

48 BC: The Battle of Pharsalus

Abstract: This paper is an in-depth analysis of the battle of Pharsalus and provides an breakdown of both Caesar and Pompey's armies. The size, organisation, frontage and depth of the armies and the legions involved on both sides have been fully investigated. The conclusions and tactics of both Caesar and Pompey as found here contravene conventional thinking about the battle of Pharsalus, yet still closely adhere to the accounts of Appian, Caesar, Cassius Dio, Eutropius, Florus, Orosius and Plutarch. At Pharsalus, it took Caesar's army of 37,000 men less than one hour to defeat Pompey's army of 63,000 men.

This paper is an edited version taken from my unpublished book "Rome's Legions: Decoding their Pythagorean Organisation 753 BC to 410 AD." The focus of the book is to reveal the size and organisation of the Roman legion from the foundation of Rome in 753 BC to the sack of Rome in 410 AD. The approach of this study was to accept the data found in the primary sources as correct. When it was found that an ancient historian did make a mistake, then the reason for the mistake is examined and explained. The premise of this study is that the primary sources contain accurate data that has been for too long unfairly criticised, overlooked, dismissed, misunderstood or misinterpreted. The reason why modern historians have failed to reconcile the army numbers given for Pharsalus is because they have developed an inaccurate interpretation of the size and organisation of the Roman legion during the lifetime of Julius Caesar. By applying the correct size and organisation of the legion, the varying numbers given by the ancient authors for Pharsalus are exceedingly precise.

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The Preliminaries

After defeating the Pompeian forces in Spain, in 48 BC, Caesar landed in Greece and suffered a reverse against Pompey at the battle of Dyrrachium. After marching from Gomphoi, Caesar reached Pharsalus and finding a suitable position in the Pharsalian plain, awaited the arrival of Pompey. A few days later, Pompey marched to Larisa and joined Scipio, and together the Pompeian army encamped on a hill some thirty stades from Caesar's camp.¹ On several occasions Caesar offered battle, but Pompey responded by deploying his army on the lower slopes of the hill. On each occasion Pompey did this, Caesar declined to fight a battle on unfavourable ground.

At Pharsalus, Caesar's army was suffering from a lack of supplies and provisions could only be gained from foraging, whereas Pompey's army was being continuously supplied by sea and fortified supply depots. Pompey's strategy was not to engage Caesar in a single battle as he considered it dangerous to risk everything against a disciplined and desperate army. Pompey preferred to wait and to let hunger then plague decimate Caesar's men.² However, a large number of Pompeian senators and the Pompeian army elated by their victory at Dyrrachium pressured Pompey to fight. **With great reluctance, Pompey gave in to their demands, being indignant that he went against his judgement and feeling dejected he was no longer commander, but under command.**³ The night before the battle, a meteor crossed the night sky travelling in the direction from Caesar's camp to Pompey's camp where it disappeared. Both armies interpreted this as an omen of victory.⁴ Caesar decided to abandon his camp and marched to Skotoussa to improve his corn supply. After Caesar's army had struck their tents and sent the transports on ahead, Caesar was informed that Pompey's army was deploying in the plain, and not in their customary position on the lower slopes of the hill. Plutarch writes that Caesar said "the day which we have waited for has come. We shall now fight against men instead of want and hunger."⁵ As Caesar's troops were encumbered with their packs, Caesar ordered the packs be laid aside, and while this was going on, Caesar ordered the rampart of his camp to be dismantled and the ditch to be filled in.⁶ This was done out of necessity to get the army quickly out of the camp gates and into battle order in the fastest time as possible.⁷

Endnotes

¹ Appian (The Civil War 2 65)

² Appian (The Civil War 2 66)

³ Appian (The Civil War 2 69), Polyaeus (Stratagems 8 23 14)

⁴ Appian (The Civil War book 2 68)

⁵ Plutarch (Pompey 68)

⁶ Appian (The Civil War 2 74), Lucan (7 326-327)

⁷ A similar stratagem was undertaken by the consul Fabius at Sutrium in 310 BC (Livy 9 37), and Alexander the Great at Gaugamela in 333 BC (Curtius Rufus 6 13 26).

The Combatants

In his description of the armies of Caesar and Pompey, Appian writes:

“Since many writers differ as to Caesar's army, I shall follow the most credible Roman authorities, who give the most careful enumeration of the Italian soldiers, as the backbone of the army, but do not make much account of the allied forces or record them exactly, regarding them as mere foreigners and as contributing little to the issue of the day. The army, then, consisted of about 22,000 men and of these about 1,000 were cavalry. Pompey had more than double that number, of whom about 7,000 were cavalry. Some of the most trustworthy writers say that 70,000 Italian soldiers were engaged in this battle. Others give the smaller number, 60,000. Still others, grossly exaggerating, say 400,000. Of the whole number some say Pompey's forces were half as many again as Caesar's, others that they were two-thirds of the total number engaged. So much doubt is there as to the exact truth.”¹

Appian clearly identifies the troops listed in his sources only refer to the legionaries (the Italian troops). This means the auxiliaries troops have been omitted from both Caesar and Pompey's order of battle. Plutarch remarks that the army of Caesar and Pompey combined numbered 70,000 men.² Florus claims the two armies combined were over 300,000 men.³

As will be shown, both armies combined will number around 100,600 men, of which 72,000 men consisted of Italian legionaries.

Endnotes

¹ Appian (The Civil Wars 2 70)

² Plutarch (Pompey 70)

³ Florus (Epitome 2 44)

Pompey's Army

The number of combatants for Pompey's army is provided by Appian, Caesar, Eutropius, Orosius and Plutarch.¹

Author	Infantry	Cavalry
Appian	45000	7000
Caesar	45000	7000
Eutropius	40000	1100
Orosius	40000	1100
Plutarch	45000	7000

In his description of the deployment of the Pompeian army, Caesar writes that:

“Caesar, having approached the camp of Pompeius, observed that his line was drawn up as follows: On the left wing were the two legions which had been handed over by Caesar at the beginning of the civil strife by decree of the senate, one of which was called the First and the other the Third. At that place was Pompeius himself. Scipio occupied the middle of the line with the Syrian legions. The Cilician legion, united with the Spanish cohorts, who had been bought over by Afranius, was stationed on the right wing. These legions Pompeius regarded as the strongest under his command. The rest he interposed between the centre and the wings and had made up the number of 110 cohorts. These forces amount to 45,000 men.”²

With a cohort numbering 360 men, the figure of 45,000 infantry equates to twelve and one half legions organised into 125 cohorts and 375 maniples at 120 men per maniple. However, Caesar's writes that Pompey had 110 cohorts, which amounts to 39,600 men organised into 330 maniples. Missing from Pompey's order of battle are forty five maniples (5,400 men) organised into fifteen cohorts. The problem rests with Caesar's computation of the number of legions present. After detailing the deployment of Pompey's left wing containing two legions, Caesar describes the right wing containing the Cilician legion, the five Spanish cohorts, then the rest of the legions being stationed between Pompey's centre and left wing. It is the troops from the left wing and the centre of the line that constitute the 110 cohorts. This means the Cilician legion of ten cohorts (3,600 men), and the five Spanish cohorts (1,800 men) giving a total of 5,400 men organised into fifteen cohorts of 360 men have been omitted from Caesar's tally of Pompeian cohorts. Therefore, with the inclusion of the missing fifteen cohorts, Pompey's legionaries increase from 39,600 legionaries to 45,000 legionaries organised into 125 cohorts each of 360 men and 375 maniples at 120 men per maniple.

Caesar also writes that Pompey's evocati (veterans - those over forty two years), numbered 'about 2,000 men,' distributed throughout Pompey's army.³ These men appear to have been included in the total of 45,000 infantry and possibly numbered 1,920 men organised into sixteen maniples each of 120 men.

Endnotes

¹ Appian (BC 2 70-76), Caesar (BC 3 84-89), Eutropius (6 20), Orosius (6 15 23-24), Plutarch (Caesar 42), (Pompey 69)

² Caesar (BC 3 88)

³ Caesar (BC 3 88). According to Sallust (War with Catilina 59 3, 61 2-3), at the battle of Pistoria in 62 BC, Catiline formed the leading ranks of his army from veterans.

Pompey's Camp Guards

Caesar reports that Pompey allocated seven cohorts to guard the camp and neighbouring forts. Appian cites Pompey's camp guards numbered 4,000 Italian soldiers.¹ As it is customary for the older soldiers in the army to be assigned as camp guards, and with Pompey's three battle lines being deployed ten men deep, Pompey's 4,000 Italian camp guards would represent those pilani aged thirty nine years to forty two years, who constitute ranks nine and ten.

