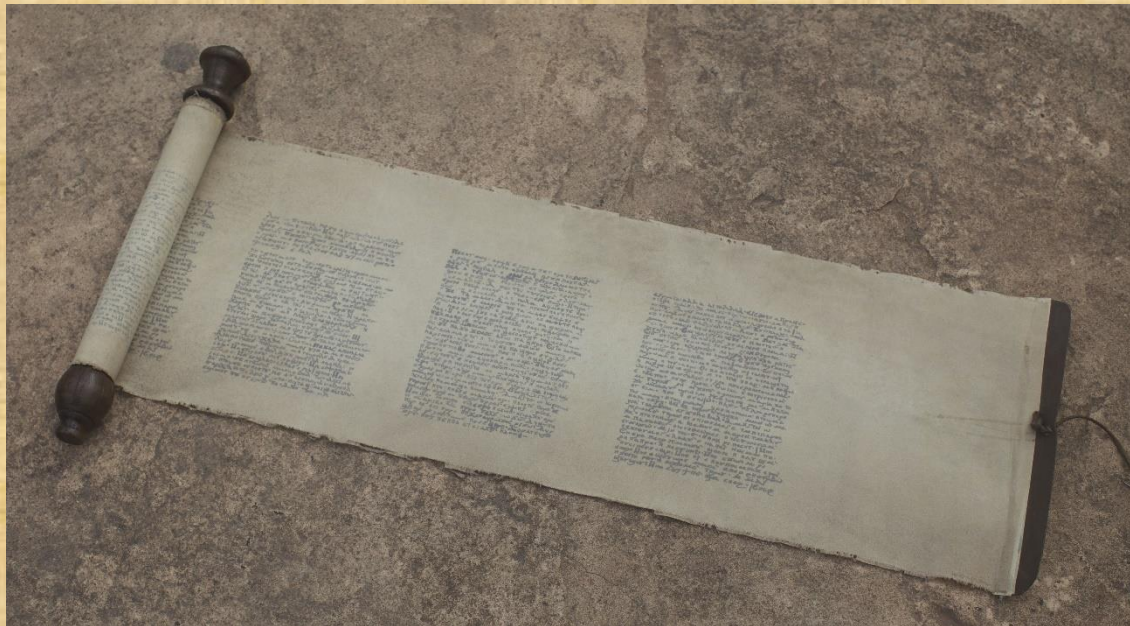


JULIUS CAESAR AND HIS TIMES

Unit 5 – Caesar as a Writer



CLAH7002

The Individual and History

- Roman historians inclined to portray events as dependant on actions of individuals and these actions of representations (good or bad) of their character.
- Rhetoric used to convince readers of causality of events.
- Speeches common in ancient historiography – means of understanding a situation or individual.

Caesar's Style

- ▣ Caesar employs a limited vocabulary - the style appears on the surface matter of fact – few figures of speech – avoidance of poeticisms.
- ▣ Reality of a complex series of patterns hidden beneath this simplicity.
- ▣ The *de Analogia* – a desire for purity and clarity of style.
- ▣ *Commentarii* meant to be firsthand memoirs – though narrated in third person.
- ▣ Nevertheless makes use of speeches – though usually not direct.

“Cicero, also in the Brutus, observes, ‘Caesar wrote admirably; his memoirs are cleanly, directly and gracefully composed, and stripped of all rhetorical trappings. And while his sole intention was to supply historians with factual material, the result has been that several fools have been pleased to primp up his narrative for their own glorifications...” – Suetonius *Divus Julius* 56.1-2.

Regard for the *Commentarii*

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“He has likewise written some commentaries, or short memoirs, of his own dealings;” ...while he pretended only to furnish the loose materials, for such as might be inclined to compose a regular history, he may, perhaps, have gratified the vanity of a few literary embroiderers; but he has certainly prevented all sensible men from attempting any improvement on his plan. For in history, nothing is more pleasing than a correct and elegant brevity of expression.” – *Cicero Brutus 262*.

“Asinius Pollio thinks that they 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 designedly or perhaps from forgetfulness; and he thinks that he intended to rewrite and revise them.” – *Suetonius Divus Julius 56.4*.

Caesar's Objectivity?

