
Fractured Friendship at the Battle of Munda 45 BC: Julius Caesar and Titus Labienus

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Julius Caesar and Titus Labienus were friends forced to fight one another because they could not deny the influence of *dignitas* and *amicitia*, two social values the Roman Republic forced them to recognize. As young men, they campaigned together in Asia. They returned to Rome and fought the *optimates* in the Senate and later, barbarians in Gaul. Nevertheless, in 45 BC at the Battle of Munda, they fought one another as enemies, and there Labienus fell. Caesar triggered a civil war when he crossed the Rubicon in 49 BC to defend his *dignitas*. Bound by *amicitia*, Labienus joined the opposition, Pompey, and the *optimates*. The study that follows begins with a discussion on related historiography and sources, followed by an outline of the conflict between the *optimates* and the *populares*. It then examines the significant cooperation between both men and determines this cooperation was rooted in genuine friendship not mutual benefit. *Dignitas* and *amicitia* divided the two friends and an analysis of these two values is given. Last, a survey of the Battle of Munda describes a tragic end to a once flourishing friendship.

Historiography and Sources

Plutarch (50-120 AD) was one of the first biographers to pass judgment on Caesar. Plutarch suggested that Caesar, from the beginning of his career, planned to achieve absolute power.¹ This approach left little room for an agonizing Caesar grieving over the death of Pompey.² If absolute power was his initial aim then celebration rather than tears was appropriate over the death of his rival. Plutarch wrote his biographies in pairs or parallel lives, and attached Caesar's life to Alexander the Great. He analyzed his subject's positive and negative attributes through a historical narrative.³ Even so, Plutarch recognized the distinction between the biographer and the historian. The biographer focuses on the character of the person while the historian focuses on the event and situates the person in it.⁴

The biographer Suetonius wrote during the same period as Plutarch. Contrary to Plutarch, Suetonius employed a realist approach to the evidence and was not concerned with the moral dilemmas Julius Caesar encountered.⁵ In his masterwork *The Twelve Caesars*, Suetonius identified Caesar as a coldblooded

opportunist who weighed the value of others based on their contributions to his quest for greater power.⁶ Suetonius's research benefited from the client-patron relationship he enjoyed with Pliny the Younger. Pliny wielded significant political influence and provided Suetonius access to government records. This provided a measure of reliability concerning Suetonius's interpretations.⁷

Cicero provided a solid source for the later part of the first century BC. Cicero was a contemporary of Caesar and no realist. He strove to restore the Republic in a manner he believed idealized its constitution and traditions. Events prevented Cicero from realizing his efforts. For example, the civil wars involving Marius and Sulla in 88-86 BC, Cataline's conspiracy to overthrow the Republic in 63 BC, and the civil war between Caesar and the *optimates* in 49-45 BC ensured Cicero's calls for restraint and public debate received little consideration. During the civil war, Cicero refused his unconditional support to either Pompey or Caesar. Believing him to be the lesser evil of the two, he favored Pompey but wisely stayed out of the military side of the dispute. In this way, he avoided retribution from either man.

Cicero defended the aged *optimatus* Rabirius against Caesar and Labienus in the courts. His *For Rabirius on the Charge of Treason* gives a detailed account of the trial.⁸ In *On Duties*, Cicero relayed his thoughts on character and moral values. Cicero believed that one who strives for absolute power is by nature immoral.⁹ Written soon after Caesar's death, *On Duties* attempted to ignite the Senate's sense of duty and cause it to govern in a way consistent with the highest principles of the Republic. His effort to sway the Senate failed.

Caesar gave his own version of political and military events in his *Commentaries*. Divided into two works, *The Gallic War* and *The Civil War*, Caesar's *Commentaries* are central primary sources for scholars researching his life and represent a unique firsthand account of ancient battles.¹⁰ The *Commentaries* were dispatches sent to Rome and read in public. When campaigning in Gaul, Caesar was absent from Rome for nine years and maintained interaction with his greatest group of supporters, the masses, through the *Commentaries*. In an effort to please his listeners and readers, Caesar wrote in the third person and limited his use of the first person. In this way, Caesar created an illusion that he was a spectator of the events he described and not a participant. In addition, his use of the third person deflected the arrogance inherent in an autobiography.¹¹ Also of note, Hirtius wrote the last book of *The Gallic War*. Hirtius campaigned with Caesar and the two were friends. Aware of Caesar's literary skills, he made clear the apprehension he felt undertaking

the task of writing the final book.¹² For the researcher, his book provides many references to Labienus just before his defection to Pompey. Likewise, the author of the last three books of *The Civil War* remains anonymous. Speculation points to Hirtius, Sallust, Asinius Pollio, or one of Caesar's junior officers as possible authors.¹³