With the frontage of Pompey's legionaries being arrayed 1,500 men wide, ranks nine and ten amount to 3,000 pilani being allocated as camp guards. As Caesar mentions that Thracians and other auxiliaries also guarded Pompey's camp, with ratio of legionaries to auxiliary infantry being 3:1, this would allocate an additional 1,000 auxiliary infantry as camp guards, which complies with Appian's figure of 4,000 camp guards (3,000 pilani and 1,000 auxiliary infantry).² The 4,000 camp guards could have been organised into ten cohorts each of 400 men, with a cohort consisting of 300 legionaries and 100 auxiliary infantry (fifty archers and fifty slingers) organised into five centuries each of eighty men (sixty legionaries, ten archers and ten slingers).

Endnotes

¹ Appian (BC 2 75)

² Caesar (3 95)

Pompey's Auxiliary Infantry

Caesar mentions that Pompey had 3,000 archers from Crete, Sparta, Pontus and Syria, plus two 600 man cohorts of slingers.¹ The two cohorts of slingers, when not distributed among the legionaries could have been organised into two cohorts each ten centuries, with a century numbering sixty men. Caesar further writes that Pompey "distributed among the legions by way of supplement a large number of men from Thessaly, Boeotia, Achaia, and Epirus."² Taking the premise the standard 1,200 auxiliary infantry are assigned to a legion, with an army of 45,000 legionaries, this equates to a force of 15,000 auxiliary infantry.

However, as twelve of Pompey's legion were arrayed 120 men wide instead of the standard 300 men wide, in order for the auxiliary infantry to efficiently use their weapons, Pompey would have had to reduce the number of auxiliary infantry attached to a legion. With each battleline having a frontage of 1,500 men, and as the auxiliary infantry would be arrayed in two lines behind each battleline, a force of 3,000 auxiliary infantry (1,500 archers and 1,500 slingers) could have been allocated to each battleline, thereby allocating the twelve legions 240 auxiliary infantry (120 archers and 120 slingers), and the five Spanish cohorts 120 auxiliary infantry (sixty archers and sixty slingers). This would give a combined force of 9,000 auxiliary infantry (4,500 archers and 4,500 slingers) assigned to the legions. Of the remaining 6,000 auxiliary infantry, after the removal of the 1,000 auxiliary infantry assigned as camp guards, this leaves the remaining 5,000 auxiliary infantry being allocated to Pompey's cavalry.

Of Pompey's 7,000 cavalry, only 3,600 cavalry can be identified, which could indicate the missing 3,000 cavalrymen are part of the 5,000 auxiliary infantry that are reported to be stationed behind the cavalry. Inclusion, Pompey's auxiliary infantry could have amounted to 15,000 men.

Attached to the legions	9000 auxiliaries
Attached to the cavalry	5000 auxiliaries
Camp guards	1000 auxiliaries
Total	15000 men

Endnotes

¹ Caesar (BC 3 4), In Appian's (BC 2 71) account, Pompey's allies consisted of Spartans, Peloponnians, Athenians, Thracians, Hellespontines, Bithynians, Phrygians, Ionians, Lydians, Pamphylians, Pisidians, Paphlagonians; Cilicia, Syria, Phoenicians, Hebrews, Arabs; Cyprians, Rhodians, Cretan slingers, Galatians, Cappadocians, and Armenians.

² Caesar (BC 3 4),

Pompey's Cavalry

Pompey's cavalry is reported to have numbered 7,000 cavalry.¹ Of the 7,000 cavalry, Caesar only identifies 3,600 cavalry: 800 slaves and herdsmen, 600 Gauls, 500 Cappadocians, 500 Gabinians, 500 Thracians, 300 Gallo-Graecians, 200 Macedonians, 200 Syrians, Dardani and Bessi mercenaries, and many mounted archers.² The 3,600 cavalry are organised into 120 squadrons at thirty men a squadron (minus the officers). With the inclusion of the cavalry officers, Pompey's cavalry numbers 4,320 men (3,600 cavalrymen, 360 decurions and 360 optiones). The 120 squadrons of cavalry would approximate to each of Pompey's twelve legions being allocated the standard ten squadrons of cavalry.

Endnotes

¹ Appian (BC 2 49) (2 70), Caesar (3 4), (3 84), Plutarch (Life of Pompey 64)

² Caesar (BC 3 4)

Pompey's Army Total

In conclusion, Pompey's army, without officers and supernumeraries, amounted to 63,600 men.

Hastati	15000 men
Principes	15000 men
Pilani	15000 men
Total	45000 men
Auxiliaries	15000 men
Total	60000 men
Cavalry	3600 men
Total	63600 men

Caesar's Army

The size of Caesar's army as given by various ancient historians varies from 23,000 men to 31,000 men:¹

Author	Infantry	Cavalry
Appian	22000	1000
Caesar	22000	1000
Eutropius	30000	1000
Orosius	30000	1000
Plutarch	22000	1000

Caesar gives his army stationed "in the line" at 22,000 men organised into eighty cohorts. This would amount to 275 men per cohort, which is incorrect as the standard cohort amounted to 360 men.

At Pharsalus, the ninth legion was under strength due to the casualties suffered at Dyrrachium.² As Caesar describes the ninth legion being deployed opposite the five Spanish cohorts, hereby calculated at five cohorts each of 360 men for a total of 1,800 men, the ninth legion must also have numbered 1,800 men, which represents a fifty percent loss in legionaries. It is most likely the ninth legion did not sustain fifty percent casualties at Dyrrachium and that those men above 1,800 men were distributed among the other seven legions as replacements. With a legion numbering 3,600 men, seven legions amount to 25,200 men and with the addition of the 1,800 men from the ninth legion, Caesar's legionaries amounted to 27,000 men.

7 legions	25200 legionaries
IX legion	1800 legionaries
Total	27000 legionaries

Caesar's 27,000 legionaries consisted of:

Hastati	9000 men
Principes	9000 men
Pilani	9000 men
Total	27000 men

Caesar's figure of 22,000 men has been rounded from 22,500 men and omits the 3,000 legionaries that formed Caesar's fourth battle line and the 1,500 legionaries assigned to guard Caesar's camp. This would not be the first time Julius Caesar has rounded his numbers. In 54 BC, when campaigning in Gaul, Caesar wrote that he had with him two legions amounting to 7,000 men and 400 cavalry.³ Caesar's two legions equates to two legions of 3,600 legionnaires, totalling 7,200 men, which has been rounded to 7,000 men.

Caesar's seven full strength legions were organised thirty maniples per legion for a total of 210 maniples. In his account of the battle of Pharsalus, Caesar gives the size of a century of ecomons (veterans) under the command of Crastinus as containing 120 men.⁴ A century of 120 men is difficult to explain, especially as Caesar had firsthand knowledge of the Roman legion. It has to be assumed the word century was a copyist mistake for 'maniple.' This is supported by Caesar's commentary stating the men who followed Crastinus had belonged to his maniple when he was the first centurion (primus pilus) in the tenth legion. This shows that Caesar's veterans were organised into maniples of veterans and not distributed among the other maniples.

Endnotes

¹ Appian (The Civil Wars 2 70-76), Caesar (BC 3 84-89), Eutropius (6 20), Orosius (6 15), Plutarch (Caesar 42), (Pompey 69)

² At Dyrrachium, Caesar (BC 3 71) reports his army lost 960 men, thirty two military tribunes and many centurions. Plutarch (Life of Pompey 65) gives Caesar's losses at 2,000 men. Orosius (6 15) lists Caesar's losses at 4,000 soldiers killed, twenty two centurions and some Roman cavalry.

³ Caesar (BG 5 48-49)

⁴ Caesar (BC 3 91), Plutarch (Caesar 44) describes the veterans as 120 "soldiers."

