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THE BATTLE OF ACTIUM: A RECONSIDERATION*

1. ANCIENT CONSENSUS AND MODERN THEORIES

Ancient writers present, with one exception, a consistent account of how Antonius came to lose the battle of Actium on 2 September 31 B.C. In these versions, while the battle was still raging, Cleopatra and her squadron took flight, and Antonius chose to join them. His abandoned fleet fought on bravely but succumbed by the end of the day, and Antonius' army of nineteen legions surrendered to Octavian a few days later. However, until Cleopatra's withdrawal, Antonius had been fighting for victory. The only divergent source is Dio, according to whom Antonius had been persuaded by Cleopatra before the battle to seek withdrawal by sea and was fighting with this objective (Cass. Dio 50.15, 30.3–4). However, even he does not maintain this interpretation consistently: when he comes to Cleopatra's flight, he ascribes it to the queen's panic (50.33.1.3).

Until the end of the nineteenth century, most scholars followed the ancient consensus. However, a few opted instead for Dio's view that Antonius' aim in the battle was to secure withdrawal, for example Gilles, Leake, Merivale and Gravière.[1] In 1899 Kromayer produced an exhaustive study of the battle, arguing forcefully that Antonius aimed for withdrawal, and his interpretation (and much of the detail of his reconstruction) has remained the dominant view ever since.[2] Almost all recent accounts adopt what is essentially Kromayer's view of the battle.[3] These

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[1] See T. Rice Holmes, *The Architect of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1928), 253, tracing the idea back to C. Merivale, *History of the Romans under the Empire* (London, 1851), 3.321, and J. de la Gravière, *La marine des Ptolémées et la marine des Romains* (Paris, 1885), 1.68–84. See also G. Rawlinson, *A Manual of Ancient History: From the Earliest Times to the Fall of the Sassanian Empire*, (Oxford, 1880), 452. In fact it can be traced back at least as far as J. Gillies, *History of the World, Comprehending the Latter Ages of European Greece, and the History of the Greek Kingdoms in Asia and Africa, from their Foundation to their Destruction* (London, 1807), 2.810, and W.M. Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece* (London, 1835), 4.32–43, but this was not the standard perception of the battle in the nineteenth century and before Gillies and Leake the prearranged plan does seem to lack support. On the perception of Actium in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, see C.H. Lange, 'The battle of Actium and the "slave of passion"', in J. Moore, I. Macgregor Morris and A. Bayliss (edd.), *Reinventing History: The Enlightenment Origins of Ancient History* (London, 2008), 115–36.

[2] J. Kromayer, 'Kleine Forschungen zur Geschichte des zweiten Triumvirats VII: der Feldzug von Actium und der sogenannte Verrath der Cleopatra', *Hermes* 34 (1899), 1–54.

[3] Accounts adopting Kromayer's view of the battle include Rice Holmes (n. 1), 253–8; G.W. Richardson, 'Actium', *JRS* 27 (1937), 153–64, at 158–9; J.M. Carter, *The Battle of Actium: The Rise and Triumph of Augustus Caesar* (London, 1970), 213; M. Grant, *Cleopatra* (London, 1972), 208, 211; J.R. Johnson, 'Augustan propaganda: the battle of Actium, Mark Antony's will, the *Fasti Capitolini Consulares*, and early imperial historiography' (Diss., University of California, 1976), 48–9, 55; H. Bengtson, *Marcus Antonius: Triumvir und Herrscher des Orients* (Munich, 1977), esp. 230; M. Reinhold, *From Republic to Principate: An Historical*

writers maintain that by the time of the battle Antonius' plight had become dire: he was thus obliged to seek withdrawal either by land or by sea, and sea was the preferable option. The fleet that Octavian deployed in the battle was nearly twice as numerous as Antonius', and so Antonius can have had no realistic hope of victory. His aim was merely to escape with a substantial part of his force, which in effect he achieved.

Kromayer's view was challenged by Ferrabino in 1924, and seven years later by Tarn, in a celebrated article that further developed Ferrabino's arguments.[4] They reverted to the view that Antonius was fighting to win, although Tarn conceded that he was also prepared for flight in the event of defeat.[5] Tarn won the support of Syme (1939),[6] but was soon heavily criticized by Kromayer (1933) himself and by Richardson (1937).[7]

Tarn did not follow the ancient consensus on the course of the battle, but instead proposed a radically different reconstruction. On his account, the turning point was not Cleopatra's flight but the defection of a substantial part of the Antonian fleet.[8] This defection gave Octavian the victory, and prompted Antonius' and Cleopatra's flight.[9] The only ancient evidence adduced in support of this novel account is in the poem that is the earliest surviving celebration of Octavian's victory, Horace *Epode* 9. Avoiding any explicit description of the main conflict, Horace evokes the defeat of Octavian's opponents with two obscurely allusive images (lines 17–20):

> at huc frementes verterunt bis mille equos
> Galli, canentes Caesarem,
> hostiliumque navium portu latent
> puppes sinistrorsum citae

But two thousand Galatians have turned their snorting horses in our direction, chanting Caesar's name; and the sterns of the enemy's ships, after making off at speed to the left, skulk in harbour.[10]

Other evidence enables us to explain lines 17–18 as referring to the defection of the Galatian king Amyntas and his contingent (Plut. *Vit. Ant*. 63.3; cf. Vell. Pat.

Commentary of Cassius Dio's Roman History Books 49–52 (36–29BC) (Atlanta, GA, 1988), 104–5; W.M. Murray and P.M. Petsas, *Octavian's Campsite Memorial for the Actian War*, (Philadelphia, PA, 1989), 131–7; D. Kienast, *Augustus: Princeps und Monarch* (Darmstadt, 1999²), 7; J. Osgood, *Caesar's Legacy: Civil War and the Emergence of the Roman Empire* (Cambridge, 2006), 374; K. Bringmann, *Augustus* (Darmstadt, 2007), 100.

[4] A. Ferrabino, 'La battaglia d'Azio', *RFIC* 52 (1924), 433–72; W.W. Tarn, 'The battle of Actium', *JRS* 21 (1931), 173–99.

[5] Tarn (n. 4), 188.

[6] R. Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford, 1952²), 296–7.

[7] J. Kromayer, 'Actium: ein Epilog', *Hermes* 68 (1933), 361–83; Richardson (n. 3).

[8] Tarn (n. 4), 174–7, 192–4; cf. W.W. Tarn, 'Actium: a note', *JRS* 28 (1938), 165–68, at 165. Rice Holmes (n. 1), 256–7, rightly points out that it would have been difficult for the readers to infer treachery in *sinistrorsum citae*.

[9] Tarn (n. 4), 173; W.W. Tarn, 'The Actium campaign', in S. A. Cook et al. (edd.), *CAH* 10 (Cambridge, 1934), 100–106, at 104–5.