Theodor Mommsen began the modern interpretation of Caesar.¹⁴ Published in successive volumes between the years 1854 through 1856, Mommsen's *The History of Rome* offers energetic prose. Mommsen described Caesar as a realist with a unique sense of daring. Fused with Caesar, these ingredients fashioned the "perfect man."¹⁵ He was the perfect leader and organizer, the perfect ally, and soldier.¹⁶ He was a statesman, a king that never wore a crown, and a Roman that epitomized Romanesque.¹⁷ Mommsen believed winning political office drove a Roman aristocrat's career. This placed Caesar in a world dominated by ambition and absent of the personal interaction and friendships that existed.¹⁸

Mathias Gelzer's *Caesar, Politician and Statesman* published in 1921, highlighted Caesar's lust for power. It separated him from his peers but made him a great statesman. He valued others on a basis of personal benefit. Incapable of genuine friendship, he formed cold-hearted relationships for the sole purpose of political advancement. Cato believed his opposition to republican values made him a tyrant and therefore a brute in conflict with human dignity. Gelzer did not challenge this.¹⁹

On the contrary, this study suggested those long marches through Gaul represented something other than mutual benefit and a tyrannical lust for power. Caesar won the loyalty of his soldiers and officers. Indeed, mutual benefit may begin a relationship but mutual benefit breeds friendship. Friendship fertilizes loyalty that it may bear trust and respect. When Labienus joined Pompey, Caesar's tone suggested he felt betrayed by a friend.²⁰ A power-maddened opportunist, incapable of friendship, would feel no such thing. Gelzer detached Caesar from his humanity. This study rehumanized Caesar.

In Philip Freeman's *Julius Caesar* published in 2008, Freeman contended Caesar recognized the experiences of the lower class *plebeians*. Due to their aristocratic ancestry, the upper class *patricians* filled government positions and maintained the republic. The Julian clan were *patricians* and amongst the oldest clans. They could trace their lineage to Rome's founding. Despite this, at the time of Caesar's birth in 100 BC his clan wielded little influence. This, combined with the proscriptions of Sulla in 81-82 BC lessened the likelihood of a revival. As a result,

Caesar grew up in Rome's rough Subura neighborhood. Though close to the Forum, its working class inhabitants included craftsmen, prostitutes, and back alley hustlers. Hence, the young Caesar heard visitors speaking in their native tongue mixed in with the bustle of workshops and the sound of passing horses. This environment gave Caesar a unique upbringing foreign to his *patrician* counterparts. Caesar grew up rubbing shoulders amongst the *plebeians*. They knew one another. His thirty-year residency there indicated strong connection to the neighborhood and its inhabitants. Even though Caesar was born with social rank, he had a clear understanding of the underprivileged.²¹ Therefore, his populist views were more than political opportunism. They were genuine. Freeman described an empathetic Caesar. This study added to Freeman's line of thought by exposing Caesar's humanity through his friendship with Labienus.

The *Optimates* and the *Populares*

During Caesar's time, the government consisted of two camps, the conservative *optimates* or “the good men,” and the progressive *populares*, acknowledged for their support of the *plebeians*.²² The *optimates* recognized Lucius Cornelius Sulla's (138-78 BC) constitutional changes and the *populares* championed Sulla's rival Gaius Marius (157-86 BC). With this alignment, *optimates* and *populares* translate to Sullans and Marians. The fracture in the government dated to the time of the progressive legislation of the brothers Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus in the late second century.²³ Both men served as *tribune*. The *tribunes* represented the *plebeians* in the Senate and championed their issues. To maintain their dominance the *optimates* killed both brothers, and afterwards the two served as divisive figures between the two camps.²⁴ The bad blood between Marius and Sulla furthered the division when it escalated into a civil war. Once Sulla secured his victory, he executed many Marians in the Senate and replaced them with handpicked supporters. He then reconfigured the constitution to ensure *optimatist* control of the government. In the meantime, the marginalized Marians waited in fear for their new champion to emerge.²⁵ Julius Caesar was that champion. To counter the *optimates*' control of the Senate, Caesar needed firm and creative allies. Titus Labienus was one of them.

