

## ‘BEWARE THE IDES OF MARCH!’: AN ASTROLOGICAL PREDICTION?\*

This paper will examine the circumstances that inspired the famous utterance attributed to the *haruspex* Spurinna, ‘Beware the Ides of March!’<sup>1</sup> Recently the argument has been made that this warning to Caesar was based upon an astrological calculation, rather than on the usual arts of an *haruspex* who read signs of the future by inspecting the entrails of sacrificial animals (*exta*) or by interpreting bolts of lightning (*fulgura*) and portents (*ostenta*).<sup>2</sup> As intriguing as this astrological theory is, I am convinced that it is fatally flawed, and I intend to show why it must ultimately be rejected. The question is not merely an academic one, having to do with the methods employed by a particular seer on a given occasion. Rather, if it can be established as even probable that Spurinna based his prophecy upon an astrological calculation, which helped convince the conspirators that Caesar was vulnerable to attack on the Ides as being an unlucky day for him according to the stars, then we are presented with a very significant and hitherto unsuspected instance of astrology influencing the course of public affairs at Rome several decades before astrology came into its own under the early emperors.<sup>3</sup> According to such a reconstruction, astrology played a key role in determining the date of one of the most fateful murders in Roman history. It is the contention of this paper, on the contrary, that there is no reason whatsoever to attribute Spurinna’s prophecy to an astrological calculation.

The notion that astrology, rather than the traditional arts of *haruspicy*, may lie behind the Ides of March prophecy rests entirely upon a detail contained in a passage in Valerius Maximus (8.11.2), namely that Spurinna made his prediction thirty days in advance of Caesar’s murder. The passage is worth quoting at length, with italics drawing attention to the element that concerns the thirty days.

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<sup>1</sup> Very little is known about Spurinna, apart from the fact that his name is Etruscan (W. Schulze, *Zur Geschichte lateinischer Eigennamen* [Berlin, 1933], 65, 94–5), and that he was a very distinguished practitioner of the Etruscan art of *haruspicy*, perhaps even being the chief *haruspex*, if he is the figure whom Cicero (*Div.* 2.52) describes as the *summus haruspex* (see below, n. 60). C. Thulin, ‘*Haruspices*’, *RE* 7.2 (1912), 2434, cites Cic. *Fam.* 6.18.1 as evidence that Spurinna was made a senator by Caesar, but the passage is too general to warrant this conclusion. Spurinna’s fame rests on the tradition that he successfully predicted Caesar’s murder on the Ides of March: F. Münzer, ‘*Spurinna* (2)’, *RE* 3A.2 (1929), 1888.

<sup>2</sup> M. Molnar, ‘Astrological omens commemorated on Roman coins: the Ides of March’, *The Celator* 8.11 (1994), 6–9, building upon a conclusion drawn by F. Cramer, *Astrology in Roman Law and Politics* (Philadelphia, 1954), 77. For the threefold division of the Etruscan discipline of *haruspicy* alluded to above (the *extispex*, *fulgurator*, and *interpres ostentorum*), see Cic., *Div.* 2.109, with the note ad loc. of Arthur Stanley Pease, *M. Tulli Ciceronis De Divinatione* (Urbana, 1920–3), 527.

<sup>3</sup> Augustus, for instance, published his horoscope and issued coins depicting his natal sign Capricorn (Suet. *Aug.* 94.12), while this successor Tiberius kept the astrologer Thrasyllus on his staff and treated him as a close advisor and confidant (Suet. *Tib.* 14.4; Tac. *Ann.* 6.21).

Spurinnae quoque in coniectandis deorum monitis efficacior scientia apparuit quam urbs Romana uoluit. *Praedixerat C. Caesari ut proximos xxx dies quasi fatales caueret, quorum ultimus erat Idus Martiae.* Eo cum forte mane uterque in domum Calvini Domiti ad officium conuenisset, Caesar Spurinnae ‘ecquid scis Idus iam Martias uenisse?’ At is ‘ecquid scis illas nondum praeterisse?’ Abiecerat alter timorem tamquam exacto tempore suspecto, alter ne extremam quidem eius partem periculo uacuum esse arbitratus est.

In grasping the intent of warnings sent by the gods, Spurinna enjoyed a more capable understanding than the city of Rome desired. For *Spurinna had forewarned Julius Caesar that he should be wary of the next thirty days as being fraught with peril to his life, a period that was to end with the Ides (15th) of March.* And when on the morning of that day, both Caesar and Spurinna by chance arrived together at the house of Domitius Calvinus to pay their respects, Caesar said to Spurinna ‘You are aware, surely, that the Ides of March have now arrived?’ But Spurinna replied, ‘Surely you realize that they have not yet passed?’ The one man (Caesar) had cast aside fear, just as if the mistrusted period of time had passed, while the other (Spurinna) judged that not even the final part of the interval was free from danger. (Val. Max. 8.11.2)

More than forty years ago, Cramer asserted with confidence that ‘there can hardly be a doubt that the already mentioned celebrated haruspex Spurinna arrived at his famous prophecy by means of astrology’.<sup>4</sup> Cramer did not present any reasons for drawing this conclusion, but in a recent article, Molnar, an amateur classicist and by profession a physicist, has drawn attention to the feature of Spurinna’s prophecy that doubtless lies behind Cramer’s assumption.<sup>5</sup> As Molnar (p. 6) writes, ‘predicting that a certain date in the future would be dangerous for a specific individual was not the customary practice of an orthodox haruspex’. He goes on to point out that haruspices more typically judged a particular undertaking at hand as either promising or foreboding, based upon their inspection of the entrails of a sacrificial animal.<sup>6</sup> Hence, the argument goes, Spurinna most likely employed astrology, rather than haruspicy, to single out the Ides of March as a day fraught with peril for Caesar.

Molnar’s statement of the facts is subject to two serious objections. First of all, He distorts Valerius’ account of the prophecy by treating the Ides of March as if it were the *only* day, or even the chief day, on which Caesar was at risk. Valerius Maximus, by contrast, does not credit Spurinna with naming any one day in particular on which Caesar should be on his guard up to and including the Ides, and we find in Suetonius a very similar version of the prophecy, minus a reference to a specific number of days leading up to the Ides:

Et immolantem haruspex Spurinna monuit, caueret periculum, quod non ultra Martias Idus proferretur.

And the haruspex Spurinna warned Caesar, when he was performing a sacrifice, to beware of danger that would extend not beyond the Ides of March. (Suet. *Iul.* 81.2)

In this respect, both Valerius and Suetonius give a significantly different version of the warning from the well-known utterance ‘Beware the Ides of March!’, which has gained such wide currency thanks to Shakespeare (*Julius Caesar* 1.2.18).<sup>7</sup>

Secondly, Molnar’s generalization about the differences that distinguish an

<sup>4</sup> Cramer (n. 2), 77.

<sup>5</sup> Molnar (n. 2), 6–7.

<sup>6</sup> For example, haruspices (μάντις) declared unfavourable the sacrifices performed by Caesar on the Ides of March, before he entered the meeting of the Senate where he was murdered (Nic. Dam. *Vit. Caes.* 24.86).