- ▣ Caesar's *Anticato* – an invective against the Republican “martyr” – accuses Cato of frequent drunkenness, avarice and incest.
- ▣ Claims divine and regal ancestry for his aunt Julia
 - “...in the eulogy of his aunt he spoke in the following terms of her paternal and maternal ancestry and that of his own father: "The family of my aunt Julia is descended by her mother from the kings, and on her father's side is akin to the immortal Gods; for the Marcii Reges (her mother's family name) go back to Ancus Marcius, and the Julii, the family of which ours is a branch, to Venus. Our stock therefore has at once the sanctity of kings, whose power is supreme among mortal men, and the claim to reverence which attaches to the Gods, who hold sway over kings themselves.” – Suetonius *Divus Julius* 6.1.

Commentarii de Bello Gallico

Propaganda?

- ▣ Not known whether Caesar issued his accounts year by year or all of books 1-7 together in 51-50 BC.
- ▣ Designed to court popular and senatorial support.
- ▣ Justify his actions in advance against potential prosecutors.

“Consequently, Caesar canvassed by proxy for a consulship, and likewise for an extension of time in which to hold his own provinces. At first, then, Pompey held his peace, while Marcellus and Lentulus opposed these plans; they hated Caesar on other grounds, and went beyond all bounds in their efforts to bring dishonour and abuse upon him.” – **Plutarch *Julius Caesar* 29.1.**

Themes of the *Gallic War*

- ▣ Book 1 – first part focuses on cleverness, cunning (*calliditas*) – later part on fear (*timor*).
- ▣ Book 2 – theme of madness (*furor*).
- ▣ Book 3 – Roman difficulties (*difficultas Romana*).
- ▣ Book 4 – probing expeditions – issue of faithlessness (*perfidia*).
- ▣ Book 5 – rout (*fugo*) – seemingly Roman death (*mors decora Romana*) – courage (*virtus*) in withstanding a siege.
- ▣ Book 6 – Swiftiness (*celeritas*) – luck (*fortuna*).
- ▣ Book 7 – liberty (*libertas*) – barbarity (*barbaria*)

Homo barbarus

- ▣ Ariovistus is represented as exercising power “arrogantly and cruelly” (*superbe et crudeliter*) and as being “barbarous, angry, and reckless” (*barbarum, iracundum, temerarium*) – **BG 1.31**.
- ▣ Ariovistus is never described physically, nor does the reader hear of any personal history before the crossing in to Gaul.
- ▣ Indirect means of characterising Ariovistus – he allows his men to attack Caesar’s while they are in parley (1.46) and in a fit of anger prepares to execute some of Caesar’s legates (1.47) – also means of contrasting him with Caesar.

- ▣ Ariovistus as cast into the role of a conventional tyrant indirectly – actions, words and thoughts of the characters in the narrative are a substitute for the direct judgement of the narrator.
- ▣ Dispassionate style – negate the space between Caesar as an active participant and Caesar as the objective narrator of events.
- ▣ Influence of the *commentarii* style – desire for a simple unadorned style (Attacism) – understatement more effective than embellishment? – *BG* written in the context of political attacks on Caesar's position.

Near Mutiny in Vesontio - *BG* 1.38-41

- ▣ Recounting this episode a means of demonstrating Caesar's ability to deal with his army and show his qualities of command – ability to control his soldiers through speech – Caesar the author has nothing to hide (apparent honesty).
- ▣ Gaulish description of Germans creates panic – claims of concern about ambush – Caesar conveys a council of war.
- ▣ Caesar's speech forms the centre piece of the narrative.
- ▣ Contrast with Dio's account (38.37) and the *BG* – preaching to the converted vs. necessity of persuasion.

- Use of *exempla* – Marius, Third Servile War, the Helvetii – discerning speech.
- *Diligentia* – concerns of soldiers hollow and presumptuous, organisation of supplies have been made.
- Caesar's blamelessness and *felicitas* – calling the soldiers bluff, break camp early and see who follows.
- Qualities of a perfect general – *scientia rei militaris*, *virtus*, *auctoritas*, *felicitas* – Cicero *Pro Leg. Man.* 28.
- Caesar goes over an open route when marching towards Ariovistus, fulfils promise to the troops – use of Diviciacus the reliable Gaul.
- The value of *usus* gained through memory and history as well as experience.