ETHNOGRAPHY ENCOUNTERED:
THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE
ETHNOGRAPHIC FRAMEWORK OF CAESAR'S *GALLIC WAR*

Over a decade before he came, saw, and conquered at Zela in 46 BC, Julius Caesar was

engaged in a similar—if much more extended—enterprise in Gaul and neighboring regions of

northern Europe. Although he set out initially to face the threat of the Helvetii, Caesar managed

to extend this originally brief expedition into an eight-year sequence of campaigns that took him

to the unexplored frontiers of the known world, where he encountered a seemingly endless

supply of new and conveniently threatening peoples to conquer. The events of this campaign

were documented by Caesar in his *de Bello Gallico.* While the work's primary focus was on

political interactions and wars with the barbarian tribes of northern Europe, Caesar also included

a number of ethnographic accounts of these peoples, some of which were the first of their kind in

ancient ethnography.

As a genre, ethnography had existed among the Greeks for centuries, but Caesar was one

of the first Romans of whom we know to write in a deliberately ethnographic mode.[1]

Furthermore, Caesar appears to have been the first author, Greek or Roman, to write an

ethnography of the Germans,[2] the first Roman to explore Britain, and one of few ancient authors

by his date to have written an ethnographic account of the island's inhabitants. Caesar was not,

however, merely content with covering new geographic and literary ground. The structure and

content of the ethnographic sections of the *Gallic War* not only indicate that Caesar was aware of

and engaging with the Greek ethnographic tradition,[3] but also that he included them with the

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[1] The only surviving text predating Caesar that engages in ethnographic inquiry in any length or detail is Cato the Elder's *Origines*, which now exists only in fragments, some of which concern the Gauls of northern Italy (Williams (2001) 71-80; Woolf (2011) 60).

[2] There is some speculation as to whether or not Pytheas's lost work contained a German ethnography in addition to his better-attested British one (Hawkes (1977) 26), but there is no evidence to support this claim.

[3] On the degree of Caesar's engagement with the ethnographic tradition: Nash (1976) 124; Woolf (2011) 80. On ethnographers correcting and criticizing their predecessors: Woolf (2011) 37; Romm (1992) 5; Hinds (1998). On

intent of constructing an 'ethnographic framework' for his entire work. This literary mechanism allowed him to contrast the customs of northern European peoples with those of the Romans and, by association, to convey the level of their savagery, ferocity, and the threat they posed to Rome on a sliding scale. In order to accomplish this, he appropriated established precedents and *topoi* of Greek ethnography to justify and glorify his victories over the more distant barbarian tribes, the Belgae, Germans, and Britons.[4]

Yet in Book 7, which tells of the year 52 BC, this framework failed: the Gauls, whom Caesar had previously depicted as a comparatively weakened and conquered people, suddenly rose in revolt against the Romans, and the abruptness and surprising sophistication of this uprising negated Caesar's clear and comfortable distinction between the civilized Romans and barbarian Northerners. This sudden shift in Gallic hostility and fierceness in Book 7, at odds with the apparent narrative objective of the preceding books of the work and of the framework as it was set up, has always proved a challenge to scholars of Caesar. It is argued here that this disconnect has significant implications not only for Caesar's integrity as a writer, since it suggests that Caesar may have deliberately downplayed the Gauls' fierceness throughout most of the *Gallic War*'s narrative, but also for the date, and way, the *Gallic War* was composed. In recent years the long-standing unitarian assumption about the composition of the work, that the *Gallic War* was written all at once in 51 BC or after, has come again to be questioned, especially by those following an influential paper by Peter Wiseman in 1998.[5] I extend this: because of the

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the potentially subversive uses of ethnography in Caesar—points closer to my own—see: Rawlings (1998) 173; Riggsby (2006) 58.

[4] Schadee (2008) 170-71; Rawlings (1992) 180-81; Riggsby (2006) 101-2.

