THE IMAGE OF CAESAR IN *BELLUM GALLICUM* 1

IN BOOK 1 of his *Bellum Gallicum* Julius Caesar describes the two initial steps in his conquest of Gaul, his victorious campaigns against the Helvetians and against the Germans of Ariovistus.[1] According to Caesar, the Helvetians were attempting to migrate en masse from eastern to western Gaul, and constituted a threat to Roman honor and security. Ariovistus, if the facts related in Caesar's narrative are reliable, had originally intervened in Gallic affairs in answer to the pleas for assistance of two Gallic tribes, the Arverni and the Sequani, who soon came to regret their stratagem, for their former ally was quick to make himself their master: Ariovistus had apparently decided to stay in Gaul, summon reinforcements from across the Rhine, and set up a Germanic empire there. He was harassing Roman allies, the Haedui, and likewise constituted a threat to Roman honor and security.[2]

Throughout, Caesar pays ample tribute to the physical bravery of his opponents. The Helvetians surpass the rest of the Gauls in *virtus* because of their constant warfare with the Germans (1.4)[3]; what is more, they exult in fighting and can be described as *homines bellandi cupidi* and *homines bellicosi* (2.4; 10.2); before emigrating they set fire to their towns, villages, and homes, as well as all surplus grain that is not to be taken with them, "that by removing all hope of returning home they might prove the readier to undergo any perils" (5.2-3); and in the final, bitterly fought engagement, "there was no rout, for throughout the action, though it lasted from the seventh hour to sunset, no one could see the back of the enemy" (26.1-3).[4] No need to dwell on the incredible bravery (*incredibilis virtus*) of the Germans, for it was proverbial (39.1); and it is proximity to this fierce and barbaric people that accounts for the *virtus* of the Helvetians (1.4). The Germanic *virtus* is set in bold

[1] It is my intention to avoid in so far as possible becoming involved in the controversy about the credibility of Caesar's narrative, though this paper cannot help but pertain to that problem. The scholarship on the topic is surveyed by T. Rice Holmes, *Caesar's conquest of Gaul*[2] (Oxford 1911) pp.211-56, and Hans Oppermann, "Neuere Forschungen zur Glaubwürdigkeit Caesars," *Gymnasium* 68 (1961) 258-69. The most notorious of the more recent attacks on Caesar's reliability are those of Michel Rambaud, *L'art de la déformation historique dans les Commentaires de César* (Paris 1953), who attempts to demonstrate that historical distortion of every type permeates the commentaries; and of Gerold Walser, *Caesar und die Germanen: Studien zur politischen Tendenz römischer Feldzugsberichte* (Wiesbaden 1956), whose analysis is confined to *BG* 1 and the account of the Germans in *BG* 4 and 6. A readable introduction to this topic is provided by the more conservative and, in my opinion, more reasonable remarks of J.P.V.D. Balsdon, "The veracity of Caesar," *Greece and Rome* n.s. 4 (1957) 19-28; and of A. N. Sherwin-White in a review of Walser, *JRS* 48 (1958) 188-91.

[2] For Roman honor and security as the ultimate justification of the two campaigns of *BG* 1, see Max Radin, "The international law of the Gallic campaigns," *CJ* 12 (1916-17) 8-33. Pertinent observations about Roman imperialistic attitudes toward the Gauls and Germans are made by A. Alföldi, "The moral barrier on Rhine and Danube," *Congress of Roman frontier studies* (University of Durham 1949) 1-16, and A. N. Sherwin-White, "Caesar as an imperialist," *Greece and Rome* n.s. 4 (1957) 36-45.

[3] Unless otherwise indicated all references to Caesar's works are to *BG* 1.

[4] All translations of Caesar are taken from H. J. Edwards (Loeb 1917), or else are influenced by him.

relief by Caesar's description of the panic (*timor*) that the Germans inspire in his own army (39). It began among those members of Caesar's staff who lacked military experience, but soon spread to his veteran soldiery, the legionaries, centurions, and cavalry commanders, until the whole army was infected and on the verge of mutiny. It is only after Caesar's persuasive oratory and his appeal to the *virtus* of the tenth legion that self-respect and a sense of duty (*pudor atque officium*) prevail over *timor* (40.14-15), with the resulting eagerness to fight (41.1). Even Publius Considius, a veteran soldier known for his military acumen, is seized with panic (*timore perterritus*) while commanding a scouting force during the Helvetian campaign, and reports to Caesar "as seen that which he had not seen" (21.4; 22.4).

