns of Julius Caesar. But in the same article the status and significance of the conference at Luca are questioned and some arguments are offered to suggest that the sources, with the notable exception of Dio, have given rise to an exaggerated picture, to the "Luca Legend" in fact. On the other hand, there were meetings between Caesar and Crassus at Ravenna and between Caesar and Pompey at Luca in mid-April 56. Hence there is a need to determine "what really happened" and, this being so, Lazenby proceeds to offer a hypothesis.<sup>2</sup>

It will be the purpose of this paper to determine if such a hypothesis is actually needed. To assume that the sources other than Dio are unreliable in so important a matter as the politics of 56 B.C. is to raise a number of important problems, not the least of which is the question of how to interpret the position and actions of Pompey. The case made by Lazenby therefore requires close examination. It is a case directed for the most part against the ancient authorities. Hence consideration of the conference of Luca will be confined in this paper to the ancient texts only, and at the beginning it might be helpful to consider what they have to tell us before the arguments of Lazenby are themselves subjected to scrutiny.

To leave Cicero and Dio aside for the moment, the evidence for the conference of Luca is in Suetonius, in Appian, and in Plutarch. The main details which emerge are as follows.

In 56 Caesar was in winter quarters in Cisalpine Gaul. Large numbers traveled to see him,<sup>3</sup> and the reason is conveyed in the biography of Pompey<sup>4</sup> where the close connection is emphasized between the Gallic campaigns and the political affairs of Rome. Indeed, Plutarch twice refers to the Gallic wars as conscious training for intervention in Rome, and he speaks of the large sums of money dispatched by Caesar to the city so that votes could be bought and friends be helped to secure high office. The reality of this link between Caesar and the current politics of the city is brought out by the remark that as many as two hundred senators and one hundred and twenty *fascēs* were to be seen at the quarters of Caesar at Luca.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to these visitors Pompey and Crassus also came.<sup>6</sup> No reason for their arrival is given by Plutarch or Appian, but Suetonius asserts that they came at the behest of Caesar who was worried by the announcement of Ahenobarbus, a candidate in 56 for the consulship of 55, that if elected he would remove Caesar from military command. Private discussions were held among the three men,<sup>7</sup> and the accounts of Plutarch, Appian, and Suetonius

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1. J. F. Lazenby, "The Conference of Luca and the Gallic War," *Latomus*, XVIII (1959), 67-76.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 71-76.

3. Plut. *Crass.* 24. 5, *Pomp.* 51. 3, *Caes.* 21. 5.

4. Plut. *Pomp.* 51. 2.

5. Plut. *Pomp.* 51. 3. Cf. App. 2. 17.

6. Plut. *Crass.* 14. 5, *Pomp.* 51. 3, *Caes.* 21. 3. Suet. *Caes.* 24; App. 2. 17.

7. That they were private discussions is stated in Plut. *Crass.* 14. 5. It is implied in Plut. *Pomp.* 51. 4 where a contrast is drawn between the meetings of Caesar with his many visitors on the one hand and, on the other, the understanding he reached with Pompey and Crassus. Appian also refers to the three men as having engaged in consultations, and the context implies that they were private.

nus join in stating that they reached an understanding. Pompey and Crassus were to be elected consuls for 55, with proconsular commands to follow, and Caesar was to be granted another five years<sup>8</sup> in Gaul. He was also to send troops back to Rome to support Pompey and Crassus at the elections.<sup>9</sup>

The picture of what now followed becomes somewhat confused. In the fullest of his three accounts<sup>10</sup> Plutarch says that Pompey and Crassus returned to Rome where the opinion spread that the meeting with Caesar had been for no good, that some agreement had been reached between the three men, although what it was and what it portended were not yet clear. There was a suspicion that a bid for the consulship by Pompey and Crassus was now likely, and this suspicion was enhanced by the evasive answer given by both men in the senate when confronted by a direct question on the subject by Marcellinus consul in 56 and Ahenobarbus. Indeed such was the ambiguity of their position that other men, Ahenobarbus among them, put their own names forward as candidates. And this state of affairs was to continue until Pompey and Crassus at last openly announced their interest in the consulship. When they did so all but Ahenobarbus withdrew in fear and, much more interesting, there was a rally of opposition, with Cato encouraging Ahenobarbus and with large numbers expressing outrage at the behavior of Pompey and Crassus. The

followers of the two men now turned violent and, using force, they secured the election of their leaders to the consulship.