[5] The debate concerning the composition of the *Gallic War*—initially divided between advocates for unitary and serial composition—has raged for nearly a century. While both sides and the various positions in between them have all furnished evidence gleaned from the text of the *Gallic War* and from other contemporary documents, none of it is conclusive enough to end the debate effectively. Furthermore, much of the evidence relies entirely on interpretation and, ultimately, each scholar's gut feeling on how he or she believes the *Gallic War* was composed. I

collapse of the ethnographic framework in Book 7 of the *Gallic War*, I argue that the work must have been composted and released to the public serially. Caesar could not go back and revise earlier pieces to accord with the surprising events of Book 7. The structure of the framework suggests, then, that Caesar released Books 1-3 in 56—probably in order to ensure his continued assignment to the *provincia* of Transalpine Gaul, which had been granted to him by the Senate in 59. Books 4-6 must have been composed before 52, and also featured a conscious downplaying of Gallic fierceness. This downplaying of fierceness is abruptly reversed only in Book 7, which must then have been written in 52 or a short time after.

I. ETHNOGRAPHY BEFORE CAESAR

In its earliest forms ethnography was much more of a literary genre than an empirical one,[6] and it was this literary mode that provided particularly fertile ground for fanciful stories of peoples in far-off lands beyond the bounds of the known world. It was at the edges of known space that Homer's Ethiopians played hosts to the vacations of the gods (Hom. *Od.* 1.23-26), and Hesiod's "well-horsed Hyperboreans" enjoyed bounteous living beyond the gusts of the north wind (Hes. *Cat.* 40a = *P. Oxy.* XI 1358 fr. 2). Although later authors would shed the most obvious elements of literary fancy by confining their ethnographic subjects to known peoples whom either they or their predecessors had visited, fantastical elements from earlier ethnography still remained a lively part of the tradition. These so-called θαύματα ("wonders" or "strange things") became an integral element of ethnography and were expected in every entry in the

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will therefore not engage with this argument in any sort of detail, but I will provide questions and observations gleaned from my readings of the ethnographic framework that I believe are relevant to the conversation. For extensive commentary and bibliography on the composition debate, see Rambaud (1966); Gesche (1976) 83-87; Lieberg (1998); Wiseman (1998); Schadee (2008) nn. 2-4, 62; Krebs (2013) n. 21.
[6] Romm (1992) 5.

genre, and as such one can find tales of dog-headed men and one-eyed griffin hunters in nearly any proper ethnographic work.[7]

Herodotus was the first writer of ethnography of whom we know to oppose the inclusion of mythical peoples in ethnographic writing. Not only does he balk at the notion of the Arimaspians being a race of one-eyed men (Hdt. 3.115), but he also seems to doubt the very existence of the Hyperboreans (Hdt. 4.36).[8] Herodotus does not appear to have applied this scrutiny to θαύματα within the bounds of the inhabited world, however, and still includes the fantastic beasts of Arabia (Hdt. 2.73, 76) and lurid descriptions of Indian sexual practices in his work (3.101-102). But regardless of the veracity of some of these more fantastical stories, Herodotus does seem to have shifted the focus of ethnography toward actual ethnic groups and autopic evidence, fostering the emergence of the highly popular world-travel accounts of the Alexandrian Age. These περίοδοι γῆς ("journeys around the earth") accounts comprised a substantial portion of ethnographic writing in the fourth century BC onward. As a result of the buildup of these travelogues, an increasing number of writers of this period did not actually engage in any travels themselves but relied entirely on earlier accounts,[9] and it was these arm-chair ethnographers who most firmly entrenched the standards of the ethnographic genre.[10] Although the dominant trends of ethnography were already in place among historians and geographers before Alexandrian ethnographers took up their pens, the tradition of relying on and engaging with the ethnographic accounts of other writers—usually by criticizing them—also

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[7] Riggsby (2006) 70. Romm (1992) collects many examples of θαύματα (69-78).
[8] There is some debate over the interpretation of this passage. Romm contends that Herodotus is genuinely puzzled at the prospect of placing the Hyperboreans within the known world, but is untroubled by their existence (Romm (1989)), while both Bridgman and Dillery assert that Herodotus's proposed dichotomy between Hyperboreans and Hypernotions is a dismissal of the Hyperborean myth (Bridgman (2005) 55; Dillery (1998) 264).
[9] Woolf (2011) 70-71.
[10] Woolf (2011) 72-73.

became a standard practice for ethnographic writing at this time.[11] As numerous accounts and styles coalesced into the fully-formed genre of ethnography, ethnographers could choose from a number of different approaches to explain the phenomena of distant lands of which they had read or (ostensibly) personally visited.