<sup>7</sup> Even in antiquity, however, this version of the prophecy, which singled out the Ides as the sole day of danger, was also known: e.g. Vell. Pat. 2.57.2 *haruspices praemonuerant ut diligentissime Iduum Martiarum caueret diem*; Plut. *Caes.* 63.5 *τις αὐτῷ μάντις ἡμέρα Μαρτίου μηνός, ἣν Εἰδούς Ῥωμαῖοι καλοῦσι, προείποι μέγαν φυλάττεσθαι κίνδυνον*; cf. App. *B.Civ.* 2.153.

astrological from an haruspical prophecy places too narrow a restriction on the sorts of prophecy that haruspices could and sometimes did make. On occasion, it is clear that haruspices employed their craft to predict the future course of a person's life, much as an astrologer did as a matter of practice. For instance, when in the last year of Augustus' life (A.D. 14), a bolt of lightning struck a statue of the emperor, haruspices (*μάντεις*) predicted that his death was destined to follow 100 days later (Dio 56.29.4; Suet. *Aug.* 97.2). They drew this conclusion, we are informed, because the lightning melted the letter 'C' in the name 'Caesar', which the seers interpreted as standing for the Roman numeral 100. Furthermore, the portion of the name that remained was taken as a sign portending Augustus' deification after death because *aesar* was an Etruscan word meaning god. We should be wary, therefore, of drawing the conclusion that a given prophecy sounds more astrological than haruspical simply because it issues a warning, or makes a prediction, concerning a certain date or period of time. Given appropriate cues, an haruspex might well single out a particular future date as somehow fateful.<sup>8</sup> We need not postulate a recourse to star charts in all such instances.

Furthermore, the supposition that Spurinna, a leading haruspex, employed astrology to arrive at his famous warning to Caesar flies in the face of the fundamental rivalry that traditionally existed between astrologers and haruspices.<sup>9</sup> Normally the practitioners of these two means of predicting the future kept to their own devices and did not poach on each other's territory. By casting a horoscope that takes into account the position of the stars (both fixed and wandering, i.e. the planets, Sun, and Moon), astrologers clearly had the advantage over their rivals in foretelling events in a person's life, whereas haruspices were better equipped to interpret portents.<sup>10</sup> Before accepting the theory, therefore, that Spurinna was adept at both arts, one would like to be able to identify at least one other figure in this age who can be shown to have practised the arts of these two ordinarily separate and competing professions.

Astrology, it should be noted, was just beginning to gain currency in Rome of the late Republic,<sup>11</sup> and so we know of only a very few figures who were adept at this art in the age of Spurinna. One of these individuals, L. Tarutius Firmanus, who at the request of M. Terentius Varro retrospectively cast a horoscope for Romulus, Rome's first king and founder,<sup>12</sup> does appear to have an Etruscan name,<sup>13</sup> but there is no evidence that he was acquainted with the Etruscan art of haruspicy. A slightly more promising candidate for the model we are seeking, someone who may have dabbled in both astrology and haruspicy, is provided by P. Nigidius Figulus, praetor in 58 and one of the four senators whom Cicero selected in 63 B.C. to record the testimony of the witnesses and the course of the Senate's deliberations after the arrest of the Catilinarian conspirators in December (Cic. *Sull.* 42). Nigidius was a learned man and a mystic, who was noted for his Pythagoreanism and also famed for his prediction of the

<sup>8</sup> To take another example, in 65 B.C. haruspices warned that the year 63 was fated to be bloody as a result of civil war unless heaven could be appeased (Cic. *Cat.* 3.19–21, *Div.* 2.45–6; Sall. *Cat.* 47.2; Dio 37.9.1–2).

<sup>9</sup> A. Bouché-Leclercq, *L' Astrologie grecque* (Paris, 1899), 550.

<sup>10</sup> *OCD*<sup>3</sup>, s.v. 'astrology' and 'haruspices'.

<sup>11</sup> It was not until the age of Sulla that astrology is attested as having any appreciable influence on public figures in Rome: E. Rawson, *Intellectual Life in the Late Roman Republic* (London, 1985), 307.

<sup>12</sup> Plut. *Rom.* 12; cf. Cic. *Div.* 2.98. For a discussion, see A. Grafton and N. Swerdlow, *CQ* 35 (1985), 454–65 and *CP* 81 (1986), 148–53.

<sup>13</sup> Schulze (n. 1), 241.

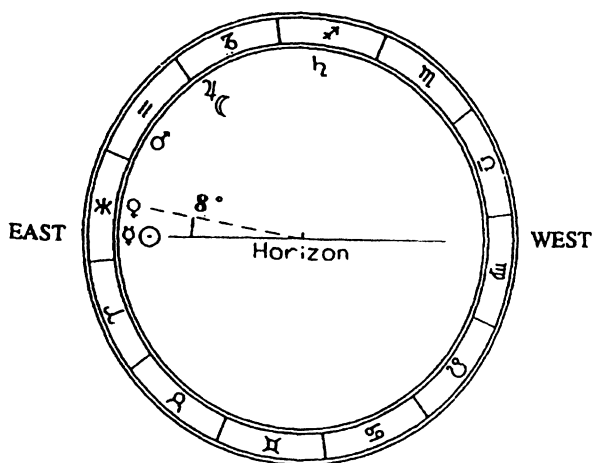


FIGURE 1. This zodiacal chart shows the position of the Sun, Moon, and planets at sunrise on 15 March 44 B.C. The Sun (☉), Mercury (☿), and Venus (♀) are in Pisces (♓); Mars (♂) is in Aquarius (♒); Jupiter (♃) and the Moon (☾) in Capricorn (♐); and Saturn (♄) in Sagittarius (♏).

future greatness of the emperor Augustus.<sup>14</sup> Nigidius is credited with making this prediction on the day Augustus was born in 63 B.C. by taking into account the hour of his birth, and Nigidius' expertise in astrology came to be so widely recognized by later generations that Lucan cast him as the astrologer who, in Book 1 of his poem (639–72), predicts the coming horrors of civil war. Very slim indeed, however, is any evidence that Nigidius may also have been adept at haruspicy. His possible Etruscan origin and the title of one of his works, *De Extis*, may point in this direction, but it is impossible to judge the extent of his expertise in the arts of an haruspex from the content of the one extant fragment.<sup>15</sup>

For these reasons, therefore, Molnar's theory that a distinguished haruspex of Spurinna's stature may have dabbled in astrology seems dubious. It still remains, however, to consider Molnar's most attractive argument in favour of his theory that astrology lies behind Spurinna's warning, namely that the thirty days leading up to the Ides of March, and the Ides of March itself, were somehow astrologically ominous for the fate of Caesar. Casting a horoscope for the Ides of March (represented by Figure 1), Molnar draws attention to two extremely baleful configurations of the planets.

The first significant feature pointed out by Molnar is the position of Saturn in *square* (quartile) to the Sun. That is, Saturn is separated from the Sun by two

<sup>14</sup> Suet. *Aug.* 94.5; Dio 45.1.3–5. Jerome (Hieron. *Euseb. Chron.* p. 156 ed. Helm) styles Nigidius 'Pythagoricus et magus' (cf. Cic. *Tim.* 1 and Schol. Bob. ad *Vat.* 14, p. 146 ed. Stangl, for Nigidius' reputation as a Neo-Pythagorean).

