

2-2007

(Review) Caesar in Gaul and Rome: War in Words

Eric Adler

Connecticut College, eadler1@conncoll.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.conncoll.edu/classfacpub>



Part of the [Ancient History, Greek and Roman through Late Antiquity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Adler, E. "Caesar In Gaul And Rome: War In Words." *Classical Journal* 102.3 (2007): 310-312. Web.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Classics Department at Digital Commons @ Connecticut College. It has been accepted for inclusion in Classics Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Connecticut College. For more information, please contact bpancier@conncoll.edu.

The views expressed in this paper are solely those of the author.

and *then* rendered mute seems to corroborate, if not absolutely require, a chronological ordering of the requisite material.

Blondell's greatest achievement lies in marrying, for the most part successfully, two tendencies in Platonic scholarship that have been kept mostly distinct: argumentative analysis and literary interpretation. Her elegant prose, clear articulation of ideas and close attention to the text ensure a pleasurable intellectual experience. Almost every page of this book is filled with clever insights and fresh ideas, contributing something new to topics that had seemed exhaustively treated by others.¹

ZINA GIANNOPOULOU

University of California at Irvine

Caesar in Gaul and Rome: War in Words. By ANDREW M. RIGGSBY. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006. Pp. ix + 271. Cloth, \$45.00. ISBN 0-292-71303-7.

"No other author so clearly part of (or even central to) the Greco-Roman canon in theory has been held in such contempt in practice, especially in the Anglophone world." Thus did Andrew M. Riggsby (henceforth R.) begin a review of a collection dedicated to Caesar's *De bello Gallico*.² With his new book, R. helps ameliorate this situation by contributing an insightful monograph on the Caesarian portion of the *BG*. The result will prove useful not only to those interested in Caesar, but also to scholars whose work focuses on the nature of Roman imperialism and ancient ethnography.

The book commences with an introduction that both establishes the topics for consideration and presents some methodological throat-clearing. R. aims to examine "the kind of Roman identity postulated by" the *BG* (p. 1), as well as "Caesar's political self-fashioning and the political ends of his writing and publishing such a work" (p. 2). By means of an emphasis on intertextuality, he endeavors to discern how the *BG*, though essentially a non-argumentative text, retains a strong argumentative force.

To this end, Chapter One examines how Caesar's discussion of space in the *BG* advances his own ends. For instance, R. maintains that Caesar depicts the geography of Gaul in a way that suggests the desirability of its wholesale conquest. In Chapter Two, R. turns to

¹ The bibliography is useful and up-to-date, and Blondell draws from many disciplines. One important omission, M.M. McCabe, *Plato and His Predecessors: The Dramatisation of Reason* (Cambridge, 2000), deals with most of Blondell's material from a similar interpretative angle.

² *Julius Caesar as Artful Reporter: The War Commentaries as Political Instruments*, edited by K. Welch and A. Powell. Reviewed in *BMCR* 1999.04.16.

Caesar's descriptions of the Germans and Gauls, contrasting them with the bulk of the Greco-Roman ethnographic tradition. R. argues that Caesar departs from "the general practice of ancient ethnography" (p. 67) in not relying on a binary framework of "Us and Other." Rather, R. posits, Caesar fashions the Germans and the Gauls into distinct groups in a manner that justifies his campaign.

Chapter Three focuses on the concept of *virtus* in the *BG*. R. argues that Caesar tweaks the meaning of *virtus* to signify "obedience under difficult circumstances" (p. 89). This, he says, highlights the commander's role in victory and establishes deference to hierarchies as a model for the future behavior of Roman elites. Further, R. suggests that Caesar, by artificially depicting the Gauls' partial assimilation of *virtus* over time, demonstrates that they were conquered at just the right moment—before they could become too formidable an opponent. In Chapter Four, R. looks at "the general ethnic identity in *De Bello Gallico*" (p. 107), in part through a detailed examination of the Critognatus speech (7.77). He concludes that the *BG*, unlike modern imperial texts, resists a starkly negative portrayal of the colonized Other; Caesar did this, R. suggests, not out of altruistic impulses, but because it was to his political and social advantage. In Chapter Five, R. maintains that Caesar wrote the *BG* very much within the *commentarius* genre—instead of that of the historian—and exploited aspects of this genre to good effect.