What is especially notable in this account is that a period of time, perhaps even as many as six months, elapsed between the Luca talks and the open avowal of interest in the consulship by Pompey and Crassus. Within that period of time there were only suspicions about the intentions of the two men, and as long as these suspicions could not be proved valid other men were ready to stake a claim for themselves. It was only when Pompey and Crassus openly affirmed their candidacy that widespread opposition was provoked. In other words, the agreement of Luca was secret and was destined to remain so until the open declaration of intent by Pompey and Crassus.

The other two accounts by Plutarch of what happened after the Luca meeting are much less detailed and present some problems.<sup>11</sup> In the biography of Pompey the clear sequence of events set out in *Crassus* is absent and it is not evident how long the period of uncertainty was between the evasions of Pompey and Crassus in the senate and their open admission of intent.<sup>12</sup> And in *Caesar* there is no interval at all between the conversations of the triumvirs and the opposition provoked in the senate.<sup>13</sup>

Suetonius has little to offer. Beyond declaring the existence of an agreement at Luca he has no further relevant information, while Appian states that after

8. Why does Dio say three years? Professor Salmon notes that it was three years from Caesar's consulship to the Luca Conference and suggests that here perhaps is the source of Dio's confusion.

9. Plut. *Crass.* 14. 5-6, *Pomp.* 51. 4, *Caes.* 21. 3. Suet. *Caes.* 24; App. 2. 17.

10. Plut. *Crass.* 15. 1-5.

11. Plut. *Pomp.* 51. 5-52. 2, *Caes.* 21. 3-4. There is one problem in *Pomp.* 51. 5: "The leading men of Rome were very angry when all this became known." All what? The Luca agreement? The two central difficulties are of timing and content. How long did it take "the leading men of Rome" to find out "all this"? As soon as the conference was over? In the weeks and months that followed? And how

much became known? If one could answer this last question one could then properly evaluate the evasiveness of Pompey and Crassus.

12. Equally unclear is the moment chosen by the candidates, other than Ahenobarbus, to withdraw. Was it immediately after the Luca agreement or somewhat later? At first sight it would appear to be in the immediate aftermath of the conversations. But if the argument in the preceding note is valid, then the withdrawal of the candidates could be assumed to have taken place rather later.

13. It will also be noted that there is the obvious mistake in Plut. *Caes.* 21. 3 where it is stated that Cato was in Cyprus at this time.

reaching an understanding the triumvirs separated, Ahenobarbus offered himself for the consulship against Pompey, and on election day Pompey and Crassus were victorious after brawls from which Ahenobarbus barely escaped with his life.<sup>14</sup>

Then there is Dio, and if his were the sole extant account no suspicion could arise that there was ever a meeting at Luca.<sup>15</sup> The focus is on Pompey whom Dio describes as a troubled man in 56, publicly taunted and humiliated by Clodius and others, distrusted by the senate, and, worst of all, threatened by the prospect of being overshadowed by the growing reputation of Caesar in Gaul. The risk of falling into a secondary place seemed most grievous to him. "On the basis of some such assessment Pompey proceeded to arm himself against Caesar. Thinking that alone he could not easily vanquish him he attached Crassus more closely to himself than ever before so that with his help he might achieve what he had in mind."<sup>16</sup> The two men came to an understanding. They now openly sought the consulship, thus abandoning other candidates whom they had helped until then. They began to canvass "outside the period specified by the law" and were blocked by the consuls on this account. But they overcame the difficulty through the agency of Gaius Cato, the plebeian tribune of 56, who prevented the holding of elections in 56. His object was to force an interregnum so that Pompey and Crassus might then legally seek office. In doing so he called forth angry senatorial opposition.