<sup>15</sup> Fr. 81 Swoboda (preserved by Gell. 16.6.12 and Macrob. *Sat.* 6.9.5, cf. Nonius 53.23). E. Rawson, *JRS* 68 (1978), 138, goes so far as to characterize him as 'an expert in the *disciplina Etrusca*', stating that 'arguments for Etruscan origin remain tempting'. However, elsewhere Rawson herself (n. 11), 128, n. 49, makes the point that the extant fragments of Nigidius' grammatical works reveal no trace of a knowledge of Etruscan, and there is nothing Etruscan in the Greek adaptation of a *Tonitruale* attributed to Nigidius by John Lydus (*De ost.* 27–38): see W. Kroll, 'Nigidius', *RE* 17.1 (1936), 208.

astrological houses of 30° each—Saturn being in Sagittarius (at the top of the chart), while the Sun is sitting on the eastern horizon in Pisces. This quartile position of Saturn—always a baleful object—was counted by astrologers as among the worst, and in a natal horoscope was associated with death by violence.<sup>16</sup> The second feature singled out by Molnar is the position of Venus, Caesar's special star. Caesar's devotion to Venus as the divine ancestress of the Julian family and his protectress is, of course, well known. One need only recall the coins depicting Venus that were issued by Caesar in the final years of his life, the temple dedicated to Venus Genetrix in Caesar's new Julian Forum, and the games in honour of Venus Genetrix established by Caesar in 46.<sup>17</sup> As the horoscope cast by Molnar reveals, on the Ides of March in 44 B.C. Venus, which was in the eastern sky, entered within 8° of the Sun, and so experienced what is known as a heliacal setting. That is, Venus on the Ides of March disappeared into the Sun's glare and was lost sight of for the next two months until it re-emerged as an evening star in the western sky. In the view of ancient astrologers, during a period of heliacal setting, a planet's powers were weakened and made vulnerable to the effects of any evil powers resulting from unfavourable conjunctions,<sup>18</sup> which on the Ides of March are to be discovered in the position of Saturn, in square to both the Sun and Venus, as well as to Mercury.

Molnar's horoscope, to be sure, accurately represents the locations of the heavenly bodies. Testing, for instance, the positions given for the Sun and Venus, because the precise degree of separation is the central feature of Molnar's argument, we find that at sunrise in Rome on 15 March 44 B.C. (6:17 LMT) the true longitude of the Sun was 352° 10', and the geocentric longitude of Venus was 344°.<sup>19</sup> These figures yield a result close enough to Molnar's calculation of 8° of separation, which he shows to have been the canonical astrological norm for the heliacal angle for Venus.<sup>20</sup> It is conceivable, therefore, that an ancient astrologer could have regarded the thirty days leading up to the Ides as 'fraught with peril' (*fatales*) for Caesar because over the course of those days, in the face of the baleful Saturn, Caesar's 'protecting star' Venus was growing progressively weaker as it approached the Sun's blinding rays. Furthermore, given the heliacal setting of Venus on the Ides, we can see why an astrologer might interpret that day as having critical importance in Caesar's horoscope.

The great weakness, however, of Molnar's theory is that it fails to take into consideration the emphasis that both Valerius Maximus and Suetonius place upon the circumstance that the danger to Caesar's life was to *expire* as soon as the last hour of the Ides of March had passed. Valerius characterizes that day as the 'last segment' (*extremam partem*) of the thirty *dies fatales*, while Suetonius states that the danger 'would extend not beyond the Ides of March' (*non ultra Mart. Id. proferretur*). The many references in antiquity to the famous verbal exchange between Caesar and Spurinna on the Ides of March itself make it abundantly plain that according to Spurinna's prophecy, Caesar was at risk until, *but only until*, the day had entirely

<sup>16</sup> Firmicus, *Mathesis* 7.23.1: *Si Saturnus Solem quadrata aut diametra radiatione respexerit, biothanati nascuntur*; cf. Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* 3.10.

<sup>17</sup> For the coins, see S. Weinstock, *Divus Julius* (Oxford, 1971), 377; 81–2 on the temple and 88–90 on the games.

<sup>18</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* 2.6: when the planets are too near the Sun to be visible (*ὑπὸ τὰς αὐγὰς ὄντες*) 'they experience a lessening of their astral effects' (*ἄνεσιν τῶν ἀποτελουμένων ποιούσιν*).

<sup>19</sup> Calculations here and below (n. 22) were made by using *SkyClock*, an electronic ephemeris compiled by the late Pierre Brind'Amour.

<sup>20</sup> Firmicus, *Mathesis* 2.9.1: 8° of separation from the Sun cause Venus to be either a morning or evening star; cf. Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* 3.10.

passed.<sup>21</sup> Shakespeare (*Julius Caesar* 3.1.1–2) memorably captures this element of the prophecy in the lines:

CAESAR to SOOTHSAYER: The Ides of March are come.  
 SOOTHSAYER (*softly*): Ay, Caesar, but not gone.

Molnar's horoscope, by contrast, not only places undue emphasis on the Ides of March as somehow being the *single* day on which Caesar's life was at risk (as we noted already above), but it completely fails to explain why, according to Spurinna's prophecy, the risk to Caesar was supposed to extend through the last hour of the Ides and no further. Granted that Venus lost its power to protect Caesar on the Ides when it plunged into the Sun's glare, the fact still remains that this feature of Caesar's horoscope was no less ominous on the days following the Ides than it was on the Ides itself because it would be approximately two months before Venus re-emerged from the Sun so as to become Caesar's protecting star once more.<sup>22</sup> This stumbling-block alone should be sufficient to reveal as untenable the astrological explanation proposed by Molnar.

What, then, if not the position of the stars, inspired Spurinna to warn Caesar that his life was in danger? Two pieces of information provide a useful starting-point for answering this question. On the one hand, as reported by Suetonius (quoted above, p. 441), Spurinna uttered his warning about the danger leading up to the Ides when Caesar was performing a sacrifice (*immolantem*), and on the other, according to Valerius Maximus, Spurinna characterized the thirty days following his prophecy (*proximos xxx dies*), ending with the Ides of March, as fraught with peril for Caesar. Valerius' account, therefore, permits us to assign Spurinna's prophecy to either 14 February, if February had twenty-eight days in 44 B.C., or 15 February, if 44 B.C. was a leap year.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, Cicero (*Div.* 1.119), a contemporary observer, informs us that 'shortly before Caesar's murder' (*paulo ante interitum Caesaris*), Spurinna interpreted the entrails of a sacrificial animal as portending danger to Caesar's life. The date of that sacrifice can have been no later than 15 February because Cicero states that it was performed by Caesar on the first occasion when he wore a purple robe and sat upon a golden *sella*, two symbols of Caesar's power which we know were displayed at the Lupercalia on 15 February (*Cic. Phil.* 2.85). The relevant passage in *De Divinatione* reads as follows:

Qui cum immolaret illo die quo primum in sella aurea sedit et cum purpurea ueste processit in exitis bouis opimi cor non fuit. . . . Qua ille rei nouitate <non est> percussus, cum Spurinna

<sup>21</sup> Val. Max. 8.11.2 is the earliest extant source to relate the anecdote involving the repartee between Caesar and Spurinna on the Ides. The tale is also told by Suet. *Jul.* 81.4, and without naming Spurinna, by Plut. *Caes.* 63.2; Dio 44.18.4; and App. *B. Civ.* 2.149, 153.

<sup>22</sup> Molnar (n. 2), 8–9, grossly underestimates the length of time required for this to have occurred, putting it 'a few weeks later'. The actual date of Venus' heliacal rising, following the Ides of March 44 B.C., was approximately 15 May, when at sunset in Rome (19:06 LMT) the true longitude of the Sun was 51° 27', and the geocentric longitude of Venus was 59° 42'.