Caesar and Labienus in Politics

The sources first mention Labienus campaigning against the Cilician pirates in 78 BC.²⁶ That Caesar took part in that campaign suggests the two future collaborators knew each other at that time and were roughly the same age.²⁷ It also leads to speculation that they served together in Asia Minor under Marcus Minucius Thermus in 80 BC.²⁸ That Labienus reappears in the sources as *tribune* and an ally of

Caesar's in 63 BC implies the two maintained ties through the period 78 BC through 63 BC.²⁹

During the consulship of Pompey and Crassus in 70 BC, Caesar worked with both to restore the traditional powers of the *tribunes*.³⁰ Longstanding allies of the *populares*, the Sullan constitution stripped the *tribunes* of their veto power and their right to introduce legislation into the Senate. The move rendered them powerless to counter the *optimates* by legal means.³¹ Caesar helped to restore those powers. His efforts strengthened the Marians, gained the support of the populace, and energized an office Labienus would later hold.

When Labienus served as *tribune* in 63 BC, he came to a strengthened office and colluded with Caesar to direct his powers against the *optimates*. He was a key supporter in Caesar's quest to win the *pontifex maximus*, the highest position in the College of Pontiffs. Labienus motioned in the Senate to reinstitute the traditional method of awarding that prestigious office, the popular vote of the *comitia*. Without this legislation, Caesar had little chance at the office because Sulla filled the College of Pontiffs with his supporters and gave them standing to elect their own members.³² In an all or nothing gamble, Caesar won the prestigious office. The victory put him at the center of Roman politics.³³ Caesar and Labienus wrested the *pontifex maximus* from the *optimates*, a significant blow indeed. Later in 63 BC, the two continued their fight against the *optimates* by prosecuting one of their members, Gaius Rabirius, for treason.

Gaius Rabirius was an aged senator who had taken part in the death of the *tribune* Saturninus and his supporters in 100 BC.³⁴ At issue was the division of the land wrested from the Cimbri in the same year. The consul Marius drove the Cimbri from the area of Gaul they were living and claimed their land in the name of Rome.³⁵ The pending legislation prevented the *optimates* from seizing the land but benefited the Italian allies by allotting them a significant share. Not trusting the Senate, Saturninus added that if the law passed, the senators would take an oath swearing to abide by it, a significant slight to the *optimates*.³⁶ A vote in the *comitia* decided the matter. The controversial legislation set off a riot during the proceedings but this did not prevent the bill from passing. Later, tension increased when senator Matellus refused the oath and suffered banishment. The country-dwelling Italian allies rejoiced but Matellus's ardent supporters in the city expressed their discontent.³⁷ For the time being Saturninus had out maneuvered the *optimates*.

Even so, as Memmius stood for the consulship in the *comitia*, Saturninus overstepped when he had him murdered.³⁸ In response, the Senate passed the *senatus*

consultum ultimum or the Ultimate Decree. The Senate retained oversight, but the measure gave the highest government official, the *consul* Marius, authority to secure the republic by whatever means necessary.³⁹ However, the immediate situation was already out of control. The following day Memmius's supporters gathered intending to kill Saturninus. Saturninus and his supporters fled to the Capitoline Hill and barricaded themselves in. Later, after they surrendered, Marius locked them in the Senate house to decide their fate. Still agitated, Memmius's people ripped the tiles off the roof and through the openings, stoned them to death.⁴⁰ In another version of the story, an angry mob killed Saturninus and his followers as they came down from the Capitoline Hill into the forum.⁴¹ At the time, the death of Saturninus and his supporters prompted no legal actions. This meant Saturninus's murder was in line with the *optimates'* designs.⁴²

