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The Augustan Empire, 43 B.C.–A.D. 69

Edited By Alan K. Bowman, Edward Champlin and Andrew Lintott

Excerpt

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## CHAPTER 1

## THE TRIUMVIRAL PERIOD

CHRISTOPHER PELLING

## I. THE TRIUMVIRATE

On 27 November 43, the Lex Titia initiated the period of absolute rule at Rome. Antony, Lepidus and Octavian were charged with ‘restoring the state’, *triumviri rei publicae constituendae*: but they were empowered to make or annul laws without consulting Senate or people, to exercise jurisdiction without any right of appeal, and to nominate magistrates of their choice; and they carved the world into three portions, Cisalpine and Further Gaul for Antony, Narbonensis and Spain for Lepidus, Sicily, Sardinia and Corsica for Octavian. In effect, the three were rulers. Soon there would be two, then one; the Republic was already dead.

Not that, at the time, the permanence of the change could be clear. As Tacitus brings out in the first sentence of the *Annals*, the roots of absolute power were firmly grounded in the Republic itself: there had been phases of despotism before – Sulla and Caesar, and in some ways Pompey too – and they had passed; the cause of Brutus and Cassius in the East was not at all hopeless. But what was clear was that history and politics had changed, and were changing still. The triumviral period was to be one of the great men feeling their way, unclear how far (for instance) a legion’s loyalty could simply be bought, whether the propertied classes or the discontented poor of Rome and Italy could be harnessed as a genuine source of strength, how influential the old families and their patronage remained. At the beginning, there was a case for a quinquevirate, for Plancus and Pollio had played no less crucial a role than Lepidus in the manoeuvrings of mid-43. But Lepidus was included, Plancus and Pollio were not; and Lepidus owed that less to his army than to his clan and connexions. In 43 those seemed to matter; a few years later they were irrelevant, and so was he. Money too was a new, incalculable factor. In 44–43 the promises made to the troops reached new heights; and there was certainly money around – money of Caesar himself; money from the dead dictator’s friends, men like Balbus and Matus; money that would be minted in plenty throughout the Roman world – no wonder that so many hoards from the period have been found, some of them vast.<sup>1</sup> But would that money ever find its way to the

<sup>1</sup> Crawford 1969 (B 318) 117–31, 1985 (B 320) 252.

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Map 2. Italy and the eastern Mediterranean.