<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, we cannot say whether 45 or 44 or 43 was a leap year in the new Julian calendar—all three being potential candidates. What we do know is (i) that two of the first five years of Julius Caesar's reformed calendar (45–41 B.C.) contained an intercalary day; and (ii) that on the basis of Dio (48.33.4), one of those two years was 41 B.C.: see T. Rice Holmes, *Ancient Britain and the Invasions of Julius Caesar* (Oxford, 1907), 715, 717–23, summarizing the arguments for and against intercalation in 44. I thank John D. Morgan for discussing with me by e-mail the current state of this thorny question.

diceret timendum esse ne et consilium et uita deficeret; earum enim rerum utramque a corde proficisci.

For when Caesar was performing a sacrifice on that day on which for the first time he sat on a gilded chair and went forth wearing a purple robe, in the entrails of a splendid bull there was no heart.<sup>24</sup> . . . Yet Caesar was <not> shaken by the strangeness of this thing, although Spurinna said that he must fear that both his plan<sup>25</sup> and his life might falter and fail on the grounds that each of these proceeds from the heart. (Cic. Div. 1.119)

It is tempting to assign the incident described by Cicero to 15 February, given the high drama of the Lupercalia in 44, at which Caesar tested the political waters by having Antony offer him a crown. The 15th seems the ideal occasion for Caesar to have displayed his purple robe and crown for the first time,<sup>26</sup> and if the sacrifice made ominous by the missing *cor* took place on the 15th and inspired the warning reported by Valerius Maximus, then the thirty *dies fatales* leading up to the Ides of March may be interpreted as supporting the conclusion drawn long ago by Matzat that 44 was a leap year.<sup>27</sup> Since, however, we do not know for certain whether February contained twenty-eight or twenty-nine days in 44, we cannot exclude the possibility that the prophecy reported by Valerius (and so too, perhaps, the incident described by Cicero) may have taken place one day earlier, on the 14th.<sup>28</sup>

We can, of course, readily understand why the seer interpreted the prodigy recounted by Cicero as he did. A missing *cor*, which we find attested on other occasions as well,<sup>29</sup> was a distinctly ominous feature of the *exta*,<sup>30</sup> whether we suppose that the heart vanished because the seer practised sleight of hand, or because the organ was withered or displaced in the beast's chest cavity.<sup>31</sup> Another factor that doubtless guided Spurinna in drawing his conclusion about the significance of the missing heart was the common knowledge that Caesar was constantly exposed to the threat of assassination

<sup>24</sup> The same account of the sacrifice and trappings of Caesar is given by both Val. Max. 1.6.13 and Pliny, *N.H.* 11.186, but whereas Valerius includes the detail of Spurinna's warning about the danger threatening Caesar's *consilium* and *vita*, Pliny mentions neither Spurinna nor his prophecy. Both doubtless go back in one way or another to Cicero (so Weinstock [n. 17], 344, n. 11). D. Wardle notes in his commentary on Book 1 of Val. Max. (Oxford, 1998), 210 that Val. Max. has recast the story to glorify Caesar.

<sup>25</sup> Weinstock (n. 17), 345 interprets *consilium* as an allusion to Caesar's plan to have Antony offer him the diadem, which suits a date no later than 15 February since afterwards Caesar seems to have abandoned the intention of having himself crowned. Rawson (n. 15), 143 tentatively draws the same conclusion.

<sup>26</sup> Weinstock (n. 17), 331 and Rawson (n. 15), 143 without hesitation assign the first display of these emblems of power to the Lupercalia.

<sup>27</sup> H. Matzat, *Römische Chronologie* I (Berlin, 1883), 11–18.

<sup>28</sup> So E. Meyer, *Caesars Monarchie*<sup>3</sup> (Stuttgart, 1922), 526, n. 2, speculating that Caesar may have resigned his fourth dictatorship and assumed his new office as 'dictator for life' on 14 February, taking that occasion to wear the purple robe and sit upon the gilded chair for the first time. U. Wilcken, *Abh. Akad. Berlin*. 1 (1940), 24, n. 4 accepts Meyer's conclusion, but E. Hohl, *Klio* 34 (1942), 110–12 is rightly sceptical about singling out 14 February since all we know for certain is that Caesar was still *dictator IV* on 26 Jan. at the *Feriae Latinae* (*CIL* I<sup>2</sup> p. 50) and *dictator perpetuus* on 15 Feb. (Cic. *Phil.* 2.87).

<sup>29</sup> For example, on the day of the murder of the emperor Pertinax (*SHA Pert.* 11.2–3), and without reference to a particular occasion (Pliny, *N.H.* 28.11; Iambl. *Myst.* 3.16).

<sup>30</sup> *Auspicia* were classified as 'deadly' (*pestifera*) when the heart was missing from the entrails, or the lobe (*caput*) from the liver: *pestifera auspicia esse dicebant cum cor in extis aut caput in iocinore non fuisset* (Paul. ex Fest. p. 244M).

<sup>31</sup> Cicero (*Div.* 2.37) opts for the latter explanation, arguing that no living creature can survive without a heart but that an animal might sustain life with a diseased and shrivelled one. Rawson (n. 15), 143 points out that if Spurinna tried to spirit away the *cor*, he would have required, at the very least, the co-operation of his assistant, the *uictimarius*.

while he remained in Rome. Our ancient sources reveal that rumours of multiple plots against the life of Caesar were rife in the weeks and months leading up to his murder on the Ides of March. Nicolaus of Damascus in his biography of Augustus (*Vit. Caes.* 23.81) recounts the details of several of these aborted plots, in addition to the successful one on the Ides of March, and Suetonius (*Iul.* 80.4) gives very nearly the same account. Furthermore, since one of those aborted plots aimed at murdering Caesar when he was holding elections, we can be almost certain that the formation of that particular plot pre-dated the ominous sacrifice in mid February that is described by Cicero. This conclusion follows from the fact that the elections in 44 appear to have been held a week or two after the Lupercalia (15 February),<sup>32</sup> and since the electoral assembly had presumably been announced in advance by the statutory *trinundinum*, the plot to murder Caesar while he was conducting the elections must have taken shape during the first week or two of February.<sup>33</sup> This reconstruction of the chronology permits us to assume that at the time of Spurinna's interpretation of the ominous sacrifice recounted by Cicero, it would have been possible for the haruspex to have heard rumours of this and/or some of the other plots as well. It should come as no surprise to learn, therefore, that Spurinna interpreted the missing heart (the locus of life) as portending a threat against the life of Caesar. One has to wonder, however, what reason Spurinna could have had in mid-February to single out the following thirty days in particular as being fraught with peril for Caesar and for naming so far in advance, as Valerius Maximus claims he did, the Ides of March as the end of the perilous period.