[10] Trans. by N. Rudd, *Horace Odes and Epodes* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 2004). R.A. Gurval, *Actium and Augustus: The Politics and Emotions of Civil War* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1995), 147, oddly mistranslates *puppes* as 'prows'. On this passage see D. Mankin, *Horace Epodes* (Cambridge, 1995), 170–1; L. Watson, *A Commentary on Horace's Epodes* (Oxford, 2003), 327–8; and further below.

2.84.2; Plut. *Vit. Ant*. 61.2; Cass. Dio 50.13.8).[11] However, the reference to a fleet manoeuvre remains tantalizingly obscure: it has been much discussed and will be considered below (section 5). As we shall see, it need not refer to a defection. In any case, this evidence is wholly inadequate to support Tarn's hypothesis of a major fleet defection that determined the course of the battle. If such a defection had taken place, it would certainly have been reflected prominently in the firmly pro-Octavian accounts of our main sources: they would surely have made the most of such a large-scale defection to what they deemed the better cause.[12]

Thus later writers have been right to reject Tarn's revisionist account of the course of the battle.[13] Regrettably, this has also meant that Kromayer's view of Antonius' aims has continued to go largely unchallenged. Among recent discussions, only Pelling has adopted a position intermediate between those of Kromayer and Tarn, but his view remains much closer to Kromayer's.[14] Antonius, he holds, did not rule out the possibility of fighting on to victory if the engagement went well, but this was not a likely outcome and Antonius would have recognised this. Thus 'the chance of a break-out in force was always the more likely option' and, in the event, Antonius and Cleopatra 'achieved all they could reasonably have hoped'.[15]

It is time to reconsider the current orthodoxy and to ask whether the ancient consensus on the battle may not have been right after all. This enquiry is necessary above all because, dominant though it has become, Kromayer's view rests on a fundamental perversity: we are asked to believe that Antonius and Cleopatra sought the outcome that in fact led to their destruction and death. Kromayer maintained that it was reasonable for Antonius to seek a naval withdrawal, since, if this could be accomplished with a substantial part of his army on board, he would be in a strong position to regroup and renew the struggle from Egypt and the neighbouring provinces. In addition to the Egyptian forces, he could, Kromayer claimed, have counted on four legions in Cyrenaica and seven in Syria and on such troops as he could bring away via the fleet, and the land army too might have been able to break out to join him.[16]

Such calculations would have been chimerical, and it is hard to credit that Antonius can have entertained them. It is unlikely that a substantial force had been retained in Syria; we hear nothing of such an army in the sequel, and more probably most, if not all, of the garrison of Syria had been included in the army deployed at Actium.[17] Although Antonius is said to have embarked 20,000 infantry on his warships (Plut. *Vit. Ant*. 64.1), in the event very few legionaries can have accompanied him, since the ships that fled were mainly the Egyptian squadron. Even if more of his Actian army had escaped with him, the outcome could have

[11] For the importance of Amyntas' defection, see Kromayer (n. 2), 23–4; Tarn (n. 9), 104–5; Watson (n. 10), 326.

[12] Livy and other Augustan authors must have had 'easy' access to information about the battle as contemporaries. Livy *Per*. 133 begins with the victory at Actium and then describes the flight of Antonius to Egypt. Book 132 is on the prehistory of the war. The battle of Actium clearly had prominence in Livy, as the preliminaries and the battle are in separate books.

[13] For a brief but thorough reassessment of the Kromayer–Tarn debate, see Murray and Petsas (n. 3), 131–7.

[14] C.B.R. Pelling, *Plutarch: Life of Antony* (Cambridge, 1988), 278–80; idem, 'The Triumviral period', in A.K. Bowman et al. (edd.), *CAH* 10² (Cambridge, 1996), 1–69, at 57–9.

[15] Pelling 1996 (n. 14), 58–9.

[16] Kromayer (n. 2), 49–54; Carter (n. 3), 213.

[17] So P.A. Brunt, *Italian Manpower 225 B.C.–A.D. 14* (Oxford, 1971), 504–5.

been no different. It was virtually inevitable that, once their leader had abandoned them, the land army would go over to Octavian. The same was true of the eastern provinces, and of Pinarius Scarpa's army in Cyrenaica. In following Cleopatra, Antonius was abandoning the empire to Octavian and taking refuge in his mistress's realm. Their destruction was the inevitable consequence.

This article will proceed from the assumption that the ancient evidence is sound. It will argue that at Actium Antonius was fighting for victory. It will be maintained that, although by the time of the battle his position had become difficult, it was not as dire as Kromayer maintained, and Octavian's circumstances were not easy either. Octavian's was probably the more numerous of the fleets deployed in the battle but its superiority was not crushing: Antonius had a reasonable hope of victory. While the fighting was still at its height, Cleopatra chose to flee and Antonius to follow her. As the sources tell us, it was Cleopatra's flight that determined the outcome.[18]

2. THE PRELIMINARY CAMPAIGN

Antonius' forces had arrived in western Greece in the autumn of 32 B.C., and spent the winter at various bases including Actium, with Antonius himself based at Patrae. In early summer 31 B.C. Octavian crossed the Adriatic unopposed and advanced to the region of Actium. The two sides then spent the ensuing months facing each other and engaging in indecisive encounters. Dio's narrative depicts Antonius' situation as progressively worsening (50.11–13). Plutarch is sketchier, but provides some confirmatory details (*Vit. Ant*. 62–3). Building on this evidence, Kromayer constructed his picture of Antonius as trapped in an increasingly desperate plight so that by the end of August his only hope had become the staging of a breakout.[19]

Antonius certainly had the worst of this phase of the campaign. Detachments of Octavian's fleet under Agrippa's command achieved notable successes against his bases in western Greece: even before Octavian's main force arrived, Agrippa captured Methone with an advance contingent, and he followed this up later by taking Leucas, Patrae and Corinth.[20] At Actium itself, Antonius had no doubt taken up his position immediately south of the straits of Actium because it controlled access to the Ambracian Gulf, while Octavian was obliged to station his fleet on the seaward side at Gomaros. However, Antonius' position was ill adapted to lengthy occupation, having poor water supplies and vulnerability to malaria (Cass. Dio 50.12.8, 15.3). Antonius may have assumed that this would be the likely place for the final battle. By contrast, Octavian's position on the high ground at

[18] The betrayal of Antonius by Cleopatra has been dismissed by almost all scholars since Kromayer (n. 2), 1, 33–4; Kromayer (n. 7), 377–80; cf. Tarn (n. 4), 173, 196; Murray and Petsas (n. 3), 133 on the consensus. Cleopatra's betrayal/flight found support in the twentieth century, but A. von Domaszewski, *Geschichte der Römischen Kaiser* (Leipzig, 1909), 154–5; M. Beike, *Kriegsflotten und Seekriege der Antike* (Berlin, 1990), 145; and most notably, C.G. Starr, *The Influence of Sea Power on Ancient History* (Oxford, 1989), 65, seem to be exceptions.