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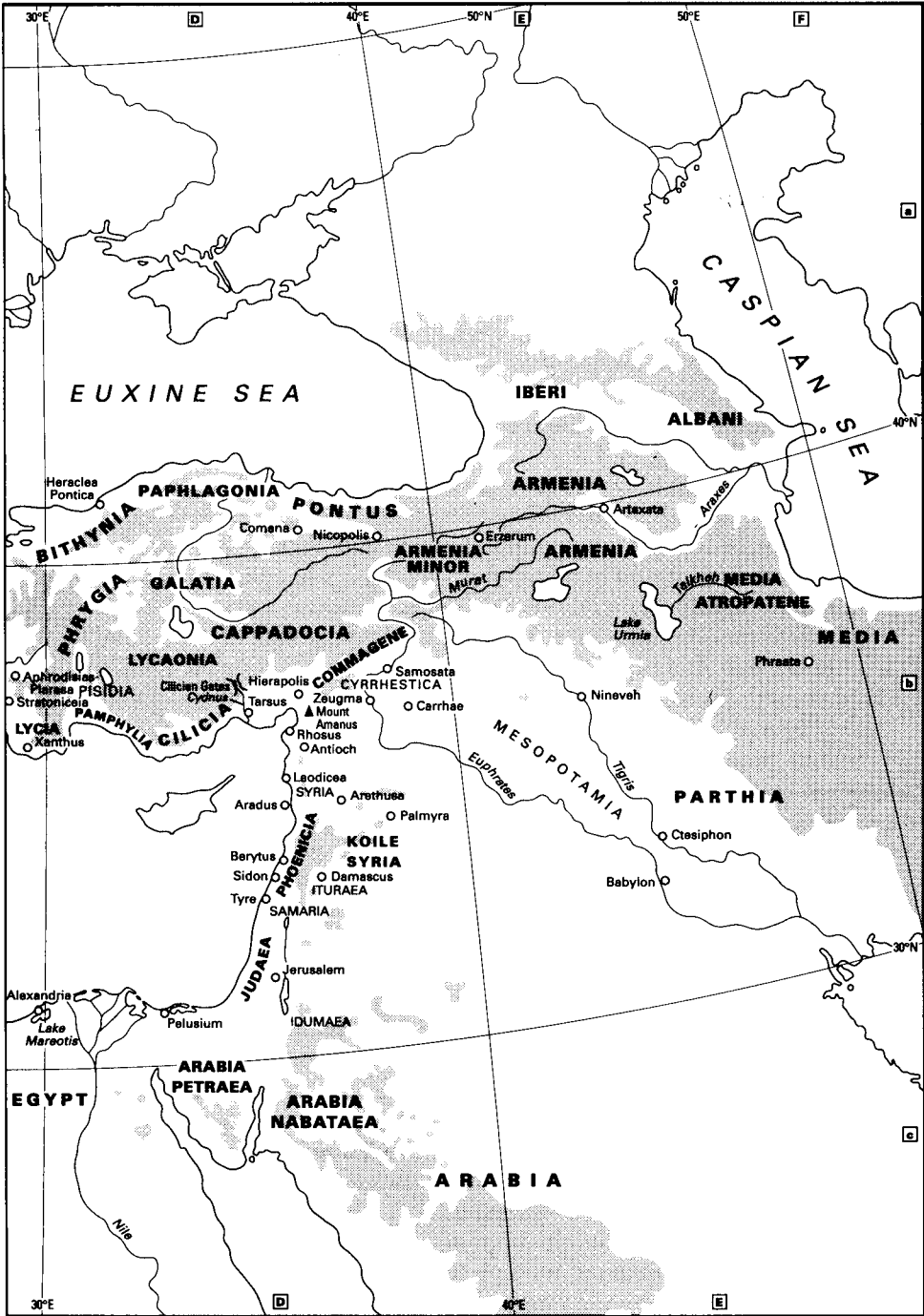
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legionaries? They did not know; no one knew. The role of propaganda was also changing. Cicero had been one master of the craft – we should not, for instance, assume that the *Philippics* were simply aimed at a senatorial audience; they would have force when read in the camps and market-places of Italy. But what constituency was worth making the propagandist's target? The armies, certainly: they were a priority in 44–43. But what of the Italians in the municipalities? Could they be won, and would they be decisive? Increasingly, the propaganda in the thirties turned in their direction, and they were duly won for Octavian. But was he wise to make them his priority – did they matter much in the final war? One may doubt it, though they certainly mattered in the ensuing peace. But it was that sort of time. No one knew what sources of strength could be found, or how they would count. The one thing that stood out was that the rules were new.

The difference is even harder for us to gauge than for contemporaries, simply because of our source-material. No longer do we have Cicero's speeches, dialogues and correspondence to illuminate events; instead we have only the sparsest of contemporary literary and epigraphic material, and have to rely on much later narratives – Appian, who took the story down to the death of Sextus Pompeius in his extant *Civil Wars* (he told of Actium and Alexandria in his lost *Egyptian History*); Cassius Dio, who gave a relatively full account of the triumviral period in Books XLVII–L; and Plutarch's fine *Lives of Brutus and Antony*. Suetonius too had some useful material in his *Augustus*; so does Josephus. The source-material used by these authors is seldom clear, though Asinius Pollio evidently influenced the tradition considerably, and so did Livy and the colourful Q. Dellius; but all the later authors may well have used other, more *recherché* material. Still, all are often demonstrably inaccurate, and there is indeed a heavy element of fiction throughout the tradition. Octavian's contemporary propaganda, doubtless repeated and reinforced in his *Autobiography* when it appeared during the twenties, spread stories of the excesses and outrages of Antony and Cleopatra; then the later authors, especially Plutarch, elaborated with romance, evincing sometimes more sympathy for the lovers, but scarcely more accuracy. And all these authors naturally concentrated on the principals themselves – Brutus, Cassius, Octavian, Sextus, Antony and Cleopatra. We are given very little idea of what everyday political life in Rome was like, how far the presence of these great men smothered routine activity and debate in the Senate, the courts, the assemblies and the streets. The triumvirs controlled appointments to the consulship and to many of the lower offices, but some elections took place as well; we just do not know how many, or how fiercely and genuinely they were contested.<sup>2</sup> The plebs and

