

A careful re-examination of the well-documented events on the Ides of March yields not only a radically readjusted chronology of what transpired that morning but also a much better appreciation of the sophistication of the plot laid against Caesar. Suetonius (*Iul.* 81.4) informs us that Caesar left home at the 5<sup>th</sup> hour (ca. 10-11 AM) to make his way to the Campus Martius, where the senate had been awaiting his arrival in the Curia Pompeia. Caesar nearly sent Mark Antony in his place to dismiss the senators because of bad omens, poor health, and frightening dreams, but the conspirator D. Brutus persuaded Caesar to overcome his hesitation and be carried in his litter to the Campus Martius. The *communis opinio* (e.g. Becht, *Regeste* (1911), 71; more recently, Ramsey, *CQ* 2000.453 and comm. *Cic. Phil.* I-II (2003), 2) is that the senate had gathered at dawn (1<sup>st</sup> hour), leading Horsfall (*G&R* 1974.199) to remark that “the Senate must have waited for some five hours [for Caesar to arrive].” In this paper, I argue that the wait was, at most, half that long. To assume a lapse of five hours obscures the cleverness with which the conspirators plotted and moved about on the morning of the Ides so as to escape suspicion.

The false conclusion that the senate met at sunrise on the Ides rests on (a) the common assumption that dawn was the usual time for the senate to be convened (Willems, *Sénat* 2.147; Mommsen, *Staatsr.* 3.2.920; Bonnefond-Coudry (1989), 227) and (b) two passages said to support this view for the Ides (Dio 44.16.2; Nicolaus Damascus 23.84). A careful examination of the evidence reveals, however, that in all instances in which the Senate is explicitly said to have met at dawn, the situation was one of grave emergency. Such was definitely *not* the case on the Ides of March, when Caesar summoned a meeting simply to debate and resolve Mark Antony’s obstruction of the election of P. Dolabella to a suffect consulship (*Cic. Phil.* 2.88). Likewise what Dio tells us is that a band of the conspirators, not necessarily the whole senate, gathered at dawn, while Nicolaus of Damascus states more loosely that the senate had been awaiting Caesar’s arrival “since early in the morning” (ἐξ ἑωθινοῦ).

Two other sources point inescapably to the conclusion that the senate was definitely *not* going to be convened at dawn. According to Valerius Maximus (8.11.2) Caesar called at the house of Domitius Calvinus (cos. 53) on the morning of the Ides. Undoubtedly Caesar did so as *pontifex maximus* so as to perform with his fellow *pontifex* Calvinus the customary public sacrifice on the festival of Anna Perenna (*Macr. Sat.* 1.12.6; *Lyd. Mens.* 4.36). Since the sacrifice would not be performed until after sunrise, it would have been impossible for Caesar to meet the senate at dawn. Another passage amply supports this conclusion. According to Plutarch (*Brut.* 14.4), M. Brutus and some of the other conspirators gathered on the Ides at the house of Cassius to participate in a *toga virilis* ceremony, and went down into the Forum. How could the chief members of the conspiracy take such a risk of failing to be present in the senate (in the Campus Martius) when Caesar arrived, assuming that the meeting was called for sunrise?

All becomes clear, if the first two hours of the day were reserved, as usual, for the morning *salutatio* (Martial 4.8.1), and the senate was to have met at, perhaps, the 3<sup>rd</sup> hour (ca. 8-9 AM), the time when courts typically began the day (Martial 4.8.2). This allows time for Caesar to perform with Calvinus the sacrifice to Anna Perenna and for the chief conspirators to meet, without arousing suspicion, under the guise of honoring Cassius’ son. While they reviewed their plans for the murder, another group of their co-conspirators arrived by sun-up at the meeting place of the senate (Dio, loc. cit.) so as to be in position and leave nothing to chance, just in case Caesar turned up early. As the day unfolded, Caesar delayed his arrival, nearly cancelling the meeting, but the wait by senate was closer to two, as opposed to five hours: long enough, but to assume that Brutus, Cassius, and all the others hung about doing nothing for five full hours grossly underestimates the sophistication of the plot that was laid against Caesar.