The Ninth Legion

The ninth legion numbering 1,800 men consisted of 600 hastati, 600 principes and 600 pilani organised into:

10 cohorts each of 180 men
30 centuries each of 60 men

Because the ninth legion was at half strength and in order to maintain the cohort organisation, the maniple organisation was abandoned in favour of the century organisation. Caesar ordered that both the eighth and ninth legion should support each other.¹ This possibly means the ninth legion was under the command of the eighth legion. Therefore, the eighth legion was the leading unit. The leading unit is the steering wheel which regulates those units ordered to conform to the actions of the leading unit. This means the ninth legion will immediately follow or imitate the manoeuvres of the eighth legion as described in Maurice's Strategicon:

“Orders should be given to the officers of the first combat line to conform to the movements to those of the centre meros (unit), where the lieutenant general is usually stationed. They should keep abreast of it and make their charge at the same time.”²

Endnotes

¹ Caesar (BC 3 89)

² Maurice's Strategicon (3 12)

Caesar's Fourth Line

On noticing Pompey's cavalry massing against his cavalry on the right wing, Caesar fearing his cavalry would be overwhelmed, "hastily withdrew individual cohorts from the third line and of these created a fourth line, stationing it opposite the cavalry."¹ Frontinus describes the fourth line as being held in reserve for emergencies.² Caesar, Frontinus and Plutarch have the fourth line organised into six cohorts.

Caesar's phraseology would suggest that Caesar took individual cohorts from the third line of pilani in order to create a fourth line. What Caesar is saying is that he took a certain number of pilani from each legion equivalent in size to a cohort and with these men created a fourth line of six cohorts. Appian and Plutarch state the fourth line numbered 3,000 men.³ To create a fourth line numbering 3,000 men, Caesar's withdrew 400 pilani from each of the seven legions at full strength and 200 pilani from the ninth legion at half strength, thereby giving a total of 3,000 pilani. The 3,000 pilani were then organised into six cohorts each of 500 men, organised into five centuries each of 100 men.⁴ The 400 pilani withdrawn from each legion is equivalent in size to a 360 man cohort, or a 384 man cohort with officers and supernumeraries, and this would explain why Caesar refers to them as a cohort.

Endnotes

¹ Caesar (3 89)

² Frontinus (Stratagems 2 3 22)

³ Appian (The Civil War 2 76), Plutarch (Pompey 71)

⁴ Caesar (BC 3 93), Frontinus (Stratagems 2 3 22), Plutarch (Caesar 44), (Pompey 69)

Caesar's Antesignani

When describing the deployment of Caesar's army, Frontinus writes that:

"Caesar also drew up a triple line, placing his legions in front and resting his left flank on marshes in order to avoid envelopment. On the right he placed his cavalry, among whom he distributed the fleetest of his foot soldiers, men trained in cavalry fighting. Then he held in reserve six cohorts for emergencies, placing them obliquely on the right, from which quarter he was expecting an attack of the enemy's cavalry."¹

Frontinus references to Caesar's "fleetest of foot being distributed with the cavalry" are the *antesignani* and are clearly distinguished from the six cohorts of the fourth line (the reserve). In the days preceding the battle of Pharsalus, Caesar, knowing full well he was inferior in cavalry, daily trained "lightly equipped youths from among the first rank men, with arms selected with a view to fleetness, should go in battle among the cavalry."² Frontinus also claims that Caesar distributed among his cavalry the fleetest of his foot-soldiers, men trained in cavalry fighting.³

The *antesignani* are the youngest of the *hastati* and form the first rank of the *hastati*, and when required are equipped with lighter equipment so as to provide them with better mobility and agility. As Caesar's eight legions had a frontage of 1,500 men, with seven of Caesar's legions at Pharsalus deployed 200 men wide, Caesar had taken 200 *antesignani* from each of the seven legions (2,800 *antesignani*). The ninth legion, being fifty percent under strength contributed 100 *antesignani*. Therefore, Caesar's *antesignani* amounted to 1,500 men.

Endnotes

¹ Frontinus (Stratagem 2 3 22)

² Caesar (BC 3 84), Polyaeus (Stratagems 8 23 12)

³ Frontinus (Stratagems 2 3 22)

Caesar's Camp Guards

Appian states 2,000 of the oldest troops remained behind to guard Caesar's camp.¹ In total there are 9,000 pilani in Caesar's army. As Caesar's pilani were deployed 1,500 men wide by six men deep, in the same manner as the antesignani, each of Caesar's seven legions at full strength would provide 200 pilani per legion as camp guards for a total of 1,400 men, and the ninth legion, being at half strength contributes 100 pilani, giving a total of 1,500 pilani as camp guards. With the ratio of legionaries to auxiliary infantry at 3:1, with the addition of 500 auxiliary infantry to help guard the camp, Caesar's camp guard numbered 2,000 men, which complies with Appian's figure of 2,000 camp guards.² The 2,000 camp guards could have been organised into five cohorts each of 400 men, with a cohort consisting of 300 legionaries and 100 auxiliary infantry (fifty archers and fifty slingers) organised into five centuries each of eighty men (sixty legionaries, ten archers and ten slingers).

Endnotes

¹ Appian (BC 2 75)

² Controversy surrounds the number of cohorts Caesar (BG 3 89 3) left to guard his camp. The section in which Caesar lists the number of cohorts is corrupt and because of this some historians have interpreted this to be seven cohorts. In other campaigns Caesar (BG 7 40) left two legions to guard the camp from a total of six legions. Caesar (BG 7 60) has five cohorts that he considered unreliable in open battle to remain behind to guard the camp. During the Spanish campaign, Caesar (BC 1 41) leaves six cohorts to guard a bridge and his camp before setting out for Ilerda. When fighting the Pompeian commanders Afranius and Petreius in Spain with an army of five legions, Caesar (BC 1 64) ordered the weaker soldiers to be picked out from all the centuries, to be left with one legion to guard the camp. In Africa, Caesar (African War 9) leaves six cohorts to guard the camp.

Caesar's Auxiliary Infantry

Caesar's auxiliary infantry are listed as being Dolopians, Acarnanians, and Aetolians.¹ With the ratio of legionaries to auxiliary infantry at 3:1, Caesar's 27,000 legionaries would be accompanied by 9,000 auxiliary infantry. Therefore, Caesar's seven legions at full strength were assigned 1,200 auxiliary infantry (600 archers and 600 slingers) and the ninth legion, being at half strength was assigned 600 auxiliary infantry (300 archers and 300 slingers). By removing 500 of the auxiliary infantry allocated to the pilani as camp guards, this would reduce the number of auxiliary infantry from 3,000 men to 2,500 men. With the inclusion of the 500 auxiliary infantry assigned as camp guards, Caesar's auxiliary infantry could have amounted to 9,000 men.

Endnote

¹ Appian (BC 2 70)

Caesar's Cavalry

Appian claims Caesar's cavalry amounted to 1,000 men made up of both Cisalpine and Transalpine Gauls.¹ Caesar and Plutarch also number Caesar's cavalry at 1,000 men.² Both Eutropius and Orosius also give Pompey's cavalry at 1,100 cavalry, which has been confused with Caesar's cavalry. The 1,100 cavalry is possibly rounded from 1,080 men organised into thirty squadrons each of thirty six men. Caesar's thirty squadrons of cavalry were organised into three alae each consisting of ten squadrons.

Endnotes

¹ Appian (The Civil Wars 2 70),

² Caesar (BC 3 84-89), Eutropius (6 20), Orosius (6 15 23-24), Plutarch (Caesar 42)

Caesar's Army Total

In conclusion, with the omission of the officers and supernumeraries, Caesar's army amounted to 37,000 men:

Antesignani	1500 men
Hastati	7500 men
Principes	9000 men
Pilani	4500 men
Total	22500 men
Fourth line	3000 men
Camp guards	1500 men
Total	27000 men
Auxiliaries	9000 men
Total	36000 men
Cavalry	1000 men
Total	37000 men

From the above, Caesar's claim of 22,000 men of the line omits the 3,000 men of the fourth line, the 1,500 camp guards and the 9,000 auxiliary infantry. Eutropius and Orosius figure of 'less than 30,000 infantry' could represent the 27,000 legionaries.