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Frei-Stolba 1967 (C 92) 80–6; Millar 1973 (C 175) 51–3.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

## PHILIPPI, 42 B. C.

5

the Italian cities did not always take the triumvirs' decisions supinely; but we do not know how often or how effectively the triumvirs were opposed in the Senate, or how much freedom of speech and action senators asserted in particular areas. We hear little or nothing of the *equites*: we cannot be sure that they were so passive or uninfluential. We no longer hear of showpiece political trials; it does not follow that they never happened. Everything in the sources is painted so starkly, in terms of the actions and ambitions of the great persons themselves. We have moved from colour into black and white.

## II. PHILIPPI, 42 B. C.

At Rome the year 42 began momentarily. Iulius Caesar was consecrated as a god.<sup>3</sup> Roman generals were used to divine acclamations in the East, and divine honours had been paid in plenty to Caesar during his lifetime: but a formal decree of this kind was still different. Octavian might now style himself *divi filius* if he chose;<sup>4</sup> and the implications for his prestige were, like so much else, incalculable. But a more immediate concern was the campaign against Brutus and Cassius in the East, a war of vengeance which the consecration invested with a new solemnity. Antony and Octavian were to share the command. The triumvirs now controlled forty-three legions: probably forty were detailed to serve in the East, though only twenty-one or twenty-two actually took part in the campaign and only nineteen fought at Philippi.<sup>5</sup> Lepidus would remain in control of Italy, but here too Antony's influence would be strong: for two of his partisans were also to stay, Calenus in Italy and Pollio in the Cisalpina, both with strong armies.

A preliminary force of eight triumviral legions, under C. Norbanus and L. Decidius Saxa, crossed the Adriatic early in the year: but the Liberators' fleets soon began to operate in the Adriatic, eventually some 130 ships under L. Staius Murcus and Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus, and it would evidently be difficult to transport the main army. A further uncertainty was furnished by the growing naval power of Sextus Pompeius. His role in the politics of 44–43 had been slight, but he had appeared on the proscription list, and now it must have seemed inevitable that he would be forced into the Liberators' camp. By early 42 he had established himself in control of Sicily, his fleet was growing formidable, and he was already serving as a refuge for the disaffected, fearful and destitute of all classes. Many of the proscribed now swelled his strength. But Octavian sent Salvidienus Rufus to attack Sextus' fleet,

<sup>3</sup> Dio XLVII.18.3–19.3; cf. Weinstock 1971 (F 235) 386–98; Wallman 1989 (C 243) 52–8.

<sup>4</sup> He did not choose for some time: the title first appears on coins of (probably) 40/39 (RRC 525).

<sup>5</sup> Brunt 1971 (A 9) 484–5; Botermann 1968 (C 36) 181–204.

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and a great but indecisive battle ensued outside the Straits of Messana. After this Sextus' contribution was slight, and the Liberators gained very little benefit from potentially so valuable an ally. By summer, the main triumviral army managed to force its crossing.

In Macedonia the news of the proscriptions and Cicero's death had sealed C. Antonius' fate: he was at last executed, probably on Brutus' orders.<sup>6</sup> Brutus himself had been active in Greece, Macedonia, Thrace and even Asia through the second half of 43, raising and training troops and securing allies and funds. He finally began his march to meet Cassius perhaps in the late summer, more likely not until early 42.<sup>7</sup> Cassius himself was delayed far away in the East till late in 43: even after Dolabella's defeat in July, there was still trouble to clear up – in Tarsus, for instance, where he imposed a fine of 1,500 talents, and in Cappadocia, where unrest persisted until Cassius' agents murdered the king Ariobarzanes and seized his treasure in summer 42. The troubles were doubtless exacerbated by the harshness of Cassius' exactions, but the wealth of the East was potentially the Liberators' greatest asset (extended though they were to support their army, the triumvirs' position was even worse), and Cassius naturally wanted to exploit it to the full. It was perhaps not until winter, when the triumvirs had united and there were already fears that the first of their troops were crossing to Greece, that Cassius began the long westward march.<sup>8</sup> He and Brutus met in Smyrna in the spring of 42. Between them they controlled probably twenty-one legions, of which nineteen fought in the decisive campaign.<sup>9</sup>