[19] Kromayer (n. 2), 9–28. Followed, e.g., by Carter (n. 3), 200–14; Pelling 1988 (n. 14), 272–3; Pelling 1996 (n. 14), 54–7.

[20] Methone: Strabo 8.4.3 (359C); Cass. Dio 50.11.3; Oros. 6.19.6 (also reporting initial disruption of Antonius' supplies). Leucas, Patrae, Corinth: Vell. Pat. 2.84.1; Cass. Dio 50.13.5.

Mikalitzi had good water supply, providing he could retain access to the River Louros and the springs at Nicopolis. During the summer, Antonius threatened Octavian's water access and sought to bring on a battle, moving his army over to the northern side of the straits and sending his cavalry round the Gulf to attack Octavian from the east. However, although Antonius may have had some success in disrupting Octavian's water supply (Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 63.2), Octavian declined a battle and the Antonian cavalry suffered a reverse (Cass. Dio 50.13.5). By late summer, Antonius had withdrawn his army south of the straits and was suffering defections, including the client kings Deiotarus and Amyntas, and Romans such as Dellius and Domitius Ahenobarbus.[21]

In one important respect, however, Antonius' situation is unlikely to have been as bad as Kromayer and his followers claim. They hold that Octavian's forces retained the bases captured by Agrippa and used them to prevent supplies reaching Antonius by sea, so mounting an effective blockade. However, although disruption of Antonius' supplies is attested by Velleius (2.84.1) and Dio (50.14.4), it is unlikely that Agrippa retained the bases he had captured and used them to mount a blockade, since this would have involved a dangerous dispersal of Octavian's forces. No reliable source speaks of them being used in this way, and Agrippa's assaults are more likely to have been just raiding designed to cause short-term disruption to Antonius' supplies and support.[22] A notice in Dio confirms that Agrippa brought his fleet back to Actium: during his absence, C. Sosius launched an attack on Octavian's remaining fleet, but he was interrupted by the returning Agrippa (50.14.2). That Antonius was able to maintain his position in the Gulf of Corinth and his use of it for supplies is shown by the fact that he retained a steward (*dioiketes*) at Corinth and that at the time of the battle forced deliveries of grain for the use of his forces were still being made from the hinterland to Anticyra on the Gulf, under the supervision of his officers and soldiers (Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 67.7, 68.4–5).

Antonius' difficulties should not distract us from Octavian's situation. He could no more afford to remain where he was over winter than Antonius could, and by late August both commanders must have been acutely aware of the problems likely to be posed by the approach of winter.[23] Each of them needed a decisive engagement. Antonius' prospects in such an encounter had not been drastically impaired by the setbacks of the summer. Each commander could reasonably hope to win the naval engagement and assume that this would give them a decisive advantage in the sequel.

3. SHIP NUMBERS

Kromayer supposed that Octavian entered the battle with some 400 ships and Antonius with 230, and this substantial disparity was central to his argument that

[21] Defections: Hor. *Epod.* 9.17–18; Vell. Pat. 2.84.2; Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 59.3, 63.2–3, *Mor.* 207a; Cass. Dio 50.13.5–7, 23.1–3; A.J. Woodman, *Velleius Paterculus: The Caesarian and Augustan Narrative (2.41–93)* (Cambridge, 1983), 222–3.

[22] Florus' reference (2.21.4) to Octavian as surrounding with his fleet *omne litus Actiacum Leucada insulam montemque Leucaten et Ambracii sinus cornua* is a mere rhetorical flourish.

[23] Naval warfare was a seasonal activity and travel at sea was only deemed safe during a five-month period in spring and summer. See H. van Wees, *Greek Warfare: Myth and Realities* (London, 2004), 219.

Antonius could have had no hope of winning.[24] Tarn accepted the same figure for Octavian's ships, but argued that Antonius had about the same.[25] In fact, our sources give a variety of evidence about ship numbers, some of it conflicting, and no solution is free of difficulties. However, there are serious objections to both Kromayer's and Tarn's solutions, and an alternative is available that does less violence to the sources.

Plutarch says (*Vit. Ant*. 61.1–2) that upon arriving at Actium Antonius had 500 warships and Octavian 250.[26] The rest of his evidence is consistent with this statement. At *Vit. Ant*. 64.1 he reports Antonius as having some ships burned before the battle, but his wording may imply that this was done only to Egyptian ships.[27] At *Vit. Ant*. 68.1 he cites the authority of Augustus' memoirs for his having captured 300 ships, and Plutarch clearly takes this as the number of ships captured in the battle itself. This figure coheres with Augustus' own statement at *RG* 3.4 that in his career he captured 600 ships: if, as is natural, this refers to ships captured in battle, this would represent 300 taken in 36 B.C. at Mylae and Naulochus and 300 at Actium.[28]

Dio gives no ship numbers, but makes some relevant statements. He, too, mentions Antonius' burning of some ships, which he associates with his alleged decision to flee (50.15.4). He also observes that not all of the fleet of Antonius was at Actium (50.12.1) and that Antonius lost ships before the final battle (50.14.1–2), partly because of a storm (50.31.2).[29] In the speech that Dio writes for Antonius before the battle he makes him boast of his stronger forces.[30] Although most empha-

[24] Kromayer (n. 2), 30–2; Kromayer (n. 7), 375–6. See Johnson (n. 3), 24–39; Reinhold (n. 3), 113, for modern discussions of ship numbers.

[25] Tarn (n. 4), 178–9.

[26] Pelling 1996 (n. 14), 55; 1988 (n. 14), 138, accepts Plutarch and his number of 500. Antonius had 500 but only managed 250 against Octavian in the final battle (1996 [n. 14], 57). See also Johnson (n. 3), 29. According to W.M. Murray, 'Reconsidering the battle of Actium – again', in V.G. Gorman and E.W. Robinson (edd.), *Oikistes: Studies in Constitutions, Colonies, and Military Power in the Ancient World. Offered in Honour of A.J. Graham*, *Mnemosyne* (Leiden, 2002), 339–60, at 340–1, and idem, 'Recovering rams from the battle of Actium', in K. Zachos (edd.), *Nicopolis B: Proceedings of the Second International Nicopolis Symposium (11–29 September 2002)* (Preveza, 2007), 445–51, at 446, this figure is reliable because the Victory Monument at Actium is a tithe. That would be 30 rams, but there are 36. See Murray (2007), 446. Furthermore, there is mention of a ten-ship monument at Actium, but it is not the Victory Monument (see Strabo 7.7.5).