At issue for Caesar and Labienus was the Senate's use of the Ultimate Decree. It was their definitive weapon. With it, the *optimates* were able to negate their opposition and consolidate power.⁴³ To bypass the *optimates*-controlled courts, Caesar and Labienus charged Rabirius with *perduellio*.⁴⁴ Translated, this means "offense against the Roman people."⁴⁵ The charge dated to the time of kings, five hundred years prior. With so much time gone by, there existed no procedure to hear the case. The Roman people were always mindful of tradition and did not prevent the case from moving forward. Without precedent to restrain them, Caesar and Labienus employed classic gamesmanship. To ensure a conviction, Labienus served as the prosecutor while Caesar served as one of the two judges and the one responsible for passing sentence.⁴⁶ Quintus Hortensius, a powerful orator, provided the defense but it was not enough.⁴⁷ The penalty for Rabirius's conviction was crucifixion on the *Campus Martius*.⁴⁸ During the first century BC, this penalty did not apply to Roman citizens, but in this matter, the archaic law trumped common practice.⁴⁹ The blow to Rabirius was two-fold. Roman tradition specified a Roman citizen could choose banishment rather than death, but again, the archaic law did not make provisions for this. The law did provide an opportunity for Rabirius to appeal to the *Comitia Centuriata* or the Centuriate Assembly.⁵⁰

The gamesmanship continued. Cicero represented Rabirius and spoke to the Centuriate Assembly. Aware of Cicero's skill, Labienus countered by limiting the great orator's speech to one half hour in place of the customary hour.⁵¹ Cicero attacked Labienus for employing such an archaic law suggesting that using a law that dated to the time of kings was an attack on the republic.⁵² As his speech progressed, it became clear he would not be able to sway the assembly to Rabirius's advantage.

Second in rank to the *consul*, the *praetor* Metellus Celer responded and prevented a condemning vote by lowering the Janiculum flag. Caesar and Labienus referenced an ancient law to prosecute Rabirius and in the same way, an ancient custom saved him.⁵³

The story of the flag is as follows. Held outside the city walls, the Centuriate Assembly was vulnerable to attack. Prior to Roman dominance, Rome's enemies were not far from the city. To address the danger, half the assembly would vote while the rest stood guard on the Janiculum Hill. When the first half of the assembly voted, they in turn relieved those guarding the hill. If an enemy approached, the defenders lowered the Janiculum flag warning those on the plain of a looming threat. Likewise, when Metellus lowered the Janiculum flag the voting stopped and the assembly adjourned. The move saved Rabirius's life.⁵⁴ Labienus pursued the case no further. This suggests that Caesar and Labienus had no interest in seeing the old man put to death and Caesar ordered the flag lowered.⁵⁵ Rabirius escaped crucifixion but the message to the *optimates* was clear. They would challenge the Senate's use of the Ultimate Decree.⁵⁶ The two next exercised their resolve in Gaul.

Caesar and Labienus in Gaul

Caesar completed his term as *consul* in 59 BC. Following the consulship, it was customary for the former *consul* to govern a province with the rank of *proconsul*. Caesar secured the provinces of Illyricum, Transalpine Gaul, and Cisalpine Gaul as his provinces and appointed Labienus *legatus pro praetore*.⁵⁷ This made Labienus second in command and he served in that capacity for nine years. *The Gallic War* provides an account of Labienus's movements in Gaul. It is evident the two men continued their cooperation and friendship in Gaul, just as they had in the Roman forum. From the beginning, Caesar charged Labienus with great responsibility and amongst Caesar's subordinates, Labienus stands alone in the first book of the *Gallic War*.⁵⁸ In 58 BC, the Helvetii migration consisting of over 300,000 people threatened to cross the Rhone River into Roman territory. Proven warriors, the Helvetii defeated a Roman army fifty years earlier. Not satisfied with the victory they further humiliated the Romans by forcing them to pass under a yoke of spears.⁵⁹ A mistake against the Helvetii invited disaster. Nevertheless, with only one legion, Labienus maintained the eighteen miles of fortification along the Rhone while Caesar left for northern Italy to raise two more legions.⁶⁰ Both men completed their task. If they were to succeed, trust and confidence in the other's ability was paramount.

Trust breeds friendship and the relationship between the two strengthened as their experience in Gaul increased. In 57 BC, Caesar warred with the Belgic Coalition. Again, Labienus is recognized and credited for capturing the enemy's camp.⁶¹ In 56 BC, Caesar and Labienus campaigned against the Morini.⁶² The famous invasions of modern day Britain and Germany occurred in 54 BC and 55 BC.⁶³ In 53 BC, Caesar and Labienus routed the Treveri. Caesar found Labienus favorable enough to quote him in the *Commentaries* as he urged his men on. The quote is one of the few times anyone other than Caesar does the speaking.⁶⁴ "Here is your chance. You have got the enemy where you wanted them—in a bad position where they are not free to maneuver. Fight as bravely under me as you often have for the commander-in-chief [*imperator*]; imagine that he is here watching the battle in person."⁶⁵ When the public speaker delivered the report to the commons, it is easy to imagine shouts of praise for both Caesar and Labienus.