Chapter Six turns to the topics of Roman imperialism and the ancient "just war" tradition. Disagreeing with the current *opinio communis*, R. maintains that the Roman elite—particularly Caesar and Cicero—cared about the justice of the state's military actions. He posits that contemporary scholars have wrongly dismissed ancient regard for martial justifications in part due to anachronistic expectations imposed on Roman authors. Chapter Seven serves as a sort of culmination of the work; R. uses the conclusions from his previous chapters to home in on the ways the *BG* presents its author in a favorable light to its intended readership. Through a comparative examination of Caesar's self-presentation and that of other Roman generals, R. concludes that Caesar portrays himself as a traditional member of the political elite—undoubtedly to assuage fears about his untraditional rise to power. The book is supplemented with two short appendices and a rather skimpy index.

Overall, the work is a success. R.'s nuanced readings of a wide variety of evidence lead to numerous convincing arguments. His discussion of Vercingetorix as the antithesis of a "noble savage" seems particularly insightful. Many of the most interesting conclusions are also the most heterodox: the discussion of Caesar's eschewing tropes typical of modern colonial authors, for instance, is compelling. Indeed, it leads one to wonder further about R.'s

conclusions: does Caesar's avoidance of integral features of colonial texts suggest that there is something fundamentally different about Roman imperialism, or, at least, the way it was conceived? Or has R. merely offered a more sensitive reading of the *BG* than more openly ideological critics have produced of, say, Conrad's works? Unfortunately, R. does not tell us.

R.'s examination of the "just war" tradition is important and satisfying; in it, he musters an array of arguments in favor of a more serious discussion of Roman views of "just wars" than fashionably skeptical critics have favored. Though some of his points in this regard are stronger than others, R. presents a persuasive case—one that should be addressed by scholars of Roman imperialism.

Shortcomings are few. R. proves too trusting of the genuineness of Roman regal *commentarii*. He also proffers an overly simplistic analysis of orations in Roman historiography. In part by suggesting that the speeches in the *BG* "usually serve no analytic function," R. concludes that "Caesar uses his speeches in a fashion hardly specific to the historian." The ancient historian, he argues, composed speeches out of a "desire to provide analysis of [a] situation or depiction of the speaker's character" (p. 142). This is too schematic. It may fit an historian such as Tacitus, but what about orations in the works of, for instance, Q. Curtius Rufus or Dionysius of Halicarnassus?

Yet these are quibbles. *Caesar in Gaul and Rome* demonstrates its author's familiarity with contemporary theoretical perspectives (post-colonialism, semiotics, etc.), yet never seems dogmatic or arcane. R. may not single-handedly reverse scholarly attitudes toward Caesar's *commentarii*, but his work goes a long way toward demonstrating what can be gleaned from a text normally—and unfortunately—reserved for novice students of Latin.

ERIC ADLER

University of Minnesota

The Genesis of Lachmann's Method. By SEBASTIANO TIMPANARO, edited and translated by GLENN W. MOST. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. Pp. 256. Cloth, \$47.50. ISBN 0-226-80405-4.

Timpanaro's remarkable book was published in 1963, and since then a German translation (1971) and a second Italian edition (1981, repr. 1985) have appeared; now we have the boon of an English translation that not only collates Timpanaro's adjustments (published and unpublished), but adds an unpublished draft (incomplete and illegible in places) on Bipartite Stemmas, the subject of Appendix C, and lists recent bibliographical material. It may seem churlish to remark that as a result the book sometimes reads less like an



COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

TITLE: Caesar in Gaul and Rome: War in Words
SOURCE: The Classical Journal 102 no3 F/Mr 2007
PAGE(S): 310-12

The magazine publisher is the copyright holder of this article and it is reproduced with permission. Further reproduction of this article in violation of the copyright is prohibited. To contact the publisher:
<http://www.rmc.edu/~gdaugher/camwshp.html>