The story went that they differed over strategy, Brutus wishing to return quickly to Macedonia, Cassius insisting that they first needed to secure their rear by moving against Rhodes and the cities of Lycia.<sup>10</sup> Cassius had his reasons, of course. Lycia and Rhodes were temptingly wealthy, and there were even some strategic arguments for delay: with the Liberators dominating the sea, the triumviral armies might be destroyed by simple lack of supplies. But still he was surely wrong. Philippi is a very long way east, and the battles there were fought very

<sup>6</sup> Plut. *Brut.* 28.1, *Ant.* 22.6, probably right on chronology and responsibility; cf. esp. Dio XLVII.24.3–6.

<sup>7</sup> Plut. *Brut.* 28.3 and Dio XLVII.25.1–2 agree that this march began after C. Antonius' death, but the chronology is very insecure.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. App. *BCiv.* iv.63.270–1; Dio XLVII.32.1; Plut. *Brut.* 28.3. So long a winter march is hard to believe, but the sources clearly connect the beginning of the march with news of the proscriptions and related events; there does not in any case seem time for it in late summer or autumn 43; yet it cannot have been as late as spring 42, for that would not leave time for the campaigns in southern Asia Minor.

<sup>9</sup> Brunt 1971 (A 9) 485–8; Botermann 1968 (C 36) 204–11.

<sup>10</sup> App. *BCiv.* iv.65.276–7; cf. Plut. *Brut.* 28.3–5; contrast Dio XLVII.32, defensively stressing their unanimity.

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late in the year. The friendly states in Macedonia and northern Greece, who had welcomed Brutus with some spontaneity the previous year and whose accession Cicero had so warmly acclaimed in the *Tenth Philippic*, were by then lost, and their wealth and crops were giving vital support to the triumvirs, not the Liberators. Rhodes and Lycia had strong navies, but Cassius and Brutus had very little to fear from them: the Liberators would dominate the sea in any case. It would surely have been better to move west quickly, provide better bases for their fleet in the Adriatic, and seek to isolate the advanced force on the west coast of Greece – to play the 48 campaign over again, in fact; and those eight unsupported legions of Norbanus and Saxa would have been hopelessly outmatched. The Liberators' brutal treatment of Rhodes and Lycia did nothing for their posthumous moral reputation. Perhaps it also cost them the war.

Cassius moved against Rhodes, Brutus against Lycia, and both won swift, total victories: in particular, the appalling scenes of slaughter and mass suicide in Lycian Xanthus became famous. Perhaps 8,500 talents were extorted from Rhodes; the figure of 150 talents for Lycia is hard to believe.<sup>11</sup> The other peoples of Asia were ordered to pay the massive sum of ten years' tribute, although the region had already been squeezed dreadfully in the preceding years. Some of the money was doubtless paid direct to the legionaries, some more was kept back for further distributions during the decisive campaign: in the event the army stayed notably loyal, though this was doubtless not only for crude material reasons. The campaigns were rapid, but it was still June or July before Brutus and Cassius met again at Sardis, and began the northward march to the Hellespont, which they crossed in August.

Norbanus and Saxa had marched across Macedonia unopposed, and took up a position east of Philippi, trying to block the narrow passes; but the much larger force of Brutus and Cassius outflanked them, and reached Philippi at the beginning of September. Norbanus and Saxa fell back upon Amphipolis, where they linked with the main army under Antony: Octavian, weakened by illness, was following some way behind. Brutus and Cassius then occupied a strong position across the Via Egnatia. Within a few days Antony came up and boldly camped only a mile distant, in a much weaker position in the plain. Octavian, still sick, joined him ten days later. Despite the strength of their position, the Liberators at first sought to avoid a battle. They controlled the sea, the triumvirs' land communications to Macedonia and Thessaly were exposed, and Antony and Octavian would find it difficult to maintain a long campaign. But Antony's deft operations and earthworks soon began to threaten the Liberators' left, and Cassius and Brutus decided to

<sup>11</sup> Plut. *Brut.* 32.4.

