

Plut. Pyrrh. 21, 5-10

Text Übersetzung:
(Bernadotte Perrin)

[5] Consequently, Pyrrhus found himself obliged to fight another battle, and after recuperating his army he marched to the city of Asculum, where he engaged the Romans. Here, however, he was forced into regions where his cavalry could not operate, and upon a river with swift current and wooded banks, so that his elephants could not charge and engage the enemy's phalanx. Therefore, after many had been wounded and slain, for the time being the struggle was ended by the coming of night. [6] But on the next day, designing to fight the battle on level ground, and to bring his elephants to bear upon the ranks of the enemy, Pyrrhus occupied betimes the unfavourable parts of the field with a detachment of his troops; then he put great numbers of slingers and archers in the spaces between the elephants and led his forces to the attack in dense array and with a mighty impetus. So the Romans, having no opportunity for sidelong shifts and counter-movements, as on the previous day, were obliged to engage on level ground and front to front; and being anxious to repulse the enemy's men-at-arms before their elephants came up, they fought fiercely with their swords against the Macedonian spears, reckless of their lives and thinking only of wounding and slaying, while caring naught for what they suffered. [7] After a long time, however, as we are told, they began to be driven back at the point where Pyrrhus himself was pressing hard upon his opponents; but the greatest havoc was wrought by the furious strength of the elephants, since the valour of the Romans was of no avail in fighting them, but they felt that they must yield before them as before an onrushing billow or a crashing earthquake, and not stand their ground only to die in vain, or suffer all that is most grievous without doing any good at all. [8] After a short flight the Romans reached their camp, with a loss of six thousand men, according to Hieronymus, who also says that on the side of Pyrrhus, according to the king's own commentaries, thirty-five hundred and five were killed. [9] Dionysius, however, makes no mention of two battles at Asculum, nor of an admitted defeat of the Romans, but says that the two armies fought once for all until sunset and then at last separated; Pyrrhus, he says, was wounded in the arm by a javelin, and also had his baggage plundered by the Daunians; and there fell, on the side of Pyrrhus and on that of the Romans, over fifteen thousand men. The two armies separated; and we are told that Pyrrhus said to one who was congratulating him on his victory, 'If we are victorious in one more battle with the Romans, we shall be utterly ruined.' [10] For he had lost a great part of the forces with which he came, and all his friends and generals except a few; moreover, he had no others whom he could summon from home, and he saw that his allies in Italy were becoming indifferent, while the army of the Romans, as if from a fountain gushing forth indoors, was easily and speedily filled up again, and they did not lose courage in defeat, nay, their wrath gave them all the more vigour and determination for the war.