So far the narrative is at least consistent. But then comes a strange passage: "Marcellinus publicly asked Pompey if he really wished to be consul. He did so in the hope that Pompey would be ashamed to admit that he was a candidate. Pompey answered that it was not on account of good men that he wanted the office, but that he was anxious for it because of those who were seditious. And so he now openly strove for it. Crassus, on being asked, did not admit the fact, of course, but he did not deny it either. Instead he took his usual middle position and said he would do whatever was of advantage to the state."<sup>17</sup>

Taken by itself this passage is clearly a muddled version of what is found in Plutarch. There is the public challenge by Marcellinus. The answer of Pompey seems affirmative rather than evasive, but in the next part Crassus is represented as avoiding the issue, and the sentiments with which he is credited are substantially the same as those reported by Plutarch.

But the passage comes oddly after what Dio has already said, namely, that Pompey and Crassus had abandoned other candidates and that the consuls had made it clear that they were opposed to the suggestion that Pompey and Crassus be consuls in 55. This would seem pointless if the time had not yet come when Marcellinus would seek a declaration of intent from Pompey and Crassus.

The remaining part of the narrative becomes consistent once more, although there are some problems. Pompey and Crassus are elected.<sup>18</sup> They assume leader-

14. App. 2. 17.

15. Dio 39. 24 ff.

16. Dio 39. 26. 3. It is worth noting that Dio is merely speculating on the reason which impelled Pompey to seek an alliance with Crassus.

17. Dio 39. 20. 1-2.

18. Dio states that Pompey and Crassus were elected in the absence of opposition and with the help of troops brought to Rome for the purpose by Publius Crassus, son of Marcus and in service at that time with Caesar. This latter detail

should be noted. By itself it would not compel the assumption that Caesar concurred in the sending of the troops for this purpose. But the question would arise as to which troops these were and whether Caesar agreed to release Publius Crassus from service so that he could go to Rome to help force the election which was taking place, partly at least, as a challenge to Caesar. On the other hand, the detail given here by Dio coincides with that of Plutarch (*Pomp.* 51. 4) who says that Caesar agreed at Luca to send troops to back the candidacy of Pompey and Crassus.

ship of the state, look after their interests, together with those of their friends, run into opposition from the supporters of Caesar, and in order to call off the opposition and because they fear for the success of their own projects they grant Caesar a three-year extension of his command.

Finally there is Cicero. Three questions arise. What information does he provide about the meeting at Luca? What light does he shed on Pompey before and after the meeting? Lastly, and arising out of the second question, is the very important problem of how much Cicero really knew about the intentions of the triumvirs in the days following the talks at Luca.

On the first issue the most important text is the long letter written to Publius Lentulus Spinther.<sup>19</sup> That there was a meeting at Luca is confirmed, although Cicero speaks only of an encounter between Caesar and Pompey. He says that Caesar had already seen Crassus at Ravenna, a statement which does not exclude the possibility that Crassus was also at Luca. He also says that at Luca a topic much discussed was the motion sponsored by Cicero and due for debate in the senate on May 15, 56. This motion concerned the whole problem of the continuing distribution of allotments in Campania, and the prospect of a debate on this subject greatly irritated Caesar who voiced strong complaints to Pompey about the action of Cicero. Pompey undertook to have Cicero called off, and that the whole issue was a very sore one is emphasized by the fact that after the meeting Pompey not only expressed considerable annoyance to Quintus Cicero regarding the behavior of his brother, but he also sent Vibullius on a mission to have Cicero desist from further action on the matter of the Campanian lands until Pompey should himself come

to see him. Cicero yielded and was not present in Rome on May 15. Hence no debate could take place.

Why did Cicero yield? The reasons suggested in his letter are interesting. Pompey, he claims, was the leading statesman in the Republic, a man whom Cicero counted a close friend and whose interests he had supported for many years. This friendship and this esteem were reflected in the public action of Cicero: "I did not believe I had to fear the reproach of being inconsistent if in some of my senatorial votes I changed my standpoint somewhat and devoted my zeal to the advancement of the dignity of a very worthy man, one to whom I am most deeply indebted." And friendship with Pompey meant involvement with Caesar: "Of necessity I included Caesar, for, you see, their policy and position were inseparably united." Furthermore there were lines of obligation binding Cicero to Caesar, and above all there was "the pledge which Pompey had given for me to Caesar."