[27] See also Cass. Dio 50.15.4. According to Tarn (n. 4), 183–4, and Tarn (n. 9), 105, it was Octavian who burned the ships *after* the victory, not Antonius. Tarn (n. 4), 192, calls the idea that Antonius burned ships 'the silly perversion'. See also Richardson (n. 3), 155–6; Pelling 1988 (n. 14), 276.

[28] According to Appian these were 30 at Mylae (App. *B Civ* 5.108) and 255 at Naulochus (*B Civ*. 5.118 [300 ships on each side]; *B Civ*. 121 [17 of Pompeius' ships escaped and 28 were sunk]). Appian says that the rest went up in flames or were captured (5.121). How many went up in flames it is impossible to say.

[29] Johnson (n. 3), 27 and n. 21.

[30] According to Johnson (n. 3), 31–2, Antonius would have been expected to say that his fleet was superior in his speech before the battle (fictitious speech) and furthermore, he is talking about size and not numbers. According to Cass. Dio 50.18.5–6, 23.2–3; Plut. *Vit. Ant*. 61.1, 64.1; Flor. 2.21.3; Oros. 6.19.9, Antonius' ships were taller than the ships of Octavian. In Cass. Dio 50.33.6–7 and 50.28.6 the talk is not about ships but men, in 50.29 about size not numbers. See Johnson (n. 3), 34–5.

sis is put on the ship sizes, he does clearly imply that Antonius has the greater number as well.[31] Octavian in his reply is not represented as disputing the point.

Our other evidence is from two sources that, as is generally recognised, must derive, directly or indirectly, from Livy, namely Florus (2.21.5) and Orosius (6.19.8–9).[32] Both of these report each side's ship numbers in the battle. On Antonius' ship numbers they are in agreement, giving a figure much lower than is suggested by the evidence considered above: Orosius says that he had 170 ships, Florus less than 200. On Octavian's numbers they are in sharp disagreement: Orosius reports him as having 230 beaked ships, 30 without beaks and triremes comparable in speed to Liburnians. Florus credits him with over 400 ships, thus more than twice as many as Antonius.

We should first consider which of these two versions of Octavian's numbers is more likely to have stood in Livy. The answer is surely Orosius'. This is the more precise and circumstantial version, whereas Florus' occurs in a highly rhetorical context – it could well have been his own contribution, arising out of his rhetorical elaboration. Further confirmation may be provided by the remark, made by both these writers, that Antonius' fleet compensated for its lower numbers by the greater size of the ships.[33] In view of their agreement on the point, this observation is likely to have stood in Livy himself. Ship size is more likely to have been claimed as compensation for lower numbers if the disparity was only modest. The claim that his ships' size would enable Antonius to match a fleet more than twice as numerous might be passed off in an account as rhetorically stylised as Florus', but seems unlikely to have been offered by Livy himself.

If we accept that Orosius' version of Octavian's ship numbers stood in Livy and that Florus' is his own aberration, our sources are in broad agreement on Octavian's forces. It is true that Plutarch's figure of 250 relates to Octavian's force at the start of the campaign, and that Orosius (6.19.6) gives the same number of 230 beaked ships for the force that Octavian himself brought over, excluding Agrippa's advance force. However, these are not serious difficulties, since Agrippa's advance force may not have been substantial. The weight of the evidence thus points to Octavian's fleet in the battle having numbered around 250 warships.

On Antonius' fleet we face a sharp disparity. If we take Augustus' figure of 300 captured ships to represent the ships that he claimed to have captured in the battle, we might suppose, with Tarn, that Antonius entered the battle with some 400 ships, allowing for the 60 Egyptian vessels and some others who escaped, and some burned or wrecked ships not counted in the total of those captured. This would fit well with Plutarch's figure of 500 for his fleet at the outset, allowing for the wastage and for pre-battle ship-burning. However, we would then have to dismiss the much lower figure reproduced from Livy by Florus and Orosius as

[31] 50.16.2: *ὅσον μὲν καὶ οἷον ναυτικὸν ἔχομεν*, 'how big and of what kind a fleet'; 50.19.5 'our ships are so strong that, even if theirs were equal in number [*εἰ καὶ τὸν ἀριθμὸν ἰσοπαλεῖς αὐταῖς ἐκεῖναι ἦσαν*], they would not be able to match them' (so implying that in fact they are not equal in number). See Kromayer (n. 7), 375, n. 1; Richardson (n. 3), 154, n. 8.

[32] See Johnson (n. 3), 25–6. On Florus and the use of Livy and the manuscripts, see L. Di Bessone, 'Floro: un retore storico e poeta', *ANRW* 2nd series, 34.1 (1993), 80–117. On Orosius and Livy, see R. J. Deferrari, *Paulus Orosius: The Seven Books of History against the Pagans* (Washington, DC, 1964), xx.

[33] Oros. 9: *quantum numerum cedens tantum magnitudine praecellens*; Flor. 2.21.5: *sed numerum magnitudo pensabat.*

an error. Tarn's suggestion that it related only to the right wing, which was under Antonius' direct command, is wholly unconvincing.[34]

On balance it is preferable to suppose that the low Livian figure for Antonius' fleet is correct. His fleet thus numbered 170, or perhaps 230 with the 60 Egyptian vessels, if, as Kromayer suggested, these were not counted in the 170. It will then be necessary to explain away Augustus' claim of 300 captured ships, and, as is usual, this may be done by assuming that (contrary to what Plutarch supposed: *Vit. Ant*. 61.1, 68.1) it represented a total of all the ships that Augustus claimed to have captured over the whole campaign of Actium, including the protracted preliminaries as well as the battle itself.[35] Some ships taken in Egypt may also have been included in the number 300.[36]

Thus the simplest resolution of the source problem is to accept the (probably) Livian figures and suppose that in the battle Antonius had 170 warships (with or without the 60 Egyptian vessels) and Octavian around 250. Octavian thus had a numerical advantage but not overwhelming superiority, and Antonius could hope that the greater size of some of his ships would compensate. This fits well with the ancient narratives of the battle, which, as we shall see, portray it as hard fought, but with Octavian's side seeking to outflank their opponents, which suggests numerical superiority.

It may be that Antonius' force had been reduced to this relatively low number from an original fleet that, as Plutarch claimed, numbered 500. This is what Kromayer and his followers suppose, explaining the huge drop in numbers by deployments elsewhere and pre-battle captures and burning of ships. However, it seems hard to suppose that Antonius would have allowed himself to slip from a force double Octavian's in size to numerical inferiority. More probably, Plutarch's 500 should be rejected – it was perhaps a mere doubling of Octavian's numbers.