In 52 BC, the Gauls united under their great general Vercingetorix in a winner-take-all attempt to end the conflict. As the struggle with Vercingetorix increased, Caesar separated his army into two parts. Labienus, charged with four legions, campaigned against the Senones and Parisii while Caesar moved along the Allier River towards Gergovia. In addition to the four legions, Caesar assigned a detachment of cavalry to Labienus's command.⁶⁶ Thus, Labienus was responsible for nearly half of Caesar's army. Labienus would need that experience at Alesia.

On the last day of the Siege of Alesia, one area in the siege lines, the north camp, proved problematic. Due to the topography, Caesar was unable to incorporate it fully into his ring of defenses. The problem, further complicated by its location at the bottom of a hill, gave the pending Gallic charge momentum.⁶⁷ The Gauls allocated their best warriors for the attack on the north camp. As a result, the outcome there decided the outcome of the entire war. As the battle progressed, the north camp began to give ground. Caesar assigned Labienus six cohorts. The detachment, tasked to reinforce the north camp and prevent the Gauls from breaking through, would require additional support. Knowing this, Caesar instructed Labienus to inform him when the situation turned critical.⁶⁸ In the meantime, Caesar would stabilize a situation at one of the fortifications. Labienus sent a dispatch to report a desperate situation. Caesar took four cohorts and divided the cavalry. Half exited the defenses to attack the Gallic rear while Caesar reinforced the internal breach. Caesar threw himself directly into the fight with Labienus and his soldiers.

As he hurried to the scene, his red cape flowed in the wind and announced his presence all along the siege lines. The reenergized legionaries pressed on. His

appearance had the opposite effect on the Gauls. This, coupled with an attack on their rear by the Roman cavalry, weakened the Gauls' will. Gallic determination gave way to panic and confusion. In that moment, Caesar, Labienus, and the Roman army won Gaul.⁶⁹ To ensure victory, this would not be the last time Caesar would throw himself directly into battle with Labienus. However, at the Battle of Munda they were on opposite of the line.

Defection to Pompey

When Caesar crossed the Rubicon, he was in open rebellion against the Roman republic. Shortly after that crossing Labienus defected to Pompey and the *optimates*. Both held firm to the social values of the Roman republic. Caesar stated that his *dignitas* was more important to him than his life.⁷⁰ In large part, he perpetuated a civil war to defend it. *Dignitas* was important to all Roman aristocrats. In 63 BC, Cataline conspired to overthrow the republic because he felt the Senate dismissed his *dignitas*.⁷¹ That is, lesser men passed him in standing. He would not allow this, nor would any aristocrat, without repercussions. Tacitus suggested *dignitas* "grows and advances."⁷² Caesar's *dignitas* had grown to a point he felt equal in rank to Pompey and believed Pompey could not bear this.⁷³ The result of this impasse was a civil war. *Dignitas* encompassed one's self-worth, lineage, achievements, and social standing.⁷⁴

Dio suggested Labienus felt equal to Caesar in status and knowing Caesar would not elevate him further, he would realize greater standing on the side of Pompey.⁷⁵ This was not probable because should an agreement between Pompey and Caesar been realized, Caesar was in a position to win the consulship in 48 BC. Furthermore, Hirtius makes clear that Labienus was already maneuvering for the consulship himself and would have sat alongside Caesar as co-consul, equal in rank.⁷⁶ Evens so, Labienus may have believed Caesar would lose the civil war and wished to be on the winning side. Considering his knowledge of Caesar's fortitude, Labienus would know better than to underestimate Caesar's chances in any conflict. In addition, if this were the case, more of Caesar's *legates* would have left him. As it was, only two did, Labienus and Cicero's brother.⁷⁷ Just as *dignitas* bound Caesar in the direction he took, the social value *amicitia* shackled Labienus.