One such approach was to explain the size, temperament, and customs of foreign peoples by appeal to what modern scholars call geographic determinism.[12] Grounded in Hippocratic climatology, which theorized that climate had a direct effect on human development,[13] this way of thinking suggested that people like the Gauls, who lived in cold northern climes, were tough, large-bodied, and fierce, while those of hot southern regions were shorter, darker-skinned, and more prone to weakness in body and spirit.[14] A related *topos* that was fused with the climatological one was the notion that a barbarian peoples' proximity to civilized (i.e., Greek and Roman) society would dictate the degree of their size and savagery—an approach that lent itself rather well to the sort of social commentary many ethnographers were attempting through their writings.[15] Thus, the θαύματα not only seasoned potentially dry travelogues and geographies with colorful anecdotes, but also provided authors with a framework for the comparison of barbarism and civilization that strengthened the audience's sense of distinctive societal identity and set up opportunities for compelling social critique. In this way, θαύματα grew more sophisticated through their use in explaining the nature—not just the appearance or habits—of distant peoples, and they became entrenched more firmly within the ethnographic tradition. Through these various *topoi*, ethnographic writers furnished readers with an often fantastical counterpoint to the practices and behaviors of their own civilized culture, and were able to assert

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[11] Woolf (2011) 37; Hinds (1998) 108-109, 131.
[12] Woolf (2011) 44-51.
[13] Schadee (2008) 163.
[14] Schadee (2008) 163; Woolf (2011) 50.
[15] Woolf (2011) 54; Wells (1999) 100-1; Romm (1992) 47; Norden (1920); Riese (1875) 11 n.1.

the normative quality of Greco-Roman culture, thus establishing a clear boundary between the civilized and barbarian peoples of the world and reinforcing their own notions of moral and cultural superiority through the dichotomy their comparisons produced.

II. CAESAR'S PREDECESSORS AND PEERS

The Romans took up ethnographic writing slowly, as they did many other artistic pursuits introduced to them by the Greeks. The first dedicated ethnographic account written in Latin was contained in the *Origines* of Cato the Elder, a work of the mid-second century BC—nearly three hundred years after Herodotus and two hundred after the dawning of the Alexandrian Age.[16] Polybius's *Historiae*, produced not long after Cato's work,[17] also contained ethnographic passages and can be seen as a logical successor given both authors' interest in the Gauls of northern Italy;[18] it was perhaps from Cato and Polybius that Caesar drew inspiration for the ethnography in the *Gallic War*, since both authors described the Gauls' gradual southward migration as having a corrupting effect that brought about their slow moral and even physical decline.[19]

Two other Greek authors are considered to have influenced Caesar's approach to Gallic ethnography, Pytheas of Massalia and Posidonius of Apamea, neither of whose work survives other than in fragments. Pytheas is cited occasionally by Strabo and Pliny the Elder, although usually just to be criticized and corrected. He nevertheless holds the distinction of having been

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[16] Williams (2001) 78-79.

[17] The intellectual relationship between Cato and Polybius is hotly contested. See Nicolet (1974) 243-255, Garbarino (1973) 343-348, Musti (1978) 128-29.

[18] It is not without some trepidation that I am faced with distinguishing between the terms 'Celt' and 'Gaul' for the northern European people treated by Cato, Polybius, and later Caesar. They are called Celts by Cato, Polybius, and many other Greek ethnographers, but Caesar consistently calls them Gauls—although he does explain at the beginning of his work that they are called Gauls by the Romans and Celts in their own tongue (Caes., *Gal.* 1.1). Since Caesar is the principal focus of this paper, I will retain his use of the term Gaul in order to avoid any potential confusion when working with quotations, and I have and will continue to refer to as Gauls those peoples whom other authors call Celts.