One relevant factor that should be taken into consideration is the fact that following the Lupercalia, the conspirators had a very limited number of weeks within which to carry out their intention to murder Caesar. This limit was imposed by Caesar's plan to leave Rome in order to conduct his projected campaign against the Parthians in the east. During his absence, which was expected to last for several years,<sup>34</sup> Caesar would be in a military camp, surrounded by an armed bodyguard of loyal soldiers. There

<sup>32</sup> At least the elections to fill the consulships for 43 and 42 are placed after the Lupercalia by Nicolaus of Damascus (*Vit. Caes.* 22.77), and this chronology suits the story told about the write-in candidacies of the deposed tribunes C. Epidius Marullus and L. Caesetius Flavus (Suet. *Iul.* 80.3; Dio 44.11.4), who were recalled from exile shortly after the Lupercalia on the motion of the praetor L. Cornelius Cinna (Nic. Dam. *Vit. Caes.* 22.76). Dio (43.51.2–4), by contrast, puts the consular elections well ahead of his account of the Lupercalia, but as A. Lintott has recently demonstrated (*ANRW* 2.34.3.2502–11), Dio does not observe a strict chronological arrangement of events in his account of the late Roman Republic. (I thank the referee for *CQ* for drawing my attention to Lintott's paper.) The issue is further complicated, however, by Suetonius' assertion (*Iul.* 80.4) that the conspirators intended to assassinate Caesar when he was 'summoning the tribes' (not centuries, which would be the voting units at the consular elections). Conceivably, therefore, the scene of the aborted plot was the election of *curule aediles* for 43, an assembly that may, or may not, have been summoned at the time of the consular comitia: see N. Horsfall, *G&R* 21 (1974), 193 and n. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Whether a *trinundinum* is to be reckoned as a fixed period of twenty-four or twenty-five days (Mommsen, *Röm. Staatsr.* 3.1<sup>3</sup> 375–7 and A. K. Michels, *The Calendar of the Roman Republic* [Princeton, 1967], 194–206, respectively), or a flexible period containing three *nundinae* ('market days', held every eight days) and so requiring a minimum of eighteen days to elapse (A. W. Lintott, *CQ* 15 [1965], 281–5 and *CQ* 18 [1968], 189–94), even by the shortest of these two reckonings (eighteen days), an assembly convened during either of the two weeks following the Lupercalia (and even as late as the first few days of March) would have to have been announced before 15 February.

<sup>34</sup> Caesar was expected to be away for three years (Dio 43.51.2) and had arranged in advance for all offices to be filled in 43 and consuls and tribunes to be picked for 42 (Dio 43.51.6).



would be no opportunity, therefore, for potential assassins to approach him, carry out the murder, and make good their escape. By contrast, Caesar was constantly exposed to attack while he remained in Rome because, prior to Spurinna's warning in February, he had dismissed his armed bodyguard.<sup>35</sup> Time, however, was growing short for the conspirators to take action because Caesar was said to be planning an early departure, and this circumstance may explain why Spurinna was able to set, with some assurance, a particular limit to the potential threat to Caesar's life. Apparently Caesar had not by mid-February already selected a specific date for his departure because we are told that after the fiasco at the Lupercalia on 15 February, when the crowd did not encourage him to accept the diadem from Antony, Caesar hastened his plans to set out for the east (App. *B. Civ.* 2.110). Eventually, he seems to have decided to leave on 18 March (App. *B. Civ.* 2.111, 114), a date not far outside the range of *dies fatales* supposedly worked out by Spurinna just over a month in advance.

We are told that when the conspirators learned of Caesar's intention to hold a meeting of the Senate on the Ides, they immediately discarded their earlier schemes to murder him on some other occasion in favour of the Ides (Suet. *Iul.* 80.4), and it is plain to see why. That meeting of the Senate would be one of the few occasions on which the conspirators could have known for certain, some days or weeks in advance, that Caesar would appear in public, unattended by any companions except senators, since non-senators would be barred from the meeting. Furthermore, the place of the meeting (the Curia of Pompey) was charged with symbolic significance for Caesar's enemies.<sup>36</sup> If the announcement of this meeting was made as early as mid-February, it is easy to see how Spurinna could have selected the Ides of March as marking the end of a period fraught with peril for Caesar. Caesar's public appearance on the Ides was likely to be his last prior to setting out for the east with his army.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to work out the timing of the announcement of that all-important meeting of the Senate on the Ides. Because there was no statutory requirement to call a meeting of the Senate a certain number of days in advance,<sup>37</sup> as there was for assemblies, we cannot fix even a *terminus post quem non* for the summons. And while it was traditional at a much earlier period in the Republic for the Senate to meet on 15 March, because that was the date when the new consuls entered office from approximately 222 to 154 B.C.,<sup>38</sup> and March 15th seems to have remained the date for the beginning of the censorial financial year,<sup>39</sup> there is no reason to believe that the Ides of March was a regular day for a meeting of the Senate in the late Republic. Dio (47.19.1) is clearly mistaken in making such a claim, being misled by later practice under the empire when a statutory meeting of the Senate (*legitimus senatus*) took place

<sup>35</sup> He had relinquished his Spanish bodyguard at the end of 45, it seems, when the Senate voted to take an oath to protect Caesar's person (Suet. *Iul.* 86.1; cf. Nic. Dam. *Vit. Caes.* 22.80; App. *B. Civ.* 2.107; and Dio 44.7.4). The unpopularity that Caesar had aroused in late January by removing from office the tribunes Caesetius and Marullus raised the possibility that he might reconstitute his Spanish guard as a precautionary measure, but in the end he decided against this course of action (App. *B. Civ.* 2.109).

<sup>36</sup> See Horsfall (n. 32), 194 for a good review of the factors that influenced the conspirators to select the meeting of the Senate on the Ides as the ideal occasion for assassinating Caesar.

<sup>37</sup> Mommsen, *Röm. Staatsr.* 3.2<sup>3</sup> 917 and n. 3.

<sup>38</sup> *MRR* 2.638–39. To the five attested meetings on 15 March in the late third and early second centuries listed by Michels (n. 33), 55, add the meeting in 211 (Livy 26.1.1) and probable meetings on that date in 215, 214, 205, 202, and 198 (Livy 23.31.1, 24.10.1, 28.38.14, 30.27.1, and 32.8.1, respectively).

<sup>39</sup> Mommsen, *Röm. Staatsr.* 2.1<sup>3</sup> 347, n. 1. I thank the referee for *CQ* for drawing my attention to this circumstance.

on certain fixed days.<sup>40</sup> In fact, the meeting in 44 is the only one securely attested on the Ides of March for the period 68 to 43 B.C.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, we do know of instances when a meeting of the Senate was called more than four weeks in advance. For example, on 5 April 56 B.C. the Senate adopted a proposal of Cicero's to hold a *frequens* meeting on the Ides (13th) of May (Cic. *Fam.* 1.9.8), and writing to Atticus on 28 or 29 April of 44 B.C., Cicero discusses a prospective meeting of the Senate announced by Antony for 1 June (*Att.* 14.14.1). Both meetings were expected to address terribly important issues, which may explain why notice was given so far in advance. In 56 the debate was to concern Caesar's Campanian law of 59 and its possible suspension; on 1 June of 44 the debate was to address Antony's ambition to secure control of the two Gauls for an extended proconsular command.

Was there a similar burning question in February 44 to justify calling a meeting for the Ides of March one whole month, or more, in advance, with the result that Spurinna could have taken this prospective meeting into consideration in setting a limit to the danger threatening Caesar? The answer, it seems, is a probable 'no'. The only item known for certain to have been on the agenda for 15 March was a debate aimed at resolving Mark Antony's opposition to the election of P. Cornelius Dolabella to a suffect consulship to replace Caesar when he departed for his Parthian campaign.<sup>42</sup> The election itself and Antony's last-minute interruption of the proceedings are vividly described by Cicero (*Phil.* 2.82–3) but, unfortunately, without any indication of the date. If the assembly to elect Dolabella suffect consul fell at approximately the same time as the consular elections for 43 and 42, which we argued above took place a week or two after the celebration of the Lupercalia on 15 February,<sup>43</sup> then the agenda for 15 March could not have been set as early as one month in advance. Until the electoral assembly was convened and Antony made good his threat to block Dolabella's election, Caesar had no way of foreseeing the need for a meeting of the Senate on the Ides of March for the purpose of resolving that impasse. If so, then Caesar's announcement that he planned to hold a meeting of the Senate on the Ides of March must have been made some days, or even weeks, after the Lupercalia, and this piece of information would not have been available to Spurinna thirty days in advance of the Ides of March.