Amicitia was an agreement that secured political interests and alliances between those wishing advancement. *Amicitia* trumped personal feelings and friendships.⁷⁸ Labienus had direct ties to Pompey and interaction with his supporters past and present. For instance, Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus formed the political union recognized as the First Triumvirate. Q. Metellus Celer, the man described

above who lowered the Janiculum flag and saved Rabirius's life, was an associate of Pompey.⁷⁹ Furthermore, Labienus was from Picenum. The Pompeii clan wielded great influence in this area of Italy. Enough influence that it enabled them to raise a private army if need be. It would be difficult for Labienus or any other upstart to realize success without a client-patron relationship with Pompey.⁸⁰ *Amicitia* bound Labienus to Pompey in the same way it bound others to Caesar. After Caesar's assassination, Gaius Matius who held firm with Caesar during the civil war wrote to Cicero, "It was not Caesar I followed in the civil conflict, but a friend."⁸¹ Matius was referring to an arrangement of mutual benefit or *amicitia*. Likewise, in a letter to Cicero, C. Asinius Pollio told Cicero he was against the civil war but had no choice but to follow Caesar. Having enemies on both sides, he could not stay neutral, thus it was better to remain amongst the safety of his friend, Caesar, lest he fall into the plots of his enemies.⁸² Labienus's ties to Pompey were no secret to Caesar. However, it was clear he did not expect Labienus to honor them.

Hirtius reports that near the time of Labienus's defection there were rumors circling that the Pompeians were in contact with him. Caesar did not believe the rumors.⁸³ That he assigned the management of Cisalpine Gaul to Labienus, a position that would promote his candidature for consul, was evidence of this. Caesar was helping his heartfelt friend reach a goal the two had discussed in depth. That they were already thinking past their long stay in Gaul and planning to play politics together in the Senate makes it clear neither was expecting a civil war. *The optimates*, determined to destroy Caesar, had other plans.⁸⁴

When Caesar crossed the Rubicon to defend his *dignitas*, there was no turning back. In the same way, when *amicitia* forced Labienus to join Pompey, there was no retreating from his decision.⁸⁵ Once on the side of Pompey and the *optimates* Labienus divulged all he knew.⁸⁶ He was in a delicate position. Should the Pompeians lose the war, he could not expect Caesar to pardon him. Likewise, if the Pompeians questioned his allegiance to them, they would kill him.⁸⁷ To prove his loyalty, he rejected all ideas of peace with Caesar and participated in every campaign of the civil war.⁸⁸

Background to Munda

Caesar defeated the Pompeians in Spain at the Battle of Ilerda in 49 BC.⁸⁹ In 48 BC, the Pompeians broke Caesar's blockade at Dyrrachium. The next engagement, the Battle of Pharsalus in 48 BC, was the deciding battle between the *optimates* backed by Pompey and Caesar. After the battle, Pompey fled to Alexandria believing it to be a safe location to regroup. He was wrong. The Egyptian

government conspired to kill him. Two Roman centurions, Septimius and Salvius accompanied by government officials including Achilles, King Ptolemy's XIII tutor, and Pothinus the treasurer, stabbed him to death as they brought him to shore in a skiff.⁹⁰ The execution was an effort to win favor from Caesar. The effort failed. When Caesar arrived in Egypt, the King's envoy presented him with Pompey's head. He turned away at the sight of it. When presented with Pompey's signet ring, he began to cry. Considering their history, Caesar's reaction proved genuine and Pompey would have received a pardon if he wished it. Caesar ordered both Achilles and Pothinus, the architects of the deed, executed.⁹¹ The episode separates Caesar from the cynic Mathias Gelzer described him to be but supports a Caesar that feels compassion and is capable of having genuine friendships. Nevertheless, victory at Pharsalus and the death of Pompey did not end the conflict. The Pompeians, under the leadership of Metellus Scipio regrouped in Africa and lost to Caesar at the Battle of Thapus in 46 BC. From there the Pompeians again regrouped in Spain to face Caesar at Munda.

The Battle of Munda

Weapons for both the Pompeian's and Caesar's army were similar. The Roman legionary used two key weapons, the *gladius* and the *pila*. The *gladius*, designed for close quarter fighting, measured thirty inches in length.⁹² It carried a long point for thrusting and a double edge for slashing.⁹³ These attributes allowed the *gladius* to deliver continuous blows that a longer sword, in limited space, could not.⁹⁴ The *pila* or javelin's two-part construction provided effective penetration. Topped with a pyramidal point, the narrow iron neck was two or three feet long and the main shaft four feet.⁹⁵ Both the *pila* and *gladius* were effective weapons and both armies had to contend with them.