Orosius claimed that Pompey's army consisted of eighty eight cohorts and numbered 40,000 infantry and 1,100 cavalry.¹ This indicates that Orosius has confused Caesar's army number with Pompey's army. The eighty eight cohorts could represent the belief that Caesar's removed one cohort from each of his eight legions. The figure of 40,000 men could represent Pompey's remaining 42,000 legionaries, which has been rounded to 40,000 infantry, or it could also represent Caesar's army total of 37,000 men rounded to 40,000 men. The 1,100 cavalry belongs to Caesar's army. The fact Orosius or his source has confused certain events can be found in Orosius account claiming that it was Pompey telling his soldiers to "spare the citizens," that is the Italian legionnaires. Appian makes the claim that when Pompey's legions routed, Caesar sent heralds among the ranks of his legionaries to tell them to spare their own countrymen and to only kill the auxiliaries.² Caesar also offered clemency to those 24,000 Pompeian troops that took refuge on a neighbouring hill and were surrounded by four of Caesar's legions.³

Endnotes

¹ Orosius (6 15)

² Appian (2 80), Orosius (6 15)

³ Caesar (3 98)

The Combined Armies

In conclusion, with the omission of the officers and supernumeraries, Caesar and Pompey's army when combined amounted to 100,600 men consisting of:

Caesar's Legionaries	27000 men
Pompey's Legionaries	45000 men
Total	72000 men
Caesar's Auxiliary	9000 men
Pompey's Auxiliary	15000 men
Total	96000 men
Caesar's cavalry	1000 men
Pompey's cavalry	3600 men
Total	100600 men

Appian and Plutarch's figure of 70,000 Italian soldiers has possibly been rounded to 70,000 men or omits Caesar's 2,000 camp guards.¹ Appian's figure of 60,000 legionaries possibly represents the removal of Caesar's 1,500 antesignani, the 3,000 legionaries of Caesar's fourth line, Caesar's 2,000 camp guards and Pompey's 4,000 older legionaries assigned to guard Pompey's camp.²

Appian's claim that some exaggerated the figure present on the battlefield to be 400,000 men. This has possibly been arrived at by multiplying the figure of 100,000 men by four, and Florus' figure of more than 300,000 men could be the 100,600 men multiplied by three.³

Endnotes

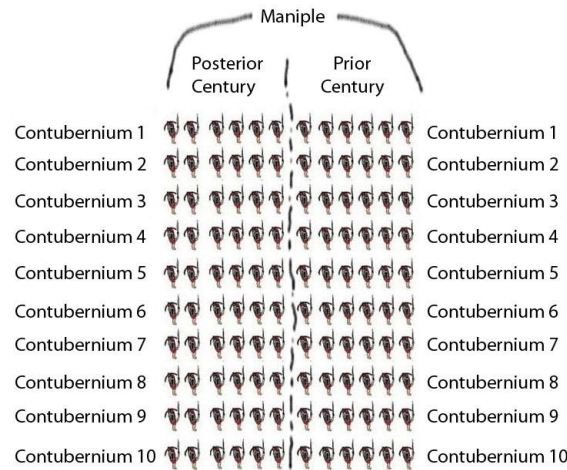
¹ Plutarch (Pompey 70)

² Appian (The Civil Wars 2 70)

³ Appian (2 70), Florus (Epitome 2 44)

Pompey's Deployment

In Appian's narrative, Pompey drew up his army between the city of Pharsalus and the river Enipeus.¹ Caesar reports that Pompey deployed on his left wing, the legions numbered the first and the third legion. The centre of the line was occupied by the Syrian legions, then the Cilician legion followed by five Spanish cohorts stationed on the right wing. Frontinus cites that Pompey drew up his men in three lines, with each line ten men deep.² In order to deploy each legion's battle line of 1,200 legionaries ten men deep, each battle line had a frontage of 120 men. Therefore, each century was deployed six men wide (one contubernium) by ten men deep (ten contubernium) and each manipule twelve men wide (two contubernium) by ten men deep (ten contubernium), termed by Lucan as "close packed columns."³



In relation to the manus system, a Pompeian century six men wide by ten men deep was arrayed six manus wide by two manus deep. In this arrangement, the manus becomes the file system and the contubernium, the rank system. With a man occupying a width of three feet in close order, a Pompeian manipule had a frontage of thirty six feet. With a legion deployed in their standard array of ten maniples wide by three maniples deep, a Pompeian legion had a frontage of 120 men and a depth of thirty men. This gave each Pompeian legion a frontage of 360 feet. Therefore, from the total of 375 maniples of legionaries, each of Pompey's three battlelines consisted of 125 maniples thereby producing a frontage of 1,500 men (4,500 feet) and a depth of thirty men.

15000 Hastati	10 deep
15000 Principes	10 deep
15000 Pilani	10 deep
45000 men	30 deep

After the removal of the 3,000 older pilani as camp guards (ranks nine and ten) from the pilani battle line, Pompey's remaining 42,000 legionaries has a depth of twenty eight men.

15000 Hastati	10 deep
15000 Principes	10 deep
12000 Pilani	8 deep
42000 men	28 deep

With the inclusion of the 9,000 auxiliary infantry, Pompey's depth at the beginning of the battle would have been thirty four ranks deep.

In Caesar's account, because a stream protected his right wing, Pompey deployed his archers and slingers on the left wing.⁴ Appian mentions that Pompey's archers and slingers "were mingled among all," then goes on to say the allied forces "were marshalled by themselves rather for show than for use." To this Appian adds that Pompey placed:

“the Macedonians, Peloponnesians, Boeotians, and Athenians near the Italian legions, as he approved of their good order and quiet behaviour. The rest, as Caesar had anticipated, he ordered to lie in wait by tribes outside of the line of battle, and when the engagement should become close to surround the enemy, to pursue, to do what damage they could, and to plunder Caesar's camp, which was without defences.”⁵

Appian's has three differing allied deployments. The first has the allies mingled among all, which must include the legionaries, the second array has the allies stationed by themselves as show pieces, and third, the allies are arrayed outside of the line with the role of surrounding the enemy, pursuing the enemy and plundering Caesar's camp. In all probability, deployment arrangements two and three are the same, which have the auxiliary infantry posted behind the Pompeian cavalry.

Caesar has Pompey deploy his whole cavalry on the left wing.⁶ Frontinus has Pompey deploy 600 cavalry on his right wing next to the river Enipeus.⁷ This would amount to twenty squadrons. Eutropius has Pompey deploy 500 cavalry on his right wing, and this would amount to 480 cavalry organised into sixteen squadrons.⁸ Lucan states the cavalry on the Pompeian right wing were from Cappadocia and Pontus.⁹ Following Caesar that all of Pompeian cavalry were all deployed on Pompey's left wing. Before the battle, Caesar's mentions his cavalry when training with the antesignani became more confident even when skirmishing with Pompey's cavalry on open ground. As this suggests the cavalry had room to manoeuvre, Pompey's 120 squadrons (twelve alae) are possibly arrayed three alae wide (thirty squadrons) by four alae deep (four squadrons). With a squadron with officers deployed nine horses wide by four horses deep, Pompey's cavalry had a frontage of 270 horses and depth of sixteen horses, and with squadron intervals, this produces a frontage of 2,700 feet. With the inclusion of the 4,500 feet required for the infantry, Pompey's army had a frontage of around 7,200 feet.

The command structure and the positioning of the Pompeian commanders on the battlefield differs in the accounts of Appian, Caesar, Lucan and Plutarch as detailed below:¹⁰

Author	Left	Centre	Right
Appian	Domitius	Scipio	Lentulus
Caesar	Pompey	Scipio	?
Lucan	Lentulus	Scipio	Domitius
Plutarch	Domitius	Scipio	Pompey

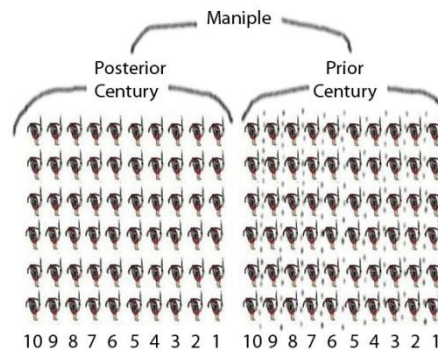
Appian has Pompey and Afranius in command of the camp.¹¹ However, when he saw his cavalry defeated, Appian reports that Pompey returned to his camp, which rules out he stayed behind and commanded the camp. As Pompey placed his hopes of victory on a decisive attack of his cavalry deployed on the Pompeian left wing, plus with his best legions (the First and Third legion) positioned on the left wing to face Caesar's best legion (the Tenth), it would seem logical Pompey was stationed on the left wing and directly opposite Caesar.¹² The problem of the different positions of some of the Pompeian commanders possibly centres on some ancient authors confusing the right and left wing, caused by information taken from a Caesarean perspective and failing to reverse the direction.