What was this pledge? Obviously it must be Pompey's undertaking to call Cicero off in the matter of the Campanian lands. But more than the question of the Campanian lands was involved, for Pompey had instructed Quintus Cicero "to commend the policies and claims" of Caesar to his brother.

In other words, Cicero had taken a public stand on certain questions, including that of the Campanian lands. After the meeting at Luca it was conveyed to Cicero that such a stand displeased Pompey, and Cicero was not prepared to resist Pompey. Hence the metaphor of trimming one's sail to the wind, a metaphor prompted by the realization of Cicero that Pompey was co-operating with Caesar. Hence the palinode of which Cicero was "a bit

19. *Fam.* 1. 9. Add to this *Q. fr.* 11. 6; *Att.* 4. 5, 4. 6, 1-2, 4. 8a. 2.

ashamed.”<sup>20</sup> Hence, most important of all, the necessary conclusion that prior to May 15 some rapport existed between Pompey and Caesar.

And the question now arises of how much we can learn from Cicero about Pompey in the period before and after Luca. One notable fact emerging from the letters written early in 56 is the inclination of Pompey to secretiveness, an inclination manifested as much toward Cicero as toward others. This is exemplified in the debate concerning the restoration of Ptolemy Auletes. The followers of Pompey were most anxious that the task of restoration be given to their leader. Others proposed Lentulus Spinther for the job. Pompey himself failed to clarify his own thoughts on the matter,<sup>21</sup> and after a dinner with him all that Cicero could surmise was that Pompey looked as if he might not want the job.<sup>22</sup> Two days later Cicero told his brother that much maneuvering was in progress but that the intentions of Pompey were completely obscure.<sup>23</sup> In the second week of February Cicero was writing to Lentulus Spinther to say that there had been public demonstrations against Pompey, that he had been harshly denounced in the senate by Cato who seemed to have been tacitly supported by his fellow senators and that, as a result, Pompey, greatly disturbed, had probably dropped the idea of leading the restoration of Ptolemy Auletes. If only Pompey would say so openly then Ptolemy would doubtless turn for help to Lentulus Spinther: “. . . sed nosti hominis tarditatem et taciturnitatem.”<sup>24</sup>

Throughout February and March Pom-

pey was constantly harassed by public hostility and senatorial criticism, though such criticism did not prevent the senators from granting him forty million sesterces toward the expenses of restoring the interrupted grain supplies to Rome.<sup>25</sup> On April 6th Cicero visited Pompey who told him that he intended to leave on April 11th so as to board a ship to Sardinia either at Labro or Pisa.<sup>26</sup> He said nothing about a visit to Caesar at Luca.

A little over a month later the expected debate on the Campanian lands did not take place because Cicero stayed away from Rome. In June Cicero was writing of his palinode, of the new alliance.<sup>27</sup> He was writing of the bitterness of his own political lot.<sup>28</sup> Something of consequence had happened. What that was he was to describe in the letter to Lentulus Spinther where the difficulty of his position was explained by the fact of the alliance between Pompey and Caesar.

Such, then, is the information yielded by the sources. It is now time to consider the arguments put forward by Lazenby to support the thesis that no major decisions had been made at the conference.

First, he claims that although the other sources mention the conference the omission of any reference to it in Dio “should give us pause, in view of Dio’s high standard as an authority at this period” (p. 70). He also notes the statement in Dio that the candidacy of Pompey and Crassus was not formally registered until after the legal deadline and he asks why this was so “if they had decided to stand some two months before” (p. 70).

20. *Att.* 4. 5. 1. That the palinode was the *De provinciis consularibus* seems unlikely. Perhaps it was some written guarantee to Pompey that Cicero would not make trouble for Caesar.

21. *Fam.* 1. 1. 3.

22. *Fam.* 1. 2. 3.

23. *Q. fr.* 2. 2. 3.

24. *Fam.* 1. 5a. 1.

25. *Q. fr.* 11. 3. 2; 11. 5. 1.

26. *Att.* 4. 5. 1.

27. “. . . huius novae coniunctionis . . .” (*ibid.*).

28. “Think of the sufferings I undergo when I am taken to be an idiot if I say what I should regarding the state, for a slave if I speak as expediency dictates, for a humbled and helpless bondsman if I keep quiet” (*Att.* 4. 6. 1–2).