[19] Williams (2001) 71.

the first Greek to circumnavigate Britain, and his descriptions of the island, its climate, and the movement of the sun are often thought to have been the sources of Caesar's version in the *Gallic War*.[20] Posidonius's work survives in somewhat better condition than that of Pytheas, and the remains of Book 23 of his *Historiae* have been reconstructed from nine quoted passages in the writings of Athenaeus and Strabo and from reconstructions using material from relevant passages of Caesar and Diodorus Siculus.[21] While Caesar does not quote Posidonius by name, his ethnographic accounts betray multiple similarities. Posidonius's work is consistent with many of the *topoi* found in other writings about barbarians in remote locations, and Caesar's ethnographic passages in the *Gallic War* are close enough to those of Posidonius that a relationship between the two works probably existed in some form—either Posidonius and Caesar used the same *topoi* in their accounts, or Caesar used Posidonius as a source.[22] It is impossible to be sure, however, since the *Gallic War* only refers to other writers in one instance in Book 6, when Caesar gently corrects Eratosthenes's and a handful of "certain Greeks'" pronunciation of the Hercynian Forest of southern Germany (*Gal*. 6.24). This indicates that while Caesar was familiar with Greek geographers and their custom of criticizing the work of predecessors,[23] he was usually content merely to dabble in ethnography as he related the course of his campaigns in Gaul, keeping references to other sources to an absolute minimum.

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[20] Hawkes (1977) 25-32.

[21] Nash (1976) 112. Tierney, for a long time the only writer in English on this issue, asserts that all four authors are important sources for Posidonius (Tierney (1960) 198), and he argues that Caesar's Gallic ethnography was lifted mostly from Posidonius, whose work was the principal source of information on the Gauls for the rest of antiquity (Ibid., 198, 201, 203). Nash is highly critical of this approach, observing that the exact contents of Posidonius's writings "are only available through textual reconstruction from derivative authors" and that most of the supposed references and quotations attributed to him "are not acknowledged and can be ascribed to him only by inference" (Nash (1976) 111). She in turn argues that Tierney has no concrete passages from Posidonius with which to prove that Caesar's ethnographic passages are effectively plagiarized, and that it is more likely that much of Caesar's work was unique to Caesar with less material drawn from other authors owing to his clear knowledge of Gallic ethnography and eight years of experience in Gaul itself (ibid., 115-19). For earlier works, Gesche collects the literature (Gesche (1976) 259-260).

[22] Nash (1976) 115.

[23] Hinds (1998) 108-109, 131; Woolf (2011) 37.

Caesar not only borrowed details from the works of his predecessors, but also sought to provide new insights on foreign peoples both for readers of the genre and for his audience in Rome. As a Roman magistrate and promagistrate whose popularity was on the rise, he felt keenly the need to distinguish himself from his peers, and (we should likely assume) he found ethnography and exploration a helpful vehicle by which to demonstrate his first-hand knowledge of the northern European frontier. The military travelogue style he adopted for the *Gallic War* conveys a sense of adventure and of the imminent danger of barbarian threats that—provided we accept that the work was composed serially throughout the course of his time in Gaul—likely would have maintained interest in future volumes among Caesar's readers in Rome and, as I will argue, kept his appointment in Gaul secure.[24] Thus, Caesar sought to use the ethnographic sections of the *Gallic War* to support the triumphant narrative of Roman conquest that lay at its core, and he constructed his ethnographic framework using both his own firsthand experience and knowledge of Greek ethnography in order to magnify the glory of his military campaigns.

III. THE ETHNOGRAPHIC FRAMEWORK OF THE *GALLIC WAR*

Armed with a host of venerable Greek ethnographic *topoi* (and a healthy number of legionaries), Caesar constructed his ethnographic framework by co-opting a particularly Roman idea to serve as the foundation of the ethnography of the *Gallic War*: the so-called *Metus Gallicus*, or 'Gallic Menace.'[25] Ever since the Romans' catastrophic defeat by the Gallic Senones

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[24] On the style of Caesar's narrative: Schlicher (1936) 212-224; Eden (1962) 74-117.