Endnotes

- ¹ Appian (BC 2 75)
- ² Frontinus (Stratagem 2 3 22)
- ³ Lucan (The Civil War 7 490 – 495)
- ⁴ Caesar (BC 3 88)
- ⁵ Appian (BC 2 75)
- ⁶ Caesar (BC 3 88)
- ⁷ Frontinus (Stratagem 2 3 22)
- ⁸ Eutropius (6 20)
- ⁹ Lucan (7 224-226)
- ¹⁰ Appian (The Civil War 2 76), Caesar (BC 3 88), Lucan (7 217-223), Plutarch (Life of Pompey 69)
- ¹¹ Plutarch (Caesar 44), (Pompey 69), Appian (The Civil War 2 76)
- ¹² Caesar (BC 3 88 3)

Caesar's Deployment

In the same manner as Pompey, Caesar deployed his legions in three lines. Caesar only mentions three legions by number; the eighth, ninth and the tenth. The tenth legion was deployed on Caesar's right wing and the eighth and ninth on the left wing. In order to match Pompey's frontage, Caesar would have to have deployed the seven legions at full strength with a frontage of 200 men rather than the standard frontage of 300 men, leaving the ninth legion, being half strength, deployed with a frontage of 100 men. In total Caesar's eight legions had a frontage of 1,500 men, which matches the frontage of Pompey's legionaries. For the seven legions at full strength to deploy with a frontage of 200 men, each century was deployed ten men wide (ten contubernium) by six men deep (one contubernium), and each manipule twenty men wide (twenty contubernium) by six men deep (one contubernium).



In relation to the manus system, a Caesarean century was arrayed two manus wide by six manus deep, thereby maintaining tradition that the manus organisation related to the rank and the contubernium organisation, the file system. In the same manner, the 1,800 men of the ninth legion were arrayed in three lines each of 600 men, deployed 100 men wide (ten centuries) by six men deep. Therefore, at the start Caesar's 27,000 legionaries had frontage of 1,500 men (4,500 feet) and a depth of eighteen men.

9000 Hastati	6 deep
9000 Principes	6 deep
9000 Pilani	6 deep
27000 men	18 deep

With the removal of the 1,500 pilani to act as camp guards, Caesar's pilani were reduced from six deep to five men deep. In total Caesar's remaining 25,500 infantry had a depth of seventeen men.

9000 Hastati	6 deep
9000 Principes	6 deep
7500 Pilani	5 deep
25500 men	17 deep

After the withdrawal of the 3,000 pilani required for Caesar's fourth line, the pilani are reduced from five men deep to three men deep. In total Caesar's remaining 22,500 infantry has a combined depth of fifteen men.

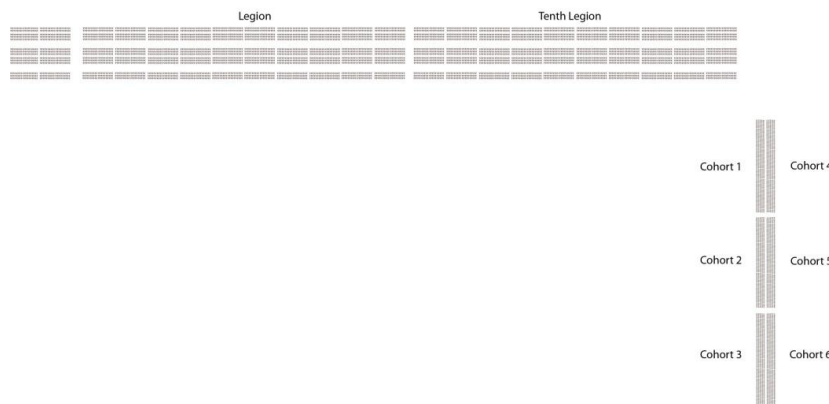
9000 Hastati	6 deep
9000 Principes	6 deep
4500 Pilani	3 deep
22500 men	15 deep

After the removal of the 1,500 antesignani taken from the first rank of the hastati, Caesar's remaining 21,000 infantry was reduced to fourteen ranks deep.

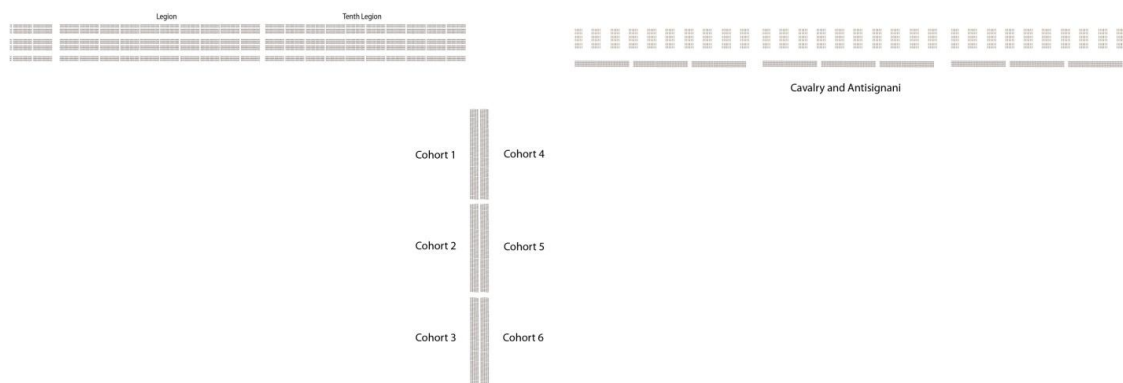
7500 Hastati	5 deep
9000 Principes	6 deep
4500 Pilani	3 deep
21000 men	14 deep

Caesar's 21,000 legionaries arrayed in three battle lines now gives a new understanding to Appian's statement that Caesar's army consisted of 'about 22,000 men and of these about 1,000 were cavalry.'¹ Appian's reference to about 22,000 men actually represents the 21,000 infantry arrayed in the three battle lines and Caesar's 900 cavalry, which Appian refers to as 'about 1,000 cavalry.' This would amount to 21,900 men, which again would approximate to Appian's claim of 'about 22,000 men.'

Because the six cohorts of pilani that formed the fourth line were assigned different tactical objectives, the six cohorts are deployed two cohorts wide by three cohorts deep. The five 100 man centuries in a cohort are deployed in column formation five men wide by twenty men deep. In this arrangement, the fourth line has a frontage of ten men (thirty feet) and a depth of 300 men (900 feet). Plutarch has the six cohorts deployed behind the tenth legion.² Frontinus states that Caesar stationed the six cohorts obliquely on the right, from which quarter his was expecting the attack of the enemies' cavalry.³ Lucan mentions Caesar deployed the cohorts "at an angle to his front behind the standards."⁴ Due to the two tactical roles assigned to the fourth line during the battle, in order to accomplish this, the fourth line has been positioned in the following manner:



Caesar's cavalry were deployed on the right wing facing Pompey's cavalry, are arrayed three ala wide (thirty squadrons) by one alae deep (270 horses wide by four horses deep), and with squadron intervals the cavalry has a frontage of 2,700 feet. Of the 1,500 antesignani, 500 antesignani were allocated to each ala. In this manner, each squadron was allocated fifty antesignani.



With the inclusion of the infantry arrayed 1,500 men wide (4,500 feet), Caesar's army had a frontage of 7,200 feet.

As with the Pompeian commanders, the command structure and positioning on the battlefield of the Caesarean commanders also differs in the accounts of Appian, Caesar, and Plutarch.⁵ Appian lists Caesar's commanders as Sulla, Antony, and Domitius, "with Caesar taking his place with the tenth legion, on the right wing, as was his custom."⁶ In Caesar's account, Antony commanded the left wing, Domitius the centre and Sulla the right wing.⁷

Author	Left	Centre	Right
Caesar	Antony	Domitius	Sulla
Plutarch	Antony	Calvinus	Caesar

Caesar mentions that he himself confronted Pompey.⁸ This means Pompey was directly opposite Caesar, with Pompey positioned on his left wing and Caesar his right wing. The study of this battle follows Caesar's command structure.

