

Last of the naval triumphs: revisiting some key Actian honours

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In 29 B.C., after his victories over Marcus Antonius (*cos.* 44, 34) and Cleopatra at Actium and in Egypt, Caesar Octavi(an)us, or Imperator Caesar Divi f., as he then wanted to be known, returned to Rome as the uncontested master of the Roman world. He did so in a carefully managed pageant that culminated with his triple triumph on 13, 14 and 15 *Sextilis* (the month later renamed *Augustus* in his honour) and the opening of the Temple of Divus Iulius in the Forum Romanum shortly thereafter, on the 18th.¹ These ceremonies marked the culmination of his claim — a pompous declaration already made in the autumn of 36 in the aftermath of Naulochus — that he had put an end to war on “land and sea” throughout the world.² While the relevant entries in the *Fasti Triumphales* are lost, Cassius Dio produces a fairly accurate précis of Octavian’s triple triumph. The first day was the triumph over the Pannonians and the Dalmatians, the Iapydes and their neighbours, and some German and Gallic tribes; the second day commemorated the naval victory at Actium, the Ἀκτίῳ ναυκρατία; the third and final triumph, the most costly and magnificent of them all, was over Egypt. Dio clarifies that the Egyptian spoils proved so rich and bountiful that they covered the expense and lustre of all three triumphal processions.³

Regardless of the issues associated with the reconstruction of the precise wording of the entries for the European and Egyptian triumphs, the scope and nature of these celebrations is unproblematic. The sources varyingly refer to the former as a victory *ex Illyrico* or *Dalmatia*, whereas the latter was in all likelihood simply inscribed as *ex Aegypto*.⁴ The nature and status of the Actian triumph, however, remains contentious. Since Actium was a victory over both Roman and foreign enemies, it has often been assumed that Octavian had been compelled to resort to obfuscation or misrepresentation to render the victory palatable to

1 For the date of the dedication of this temple, see the *Fasti Antiaties Ministrorum Domus Augustae* as published in *Inscr. Ital.* 13.1, 328: *Aedis diui Iul(ii) ded(icata)*; cf. also Dio 51.22.2 f.

2 This claim, prominently featuring on the dedication inscription of the victory monument at Nicopolis (W. M. Murray and P. M. Petsas, *Octavian’s campsite memorial for the Actian war* [Philadelphia 1989] 76), resonates in Livy 1.19 and RG 3 and 13. See App., *BC* 5.130 (discussed below) for the same proclamation having been made by Octavian for the first time after the battle of Naulochus.

3 Dio 51.21.5-8. W. Havener (“A ritual against the rule? The representation of civil war victory in the Late Republican triumph,” in C. H. Lange and F. J. Vervaeet [edd.], *The Roman Republican triumph: beyond the spectacle* [Rome 2014] 174 n.65) incorrectly believes that Dio here states that all three triumphs were adorned with Egyptian spoils.

4 *Unum ex Illyrico*: Livy, *Per.* 133; Suet., *Aug.* 22: *Delmaticum (triumphum)*. The *Fasti triumphales Barberiniani* record the triumph as *de Dalma[t]is* (*Inscr. Ital.* 13.1, 344 f.). Observing that the Dalmatians had been the fiercest opponents, R. A. Gurval (*Actium and Augustus: the politics and emotions of civil war* [Ann Arbor, MI 1995] 27) suggests that this echoes the representation in the *Fasti Capitolini*. In our opinion, Dio’s representation indicates that the entry may well have listed a wide range of vanquished peoples and tribes, on the model of Pompey’s extensive *inscriptio triumphis* of 61 B.C. For obvious reasons, the literary sources as well as the *Fasti Barberiniani* distil matters down to their essence, singling out Illyricum or Dalmatia as the triumph’s foremost feature. The third triumph is recorded as *ex A[egy]pto* in the *Fasti Barberiniani* and Dio 51.21.7; cf. Livy, *Per.* 133: *tertium de Cleopatra*.