4. ANTONIUS' PLANS AND CLEOPATRA'S FLIGHT

Cleopatra's flight does not, as it happens, bulk large in the Augustan poets' allusions to Actium, but this need not be significant – they just happened to highlight different images and motifs. It does in any case get due prominence in the fullest of such battle narratives, on the Shield of Aeneas (Verg. *Aen.* 8.704–8): Apollo bends his bow, all the orientals flee and *ipsa regina* sets her sails. The queen's initiative gets the same prominence in the surviving prose narratives of Velleius (2.85.3, *prima occupat fugam Cleopatra*), Plutarch (*Vit. Ant*. 66.3), Florus (2.21.8–9), Dio (50.33.2) and Orosius (6.19.11), as well as in an incidental reference in Josephus, stressing her abandonment of Antonius (*Ap*. 2.59). Thus modern reconstructions of the battle that deny that Cleopatra took the decisive initiative reject the clear consensus of the sources.

Only our two fullest sources, Plutarch (*Vit. Ant*. 63.3–5) and Dio (50.14.4–15.3), report the pre-battle deliberation on Antonius' side. Both versions place the council

[34] Tarn (n. 4), 191.

[35] See Kromayer (n. 2), 31 and n. 2; Kromayer (n. 7), 365; Richardson (n. 3), 155; Johnson (n. 3), 29–30; Murray and Petsas (n. 3), 137–8; Pelling 1988 (n. 14), 287–8; and esp. Murray 2002 (n. 26), 341.

[36] Alternatively, the claim of Augustus to have captured 300 ships may be an exaggeration.

in the context of Antonius' increasing difficulties, and there are considerable points of similarity between their accounts, as well as important differences. In Dio, the council is called to determine whether they should stay where they are and fight or move elsewhere, and Cleopatra prevails with her view that, leaving garrisons behind, she and Antonius should withdraw to Egypt with the remainder, although concealing this intention from their forces for the time being. In Plutarch, Canidius argues that Antonius should send Cleopatra away, withdraw to Thrace or Macedonia and seek a land battle, but Cleopatra prevails in arguing for a sea battle; her motive in arguing this case was that she was already contemplating flight.

These reports evidently derive from one or more well-placed sources in the Antonian camp, hostile to Cleopatra: the history of Dellius is an obvious possibility. Some, perhaps all, of the divergences in the accounts may be due to Plutarch and Dio themselves. The accounts clearly reflect an authentic debate that took place in the Antonian camp, but any attempt to reconstruct its actual course is necessarily conjectural. It is plausible to suppose, with Plutarch, that the deliberations focussed on the question whether Antonius should seek to withdraw inland, perhaps to Thrace or Macedonia and seek a decisive battle there, or to decide the issue in a sea battle at Actium, and that Canidius and Cleopatra argued on the two sides. Antonius' situation was in some ways comparable to Caesar's at Dyrrachium in 48 B.C., and so one natural course would be to emulate Caesar's breakout to Pharsalus.[37]

In the light of Cleopatra's flight, it would be natural for men to connect her advocacy of the naval battle with her flight, and therefore to make the conjecture that at least she, and perhaps Antonius too, had secretly planned the flight. If such discussions had taken place, they would surely have been secret, and reliable information about them is unlikely to have reached the historical tradition.

As Plutarch and Dio tell us, sails were stowed on at least some of the ships (Plut. *Vit. Ant*. 64.2; Cass. Dio 50.31.2), as was the treasure (Cass. Dio 50.15.4), and in the event Cleopatra's contingent resorted to using sails in their flight. Stowing sails was certainly an exceptional measure before a battle, and Kromayer took it as decisive evidence that Antonius was aiming to break out rather than seeking a victory.[38] However, the interpretation of Tarn is preferable: Antonius was aiming at victory, but providing for the possibility of flight in the event of defeat.[39] This was a sensible precaution, for, if he had retreated to Actium after a defeat at sea, Antonius' prospects would have been bleak indeed. Flight was not an outcome for which Antonius was aiming or for which he would have been happy to settle. As we have seen, his fleet numbers gave him a realistic chance of victory, and he was fighting to win.[40]

[37] Cf. Pelling 1988 (n. 14), 272.

[38] Kromayer (n. 2), 35.

[39] Tarn (n. 4), 188–9.

[40] Pelling 1988 (n. 14), 278–80, and 1996 (n. 14), 57–9, acknowledges that Antonius was keeping his options open between victory and flight, but he supposes that Antonius was heavily outnumbered in ships, had little prospect of victory and regarded flight as the most likely and an acceptable outcome.

5. THE COURSE OF THE BATTLE

When it comes to descriptions of the battle itself, Dio's account is certainly laden with rhetorical colour. In this respect, his version can be contrasted with the much fuller narrative of Plutarch, which includes considerably more circumstantial detail.[41]

According to Plutarch, Antonius' fleet was drawn up 'in the narrows' (*Vit. Ant*. 65.3) – so extending north–south and, as in the usual reconstructions, such as the plan by Rice Holmes,[42] with Octavian's fleet facing them from the wider water. Antonius aimed, according to Carter, to fight close to land so that the more manoeuvrable ships of Octavian could not sail round the ends of his line.[43] This might give a clue to the plan of Antonius; he wanted to fight close to the narrow mouth of the Gulf, as the Greeks did at Salamis.[44] Of course, Octavian and Agrippa knew the battle of Salamis as well and thus did not accept battle close to land. The intention to fight in the narrows seems also to suggest that Antonius wanted to win the battle, as fighting in restricted waters with little sea room made tactics such as the *diekplous* (breaking through the enemy line of ships) difficult to use (Thuc. 2.89; cf. Polyb. 1.51.9).

Plutarch tells us that Antonius had the right wing together with Publicola, Coelius had the left, and in the centre were Marcus Octavius and Marcus Insteius. Octavian had Agrippa on the left and reserved the right wing for himself. Plutarch also suggests that the centre of the forces of Octavian was commanded by Arruntius (*Vit. Ant*. 65.1–2, 66.3 on Arruntius). Variants are presented by Velleius, who puts Marcus Lurius in command of the right wing of Caesar's fleet and Arruntius on the left, with Agrippa in overall command (2.85.2). The land forces of Antonius were commanded by Canidius, those of Caesar by Taurus (*Vit. Ant*. 65.2; cf. Vell. Pat. 2.85.2).

An important factor at Actium is the wind, especially after midday.[45] Plutarch *Vit. Ant*. 65.4 stresses that there was no fighting before midday and he suggests that Cleopatra used the wind to flee (*Vit. Ant*. 66.4; cf. 65.4).[46] But surely Agrippa and Octavian knew about the local wind as well. It is of course possible that Antonius had been waiting until this point to advance to ensure that, if the outcome was unfavourable, there would be a sailing wind for flight.

