



*The Landmark Julius Caesar: The Complete Works: Gallic War, Civil War, Alexandrian War, African War, and Spanish War* ed. and trans. Kurt A. Raaflaub.

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In this most recent installment of the “Landmark” editions<sup>1</sup> of ancient historians, distinguished classical scholar Kurt Raaflaub (Brown Univ.) presents Julius Caesar’s *Commentaries* and three other, contemporary but non-Caesarian works transmitted under his name. The carefully annotated texts are preceded by a ninety-two-page introduction (co-written with Cynthia Damon) and followed by four appendices on persons (J. Ramsey), currency (B. Brinkman), calendars, and the Roman military (C. Mackay). In addition, there is an annotated list of ancient authors, a glossary, a bibliography, an eighty-page index,<sup>2</sup> and nine serviceable reference maps. A further *forty-three* appendixes or “web essays” by various authors are freely available online (www.landmarkcaesar.com).

The volume’s standard “Landmark” features include numbered subsections within paragraphs, marginal notations of books and chapters, dates of particular campaigns, specification of locations (“Near Gergovia”), and short summaries. Many detailed maps appear with insets locating, say, southwest France on a map of the northwest Mediterranean (3.23). Battle-drawings and photographs clarify the phases of important battles among other details. For example, fig. 2.4 shows both sides of a Belgic coin of King Diviciacus; fig. 7.9 shows D. Junius Brutus Albinus’s denarius of 48 BCE with annotations. Well chosen illustrations include a Greek trireme beak, Roman catapult, Gallic fort (Bibracte), and photographs show battle sites and towns (8.33, 11.112), Roman tunnels (Uxellodunum 8.43), weapons and armor, a reconstruction of Alesia (7.72), Gallic metalware (coins, Gundestrup cauldron), and military relief sculptures, including over a hundred scenes from Trajan’s Column, showing battle equipment, beheadings, and the torching of “hostile” villages. A twenty-six-page summary by book and chapter tracks Caesar’s actions month by month.<sup>3</sup> The large volume is beautifully printed and bound to last (in both senses).

Raaflaub begins by sketching Caesar’s life (100–44 BCE) and political career. Despite his aristocratic birth, he associated with the more democratic *populares* political faction. By marriage in the previous generation, he had ties to Gaius Marius, the enemy of the *optimates* politicians, especially Sulla and his successors. But Caesar’s allegiance was less ideological than opportunistic and familial. He may have been *for* the people but he was not *of* the people.

Caesar’s Gallic campaigns were successful for both himself and his troops; the Empire expanded west despite his opponents in the Senate, who were motivated more by personal enmity than

1. Robert B. Strassler is the series general editor. Earlier installments have been devoted to Thucydides (1996), Herodotus (2007), Xenophon’s *Hellenika* (2009), and Arrian’s *Campaigns of Alexander* (2010).

2. The index offers a serious education in itself. E.g., we find under “Caesar” entries for cruelty, emotions, justifications, reputation, etc. Other indexed subjects include cohorts, Druids, disinformation, foraging, gifts, messaging, oaths, surrender, towers, and water.

3. E.g., at GW 4.17, “SITE OF RHINE BRIDGE: The Romans build the Bridge; Caesar explains the construction.”

legal or anti-imperial ethics. The *Gallic War* paints a rather rosy picture of plodding progress and great military ingenuity—Caesar’s view in Caesar’s words.

Sulla’s young butcher, Gnaeus Pompeius (Pompey) had become a middle-aged darling of the post-Sullan Senate, if not the people. Caesar, away from Rome on campaign from 58 to 50 BCE, bribed and otherwise seduced useful officials and spent his Gallic loot on public buildings in Rome, including a new forum, a basilica, a temple to his patron “ancestral” goddess—Venus Victrix. Ironically, Caesar, the least religious of Romans, gained election to the highest priesthood, Pontifex Maximus, with all its accruing prestige and social and political power. After his Gallic command expired, Caesar could not appear in Rome (as legally required) to run again for consul or celebrate his triumph(s), without forfeiting his immunity to prosecution. Senatorial rivals refused to compromise because of Caesar’s illegal acts and violations of custom committed in wars and peacetime, at home and abroad.

The ensuing civil wars (and sometimes Caesar’s account of them) were “a long, grinding, and brutal affair” (xxxii). Caesar defeated Pompey’s forces in Italy and northern Greece, then Pompeian holdouts in Spain, Africa, and Egypt. His quadruple triumph celebrated victories over noncitizen Gauls and Egyptians, and kings Pharnaces in Asia Minor and Juba in Africa. By 44 BCE, Caesar had many supporters and “friends,” but had alienated Rome’s governing elites, to whom any imaginable replacement for the old Republic, which had won them handsome rewards for centuries, was simply anathema. After Caesar’s assassination, further civil conflicts (44–31 BCE) ended in the defeat and deaths of Antony and Cleopatra and left only one leader, Caesar’s great-nephew Octavian, soon to be titled “Augustus.”