If we look more closely at the various accounts of Spurinna's prediction concerning the Ides of March, we find that Valerius Maximus is, in fact, the *only* ancient source to claim that the prediction was made so far as thirty days in advance. Suetonius (*Iul.* 81.2, quoted above, p. 441), by contrast, informs us merely that the prophecy preceded

<sup>40</sup> P. Willems, *Le Sénat de la république romaine* 2 (Paris, 1883), 149, n. 1. Under the empire, the statutory avoidance of holding a meeting of the Senate on the Ides of March (Suet. *Iul.* 88) caused 14 March to be treated as a regular meeting day (*legitimus senatus*) under the *lex Julia* passed by Augustus in 9 B.C. (Suet. *Aug.* 35.3): R. Talbert, *The Senate of Imperial Rome* (Princeton, 1984), 209.

<sup>41</sup> Paul Stein, *Die Senatssitzungen der ciceronischen Zeit (68–43)* (Münster, 1930), 119.

<sup>42</sup> Cic. *Phil.* 2.88. One other possible item on the agenda is less easy to accept at face value. A number of sources (e.g. Suet. *Iul.* 79.3; App. *B. Civ.* 2.110; Plut. *Caes.* 64.2, cf. 60.1) state that one of the *XVviri* (Cotta) was to reveal at the meeting on the Ides a Sibylline oracle requiring Caesar to be named 'king' before his departure to do battle with the Parthians, but according to Cicero (*Div.* 2.110), this was only a rumour. Of course, even a rumour could have influenced the course of the conspiracy, as both Dio (44.15.4) and Appian (*B. Civ.* 2.113) claim that it did. See Horsfall (n. 32), 192, for a good account of the role this rumour may have played.

<sup>43</sup> See above, n. 32. A date in late February (or early March?) suits the statement in Cicero (*Phil.* 2.81) that Antony's threat to block Dolabella's election was made 'many months in advance' (*multis ante mensibus*), presumably at the meeting of the Senate on 1 January.

the Ides of March by an unspecified number of days, while Cicero's account of Spurinna's warning to Caesar at the sacrifice of the heartless beast makes no mention of the Ides at all (*Div.* 1.119, quoted above, pp. 445–6). Cicero's silence is at first glance very damning, and this silence even led Weinstock to call into question the well-established tradition that Spurinna warned Caesar about the Ides of March.<sup>44</sup> The passage in Cicero, however, needs to be examined in its context. It was not Cicero's purpose in *De Divinatione* to give a complete historical account of the ominous sacrifice and Spurinna's prophecy, which, as we have seen, most likely can be dated to the Lupercalia. Rather, Cicero relates the incident solely as an *exemplum* to prove a particular point, and he omits such details as, for instance, Caesar's *bon mot* reported by other accounts of the sacrifice that 'the entrails would be more favourable when Caesar willed them to be so'.<sup>45</sup> In *De Divinatione*, the incident is recounted specifically in support of the proposition advanced by Cicero's brother Quintus that the gods have infinite power to alter the laws of nature in strange and miraculous ways so as to convey to mortals signs of the future. Hence the reason for telling the anecdote was not to illustrate the *success* of prophecies, in which case, Spurinna's naming of the Ides (if it did indeed occur on that occasion) would have been a terribly relevant detail. Instead, the focus of the passage is on the power of the gods to snatch the heart from the bull at the moment of sacrifice, and so there was no particular reason for Cicero to give a full account of Spurinna's prophecy and tell us whether the seer set a particular limit to the danger portended by the missing *cor*.

On the other hand, in trying to determine whether a warning about the Ides was in fact issued by Spurinna at the sacrifice described by Cicero (thereby lending credence to Valerius' dating of the prophecy to mid-February), we cannot help but notice that both Valerius Maximus and Suetonius separate their report of the prodigy of the missing heart (Val. Max., 1.6.13; Suet. *Iul.* 77) from their account of Spurinna's warning about the 'danger that would not extend beyond the Ides' (Val. Max. 8.11.2; Suet. *Iul.* 81.2). Valerius relates the portentous sacrifice as a foreshadowing of Caesar's later deification, while Suetonius gives an account of the sacrifice, without any historical context, simply to recount Caesar's haughty disregard of the baleful omen, to which he is supposed to have given the disdainful reply mentioned above about the entrails being more favourable in the future when he willed them to be. It is surprising that both Valerius and Suetonius separate in this way Spurinna's prophecy about the Ides from the sacrifice, if, in his interpretation of the missing *cor*, Spurinna succeeded in designating the very day of Caesar's murder as the last in a series of *dies fatales*. More suggestive still is the fact that Appian (*B. Civ.* 2.116; cf. 153), whom Shakespeare followed (*Julius Caesar* 2.2.40), transferred from mid-February to the Ides of March itself the occasion of the sacrifice at which the heart vanished. Ordinarily, the dates of historical events are altered by later sources so as to give those incidents greater impact, to make them somehow more marvellous and awe-inspiring.<sup>46</sup> In this instance,

<sup>44</sup> According to Weinstock (n. 17), 345, the versions of Spurinna's prophecy given by both Valerius Maximus and Suetonius must be later inventions.

<sup>45</sup> *Futura diceret laetiora, cum uellet* (Suet. *Iul.* 77). For a good discussion of the need to take into account the context in which Cicero relates a particular historical episode in one of his philosophical treatises and to consider the reason *why* he relates the incident (i.e. what it is intended to prove), see M. Alexander, *CP* 94 (1999), 65–9.

<sup>46</sup> Sallust (*Cat.* 31.9), for instance, could not resist taking Catiline's words that we know from Cicero (*Mur.* 51) were uttered shortly before the elections in 63 B.C. and making them Catiline's parting threat when he dashed out of the Senate to leave Rome for the last time in November: *incendium meum ruina restinguam* ('I shall douse the conflagration that is being whipped up

however, if the sacrifice involving the missing heart had indeed prompted Spurinna to name the very day of Caesar's murder so far in advance, his interpretation of the prodigy would have been a truly remarkable, long-range prophecy. We would expect that sacrifice, therefore, to be more firmly anchored in its true historical setting, in mid-February, where we know from Cicero it belongs. To make matters more complicated, Appian (*B. Civ.* 2.116; cf. 153), not only shifts the ominous sacrifice to the Ides, but claims that the prodigy occurred once before, on an earlier occasion, when Caesar was sacrificing during his Spanish campaign in 45 B.C. This assertion, although it lacks confirmation,<sup>47</sup> does raise the possibility that Suetonius may have had the earlier occasion in mind,<sup>48</sup> rather than its attested occurrence at the sacrifice described by Cicero.