If we look at the sources' description of the actual fighting, it seems that Agrippa tried to outflank the right wing of Antonius (Plut. *Vit. Ant*. 66.3; cf. Cass. Dio

[41] Plutarch's sources for the battle included the autobiography of Augustus (*Vit. Ant*. 68.1). See Pelling 1988 (n. 14), 26–30. We do not know what sources Dio used on the Augustan age, but they may have included Livy, Cremutius Cordus and Aufidius Bassus, apart from the autobiography of Augustus. See Reinhold (n. 3), 7–8; J.W. Rich, *Cassius Dio: The Augustan Settlement (Roman History 53–55.9)* (Warminster, 1990), 5–8.

[42] Rice Holmes (n. 1), facing page 147.

[43] Carter (n. 3), 215–19.

[44] W.L. Rodgers, *Greek and Roman Naval Warfare: A Study of Strategy, Tactics, and Ship Design from Salamis (480 B.C.) to Actium (31 B.C.)* (Annapolis, MD, 1937), 86; B. Strauss, *The Battle of Salamis: The Naval Encounter that Saved Greece – and Western Civilization* (New York, 2004), 87; J.E. Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts: A History of Battles in Classical Antiquity* (New Haven, CT, 2005), esp. 67.

[45] Kromayer (n. 2), 42 and n. 3; Leake (n. 1), 25, 38, 41, 44; Rice Holmes (n. 1), 258–9; Tarn (n. 4), 189; Rodgers (n. 44), 531; Carter (n. 3), 218.

[46] According to Plutarch the battle of Salamis was also decided by knowledge of wind (*Them*. 14.2–3).

50.31.5–6). Publicola responded and the centre was separated from the flank, and as a result the centre was thrown into confusion. In planning naval battles, ancient commanders frequently used linear tactics, where the danger of being outflanked meant that commanders arranged their ships in a line, trying to match the opponent's line. This effectively reduced a sea battle to a simple struggle, ship against ship, that could be prearranged and enforced by discipline.[47] Agrippa's tactics were the natural action of a numerically superior force seeking advantage. Antonius' side responded predictably. The numerical advantage also meant, however, that Octavian could use outflanking tactics without significantly weakening his centre.

Kromayer suggests that Antonius took the northern flank because it would be easier to flee to the south, but this does not explain how Cleopatra did the same from her position behind the lines. He concludes that Cleopatra broke through the middle of the enemy line ('sie bricht vor, bricht durch').[48] Clearly Kromayer thought fleeing from the scene of battle was not a problem at all.[49] In 1933 he reaffirmed the idea, talking about the gap ('Lücke') in the centre of the fleets.[50]

Kromayer's supporters present some ingenious theories about Antonius' side's manoeuvres (allegedly designed to put his fleet in the position for sailing away, by rounding Leucas). Yet these go way beyond anything in the ancient accounts.[51] Murray stresses:

> At some point, when the possibility for dispersing the enemy had definitely passed but when the fighting was still intense enough to limit pursuit, Cleopatra led her squadron through the gap that separated the right wing from the center and gained enough sea room to raise her sails. Whether we choose to censure or praise her action, we must admit that Cleopatra personally commanded the largest portion of the fleet that escaped. And if we admit that the primary objective was to retreat from the gulf with as many ships as possible, it is difficult to blame her for successfully leading an entire squadron to safety.[52]

Even though Plutarch mentions the gap in the centre (*Vit. Ant*. 66.3), the statement that Cleopatra fled through 'the middle of the combatants' need not imply that she used the gap. There is also a question of the relative positions of the fleets in battle. The two fleets probably started the battle in the positions depicted on the plan drawn up by Rice Holmes.[53] Yet what happened to these initial positions as the battle evolved? If the line had moved more towards east–west, it would have been easier to use sails and get round Leucas and the gap might not have been needed. But this hardly explains why only the Egyptian squadron got away.

Antonius and Cleopatra could not at the outset have been sure that the battle would turn out like this; they could not have *planned* to create this gap, as that

[47] J. Keegan, *Battle at Sea: From Man-of-War to Submarine* (London, 2004), 43–5. Even though the concept of a 'line' is used here, it must be remembered that ancient battles were fought without the use of sail and cannon. According to J.S. Morrison, *Greek and Roman Oared Warships 399–30 B.C.* (Oxford, 1996), 45, the normal tactics of a faster fleet was to move round the enemy line if there was sea room and attack ships abeam or in the stern.

[48] Kromayer (n. 2), 40–1, quotation on page 46.

[49] Similar Leake (n. 1), 38.

[50] Kromayer (n. 7), 362, 377–8.

[51] Carter (n. 3), 219–24.

[52] Murray 2002 (n. 26), 353. See also Kromayer (n. 2), 40–8; Rice Holmes (n. 1), 156; Rodgers (n. 44), 533; Johnson (n. 3), 53–6; Bengtson (n. 3), 243; Reinhold (n. 3), 114; Pelling 1996 (n. 14), 58, invents the concept of 'maritime Panzer-tactic'; Osgood (n. 3), 274.

[53] See above, n. 42.

would have been much too complicated. They could not have been sure of dominating the battle and thus making the flight possible. The sources do indeed indicate that they did not dominate. Cass. Dio 50.31.4 suggests that the outflanking of his fleet made Antonius move forward, trying to engage in battle, not because he wanted to but because he had to.

At the time of the flight, the battle scene must have been in chaos, with ships trying to board, trying not to get rammed and protecting their oars.[54] A relatively static battle evolved into chaos when the engagement began. Keegan concludes: 'But naval wars, even less than land wars, do not fall out as paper calculations predicate'.[55] Fundamentally, a battle plan intending to create a gap in the middle of the fighting ships seems unlikely and impossible. Kromayer's idea that Antonius and Cleopatra could control the battle and that, as a result, Cleopatra could flee through the middle of the enemy line, using the sea breeze, seems implausible for the same reasons.

Cleopatra's withdrawal is presented in all the sources (including Dio) as her own impulse. The panic described by Dio at 50.33.1–2 finds support in the other sources, suggesting that Cleopatra led the flight. In this account Dio also focusses on Antonius and his disbelief when he learned that Cleopatra was fleeing. According to Plutarch, Cleopatra ran away at a time when the battle was yet to be decided; it is at this crucial point that Antonius chose Cleopatra above his men (Plut. *Vit. Ant*. 66.4–5). He did not even believe that she had initiated the flight, and instead blamed her fleet. In Plutarch's account the confusion in the middle of Antonius' line is generated by Publicola's move to the right in response to Agrippa's outflanking – if this can be pressed, it may be that Cleopatra jumped to the conclusion that the battle was being lost.