[25] Bellen (1985) argues that the *Metus Gallicus* had its roots in a deep and abiding Roman fear of their city being conquered by foreign invaders, and that this long-standing foundation led rather organically to the birth of the *Metus Punicus* ('Punic Menace') during Rome's wars with Carthage. Bellen cites two main pieces of evidence to support his argument about the power of the *Metus Gallicus* in Roman society. The first is a special declaration by the Senate of a state of *tumultus*, which allowed for all military-age men—even priests and the elderly—to be called up for defense of the city against a dire threat (Bellen (1985) 9-15). The second is the Romans' rare practice of human sacrifice, which they performed only in times of great duress under threat of foreign conquest in 228, 216, and 113 BC (Bellen (1985) 43). Given the several occurrences of both practices in the face of Gallic and Punic threats, Bellen asserts that the *Metus Gallicus* and its spiritual successor the *Metus Punicus* were not simply political tools,

in at the Battle of the Allia 390 BC and the Gauls' subsequent sack of Rome itself, the fear of a renewed Gallic threat had for centuries loomed over the vales of Italy.[26] By Caesar's day, a serious Gallic threat to Rome had occurred as recently as fifty years ago, when the Cimbri and Teutones, a pair of migrating Germanic tribes, had recruited Gallic allies to aid them against the Romans.[27] So terrified were the Romans after several of their legions had been defeated by these enemies in 113 that, hoping to stave off destruction, they revived the rare practice of human sacrifice—the third time they had done so in the previous two hundred years (Zonar. 8.19; Liv. 22.57; Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 83).[28] With a threat of this gravity within the relatively recent cultural memory of Caesar's time, the Gallic Menace would likely have been a powerful persuasive tool in the hands of enterprising Roman politicians, regardless of the Gauls' actual fighting strength or intentions toward Rome.[29]

Caesar seems to have used the idea of the Gallic Menace for his narrative of the *Gallic War* rather cleverly: instead of just tapping into the Gallic Menace's rich history of terror in order to magnify the threat of the Helvetii and other Gallic tribes, Caesar aimed to transfer the fear inspired by the Gauls to the latter's even fiercer neighbors, the Belgae, Germans, and Britons, who lived further away from Roman borders. This he accomplished by portraying the Gauls as a comparatively weakened and corrupted people whose inherent fierceness had been drained away by Roman luxuries and whose borders were harried by the fierce attacks of the more savage skin-

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but manifestations of a very powerful fear that drove Roman decision-making at a fundamental level for several centuries.

[26] For more on the Romans' relationship with the Gauls of northern Italy and on the Transpadane frontier between 390 and 60 BC, see Dyson (1985) 7-87.

[27] There is some debate concerning how powerful a threat the Gauls posed to Rome following the conclusion of the Second Punic War and the Romans' gradual conquest of the Po valley from the 220s BC onward (Kramer (1948) 1-26; Gardner (1983) 181-85). It is notable that the most recent barbarian threat the Romans had faced was that presented by the Cimbri and Teutones in the late second century BC—neither of whom were Gallic tribes, but whose presence in Gaul sufficiently stirred some Gauls to take up arms against the Romans.

[28] Bellen (1985) 43.

[29] Gardner (1983) 181-82.

wearing Germans—a *topos* he likely inherited from Cato, Polybius, and others.[30] This image of

a debased Gallic people surrounded by fiercer, more distant neighbors serves as the foundation

of the ethnographic framework, and it uses distance from Rome as the chief determinant of a

barbarian tribe's fierceness and savagery. By this reckoning, then, the Gauls are nearest to Rome

and are therefore the weakest of the barbarians, while the Belgae, Germans, and later the Britons

are further away and correspondingly stronger.

Gallic Ethnography I

       Caesar offers this formula at the very beginning of his work, in the famous geographical

passage that divides Gaul into three parts:

> Gaul is a whole divided into three parts, one of which is inhabited by the Belgae, another
> by the Aquitani, and a third by a people called in their own tongue Celtae, in the Latin
> Galli . . . Of all these peoples the Belgae are the strongest, because they are farthest
> removed from the culture and the civilization of the Province, and least often visited by
> the merchants introducing the commodities that make for effeminacy; and also because
> they are nearest to the Germans dwelling beyond the Rhine, with whom they are
> continually at war (Caes. *Gal*. 1.1).[31]

Caesar's initial ethnographic coverage of the Gauls is primarily focused on establishing

geographic boundaries within which his savagery metric functions, and he accomplishes this by

emphasizing the enervation of Gallic society and, thereby, the diminished threat posed by the

Gallic Menace. Here the weakened and corrupted Gauls live within a clearly defined and

measured space with no further room for inquiry or discovery, a feature that Caesar uses,

Schadee has convincingly argued, to indicate that Gaul and its people are both known and

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[30] Romm (1992) 47; Wells (1999) 100-1; Woolf (2011) 54.