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accept battle. There was not much difference in strength between the two sides: the triumviral legions had perhaps nearly 100,000 infantry, the Liberators something over 70,000; but the Liberators were the stronger in cavalry, with 20,000 against 13,000.<sup>12</sup>

Cassius commanded the left, Brutus the right, facing Antony and Octavian respectively. The battle began on Cassius' wing, as Antony stormed one of his fortifications. Then Brutus' troops charged, apparently without orders; but they were highly successful, cutting to pieces three of Octavian's legions and even capturing the enemy camp. Cassius fared much worse: Antony's personal gallantry played an important part, it seems, and he in turn captured Cassius' camp. In the dust and the confusion Cassius despaired too soon, and in ignorance of Brutus' victory he killed himself. So ended this first battle of Philippi (early October 42). On the same day (or so it was said) the Liberators won a great naval victory in the Adriatic, as Murcus and Ahenobarbus destroyed two legions of triumviral reinforcements.

Then there were three weeks of inaction. The first battle had done nothing to ease the triumviral problems of supply, and Antony was forced to detach a whole legion to march to Greece for provisions. But Brutus was under pressure from his own army to fight again; he was a less respected general than Cassius, and after the first battle he feared desertions; and he also soon found his own line of supplies from the sea threatened, for Antony and Octavian occupied new positions in the south. He felt forced to accept a second battle (23 October). His own wing may again have won some success, but eventually all his lines broke. The carnage was very great; and Brutus too took his own life. With him died the republican cause. Several of the surviving nobles also killed themselves, some were executed, others obtained pardon; a few fled to Murcus, Ahenobarbus, or Sextus Pompeius. Most of the troops came over to the triumvirs.<sup>13</sup>

Antony had long been known as a military man, but until now his record was not especially lustrous. His wing had played little part at Pharsalus, he had been absent from most of Caesar's other battles, and the outcome at Mutina had been shameful. All that was now erased. Octavian had given little to this victory; he had indeed been absent from the first battle – hiding in the marsh, and not even his friends could deny it.<sup>14</sup> Before the fighting the forces had appeared equally matched: it was Antony's operations that forced the battles, his valour that won the day. He took the glory and the prestige. Now and for years to come, the world saw Antony as the victor of Philippi.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. esp. App. *BCiv.* iv.108.454; Brunt 1971 (A 9) 487.

<sup>13</sup> App. *BCiv.* iv.135.568–136.576, v.2.4–9; Dio *XLVII.*49.3–4; Brunt 1971 (A 9) 488.

<sup>14</sup> Agrippa and Maecenas, Pliny, *HN* vii.148.



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## THE EAST, 42–40 B.C.

9

## III. THE EAST, 42–40 B.C.

Antony's strength was reflected in the new division of responsibility and power. His task would be the organization of the East; he was also to retain Further Gaul, and take Narbonensis from Lepidus; he would lose only the Cisalpina, which was to become part of Italy. Italy itself was nominally left out of the reckoning, but Octavian was to be the man on the spot, with the arduous and unpopular task of settling the veterans in the Italian cities. He was also to carry on the war against Sextus Pompeius; he would retain Sardinia; and he too was to gain at Lepidus' expense, taking from him both provinces of Spain. Lepidus himself would be allowed only Africa; and there was some doubt even about that.<sup>15</sup> Already, clearly, he was falling behind his colleagues. Antony was also to keep the greater part of the legions. A large number of the troops in the East had served their time, and were to be demobilized; the rest, including those who had just come over from Brutus and Cassius, were to be re-formed into eleven legions. Antony was to take six of these, Octavian five; he was also to lend Antony a further two. The position concerning the western legions is more obscure, but there too Antony's marshals seem to have controlled about as many legions as Octavian.<sup>16</sup> Antony promised that Calenus would transfer to Octavian two legions in Italy to compensate for the two he was now borrowing: but such promises readily foundered. The legions stayed with Calenus.