Looking at the sequel of Antonius' and Cleopatra's withdrawal, there is, as we shall see below, no need to doubt the claim of the sources that Antonius' fleet continued to put up stiff resistance. The use of fire in order to subdue the fleet of Antonius is mentioned by Dio (50.34) not Plutarch, but the latter does stress that the fleet of Antonius held out for a long time and only at the tenth hour gave up the struggle (*Vit. Ant*. 68.1; cf. Suet. *Aug*. 17.2; Vell. Pat. 2.85).[56]

Returning briefly to Horace *Epod.* 9.19–20, it is clear that the description of the battle does not contain much fighting, but four lines in a poem cannot decide this matter (Propertius used two: 4.6.55–6).[57] In line 27 *terra marique victus* is mentioned. This is similar to lines 17–20: Amyntas' defection represents the battle *on land*, while the fleet's return to the Ambracian Gulf, most likely after initial fighting, represents the battle *at sea*. Perhaps lines 19–20 are a description of the final battle, which would otherwise go undescribed.

The most debated word of Horace's poem is probably *sinistrorsum*. A proposed scenario is that the forces of Antonius realised during the fighting itself that they

[54] Rodgers (n. 44), 11, on oars; Morrison (n. 47), 359–60, on tactics in ancient warfare, and 9–10 on the use of rams.

[55] Keegan (n. 47), 25, 44. See also Pelling 1988 (n. 14), 278–80; 1996 (n. 14), 58.

[56] On the use of fire, see also Hor. *Carm*. 1.37.12–13; Verg. *Aen*. 8.694; Serv. *Aen*. 6.682; Flor. 2.21.6. See Johnson (n. 3), 43–7; Murray 2002 (n. 26), esp. 346. Tarn (n. 4), 183–4, calls this an 'impossibly silly story'. See also Carter (n. 3), 225; Reinhold (n. 3), 114–15.

[57] According to E. Wistrand, *Horace's Ninth Epode and its Historical Background* (Göteburg, 1958), 24–6, lines 19–20 must be related to the failed attempt to break out by C. Sosius, a theory put forward by Ferrabino (n. 4). On Propertius 4.6.55–6, see now G. Hutchinson, *Propertius: Elegies Book IV* (Cambridge, 2006), 164–5.

would lose and thus decided or were forced to return to harbour. The term *latent* (*lateo*) together with *puppes sinistrorsum citae* does seem to suggest that they escaped or hid from something, meaning the fleet of Octavian.[58] This is a retreat and *sinistrorsum* probably means back to the harbour, as this involved a movement to the left.[59] However, the conclusion still stands that the lines 19–20 can never be decoded. All in all, the reference to a fleet manoeuvre remains obscure, and it seems impossible to determine whether this is a description of events during or after the battle. The poem simply cannot be taken to support the theory of Tarn that Antonius' fleet deserted him.

The evidence permits only a very limited reconstruction of the battle, but what we are told fits well with this being a hard fought contest between two sides who were each trying to win and quite well matched, though Octavian's had numerical advantage. There are no grounds here for scholars' current dismissal of the battle as a lame contest (see below).

In fact nothing in the ancient accounts of the battle lends support to the view that Antonius was seeking not victory but an opportunity for escape. If that was his plan, the course of the battle surely did not go as he wished: he would have wished to extricate a substantial part of his Roman forces, rather than little more than the Egyptian squadron. Yet it is very hard to see how he could have set out to achieve this and organize the outcome of the battle to this effect. The actual outcome was surely the result of Cleopatra's own initiative rather than in any sense complying with an agreed plan. It seems unlikely that it would be possible to retain the navy and the army after fleeing, and thus fleeing would equal losing not just the battle but the whole war. It is hardly plausible to think that the army would have stayed loyal after they witnessed their general's flight.

Why did Antonius not return to his army and fight after the defeat in the naval battle? Mommsen is certainly right in stressing that in all probability the legions of Antonius were at Actium to be used in the land war.[60] Of course they were also fighting at sea, but could easily have been deployed after the sea battle.[61] Most likely the naval engagement was only part of the intended battle and to the surprise of everybody Cleopatra and Antonius ran away, as suggested by Plutarch (*Vit. Ant*. 68.2–3), and the land battle never materialised.[62] In the end it was per-

[58] Watson (n. 10), 326–8; E. Kraggerud, *Horaz und Actium: Studien zu den politischen Epoden* (Oslo, 1984), 93. Kromayer (n. 7), 379, suggests an engagement before the final battle. Gurval (n. 10), 151–2, suggests that *portu latent* means that the two lines 19–20 refer to ships' movements before the battle, but *sinistrorsum citae* can only mean that they had to withdraw from the fighting or at least from the battle scene and back to the Ambracian Gulf.

[59] C.B.R. Pelling, '*Puppes sinistrorsum citae*', *CQ* 36 (1986), 177–81, at 180–1, and on page 179 he suggests that *sinistrorsum* meant back to port in everyday usage. See also R.G.M. Nisbet, 'Horace's *Epodes* and history', in T. Woodman and D. West (edd.), *Poetry and Politics in the Age of Augustus* (Cambridge, 1984), 1–18, at 13; Watson (n. 10), 327. Mankin (n. 10), 170, prefers a literal sense, not 'to port'. According to Morrison (n. 47), 167, it must refer to the ships in the line, fighting.

[60] T. Mommsen, *Römisches Kaisergeschichte: Nach den Vorlesungs-Mitschriften von Sebastian und Paul Hensel 1882/86, Herausgegeben von Alexander Demandt* (Munich, 1992), 85.

[61] On the legions fighting the actual sea battle, see Plut. *Vit. Ant*. 64.1; Oros. 6.19.8. See also L. Keppie, 'The army and the navy', in A.K. Bowman et al. (n. 14), 371–96, at 376.

[62] D. Potter, 'The roman army and navy', in H.I. Flower (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to The Roman Republic* (Cambridge, 2004), 66–88, at 78, suggests that the fleet was always of lesser importance than the legions. According to Keegan (n. 47), 273, most naval engagements through history were part of a land operation.

haps understandable that Cleopatra, putting Egyptian interests first, opted to flee, saving her fleet, when things appeared to her to have gone wrong, but Antonius' impulsive decision to follow her was an indefensible error.[63]

After the battle of Actium, Octavian sent envoys to Canidius Crassus and the army of Antonius. Ultimately, the army was abandoned by Crassus and the other officers, and the legions changed sides (Plut. *Vit. Ant*. 68.1–3; Cass. Dio 51.1.4). They had been ordered into Macedonia by Antonius (Plut. *Vit. Ant*. 67.5) and remained intact for seven days (*Vit. Ant*. 68.3).[64] Antonius' army was later incorporated into the forces of Octavian and some were disbanded (Cass. Dio 51.3.1–2).[65] Any pre-battle plan will have envisaged flight in the event of defeat. Cleopatra's action is therefore best explained by supposing that she panicked and prematurely assumed that the day was lost, so initiating 'Plan B' of her own volition. Her action triggered Antonius' fatal decision to follow suit.