Caesar also recognizes the intellectual competence of the enemy's leaders. Orgetorix, who originated the plan of the Helvetian emigration, but did not survive to lead it, exhibits an ability to convince others (*persuadere*) to join his grandiose imperialistic designs that is reminiscent of the persuasive powers of the Herodotean-Thucydidean Themistocles.[5] And Caesar in a desperate situation argues that Ariovistus had won a victory over the Gauls "rather by skill and stratagem than by courage" (*magis ratione et consilio quam virtute*, 40.8), a remark which might help quell a mutiny but which had troublesome implications that needed to be explained away: "even Ariovistus himself does not expect that our own armies can be caught by tactics (*ratio*) for which there was a chance against unskilled barbarians" (40.9). And such ability as Ariovistus had exhibited against the Gauls Caesar obviously admired, as is revealed in his own campaigns and in a remark he makes elsewhere in reference to himself (*BC* 1.72.2), that it is the responsibility of a commander to conquer by *consilium* as well as by the sword.

Caesar, however, offers a pretty damning picture, either by direct statement or by implication, of the purely moral qualities of the enemy. Since the Helvetians, because of the premature demise of Orgetorix, have no great leader comparable to Ariovistus, the censure tends to fall broadly on the whole people. Their envoys request permission to pass through the Roman Province and profess their intention of refraining from *maleficium* (7.3). Caesar denies the request, for he is fully aware of their treacherous and unprovoked attack on the army of a Roman consul a half a century earlier (7.4; 14.1-2); furthermore, he is convinced that the envoys are lying—that the Helvetians will not refrain from *iniuria et maleficium* (7.5). Later (14.1-6) he openly rebukes their envoys for insolently (*insolenter*) boasting of the unavenged *contumelia* and *iniuriae* which they had inflicted on the Roman people and its allies, and warns them that they may be enjoying only temporary impunity for their crimes (*scelus*).

But it is for Ariovistus, his archantagonist in Book 1, that Caesar reserves his most devastating moral castigation.[6] Ariovistus is introduced into the narrative as the leader of a barbaric horde (*homines feri ac barbari*, 31.5), who rules his Gallic subjects with haughtiness and cruelty (*superbe et crudeliter imperare*) and subjects hostages to every imaginable atrocity (31.12)—in short, as a tyrant who is *barbarus*, *iracundus*, *temerarius* (31.13). The accusation is assigned to Caesar's faithful partisan, the Gallic chieftain Diviciacus; and he, Caesar claims, represents the sentiment of nearly all Gaul (30.1-31.3), whose envoys have been dispatched to plead with Caesar for

[5] This aspect of Themistocles' character is analyzed in my article, "The character of Plutarch's Themistocles," *TAPA* 92 (1961) 327-31.

[6] Hans Diller, "Caesar und Ariovist," *Gymnasium* 46 (1935) 189-202, has pointed out that in justifying his aggressive actions against Ariovistus Caesar added to the themes of Roman honor and security a third one, the immoral and barbaric character of the German war lord. Interesting is the effect of Nazi chauvinism on Erich Köstermann's remarks about Ariovistus, "Caesar und Ariovist," *Klio* 33 (1940-41) 308-34, esp. 323.

protection against Ariovistus.[7] But not a word can Caesar elicit from the envoys of the Sequani; for Ariovistus has settled within their borders, and they are dumb with terror at his *crudelitas* and the atrocities their people are suffering (32.1-5). After reflection Caesar delivers his own indictment: "as for Ariovistus himself, he had assumed such a haughty and arrogant attitude that he would probably have to be removed" (*ipse autem Ariovistus tantos sibi spiritus, tantam arrogantiam sumpserat ut ferendus non videretur*, 33.5). Later, however, Caesar tells his officers that Ariovistus will probably be reconciled by his own equitable proposals (*cognitis suis postulatis atque aequitate condicionum perspecta*), since only a mad man (*furore atque amentia impulsus*) would reject them (40.3-4). When Ariovistus finally agrees to a conference (42.1-3), Caesar is convinced that he has returned to his right mind (*ad sanitatem*), and expects him to requite the great *beneficia* he has received from Caesar and the Roman people by abandoning his obstinate behavior (*pertinacia*); but Ariovistus' *arrogantia* thwarts Caesar's attempts at a peaceful settlement, and the conference comes to nought (46.4). The theme of Ariovistus the ingrate is one which Caesar takes full advantage of. As Caesar tells it, despite unprecedented *beneficia* from himself, from the senate, and from the Roman people in the form of titles and money, *beneficia* conferred not for services rendered but freely given in a spirit of personal and public *liberalitas* (33.1; 35.1-2; 42.3; 43.4-5), Ariovistus at first insolently refuses even to parley (34), and when he finally consents to do so it is largely in the form of boasts, threats, and accusations—together with an attempt to bribe the proconsul (44). His treacherous seizure of Roman envoys is yet to come (47).