In Antony's lifetime two generals had successfully invaded Italy from their provinces, Sulla from the East and Caesar from Gaul. Both Gaul and the East would now fall to Antony. The menace was clear. The case of Gaul is particularly interesting. So much of the fighting and diplomacy of the last two years had been, in one way or another, a struggle for Gaul: and the province's strategic importance was very clear.<sup>17</sup> With hindsight, we always associate Antony with the East; Octavian's propaganda was to make great play with his oriental degeneracy. But nothing suggests that Antony yet planned any extended stay in the East. Naturally, he eyed its riches and prestige; he *might* of course have to play Sulla over again; but it was just as likely that he would return peaceably, as Pompey had returned in the sixties, to new power and authority in the West. In that case, and in the likely event of the triumvirs eventually falling out, Gaul would prove vital. Its governor would be Calenus, with eleven legions: Antony could rely on him. And, even if the Cisalpina were technically part of Italy, that too

<sup>15</sup> App. *BCiv.* v.3.12 and Dio *XLVIII.1.3* (cf. *XLVIII.22.2*) suggest some equivocation.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Brunt 1971 (A 9) 493–7.

<sup>17</sup> '... Galliaque quae semper praesidet atque praesedit huic imperio', Cic. *Phil.* v.37; cf. esp. *Phil.* v.5, XII.9, 13, XIII.37.

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would not be out of Antony's control: Pollio was to be there, and he too had veterans under his command. The trusty Ventidius would also be active in the West, perhaps in Gaul, perhaps in Italy.<sup>18</sup> In the event Antony's possession of Gaul came to nothing, for Octavian took it over bloodlessly on Calenus' death in 40. It was that important historical accident that would turn Antony decisively towards the East. But, for the moment, possession of Gaul kept all his important options free.

The East came first. Its regulation would be a massive task, but a rewarding one; and it also offered the possibility of a war against Parthia. King Orodes had helped Cassius and Brutus,<sup>19</sup> and vengeance was in order; indeed, the republican commander Labienus was still at the Parthian court. No one yet knew what to expect of that; but, whether or not Parthia attacked Roman Asia Minor again, a Roman general could always attack Parthia, avenging Crassus' defeat, tickling the Roman imagination and enhancing his own prestige. He might even appear a second Alexander, if all went well: that always had a particular appeal to Roman fancy.

Antony spent the winter of 42/1 in Greece, where he made a parade of his philhellenism.<sup>20</sup> In spring 41 he crossed to Asia; it seems that he visited Bithynia, and presumably Pontus too, before returning to the Aegean coast.<sup>21</sup> At Ephesus, effectively Asia's capital, he was greeted as a god – such acclamations were by now almost routine in the East;<sup>22</sup> but exuberance soon turned sour, as Antony addressed representatives of the Asian cities and announced his financial demands. Yet again, the East found it had to fund both sides in a Roman civil war: and this time vast sums were needed to satisfy the legions – perhaps 150,000 talents if all the promised rewards were to be paid.<sup>23</sup> That was well beyond even the East's resources, especially after the exactions of Dolabella, then Cassius and Brutus. Antony eventually demanded nine years' tribute from Asia, to be paid over two years;<sup>24</sup> and he would be fortunate if the province could manage that. Asia's normal tribute was probably less than 2,000 talents a year.<sup>25</sup> Even allowing for contributions from the other eastern provinces and for extra sums from client kings and free cities,<sup>26</sup> Antony could scarcely hope for more than 20,000 talents, the amount which Sulla raised in a similar levy after the Mithridatic War. And not all of that could be spent on rewards. There were the running costs of Antony's

<sup>18</sup> App. *BCiv.* v.31.121 with *MRR* II 393. <sup>19</sup> App. *BCiv.* iv.59.257, 63.271, 88.373, 99.414.

<sup>20</sup> Plut. *Ant.* 23. <sup>21</sup> Joseph. *AJ* xiv.301–4; cf. Buchheim 1960 (C 49) 11–12.

<sup>22</sup> Plut. *Ant.* 24.4 with Pelling 1988 (B 138) *ad loc.*

<sup>23</sup> App. *BCiv.* v.5.21 makes Antony claim that he needs 'money, land and cities' for twenty-eight legions, comprising 170,000 *μετὰ τῶν συντρασσομένων*: there were also the cavalry and 'another mass of another army'. The figure 170,000 may be realistic for the total of triumviral troops, including those in the West (*οἱ συντρασσομένοι*?), owed money, land, or both: but 'another mass of another army' is obscure. Cf. esp. Brunt 1971 (A 9) 489–94, Keppie 1983 (E 65) 60–1.

<sup>24</sup> App. *BCiv.* v.6.27. <sup>25</sup> Broughton 1938 (E 821) 562–4 estimated it as 1,600 talents.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. App. *BCiv.* v.6.27.