Endnotes

¹ Appian (The Civil Wars 2 70)

² Plutarch (Caesar 44), (Pompey 69)

³ Frontinus (Stratagem 2 3 22)

⁴ Lucan (The Civil War 7 521 – 525)

⁵ Appian (The Civil War 2 76), Caesar (BC 3 88), Lucan (7 217-223), Plutarch (Life of Pompey 69)

⁶ Appian (The Civil War 2 76)

⁷ Caesar (BC 3 88)

⁸ Caesar (BC 3 89 3)

The Battle

Appian reports that at the battle of Pharsalus “never before had such large Italian armies confronted the same danger together.”¹ Both opposing armies had a moderate space between them. In comparison, Caesar’s 21,000 infantry of the line arrayed in three battle lines fourteen ranks deep faced Pompey’s 42,000 infantry arrayed in three battle lines twenty eight ranks deep. Pompey’s plan centred on his cavalry destroying Caesar’s cavalry, then for his cavalry to rout Caesar’s tenth legion by attacking it in the flank and rear. On witnessing the best legion in Caesar’s army fleeing, hopefully the rest of Caesar’s legionaries would follow suit.²

Caesar placed his hopes of victory on the valour of the fourth line to attack Pompey’s extreme left wing consisting of Pompey’s best two legions in the flank and then rout his army. Pompey planned for his cavalry to defeat Caesar’s cavalry and then to attack the flank and rear of Caesar’s tenth legion and rout his army. The Pompeian watchword was “Hercules the Invincible,” and for the Caesareans “Venus the Victorious.”³

After the armies had finished deploying, both armies waited for sometime in profound silence. Appian writes that the Italian troops “stood motionless in their places, but when Pompey saw that his allied forces were falling into confusion by reason of the delay, he feared lest the disorder should spread from them before the beginning of the battle. So he sounded the signal first and Caesar echoed it back.”⁴ Caesar’s commentary indicates it was Caesar who gave the signal for the battle to commence.⁵ After the trumpets sounded the signal for battle, Appian writes that the men:

“advanced confidently to the encounter, but with stupor and the deepest silence, like men who had had experience in many similar engagements. And now, as they came nearer together, there was first a discharge of arrows and stones.”⁶

Lucan states that at Pharsalus the archers “shot their arrows at no mark, aiming only at the sky overhead; and from the sky death came down.”⁷ According to Josephus, the tactic of the archers in the Roman army was to keep firing until their quivers were empty.⁸ Once the enemies’ line advanced under the range of the indirect fire, the missile fire ceased and the slingers and archers retired and took up position behind the pilani.

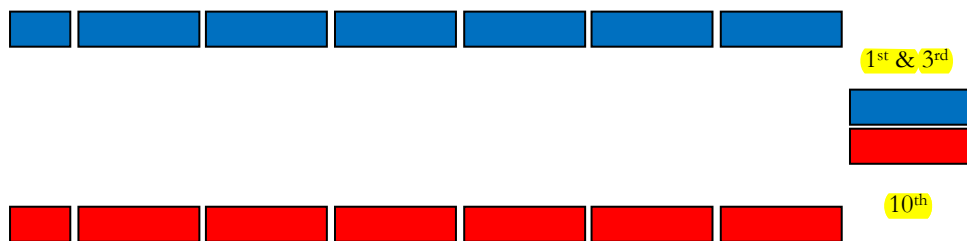
At this stage, Appian has the cavalry of both armies in advance of the infantry; and because of this the cavalry were the first to engage, whereas Caesar has the infantry engaging the infantry and cavalry engaging the cavalry simultaneously, while Florus and Plutarch have the cavalry engaging after the clash of the infantry.⁹

In his commentaries, Caesar has Pompey order his infantry to await the charge of Caesar’s infantry without moving from their position. It was hoped Caesar’s line would fall into disorder when charging.¹⁰ When Caesar’s infantry realised that Pompey’s infantry were not advancing against them, the Caesarean infantry, so as not to be fatigued and their formation disordered, halted in the space between both armies. After a brief interval they renewed the advance and discharged their missiles and quickly drew their swords. Caesar criticises Pompey’s tactic as an irrational act because it repressed the soldier’s keenness of spirit and impetuosity. Caesar further elaborates that it was the duty of a commander not to repress the army’s bellicosity. However, later Caesar comments that the Pompeian infantry did not fail to meet the emergency and withstood the attack of Caesar’s legions without breaking their ranks.

Appian claims when Caesar’s fourth line attacked Pompey’s left flank, Pompey ordered “his infantry not to advance farther, not to break the line of formation, and not to hurl the javelin, but to open their ranks, bring their spears to rest, and so ward off the onset of the enemy.”¹¹ Appian states that he had before him several Roman accounts of the battle, so he was not solely reliant on Caesar’s account.¹² It is possible Caesar has confused the sequence of events in his narrative. According to Asinius Pollio, one of Caesar’s officers present at Pharsalus “Caesar’s official reports were put together somewhat

carelessly.”¹³ In conclusion, Caesar’s account of Pompey ordering his men to remain stationary at the beginning of the battle should be dismissed in favour of Appian’s account that this event occurred when Pompey’s left wing was being attacked in the flank and rear from Caesar’s fourth line of legionaries.

Of significant importance, Plutarch mentions that Pompey was slow in bringing his right wing in action; he kept looking in the other direction (the left), waiting to see how his cavalry was doing.¹⁴ This indicates that both Caesar and Pompey had purposely not committed all their legions to engage in close combat and thereby risk being defeated in one part of the line before their outflanking manoeuvres could yield results. Pompey’s plan was to refuse his centre and right wing, leaving the first and third legions of the Pompeian left wing to conduct an oblique attack against Caesar’s tenth legion. Caesar’s plan was similar and only involved the tenth legion being engaged in close combat.



The 200 man frontage of the tenth legion was engaged against Pompey’s first and third legion with a frontage of 240 men (120 men per legion). In order to match the frontage of Pompey’s first and third legion, two cohorts from the legion adjacent to the tenth legion with a frontage of forty men would have to support Caesar’s tenth legion. In this manner, the tenth legion had a frontage of 240 men. When the infantry combat began, Florus, Lucan and Plutarch claimed that Gaius Crassianus, a Caesarean veteran (evocati) centurion in command of 120 men (a maniples) from the tenth legion was the first infantryman to rush out and engage the Pompeian infantry.¹⁵ After the battle, the tenth legion was rewarded with the palm (decoration) for its role at Pharsalus.¹⁶ Again this can only highlight the brunt of the infantry fighting among Caesar’s legions was undertaken by the tenth legion. On Caesar’s right flank, the Caesarean and Pompeian cavalry were locked in combat. Dio describes the Pompeian cavalry doctrine was to:

“surround troops at a distance, employ sudden assaults (hit and run tactics), and retire after throwing their opponents into confusion; then they would attack them again and again, turning now to this side and now to that. The Caesareans, therefore, were on their guard against this, and by wheeling round always managed to face their assailants, and when they came to close quarters with them, would seize hold of both men and horses in the eagerness of the struggle; for light-armed cavalry had been drawn up with their cavalry for this very purpose.”¹⁷

Dio’s commentary would make more sense if the “light armed cavalry” was substituted for “light armed infantry,” or the antesignani and this would then read “the light-armed infantry (antesignani) had been drawn up with their cavalry for this very purpose.”

Caesar claimed his cavalry gradually quitted their position and retired.¹⁸ Plutarch states that Caesar gave the signal for his cavalry to retire.¹⁹ The withdrawal of Caesar’s cavalry was possibly a feint retreat planned in advance to lure Pompey’s cavalry into an ambush set by the cohorts of the fourth line. In his commentary of the battle, Caesar writing in the third person concerning the six cohorts of the fourth line writes:

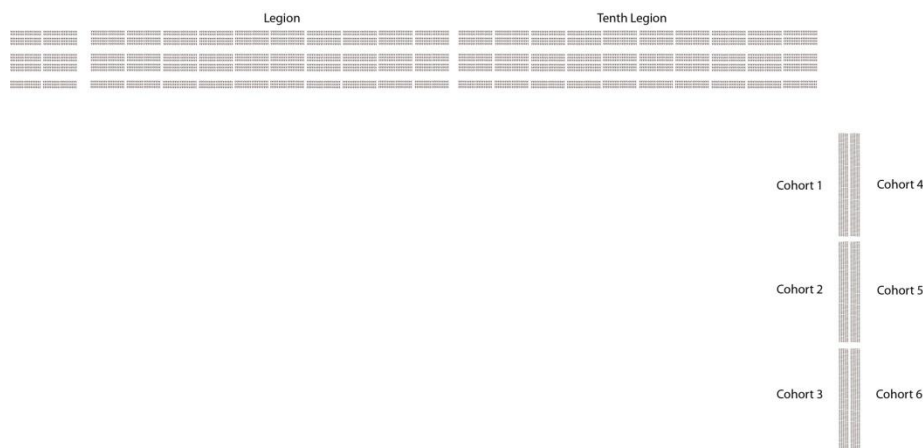
“Nor was Caesar wrong in thinking that the victory would originate with those cohorts which had been posted opposite the cavalry in the fourth line...for it was by them that the cavalry was first repulsed, by

them that the archers and slingers were slaughtered, by them the Pompeian force was surrounded on the left and the rout first started.”²⁰

Here Caesar’s accredits the fourth line with defeating the Pompeian cavalry, then massacring the Pompeian archers and slingers following closely behind the Pompeian cavalry, and then finally has the fourth line surround and rout the left wing of the Pompeian legions. It would appear that Caesar has failed to fully explain that part of the fourth line helped defeat the cavalry while the other half of the fourth line attacked the flank of Pompey’s legionaries. Although Caesar was an eye witness, Suetonius, quoting Asinius Pollio, one of Caesar’s officers present at Pharsalus, comments that Asinius Pollio believed that Caesar’s official reports:

“were put together somewhat carelessly and without strict regard for truth; since in many cases Caesar was too ready to believe the accounts which others gave of their actions, and gave a perverted account of his own, either from design or perhaps from forgetfulness; and he thinks that he intended to rewrite and revise them.”²¹

Following Caesar, cohorts four, five and six numbering 1,500 men, when ordered by Caesar, attacked the Pompeian cavalry, while cohorts one, two and three, also numbering 1,500 men simultaneously attacked the flank and rear of Pompey’s first and third legion. When Caesar’s cavalry retired, in response, which possibly exposed the flank of Caesar’s legionaries, the Pompeian cavalry squadrons were most probably wheeling so as to better position themselves to attack Caesar’s exposed flank and rear. It was at this moment that cohorts four, five and six from the fourth line accompanied by the Caesarean cavalry and the antesignani charged the Pompeian cavalry.