The fluid nature of the date assigned to that ominous sacrifice in our later sources, on top of the failure of Valerius and Suetonius to link their account of that sacrifice with their report of Spurinna's warning concerning the Ides of March, does make it seem unlikely that Spurinna named the Ides of March on that particular occasion. Also, as we have seen, there was no apparent reason for Spurinna to have singled out the Ides of March thirty days in advance, although it is entirely conceivable that Spurinna issued such a warning on a somewhat later occasion, after the meeting of the Senate had been announced for that date.<sup>49</sup> In mid-February, it is quite reasonable to suppose that Spurinna interpreted the absence of a heart in the sacrificial bull as portending danger to Caesar's life, and we are told that on the following day a similarly ominous portent at a sacrifice performed by Caesar reinforced this conclusion.<sup>50</sup> By the date of those two sacrifices, at least one of the early plots against Caesar (the one to murder him while he was holding the elections) had been formed, and there is no reason why rumours of that plot could not have reached Spurinna's ears. It would have

against me by means of general destruction'). Sallust's account of the context of these words ultimately prevailed over Cicero's because it was the 'better' story: Val. Max. 9.11.3; Florus 2.12.7.

<sup>47</sup> Despite scholarly opinion to the contrary, Polyaeus' account of this incident (*Strat.* 8.23.33) fails to connect it with Caesar's Spanish campaign. The incident is related by Polyaeus in a section that comes shortly *after* his summary of the final campaigns in the civil war (23.30–31). The sole ground for assigning the incident to Spain is Polyaeus' statement that 'the soldiers took courage' (οἱ στρατιῶται τοῦτ' ἀκούσαντες ἐθάρρησαν) when they heard Caesar dismiss the ominous sacrifice with the flippant remark that 'it was nothing strange to find no *cor* (the seat of reason) in a beast lacking reason'. These soldiers, however, may well have been Caesar's veterans who were present in Rome in the spring of 44, awaiting allotments of land in the colonies planned for his discharged soldiers (App. *B. Civ.* 2.119, 125, 133–5; Dio 44.34.1–3; Flor. 2.17.2).

<sup>48</sup> So H. Butler and M. Cary assume in their commentary on Suet. *Iul.* 77 (Oxford, 1927), basing their conclusion on the false clue provided by Appian (*B. Civ.* 2.116) that the only other securely dated occurrence of this incident was on the day of Caesar's death.

<sup>49</sup> Cramer (n. 2), 77, n. 240, anticipated this explanation by claiming that Spurinna's warning reported by Val. Max. and Suetonius was preceded by another haruspical warning attested by Cic. *Div.* 1.119. Cramer, however, failed to appreciate that the reference in Valerius to the 'thirty days' leading up to the Ides makes it virtually certain that Val. Max. and Cic. (but not necessarily Suet.) refer to the same occasion.

<sup>50</sup> The *caput* (i.e. the lobe) of the liver was missing (Cic. *Div.* 1.119), a not infrequent occurrence at sacrifices: examples collected by Thulin (n. 1), 2451. According to Cic. (*Div.* 2.32), haruspices regarded no feature of the entrails more baleful than a missing lobe: *nihil (haruspices) putant accidere potuisse tristius*; cf. above, n. 30. App. (*B. Civ.* 2.116) placed this incident too on the Ides and further claimed that it was a repetition of an earlier sacrifice in Spain in 45. Possibly Appian invented earlier occurrences of both the incident of the missing heart and the missing *caput* of the liver, which Cicero, a contemporary witness, assigns to February 44, so that he could claim that a repetition of the same prodigy foreshadowed the deaths of both Caesar and Alexander the Great (2.152–3).

been relatively easy for the seer to calculate how long this danger was likely to be most threatening to Caesar, given his imminent departure for the Parthian campaign.<sup>51</sup> Mid-March would have been a reasonable estimate for that departure date, soon after the commencement of the sailing season, which was traditionally viewed in antiquity as beginning on 10 March (*a. d. VI Id. Mart.*: Vegetius, *Mil.* 4.39); and 18 March, we are told, was the date that Caesar ultimately selected for leaving Rome (App. *B. Civ.* 2.111, 114).

Another factor that we should take into consideration in trying to determine whether it makes sense for Spurinna to have set the following thirty days as the limit of the danger threatening Caesar is the frequency with which thirty days turns up as a stock interval of time in religious and legal texts. This frequency is doubtless to be explained by the fact that thirty days reflects the average length of a lunar month (29.531 days) rounded to the nearest whole number.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, Spurinna may simply have assigned the danger threatening Caesar to the following thirty days (with, or more likely without, naming or putting any great emphasis on the Ides of March) because it was such a common and convenient unit of time, well suited to expressing how much longer Caesar was expected to remain in Rome. Of course, when Caesar was murdered on the Ides, it would have been an easy matter for Spurinna's contemporaries and later generations to credit him retrospectively with foreseeing that the Ides in particular was to be the last of the *dies fatales*. To quote Sir Francis Bacon (*Novum Organum*, Book I Aphorisms, no. 46), the superstitious 'observe events which are fulfilled, but neglect and pass over their failure, though it be much more common'. In this instance, possibly because a somewhat later prophecy of Spurinna's concerning the Ides of March was amalgamated with an earlier, more general warning of his in mid-February, or because the thirty-day period mentioned in the earlier prophecy by coincidence happened to end on, or close to, the Ides of March,<sup>53</sup> Valerius Maximus, or his source (Livy?), has credited Spurinna with greater foresight than he may deserve.

Valerius makes what appears to be at least one other slight error in the passage recounting Spurinna's prophecy, and this circumstance should cause us to wonder whether we can believe Valerius' unique assertion that Spurinna singled out specifically the Ides of March as the limit of the danger threatening Caesar so far as thirty days in advance. The apparent blunder is committed by Valerius when he reports that the famous exchange between Caesar and Spurinna about the Ides having 'come but not yet gone' took place at the house of Domitius Calvinus (cos. 53 B.C. and Caesar's *magister equitum* designate for 43), where Caesar and Spurinna met *ad officium*.<sup>54</sup> If *ad*

<sup>51</sup> The plans for the election of Dolabella to fill the consulship to be left vacant by Caesar, together with the gathering of Caesar's veterans to see him off (App. *B. Civ.* 2.119, 120), must have made it possible for Spurinna, as well as for any other perceptive observer, to estimate the likely date of that departure.

<sup>52</sup> For the widespread occurrence of thirty days as a standard interval of time for religious or secular purposes in Indo-European cultures (doubtless arising from the heavenly time-marker provided by the length of a lunar synodic period, = 29 days 12 hours 44 minutes 3 seconds), see R. Düll, 'Triginta Dies', *Festschr. f. P. Koschaker* (Weimar, 1939), 27–41, esp. 27–35. I thank Michael Alexander for causing me to entertain this explanation of the thirty days attested solely by Valerius Maximus' account of Spurinna's prophecy.

<sup>53</sup> Truly remarkable coincidences do sometimes occur in the course of history. For two striking, 'believe-it-or-not' examples, see John T. Ramsey and A. Lewis Licht, *The Comet of 44 B.C. and Caesar's Funeral Games* (Atlanta, 1997), 62, n. 3.

<sup>54</sup> The unlikelihood of this meeting is pointed out by Hohl (n. 28), 111–12 and Rawson (n. 15), 144. Weinstock (n. 17), 346, n. 1, accepts the possibility of the meeting, without treating the verbal exchange between Spurinna and Caesar as necessarily historical.