In the *Gallic War*, Caesar selected and elaborated events to enhance his image at home and for posterity (xxxix), stressing the speed and success of his land grab. Consistently highlighted are Gallic aggressions, German factionalism, and near universal barbarian perfidy, although trusting Caesar himself was a mug’s game. Barely mentioned is Caesar’s rapacious extraction of Gallic wealth for his soldiers and dependents in Italy. Roman punishments for perceived disloyalty were severe: reprisals against the Eburones, for instance, included devastation of the land, torture and execution of council members and their chief, Acco.<sup>4</sup> The tribe was intentionally “wiped off the map” (xlili). General Caesar makes no, or only minor, errors. However, he does not boast of his (elsewhere attested) courage and skill with arms and horses. The editors establish a “Caesar” imbued with ancestral Romanness (xlv), faithful to friends, terrible to enemies, loved by his men.

Even after eight years of successes, culminating in victory over Vercingetorix in 52 BCE, the conqueror of Gaul had to face a pan-Gallic coalition. The situation makes us question the veracity of his account, but alternative sources, never as many as Raaflaub claims (xlvi), do not survive. Rarely is Caesar demonstrably wrong in his facts, but his self-justifying propagandistic purpose is undeniable (though it has been!).<sup>5</sup> Raaflaub maintains that Romans had a sense of cultural mis-

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4. The brutalities perpetrated in the cause of Roman imperialism include the killing of 40,000 Arvernian men, women, and babies, and the enslavement of 53,000 Atuatucans (GW 2.33, 7.28).

5. “[What] critics consider falsification can be explained in other ways. Caesar’s tendency is visible ...in selection, omission, emphasis, and exaggeration—and occasional fudging” (lviii). In other words, he ignores and bends facts for cagey self-glorification. See, further, web essays HH: “The *Gallic War* as a Work of Propaganda,” by Alexa Jervis, and JJ: “The *Civil War* as a Work of Propaganda,” by Kurt Raaflaub; see also Michel Rambaud, *L’Art de la déformation historique dans les Commentaires de César* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1953), Kathryn Welch and Anton Powell, eds., *Julius Caesar as Artful Reporter* (London: Classical Pr of Wales, 1998), and Richard W. Westall, *Caesar’s Civil War: Historical Reality and Fabrication* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

sion,<sup>6</sup> but Cicero's histrionic gestures in this vein are not as persuasive as motives of personal prestige (*dignitas*—Caesar's *summum bonum*), power, and influence, as well as loot.

Caesar's prose style is plain and speedy, without the usual pre-battle harangues, enemy council "speeches," digressions, and rhetorical adornments found, for instance, in Livy. Cicero admired Caesar's prose, and that is high praise. The first seven books of the *Gallic War* were probably published separately, year by year. Caesar's distancing, third-person self-presentation, references to his troops as "our men" (i.e., fellow Romans), and "othering" of the Gauls are calculated to further his own agendas.

The *Civil War* is meant to justify Caesar's declaration of war on his country's government. He has been disrespected, lied to, and denied his well-earned triumphal honors (e.g., *CW* 1.1–6). Raaflaub observes (lii) that Caesar's complaints, though valid, were a surprising basis for armed treason. Caesar won the hearts of *tota Italia*. He counted all men who remained neutral as "friends," and extended his policy of clemency to hostile senators and enemy troops who joined his militant faction. Thus, traitorous Caesar became a statesman, portraying his elite Roman foes as no better than barbarians.

Caesar pursued defeated Pompey to Egypt (*CW* 11.106). The *Alexandrian War* (48–47 BCE) picks up when the *Civil War* abruptly stops. Two months after returning to Italy, Caesar sailed via Sicily to Africa, and the *African War* (47–46 BCE) commences without connection to its predecessor (likely a sign of unrelated authorship). A sometimes disorganized centurion wrote the *Spanish War* (46–45 BCE) in more colloquial Latin; it touches on the victories in Asia and Africa, before plunging into Dictator Caesar's last campaign. "After finish[ing] up a whole lot of business, ... he left and arrived in Spain with enormous speed to wind up the war" (*SW* 14.2.1). The anonymous author's eyewitness account is invaluable, since most reports of Caesar's bloody actions surfaced fifty to two hundred years later. Troop movements and battles predominate, with little attention to long-term strategy or individual actions.

Raaflaub's translation is at times wordier and more colloquial than the Latin original, no surprise given Caesar's trademark concision. But this lavish yet affordable new edition of the Caesarian literary corpus will instruct anyone, novice or expert, with an interest in ancient politics, Roman imperialism, military literature more generally,<sup>7</sup> and the life and career of one of history's giants.

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6. In what may be a professor's inside joke, Raaflaub cites Tacitus (*Agricola* 30), where the Briton Calgacus, speaking of the Romans' arrogant pillaging pacifications, says "They make a desert and they call it a peace."

7. See, further, Luca Grillo and Christopher B. Krebs, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to the Writings of Julius Caesar* (NY: Cambridge U Pr, 2018).