In Florus’ account of the battle he writes that: “the fight had continued for a long time without advantage to either side and, by Pompey’s order, his cavalry had poured forth in an onslaught from the wing, suddenly at a given signal the cohorts made so violent an attack from that quarter on the cavalry as they rushed out that the latter seemed but infantry, while their assailants seemed to be mounted on horseback. The slaughter of the retreating cavalry was accompanied by the destruction of the light infantry.”²²

Florus’ account would suggest the 1,500 pilani broke ranks to attack the Pompeian cavalry. The pilani were under orders not to throw their javelins but thrust them at the faces of the Pompeian cavalymen.²³ The surprise and ferocity of the attack of Caesar’s 1,500 pilani caused the Pompeian cavalry to wheel around and according to Plutarch, flee in a disgraceful manner.²⁴ Appian claims that because the Pompeian cavalry could not endure the savagery of the spears aimed at their faces, they fled in disorder.²⁵ Lucan writes that after the first charge, the Pompeian cavalry “fled from the field: turning their horses round, they rushed furiously in a dense cloud against their own ranks.”²⁶ This would indicate that the front line squadrons, in their haste to flee, threw the support squadrons into

confusion and disorder, thereby spreading the panic. By observing in which direction the cloud dust thrown up by the horse's hooves was travelling, Pompey knew his cavalry had been defeated.²⁷ Caesar writes that the Pompeian cavalry fled towards the nearest hills.²⁸

Appian reports that the archers and slingers assigned to capture Caesar's camp, which were moving behind the Pompeian cavalry, did nothing but watch the cavalry battle in a kind of stupor.²⁹ It is most likely these troops were not trained to work in conjunction with cavalry and therefore could do nothing but occasionally fire on individuals when the opportunity presented itself. Caesar writes that when the Pompeian cavalry routed, the Pompeian archers and slingers stationed behind the Pompeian cavalry, now left defenceless were slain. Having being run down by the routing Pompeian cavalry the archers and slingers were then set upon by the pursuing Caesarean force. Florus states "the slaughter of the retreating [Pompeian] cavalry was accompanied by the destruction of the light [auxiliary] infantry."³⁰

After the Pompeian cavalry has been routed, Caesar comments "with the same onslaught the cohorts surrounded the (Pompeian) left wing [the first and second legions] still fighting and continuing their resistance in their lines, and attacked them in the rear."³¹ When the signal for the fourth line to attack was given, this meant cohort one, two and three would attack the left flank of the Pompeian legionaries while simultaneously cohorts four, five and six would attack Pompey's cavalry. When cohorts one, two and three moved onto the flank of Pompey's left wing, Plutarch writes that Pompey's men "had expected that they were going to surround the enemy, saw that they were being surrounded themselves."³² Appian reports that when Pompey learnt his left wing was being surrounded:

"Pompey ordered his infantry not to advance farther, not to break the line of formation, and not to hurl the javelin, but to open their ranks, bring their spears to rest, and so ward off the onset of the enemy. Some persons praise this order of Pompey as the best in a case where one is attacked in flank, but Caesar criticises it in his letters. He says that the blows are delivered with more force, and that the spirits of the men are raised, by running, while those who stand still lose courage by reason of their immobility and become excellent targets for those charging against them."³³

Appian writes that Pompey's left wing "was assailed with javelins in flank, where it stood immovable; until, finally, the assailants threw it into disorder, routed it, and this was the beginning of the victory."³⁴ The tenth cohort of the Pompeian first legion, being on the extreme left wing of the line, must have turned outwards to face the encircling three Caesarean cohorts (one, two and three) of the fourth line. Then as Appian records, these flank guards adopted open order and then attempted to ward off the incoming missiles. Plutarch states they were in close order, and to reconcile both accounts, Pompey's men were in open order before being surrounded, then when they were being encircled, the tenth cohort of the Pompeian first legion, after turning to face the threat, changed to close order so as to form a shield wall to deflect the missiles launched by the three outflanking Caesarean cohorts.

Seeing the danger they were in, Appian reports that the auxiliary infantry, possibly those that had earlier fired their missiles from behind the hastati, had withdrawn and taken up position behind the pilani, and now seeing the threat of being outflanked fled to the camp and carried away anything they could carrying.³⁵ Appian and Lucan claim that the Pompeian left wing began to give way and retire step by step in perfect order.³⁶ Appian further illustrates that when the rest of Pompey's legion perceived the disaster occurring on the left wing, they too retired slowly and in good order. This would indicate the Pompeian first legion was trying to withdraw before Caesar's three cohorts of pilani completely encircled them and attacked them in the rear. In order to maintain an unbroken front, as the first legion withdrew, so would the third legion next to it.

While Caesar's three cohorts of pilani (cohorts one, two and three) attacked the Pompeian legions flank, Caesar writes that he "ordered the third line which had been undisturbed and at that time had retained its position to advance. So, as they had come up fresh and vigorous in place of the exhausted troops."³⁷ The troops Caesar refers are the remaining 600 pilani of the tenth legion deployed 200 men

wide by three men deep, supported by 240 pilani of the adjacent legion. Because the Pompeian first legion was being attacked in the flank and rear, it could not replace its fatigued lines with fresh troops. This would give the tenth legion's third line a major advantage in fighting the Pompeian first legion. With the remaining pilani of the tenth legion now committed, the Pompeian first legion and third legion finally broke and routed.

Appian states that the rest of Pompey's Italian legions, "perceiving the disaster to the left wing, retired slowly at first, in good order, and still resisting as well as they could; but when the enemy, flushed with victory, pressed upon them they turned in flight." This would indicate Caesar's remaining legions began to advance towards the Pompeian line. Plutarch writes that after his defeat Pompey reflected "how in one hour he had lost the glory and the power which he had won in so many wars and battles."³⁸ This possibly indicates that from the moment the battle began, it took Caesar's army one hour to rout Pompey's army. Appian reports that Caesar sent heralds everywhere among the ranks of his soldiers to spare the lives of the Italians in Pompey's army but to kill Pompey's auxiliaries. Appian goes on to say:

"The heralds drew near to the retreating enemy and told them to stand still and fear not. As this proclamation was passed from man to man they halted, and the phrase "stand and fear not" began to be passed as a sort of watchword among Pompey's soldiers; for, being Italians, they were clad in the same style as Caesar's men and spoke the same language. Accordingly, the latter passed by them and fell upon the auxiliaries, who were not able to resist, and made a very great slaughter among them."³⁹

When Caesar saw the Pompeians being slain in the rout, according to Asinius Pollio; Caesar made the dictum: "They made this happen; they drove me to it. If I had dismissed my army, I Gaius Caesar, after all my victories, would have been condemned in their law courts."⁴⁰

When he saw his cavalry defeated, followed by the first and third legion, Caesar writes that Pompey mistrusting the rest of his army rode back to the camp.⁴¹ To be fair, it was not about Pompey mistrusting his troops, with the rout of his best veteran legions (the first and the third), Pompey was realistic enough to know that those legions in his army made up of raw levies were not going to stand and fight.