An unfavorable engagement on March 5, 45 BC at Soricaria deterred the Pompeians from engaging Caesar without a recognizable advantage.⁹⁶ The Pompeians chose an elevated position near Munda to offer a decisive battle.⁹⁷ Below the heights and between the two camps was a plain that extended for five miles. Caesar believed the enemy would advance to the center of this plain to offer battle at a time of their choosing.⁹⁸ On March 17, the enemy offered battle. Caesar raised the battle flag at his tent and his army began to march towards the enemy.⁹⁹ The march, slowed by the soggy nature of the plain in several areas, provided an opportunity for the enemy, yet they maintained their position on the heights.¹⁰⁰ Undaunted by the tactical advantage of his opponents, Caesar ordered his army to march uphill and engage the enemy.

As in previous engagements during the civil war, both Caesar and Labienus had to consider the knowledge they had of one another's thought process. Labienus had counseled the Pompeians on appropriate strategy against Caesar throughout the civil war and, the Pompeian's determination to maintain their position on the heights is indicative of this. During the Gallic War, Caesar had charged uphill at the Battle of Gergovia and suffered his first setback.¹⁰¹ This leads to the conclusion Labienus hoped to put Caesar in a similar situation.

Caesar was outnumbered but his soldiers were more experienced and his cavalry superior.¹⁰² At the onset of the battle, both Labienus and Caesar knew where the other was and as the battle progressed, it seemed Caesar would lose. However, as Labienus had witnessed in the past, Caesar threw himself directly into the fighting to encourage his men, shouting, "Are you not ashamed to take me and hand me over to these boys?"¹⁰³ Due to the bright red cloak he always wore in battle to signal his identity, the enemy spotted him and directed a barrage of missile fire at him.¹⁰⁴ At no time prior had Caesar come so close to losing his life.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, the risk to Caesar's life was great but so were the stakes. The prize was Rome. Caesar's famous Tenth Legion broke through first.¹⁰⁶ To halt the breach, Gnaeus ordered Labienus from the right wing to the left. The move allowed Caesar's cavalry to swing around the enemy's weakened right flank and attack from the rear.¹⁰⁷ The move was decisive and Labienus lost his life as the Pompeian army collapsed. To show his respect, Caesar gave Labienus a proper burial.¹⁰⁸

Conclusion

Caesar and Labienus were friends forced to fight one another by forces they had little control over. Caesar fought to defend his *dignitas* and *amicitia* bound Labienus's allegiance to Pompey. They had achieved much together. They served with distinction in Asia, defeated the political designs of the *optimates* in Rome, and conquered all of Gaul. Nevertheless, their friendship could not prevent them from opposing each other during the civil war. The point of no return for both men was the Rubicon. From there, only one of them could live. They each knew the other's thought process, and in a way, they were fighting a reflection of themselves. To survive, that reflection could not bear light of their former friendship. That they spent the last years of their lives trying to deprive the other of existence indicates neither man questioned their choices.

Making choices allows a measure of freedom to the human condition. *Dignitas* and *amicitia* denied both Caesar and Labienus an alternative to fighting one another. Those who come to Caesar's story must also make a choice. If they choose

to believe in Caesar, the villainous dictator, there is evidence to support that. If they choose to believe in an empathetic Caesar, the people's dictator, champion of the underprivileged, there is evidence to support that as well. One element that does not need support is that Caesar was a man. None living shared Caesar's time, but all share with him the experience of human existence. To have friends and to lose friends is part of that human existence the same as it is to experience tragedy and triumph. Through their friendship, Caesar and Labienus shared these experiences. They did not die together in battle as comrades. Rather, both men fought their last battle together as enemies. Labienus died at the Battle of Munda, March 17, 45 BC and Caesar on March 15, 44 BC.

Notes

1. Plutarch, *Caesar* 69.
2. Plutarch, *Pompey* 78; Appian, *Civil Wars* 2.84.
3. Philip Stadter, "Biography and History," in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography* ed. John Marincola (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2011), 538-39.
4. Ernst Breisach, *Historiography, Ancient, Medieval, and Modern*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 71.
5. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius, the Scholar and His Caesars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 69.
6. Suetonius, *Divus Julius* 9.
7. J.B Rives, Introduction to Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars* (London: Penguin, 2007), xviii.
8. Cicero, *For Rabirius on a Charge of Treason* 21.
9. Cicero, *De Officiis* 3.36.
10. Ronald Mellor, *The Roman Historians* (London: Routledge, 1999), 176.
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