

those reports. Why would Caesar have chosen a genre that imitated such reports? Caesar was the politician who, during his consulship, first published “minutes” or “proceedings of the Senate” (*acta Senātūs*), much to the resentment of the conservative aristocracy, who preferred to settle matters among themselves without public scrutiny. When Caesar departed for Gaul, he probably chose *commentārii* as a genre to publicize his accomplishments among as wide a public as possible in a format that made it appear as if he were sharing his official reports to the Senate with all Roman citizens. Caesar was also absent from Rome for nine years. His “dispatches” on the Gallic War would have been devoured by a public eager for news, and would have been promoted by Caesar’s political allies. Similarly, Caesar’s “reports” on the civil war were likely crucial in presenting Caesar’s side in this bitterly divisive conflict. When were these books published? How were they published? Did they appear serially or as a complete work? Were there revisions along the way? The answers to all these questions remain disputed. We do have testimony, however, that, although the genre was in general conceived of as providing the raw materials for historians, Caesar’s *commentārii* were considered so polished that they dissuaded competitors from attempting to rewrite his accounts, especially of his Gallic campaigns.

Caesar’s style has often been praised for its distinctive qualities. He tells his stories logically, clearly, and without obscure Latin vocabulary. If readers compare his prose to his contemporary Cicero or to the later historian Livy, they will soon perceive why Caesar’s style is called “plain.” His sentences, artfully constructed though they are, do not become involved in the complex syntax of subordinate and relative clauses (a style called “periodic”). His use of rhetorical devices is more subtle. He writes as a dispassionate observer, as opposed to the outraged orator or the emotional and moralizing historian.

Caesar also demotes himself to the third person. Much has been written on this topic, but one must consider his original audience at Rome: a public eagerly listening to reports about the progress of the Gallic war. Texts were often read aloud to larger groups who gathered to listen. If we compare, “When Caesar was informed of this, he decided to . . .” to “When I heard this, I reckoned I should . . .,” we can observe that the third person would seem more natural in reporting the great general’s accomplishments in the wilds of Gaul to a larger audience. Even upper-class “readers” frequently employed slaves to read texts to them out loud. If Caesar were not writing letters to people personally, the first person would have been jarring. Why would Caesar be speaking to them directly, especially if they were in a

group, and he was so far away in Gaul? With the help of the third person, the focus of the reports was more squarely on Caesar's actions rather than his authorship, and their plain and unemotional style lent them a seeming objectivity. How could they not be true? And Caesar does use the first person from time to time, but when he speaks as an author, not when he is telling a story in which he is another character, even though we know that he is the most important character in his own story!

Caesar's *commentārii* have seduced many readers over thousands of years with their seemingly objective authority. A cursory glance, however, at the bitterly partisan times in which they appeared quickly reveals what was at stake for Caesar: his reputation, his public career, and even his life, as the subsequent civil war and Caesar's murder amply demonstrate.

Caesar's view of the world is a pleasure to read, and his prose is convincing. *Caveat lector* (reader beware). Critically aware study of his texts will reap even richer harvests.

THE CHAIN OF COMMAND: CAESAR AS GENERAL AND THE ROMAN ARMY

Commander-in-Chief

Caesar, who had been consul in 59 BCE, arrived in his province as a proconsul, that is, a magistrate who came in place of (*prō*) a consul. A proconsul enjoyed the executive power of a Roman consul within his assigned sphere of operation, his *prōvincia* or province. Roman Gaul, however, was at the edge of the Roman world, and Caesar's province was protected by the Roman army. As governor, Caesar also served as commander-in-chief or leader (*dux*) or—after he won a victory, and was hailed as such—commander (*imperātor*) of the army. Who served in this army? Whole books are written on this topic, but we can sketch the basic principles here, and we will begin with the chain of command, and work our way from Caesar to subordinate officers to infantry and beyond.

Caesar enjoyed almost unlimited authority as a general. His power to punish enemies, for example, included execution, selling them into slavery, or, as his general Aulus Hirtius in his supplementary book on the Gallic War writes, chopping off the hands of those who had rebelled. Roman citizens had the right to appeal and were not supposed to be put to death without trial. The rules were different in the army. There was no appeal, and Caesar had the right, as general, to order the execution of deserters, thieves, and other criminals. Although the power of life and death dramatically