So much for Caesar's opponents. What of the morality of his Gallic partisans? He pauses in his narrative to characterize his loyal friend Gaius Valerius Procillus as a young man of the greatest *virtus* and *humanitas* (47.4) and as a *homo honestissimus provinciae Galliae* (53.6). And the Haeduan chieftain Diviciacus fares very well indeed: his devotion to the Roman people and to Caesar (*summum in populum Romanum studium, summa in se voluntas*) is accompanied by *egregia fides, iustitia,* and *temperantia* (19.2). This is the type of man who acquires *gratia* with Caesar, and his intercession on behalf of his disloyal brother Dumnorix, an expression of fraternal devotion (*amor fraternus*), wins Caesar's forgiveness (20.3-6).

And what of Caesar himself? How does he fit into the ethical milieu of Book 1?In his negotiations with the Helvetians and with Ariovistus he bases his demands, and therefore his subsequent conduct, on the "traditional policy of the Roman people" (*consuetudo populi Romani* or *mos et exemplum populi Romani*). Both the Helvetians, when they are refused permission to pass through the Province, and Ariovistus, when he is denied a free hand in his dealings with Roman allies, receive the explanation that Caesar is acting in accordance with this traditional policy (8.3; 43.8; 45.1); and he frequently appeals to the interests of Rome to justify his actions (7.4-5; 10.2-3; 28.3-5; 33.2-4). There is also a constant identification of Caesar's own interests and policies with those of the state (12.7; 20.5; 33.2; 35.2; 35.4; 42.3; 43.4-5; 45.1). For instance, after describing his victory over the Tigurini, that canton of the Helvetians which had killed the Roman consul Lucius Cassius and sent his army under the yoke, Caesar observes that "he has avenged private as well as national outrages (*iniuriae*)," for in the same battle in which they slew Cassius the Tigurini also killed the grandfather of Caesar's father-in-law

[7] According to C. E. Stevens, "The *Bellum Gallicum* as a work of propaganda," *Latomus* 11 (1952) 3-18, 165-79, Caesar in smashing the Helvetians was actually smashing the defenders of Gallic freedom, since a national party of the Haedui under Dumnorix had invited the Helvetians to settle in Gaul and furnish aid against Ariovistus. If this is right, Caesar is usurping the role of Dumnorix and the Helvetians when he depicts himself as the champion of Gaul against the Germanic enemy.

(12.4-7)—a connection not so remote for a Roman aristocrat as it would be for us. And Caesar in his final ultimatum to Ariovistus asserts (45.1) that to desert loyal allies is neither his policy nor the policy of the Roman people (*neque suam neque populi Romani consuetudinem*). Caesar is, therefore, above all else the proconsul of the Roman people, and as such is meticulously faithful to its interests and policies, which are actually identical with his own. This image of Caesar as proconsul was undoubtedly geared to appeal to Roman sentiment. It also serves to reinforce the implication in the introductory chapter of the *Bellum Gallicum* that Caesar came to Gaul as the advocate of *cultus* and *humanitas* (1.3). If Roman *imperium* in Gaul is *iustissimum*, as he proclaims to Ariovistus (45.1-3), his position is ethically unimpeachable.

As for Caesar's personal virtues, his *diligentia*, which complements the *virtus* of his legionaries (40.4), is intellectual, military, and abundantly illustrated on almost every page of his narrative. Its clearest demonstration is, of course, victory itself. The *liberalitas* (43.4-5; 33.1; 35.2; 42.3) and *aequitas* (40.3) which Caesar attributes to himself in his negotiations with Ariovistus have already been mentioned. He boasts of his *innocentia* ("honesty" or "incorruptibility") to help restore the morale of his mutinous army (40.12-13),[8] and ignores Ariovistus' offer of a bribe (44.13): the very fact that he does not even bother to comment on the offer merely heightens the impression of *innocentia*. Though he implicitly attributes to himself *fides* by pointing out that it is not Caesar's policy to desert friends and allies (45.1; 33.2; 35.4; 43.6-9) and *clementia* by expressing a willingness to forgive *iniuriae* (14.1-6) and by pardoning Dumnorix (for *rei publicae iniuria et suus dolor*, 20.5), the terms *fides* and *clementia*[9] are not actually used. The *constantia* which he recommends as an antidote to *timor* (40.6) indicates a sophisticated, civilized attitude toward *virtus*.

But Caesar and the Roman people enjoy more than simply moral and intellectual superiority over their enemies. Caesar raises the crucial question after he has avenged the *iniuriae* inflicted on himself and the state by crushing the Tigurini (12): "and so, whether by accident or by the purpose of the immortal gods, that section of the Helvetian state which had brought so signal a calamity upon the Roman people was the first to pay the penalty in full."