Caesar states that when Pompey returned to his camp, he retired to his tent and waited for events to unfold.⁴² In other words, Caesar is claiming Pompey had abandoned the army to its fate. Again, this is Caesarean political propaganda to insinuate Pompey's defeatist attitude ruled him as unfit to rule the republic. Given Pompey's distinguished military career, as most of the Pompeian army would be trying to flee to their camp as a rally point, Pompey was inside the camp trying to save his army from total destruction as Caesar had done at Dyrrachium. Caesar does state that when Pompey returned to the camp, he informed the centurions of the praetorian gate that he was going round the camp to encourage the guards of the camp.⁴³ Therefore, Pompey was preparing the camp's defence against attack. For Pompey all was not lost. Although his men were fatigued by the midday heat, Caesar implored his men to capture Pompey's camp. Lucan writes that Caesar:

"fearing that their camp would rally the fugitives, and that a night's rest would dispel their fears, he decided to march at once up to the enemy's rampart, and to strike while the iron was hot and panic irresistible. He felt no fear that this command would be grievous to his weary veterans. The soldiers needed but little encouragement to lead them to plunder."⁴⁴

Pompey's camp guards and the Thracian auxiliaries put up a stubborn resistance. Caesar writes that the camp defenders on the ramparts could no longer stand up to the multitude of javelins, and as many of the panic stricken Pompeians had thrown their weapons away, they had no interest in defending the camp.⁴⁵ When the Caesareans burst into the camp on the heels of the fleeing Pompeians, Pompey knew the camp could no longer be defended.

With some companions, Pompey escaped via the decuman gate and fled to Larissa, and then from Tempe to the sea, where he finally made his way to Egypt to seek the protection of the child king Ptolemy.⁴⁶ However, the king's counsellors had Pompey executed to gain political favour with Caesar. Other prominent commanders in Pompey's army that escaped are Afranius, Scipio, the younger Gnaeus Pompeius, Cato and Labienus. Brutus escaped the camp by a gate situated near some marshes and made his way at night to Larissa.⁴⁷ At Larissa, Brutus wrote a note to Caesar telling him where he was. Caesar offered Brutus a pardon and invited him to Caesar's camp. Before the battle, Plutarch writes that Caesar gave orders to his officers not to kill Brutus, and if Brutus refused to surrender, to leave him alone. Caesar apparently did this out of regard for Servilia, Brutus' mother. Plutarch then goes on to say that when Caesar was a young man, he was intimate with Servilia who was madly in love with him, and Caesar had some grounds to believe Brutus was his son.⁴⁸

After the Caesareans gained entry to the camp, many of the Pompeian soldiers fled to a surrounding hill. During the rout from the camp to the hill, Caesar reports that Domitius, one of Pompey's wing commanders was killed by the Caesarean cavalry.⁴⁹ Cicero accuses Mark Antony of causing his death.⁵⁰ Caesar then started to surround the hill with earthworks. The Pompeians, aware the hill had no water, and lacking confidence in the position, began to withdraw in mass by the ridgelines towards Larissa which is where the last camp of the Pompeian army had been. In response, Caesar divided his force and in order to cut off the Pompeians from escaping, with four legions Caesar marched to a distance of four miles, deployed and then advanced on the Pompeians. When the Pompeians observed what was happening, they stopped on a hill, which at its base had a river. Although night was approaching, Caesar's men build fortifications so as to cut off the Pompeians from the river. When the fortifications were complete, the Pompeians sent a deputation to discuss surrender. During the night, a few senators among the Pompeians escaped. In the morning, the Pompeians, having been abandoned by their leaders, came down from the hill and surrendered. Caesar's soldiers were under strict orders not to harm any of the Pompey's legionaries. Later Caesar enrolled many of the Pompey's legionaries into his legions.

Dio reports that of those Pompeian knights and senators that Caesar had captured and spared in previous campaigns, Caesar put them to death.⁵¹ Caesar gives the death toll for his army at 200 legionaries and about thirty centurions.⁵² The low number of casualties indicate the fighting fell to Caesar's tenth legion. Pompey's army lost 15,000 dead and 24,000 surrendered. Plutarch writes that according to Asinius Pollio 6,000 soldiers fell in the battle.⁵³ In the number of men lost at Pharsalus, Appian reports:

"the losses of Italians on each side — for there was no report of the losses of auxiliaries, either because of their multitude or because they were despised — were as follows: in Caesar's army, thirty centurions and 200 legionaries, or, as some authorities have it, 1,200; on Pompey's side ten senators, among whom was Lucius Domitius, the same who had been sent to succeed Caesar himself in Gaul, and about forty distinguished knights. Some exaggerating writers put the loss in the remainder of his forces at 25,000, but Asinius Pollio, who was one of Caesar's officers in this battle, records the number of dead Pompeians found as 6,000."⁵⁴

Orosius reports Pompey's losses at 15,000 troops and thirty three centurions killed.⁵⁵

Endnotes

- ¹ Appian (The Civil War 2 77), (Orosius 6 21)
- ² Caesar (BC 3 86)
- ³ Appian (The Civil War 2 76)
- ⁴ Appian (The Civil Wars 2 78), (Dio 41 58)
- ⁵ Caesar (BC 3 90)
- ⁶ Appian (The Civil Wars 2 78)
- ⁷ Lucan (The Civil War 7 514)
- ⁸ Josephus (The Jewish Wars 3 25 258)
- ⁹ Appian (The Civil War 2 78), Caesar (BC 3 93), Florus (Epitome 2 48), Plutarch (Life of Caesar 45), (Life of Pompey 71)
- ¹⁰ Caesar (BC 3 92)
- ¹¹ Appian (BC 2 79)
- ¹² Appian (The Civil War 2 70)
- ¹³ Suetonius (Life of Julius Caesar 56), Caesar could have been attempting to undermine Pompey's reputation by highlighting the fact that Pompey was militarily incompetent and lacked the essential characteristics of good leadership required to rule the republic. Therefore, Caesar's criticism of Pompey's tactic should be dismissed as political propaganda.
- ¹⁴ Plutarch (Pompey 71)
- ¹⁵ Florus (Epitome 2 46), Lucan (The Civil War 7 470), (Plutarch Caesar 44), (Plutarch Pompey 71)
- ¹⁶ Appian (BC 2 82)
- ¹⁷ Cassius Dio (41 60)
- ¹⁸ Caesar (BC 3 93)
- ¹⁹ Plutarch (Pompey 71)
- ²⁰ Caesar (BC 3 95)
- ²¹ Suetonius (Life of Julius Caesar 56)
- ²² Florus (Epitome 2 48-49)
- ²³ Florus (Epitome 2 50), Frontinus (Stratagems 4 7 32), Plutarch (Caesar 45), (Pompey 69), Polyaeus (Stratagems 8 23 25), (Excerpts 18 7)
- ²⁴ Plutarch (Pompey 71)
- ²⁵ Appian (The Civil War 2 78)
- ²⁶ Lucan (The Civil War 7 526 – 529)
- ²⁷ Appian (The Civil War 2 79)
- ²⁸ Caesar (BC 3 93)
- ²⁹ Appian (The Civil War 2 79)
- ³⁰ Florus (Epitome 2 49)
- ³¹ Caesar (BC 3 93)
- ³² Plutarch (Life of Pompey 71), (Florus Epitome 2 47)
- ³³ Appian (The Civil War 2 79)
- ³⁴ Appian (The Civil War 2 79)
- ³⁵ Appian (The Civil War 2 80)
- ³⁶ Appian (The Civil War 2 80), (Lucan 7 545-547)
- ³⁷ Caesar (BC 3 94)
- ³⁸ Plutarch (Pompey 71), Plutarch (Pompey 73)
- ³⁹ Appian (The Civil War 2 80), (Florus 2 Epitome 50-51), Polyaeus (Stratagems 8 23 29), (Excerpts 4 14)
- ⁴⁰ Plutarch (Caesar 46), Suetonius (Life of Julius Caesar 30 4)
- ⁴¹ Caesar (BC 3 94)
- ⁴² Appian (The Civil War 2 81), Caesar (BC 3 94), Plutarch (Caesar 45), (Pompey 72)
- ⁴³ Caesar (BC 3 94)
- ⁴⁴ Lucan (The Civil War 7 730 – 735)
- ⁴⁵ Caesar (BC 3 95)
- ⁴⁶ Appian (BC 2 81), Valerius Maximus (4 5 5)

- ⁴⁷ Plutarch (Brutus 6)
- ⁴⁸ Plutarch (Brutus 5)
- ⁴⁹ Caesar (BC 3 99)
- ⁵⁰ Cicero Second Philippic (71)
- ⁵¹ Cassius Dio (41 62), Polyaeus (Stratagems 8 23 30)
- ⁵² Caesar (BC 3 99)
- ⁵³ Plutarch (Pompey 72)
- ⁵⁴ Appian (The Civil War 2 82)
- ⁵⁵ Orosius (6 15)