*officium* is a reference to the *salutatio*, the morning gathering of well-wishers, which normally took place during the first two hours of the day (Martial 4.8.2) and sometimes even *ante lucem* (Cic. *Cat.* 1.9 with Sall. *Cat.* 28.1),<sup>55</sup> then the meeting on 15 March must have occurred sometime before roughly 8 a.m. Such a meeting, however, is strictly at odds with what our other sources tell us about Caesar's whereabouts during the early morning hours of the Ides.<sup>56</sup> According to the prevailing tradition, on the morning of the Ides, Caesar hesitated to leave his house for a long time because of ominous dreams he and his wife had had the night before and because of warnings issued by haruspices (μάντεις) in response to unfavourable sacrifices.<sup>57</sup> Suetonius (*Iul.* 81.4) states that these forebodings, compounded by poor health, nearly convinced Caesar to remain at home all day and send word to dismiss the meeting of the Senate which was awaiting his arrival. It was not until D. Brutus paid him a visit at the fifth hour (approximately 11 a.m.) that Caesar was persuaded to disregard these evil premonitions and set out for the *frequens* meeting of the Senate which had assembled at dawn.<sup>58</sup> This leaves no room on the morning of the Ides for Caesar and Spurinna to have met at Domitius' house and banter about the uneventful arrival of the Ides. The locale assigned to this incident by Valerius looks like pure invention on his part (or that of his source), although room can readily be found for the remarks to have been exchanged at the sacrifices performed by Caesar just before he entered the meeting of the Senate.<sup>59</sup> Valerius' account of Spurinna's prophecy about the Ides, therefore, may contain an element of what the seer actually said in mid-February about Caesar being in danger, perhaps even including a statement about the danger being greatest for the following thirty days, but without any specific reference to the Ides of March itself.

Two examples should suffice to give us an idea of the sort of long-range prophecy that Spurinna is likely to have uttered thirty days in advance of the Ides. One of these possible parallels is an actual warning issued to Caesar, while the other is a purely fictional prophecy that is put into the mouth of Spurinna. Both are reported by Cicero. The first of these two passages (*Div.* 2.52) relates that the *summus haruspex*, who may or may not have been Spurinna,<sup>60</sup> warned Caesar in 47 B.C. not to cross over to Africa to face his republican foes 'before the winter solstice' (*ante brumam*).<sup>61</sup> As it turned out,

<sup>55</sup> This is how the passage is usually interpreted: e.g. *TLL* 9.2.519.81 s.v. '*officium*'. F. Münzer, 'Domitius (43)', *RE* 5.1 (1903), 1422, on the other hand, speculated that the meeting may have been occasioned by a sacrifice attended by both Caesar and Domitius, if Caesar had already appointed Domitius a *pontifex* (an office later attested by *CIL* 6.1301). Possibly such a sacrifice was called for by the festival of Anna Perenna on 15 March (sacrificial rites to Anna Perenna during March attested by Macrob. *Sat.* 1.12.6; public prayers attested by Lydus, *De Mens.* 4.36); see E. Becht, 'Regeste über die Zeit von Cäsars Ermordung bis zum Umschwung in der Politik des Antonius', Freiburg diss. (1911), 7, n. 2.

<sup>56</sup> Appian (*B. Civ.* 2.149) alone of our other sources appears to follow the tradition found in Val. Max. when he puts the meeting between Caesar and Spurinna 'at about dawn' (περὶ τὴν ἑω), without specifying the location.

<sup>57</sup> Nic. Dam. *Vit. Caes.* 23.83; Dio 44.17.3; Plut. *Caes.* 63.7; App. *B. Civ.* 2.115.

<sup>58</sup> For a good account of these final hours, see Horsfall (n. 32), 197–9.

<sup>59</sup> So Plutarch (*Caes.* 63.3), Suetonius (*Iul.* 81.4), and Dio (44.18.4).

<sup>60</sup> Thulin (n. 1), 2434, insists that the seer was not Spurinna on the grounds that the prophecy was hostile to Caesar's cause (see n. 61 below), but the question is left open by Rawson (n. 15), 143 and by Pease ([n. 2], 440) in his note on *Div.* 2.52.

<sup>61</sup> Possibly this date was singled out because traditionally it was considered unlucky to begin important undertakings during the period immediately preceding the winter solstice (Ter. *Phorm.* 709–10 and Donatus ad loc.). Alternatively, the seer may have been in sympathy with Caesar's enemies, wanting to delay Caesar's arrival so that, as Cicero (loc. cit.) remarks, the republican forces could gather in greater numbers.

Caesar observed the letter, but not the spirit, of the warning. The date of his crossing, 27 December ([Caes.] *B. Afr.* 2.4), fell just a few days *after* the winter solstice (approximately 25 December, according to Pliny, *N.H.* 18.221). However, because prior to Caesar's reform of the calendar in 46 the Roman civil calendar was more than two months out of step with the solar year, Caesar's crossing actually took place on a date corresponding to 8 October in the proleptic Julian calendar. Cicero's account would lead us to conclude that Caesar crossed in violation of the warning in every respect, and this is the version that became standard in the later tradition,<sup>62</sup> thus providing another example of the need for caution in trying to extract historical fact from an incident related by Cicero merely as an *exemplum* in a philosophical treatise. Cicero recounted the incident merely as one in a series of examples designed to illustrate how prophecies of doom (or the reverse) were often unfulfilled.

A second passage in Cicero connects Spurinna with an amusing fictional incident in the year following Caesar's murder (*Fam.* 9.24.2). It is the only other extant passage of Cicero, besides *Div.* 1.119, to mention Spurinna by name. Writing to his wealthy Epicurean friend L. Papirius Paetus early in 43 B.C., Cicero states with mock solemnity that he has consulted Spurinna on the subject of Paetus' neglect of his custom to attend banquets, and that he has been duly informed by the seer that the highest interests of the state are threatened with great danger unless Paetus resumes his habit of going to dinner parties 'when Favonius starts to blow' (*cum Favonius flaret*). Since Favonius (the West Wind) is associated with the advent of spring c. 8 February (Pliny, *N.H.* 2.122; cf. *Ov. Fast.* 2.149; *Col. Rust.* 11.2.15), and since, according to Cicero's account, it was apparently the cold that was keeping Paetus from his dinner parties, it is perfectly understandable why the fictitious response put into the mouth of Spurinna took the form it did. It permits us to date the letter most likely to January (see Shackleton Bailey's note ad loc.). Moreover, since the account of this bogus and high-flown prediction is obviously intended to mimic the sort of utterance that Spurinna was noted for making, it tends to reinforce our conclusion that in mid-February Spurinna conceivably made such a relatively long-range prophecy about the danger threatening Caesar's *consilium et uita*, but it may not have been precisely on that occasion (*pace* Valerius Maximus) that Spurinna named specifically the Ides as somehow significant.

This much *is* certain from our sources: both Suetonius (explicitly) and Valerius Maximus (by implication) place Spurinna's famous warning concerning the Ides of March in the context of a sacrifice being performed by Caesar. There is no need, therefore, or justification, for making Spurinna a practitioner of astrology. He was simply reading the signs in the entrails, which, combined with his likely knowledge of rumoured plots against the life of Caesar, permitted him both in mid-February, and presumably on one or two later occasions, to divine correctly the danger that threatened Caesar so long as the dictator remained in Rome.

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<sup>62</sup> So Minucius Felix (*Oct.* 26.4) and Cyprian (*Quod Idola Dii Non Sint* 5). Suet. (*Iul.* 59) simply reports that the escape of a sacrificial victim, when Caesar was officiating, did not cause him to postpone his departure for the African campaign—possibly a confusion on Suetonius' part (?) with an incident in 49 B.C. (Dio 41.39.2).