And moved perhaps by this premonition of divine favor, Caesar warns the envoys from the surviving cantons of the Helvetians that their elation over success may be premature, since it is the policy of the immortal gods to grant evil men temporary impunity, and even prosperity, that their final punishment may be even more painful because of the reversal of fortune (14.4-5). Is not the implication clear that Caesar is the agent of the immortal gods? And might not one add the further implication that this exalted function is in some way connected with the moral excellence of the proconsul of the Roman people? Now the favor of the gods was undoubtedly a good thing, but what Caesar appeals to in order to arouse the martial spirit of his mutinous troops for their confrontation with the Germans is the favor of *Fortuna*, who had conferred *felicitas* on their commander (40.12).[10] The war with the Helvetians

[8] Jefferson Elmore, "Caesar on the causes of mutiny," *CJ* 20 (1925) 430-32 has convincingly explained this passage. Caesar's *innocentia* is his honesty in distributing the spoils of war among his troops. The mutiny of Lucullus' troops provides an example of what might happen to a commander who practiced the antithetical vice of *avaritia*.

[9] *Clementia Caesaris* is a much debated subject. At the extremes of the controversy stand Cornelia Catlin Coulter, "Caesar's clemency," *CJ* 26 (1931) 513-24, who is extremely generous to Caesar, and Rambaud (above, n. 1), pp.283-93, highly skeptical here as in all else.

[10] *Fortuna Caesaris* has an extensive scholarly literature. W. Warde Fowler, "Caesar's conception of Fortuna," *CR* 17 (1903) 153-6, and Harry Ericsson, "Caesar und sein Glück," *Eranos* 42 (1944) 57-69, deny that Caesar had any mystical or superstitious faith in his own good fortune. Caesar's references to *Fortuna* emerge from Rambaud's analysis (above, n. 1), pp.256-64, as a crude propaganda device. To my knowledge the most recent treatment of the subject is that of Cordula Brutscher, "Cäsar und sein Glück," *Museum Helveticum* 15 (1958) 75-83, who is probably correct in insisting (p.78) that the *fortuna* and

had proved that, Caesar asserts; and Ariovistus was soon to pay the penalty for denying her favorite. Her beneficence is, in fact, unbounded, for she preserves Caesar's comrade Procillus from a fiery death at the hands of the Germans (53.5-7). Might we not conclude that the same metaphysical forces that helped Caesar gain victory over the Helvetians did not desert him when he faced an even more pernicious antagonist?

Propaganda? Certainly, and we can be sure that Orgetorix, Dumnorix, and Ariovistus would have told a different story. It seems to me, however, that the commentaries on the Gallic campaigns could scarcely have served any immediate or short-term political ends, but that they were admirably suited to enhance the *gloria* of their author, both during his lifetime and among succeeding generations.[11] Whatever their purpose, we should pause before questioning Caesar's sincerity, even if we are moved to scoff at it. His claim to moral excellence is wholeheartedly endorsed by his contemporary, the historian Sallust, who introduces into his *Bellum Catilinae* a sketch of the nature and character (*natura et mores*) of Caesar and Cato the Younger with this remark (53.6-54.6): "In my time, however, there have been two men of tremendous *virtus*, though of different character—Marcus Cato and Gaius Caesar." As for supernatural favor, Caesar almost a decade before, when only a quaestor, had hinted at this in a funeral oration in honor of his aunt Julia (Suet. *Jul.* 6.1). After averring regal and divine ancestry for her—and therefore for himself—he had asserted: "There is, therefore, within our family both the sanctity of kings (*sanctitas regum*), who exercise supreme power among men, and the holiness of the gods (*caerimonia deorum*), who have power even over kings."[12]

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felicitas of a Roman general do not depend on his moral qualifications. The relationship between *Fortuna* and *felicitas* has frequently been misunderstood. The terms should not be construed as synonyms. *Felicitas* is the special attribute which *Fortuna* bestows on her favorite.

[11] Herein I am indebted to Norman J. DeWitt, "The non-political nature of Caesar's *Commentaries*," *TAPA* 73 (1942) 341-52, who argues that in keeping with the function of *commentarii*, which was to provide source material for future historians, Caesar's *BG* was designed primarily to insure *gloria* in posterity. Yet Cicero pleads with L. Lucceius to make haste in writing a history of his achievements—and offers to furnish *commentarii rerum omnium*—that he might enjoy his bit of glory (*gloriola*) while still alive (*Ad fam.* 5.12.9-10). For a lucid explanation of the relation of *commentarius* to *historia* see F. E. Adcock, *Caesar as man of letters* (Cambridge 1956) pp.6-18.

[12] W. Warde Fowler, "An unnoticed trait in the character of Julius Caesar," CR 30 (1916) 68-71, explains several unusual actions taken by Caesar—among them the prosecution of Rabirius—in the light of this passage. While Fowler may well be right in recognizing a strong religious instinct in Caesar's character, he has erred, I feel, in interpreting *caerimonia* to mean that the Julii had an inherited instinct for looking after the cult of the gods.