

Caesar DĒ BELLŌ GALLICŌ 1.1–7: Caesar Describes Gaul and Begins the War

Latin Text, DĒ BELLŌ GALLICŌ 1.1.1–4, p. 3

[1.1] *Gallia est omnis dīvisā in partēs trēs, quārum ūnam incolunt Belgae, aliam Aquitānī, tertiam quī ipsōrum linguā Celtae, nostrā Gallī appellantur. Hī omnēs linguā, īstitutīs, lēgibus inter sē differunt.*

Literal Translation Molinarius

Gaul is [as] a whole divided into three parts, of which [parts] the Belgians inhabit one [part], the Aquitani [inhabit] another [part], [and] the third [part those people inhabit] who by their own language [are called] Celtae, [but] by our [language] are called Gauls. All these [peoples] differ from one another in respect to language, customs, [and] laws.

Literal Translation McDevitte

All Gaul is divided into three parts, one of which the Belgae inhabit, the Aquitani another, those who in their own language are called Celts, in ours Gauls. All these differ from each other in language, customs and laws.

Discussion Questions

1. Caesar's report on Gaul begins abruptly and with a simple overview of who lives there and where. Why do you think he begins this way? For what audience does Caesar write? Why was Caesar, despite his distance from the Capital, eager to keep himself before the eyes of his fellow Romans?
2. How likely do you think it is that Caesar's audience had a clear picture in their heads of the map of Gaul?
3. Why does Caesar begin with language, customs, and laws rather than physical geography?
4. We think of individual countries today as relatively unified in terms of language, but, before the invention of the nation-state, the linguistic map of ancient Europe was much more diverse. How is this similar to or different from linguistic diversity today?