Next, he turns to Cicero. He finds no reference, direct or indirect, to a Luca agreement in the speech *De haruspicum responsis*. Nor is there any reference in the *De provinciis consularibus* "where it is impossible to believe that Cicero could have spoken as he did had he known of the alleged decisions of the 'conference'" (p. 70). Furthermore there is "no hint of it in the letters."<sup>29</sup> And "it is incredible that no word reached Cicero of the alleged decisions in view of Pompey's contact with Quintus immediately afterwards" (p. 71).

Finally, Lazenby declares it unlikely that any future provinces for Pompey and Crassus had been decided upon "in view of the fact that the Lex Trebonia is almost certainly to be dated as late as August-September 55" (p. 70) and this "again" is shown by Dio who made the passage of the *Lex Trebonia* contemporary with the first invasion of Britain by Caesar.

The thesis proposed by Lazenby depends heavily on his use of Dio, on his interpretation of Cicero, and on *argumenta e silentio*. There can be no denial of his contention that the omission of any reference to the Luca conference in Dio "should give us pause." That it should do so to the extent of compelling the belittlement of the information in the other sources is less evident. For there was a meeting at Luca, and the letter of Cicero to Lentulus Spinther makes it abundantly clear that Pompey and Caesar had achieved some measure of co-operation. The information in this letter is plainly at variance with the theme of Dio's account, namely, that Pompey, through jealous hostility to Caesar, had made a pact with Crassus, the purpose of which was to achieve a position exceeding the importance of that occupied by Caesar, that the two men had managed to become

consuls, and that only then, and as a matter of expediency, did they make an accommodating gesture toward Caesar. In this matter Cicero and Dio offer two quite different pictures. One has to choose between them, and the choice is not difficult. For not only does the account of Cicero harmonize in essentials though not in all details with that of Appian, Plutarch, and Suetonius, but, as seen above, the account in Dio is muddled and, much more serious, it is self-contradictory.

Lazenby is much impressed by the absence of direct references to a Luca agreement in the speeches and letters composed by Cicero in the spring and summer of 56. As noted earlier, he thinks it "incredible that no word reached Cicero of the alleged decisions." But is it incredible? Is it necessary to assume that Cicero would have been fully informed of what had happened at Luca? It has been seen above that Cicero's own letters of 56 give evidence of the fact that even when sharing the table of Pompey he had no means of knowing what Pompey was thinking on such questions as the restoration of Ptolemy Auletes. Pompey seemed to feel no urge to reveal his thoughts to Cicero. Is there any reason to suspect that he might have been more communicative in April or May than he had been earlier in the year? "... sed nosti hominis tarditatem et taciturnitatem."<sup>30</sup>

On the other hand Cicero was aware of the fact that something had happened at Luca. Hence the decision not to press the matter of the Campanian lands. Hence the palinode. But to admit this is to admit no more than what is conveyed in the letter to Lentulus Spinther, namely, that Cicero had learned that the bonds between Pompey and Caesar had been strengthened at

29. Presumably Lazenby means the letters written in 56 and is not including the letter to Lentulus Spinther in his argument here.

30. Cf. the remark made later in *Att.* 4. 5. 1: "non est credibile quae sit perfidia in istis principibus."

Luca. He had to modify his own conduct accordingly. He had to trim his sails. But this does not mean that he knew all the details of the agreement. It only means that he was one of the many in Rome, referred to by Plutarch, one of those who suspected that nothing good had happened at Luca but who had had to live through the interval preceding the moment when Pompey and Crassus dropped all evasion and openly announced that they were candidates for the consulship.

In short, Lazenby quite rightly points to some puzzling questions such as the relationship between the cryptic note in

Dio recording the grant of Spain to Pompey and the decisions referred to by the other sources concerning the distribution of provinces. The interval between Luca and the open declaration of candidacy by Pompey and Crassus also needs clarification. But it is the contention of this paper that such problems do not undermine the validity of the information given in the sources—and even reflected in some of the details in Dio—namely, that there was a conference at Luca at which the triumvirs made decisions which were very important indeed.

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