6. THE CASUALTIES

The ancient sources agree in portraying the battle as hard fought, with Antonius' fleet putting up a protracted struggle long after their leader had deserted them.[66] Modern scholars, both those following Kromayer and those following Tarn, have disputed this, arguing that the Antonians put up little resistance and that casualties were low. Thus Syme, who dismisses the battle as 'a shabby affair', asserts that 'there may have been little fighting and comparatively few casualties'.[67] Pelling echoes Syme in judging the battle 'a very lame affair' and remarks that 'the whole battle produced only 5,000 casualties, an amazingly small number by the standards of a sea-battle'.[68] In fact, the casualty evidence is problematic, and cannot validly be used to deny the sources' account of the extent of the fighting, or, more broadly, to denigrate the battle's significance.

Two conflicting sets of casualty figures are reported. According to Plutarch, 'there were not more than 5,000 dead, but 300 ships were captured, as Caesar himself wrote' (in view of the linkage with captured ships, the 5,000 must be intended as the total of the dead on the Antonian side).[69] Orosius, however, states that 'of the dead 12,000 are said to have been killed, and 6000 were wounded, of whom 1000 died while being cared for'.[70] Thus the lower figure has the authority

[63] Mommsen (n. 60), 85–6.

[64] Pelling 1988 (n. 14), 288; Grant (n. 3), 212–13, stresses that Canidius was loyal towards Antonius, the army was disloyal. This does seem overstressing the point, as Antonius had after all left them in battle.

[65] See Reinhold (n. 3), 125–8. On the soldiers of Antonius, see L. Keppie, *Colonisation and Veteran Settlement in Italy: 47–14 B.C.* (London, 1983), 79–80.

[66] Vell. Pat. 2.85.4 (*illis etiam detracto capite in longum fortissime pugnandi duravit constantia et desperata victoria in mortem dimicabatur*); Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 68.1; Cass. Dio 50.33–4.

[67] Syme (n. 6), 297.

[68] Pelling 1996 (n. 14), 59; cf. 1988 (n. 14), 287 and already Rawlinson (n. 1), 452; C.G. Starr, *The Roman Imperial Navy 31 B.C.–A.D. 324* (Ithaca, NY, 1941), 7; Carter (n. 3), 224–5; Johnson (n. 3), 71–2; Reinhold (n. 3), 115–16; Mommsen (n. 60), 86.

[69] Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 68.1: *καὶ νεκροὶ μὲν οὐ πλείους ἐγένοντο πεντακισχιλίων, ἑάλωσαν δὲ τριακόσιαι νῆες, ὡς αὐτὸς ἀνέγραψε Καῖσαρ*. The translation is adopted from B. Perrin, *Plutarch Lives*, vol. 9 (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1920).

[70] Oros. 6.19.12: *ex victis duodecim milia cecidisse referuntur, sex milia vulnerata sunt, e quibus mille inter curandum defecerunt.*

of Augustus' own lost autobiography.[71] However, unless there has been a scribal error, we may assume that Orosius' figure derives from Livy. Thus on this point the principal historian of Augustus' reign appears to have disputed the emperor's own account.

If Augustus' lower figure is accurate, this need not be an indication that there had been relatively little fighting. De Souza has recently argued cogently that casualties are in general unlikely to have been very high in sea battles of the Hellenistic and Roman periods.[72] The number of Carthaginians killed in the first great Roman naval victory, at Mylae in 260 B.C., is reported to have been a mere 3000 (Eutr. 2.20.2; Oros. 4.7.10). For purely statistical reasons the battle of Actium may also be compared to the battle of Midway, where there were not more than 3,000 dead Japanese and fewer than 1,000 dead Americans, thus giving a total number of dead soldiers well below the battle of Actium.[73]

Accurate figures for enemies killed will have been even more difficult to obtain in naval than in land battles. We have already noted the problematic character of Augustus' reported claim to have captured 300 ships. His claim (if accurately reported) to have killed not more than 5,000 may be no less questionable. Political considerations may have affected the claim, along with the war's ambivalent status as both an external and a civil conflict. Octavian and his party had portrayed the war as an external struggle against a foreign queen menacing Italy, but they acknowledged that it was also a civil war conflict, since citizen traitors were abetting Cleopatra.[74] The external character of the war meant that Octavian's victory would qualify for a triumph but, since it was also civil, he had an interest in playing down the carnage.[75] It may be no coincidence that, since the early second century, 5,000 had by law been the minimum number killed to qualify a commander for a triumph.[76] Augustus' claim may have been carefully calibrated: he had killed just enough to earn his Actian triumph.

7. CONCLUSION

Since Kromayer, the dominant modern view has been that Antonius, fatally weakened by developments over the summer, and by September 31 B.C. hopelessly outnumbered in ships, entered the battle without hope of victory and aiming simply to achieve a breakout; thus, in the event the battle went largely as he had planned. Tarn's rival theory that Antonius was aiming for victory but undone by large-scale defections has rightly been generally rejected. Pelling concedes that Antonius may

[71] Pelling 1988 (n. 14), 26 and 287–8; Tarn (n. 4), 178. Johnson (n. 3), 43, concludes that 'If Augustus himself recorded this figure in his memoirs, as Tarn contends, either he was not attempting to make a small battle into a large one or 5,000 was indeed a large number of men lost. In either case Tarn's view is defeated'.

[72] P. de Souza, 'Naval battles and sieges', in P. Sabin et al. (edd.), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare* (Cambridge, 2007), 1.434–60, at 440–1.

[73] Keegan (n. 47), 211.

[74] See further C.H. Lange, *Res Publica Constituta: Actium, Apollo and the Accomplishment of the Triumviral Assignment* (Leiden, 2009), 79–90.

[75] So R.G. Lewis, 'Imperial autobiography, Augustus to Hadrian', *ANRW* 2nd series, 34.1 (1993), 629–706, at 683 ('low casualties, befitting a civil war').

[76] Val. Max. 2.8.1; cf. Oros. 5.4.7. The historicity of the law is unconvincingly denied by M. Beard, *The Roman Triumph* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 2007), 209–10.

have retained some hope of victory, but he holds that this was an unlikely prospect and that Antonius would have recognised this and resigned himself to the strong possibility of defeat.

In place of these interpretations, this article offers a reconstruction of events that adheres much more closely to the ancient accounts. Although Antonius had had the worst of the summer campaign, his position was not desperate, and both sides needed to decide the issue in battle before winter. Octavian had only a modest numerical advantage in ships, which could be compensated by the greater size of Antonius' vessels. Antonius took the prudent precaution of stowing sails to enable him to flee in the event of defeat, but he entered the battle aiming for victory and with a realistic chance of success. Cleopatra's flight was not the implementation of an agreed plan but, as the ancient tradition insists, her own initiative. Antonius' impulsive decision to follow her sealed his fate. Even after he had abandoned them, his fleet fought on bravely. Syme's 'shabby affair' has proved to be yet another of the myths of Actium.

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