[31] Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own, although they tend to follow those in the Loeb edition of H.J. Edwards. *Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres, quarum unam incolunt Belgae, aliam Aquitani, tertiam qui ipsorum lingua Celtae, nostra Galli appellantur. . . Horum omnium fortissimi sunt Belgae, propterea quod a cultu atque humanitate provinciae longissime absunt, minimeque ad eos mercatores saepe commeant atque ea quae ad effeminandos animos pertinent important, proximique sunt Germanis, qui trans Rhenum incolunt, quibuscum continenter bellum gerunt.*

conquered.[32] The Belgae, who are technically Gallic but live beyond the bounds of Gaul proper, have been made fierce because of their distance from Roman society and because of their constant fighting with the Germans, who are yet further away from society and therefore, by Caesar's reckoning, even fiercer than the Belgae. The Germans themselves are clearly separated from the Gauls by the Rhine, which acts as an effective boundary in Caesar's conception between the known, conquered, Gaul and the unknown wilds of Germany. This is a too-convenient division, however, as abundant archaeological, linguistic, and historical evidence has shown that there were Germanic peoples living on the west banks of the Rhine. Caesar's ignorance of this, be it willful or otherwise, only serves to strengthen the case for the clear and easy spatial boundaries he sought to provide for his ethnographic framework.[33] It is notable that Caesar does not seek to establish any other distinctions between the different barbarian groups beyond their geographic locations: in the rest of Book 1 there are no θαύματα to speak of. This not only further enhances the sense of "knownness" for the Gauls and their territory, but also places an increased importance on the distance = savagery formula.

With this formula in place, Caesar then introduces the crisis that initiated his assignment to Transalpine Gaul: the encroachment of the Helvetii. By rights, the Helvetii should not present any threat to Caesar, for, as the crow flies, the Helvetii were the Gallic tribe closest to Roman territory, and so, in principle, corrupt and no longer fierce. But Caesar had prepared for this potential problem when he first introduced the Gauls, Belgae, and Germans, for he says immediately after that "the Helvetii also excel the rest of the Gauls in valor, because they are struggling in almost daily fights with the Germans, either endeavoring to keep them out of their

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[32] Schadee (2008) 162.
[33] Schadee (2008) 170; Krebs (2006) 113-14; Rankin (1987) 2-4; Riggsby (2006) 60; Wells (1999) 104; Woolf (2011) 83-86.

own territory or waging aggressive warfare into German territory" (*Gal*. 1.1).[34] Even though the

Helvetii live close to Roman territory, their constant fighting against the Germans on their other

borders either for survival or supremacy keeps their primitive fierceness alive and, perhaps more

important for Caesar's political interests, makes them an imminent threat to Rome. It is also

important to note here that although the Helvetii are atypically strong for a Gallic tribe, they do

not represent a renewed Gallic Menace, but are rather a by-product of what Caesar would have

his readers believe is the greater threat posed by the more distant Germans. With this potential

contradiction solved, Caesar proceeds to narrate his campaign against the Helvetii and various

Belgic and Germanic tribes, established now as even more dangerous threats than the Gauls

themselves

Gallic Ethnography II

Caesar does not feel compelled to offer a more detailed ethnographic account of the

Gauls until Book 6 of the *Gallic War*, and he appears to have been committed enough to

depicting the Gauls as a conquered and known people that this ethnography was written mostly

to provide a comparison for the Germanic ethnography that immediately follows. Unlike the

terse account found in Book 1, this section presents a fuller ethnography that engages with the

ethnographic tradition and Caesar's own ethnographic framework in order to flesh out and

explain the differences he perceives between the Gauls and Germans. The emerging political

maturity of the Gauls is evident in Caesar's description, for he notes that they have mostly

abandoned the older tribal systems that dominated their society and have now adopted a more

Roman-style system of assemblies, which are presided over by chieftains and priests (*Gal*. 6.11).

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[34] *Helvetii quoque reliquos Gallos virtute praecedunt, quod fere cotidianis proeliis cum Germanis contendunt, cum aut suis finibus eos prohibent, aut ipsi in eorum finibus bellum gerunt.*

Although he does here mention briefly their presence within the governing structure of Gallic society, Caesar downplays the role of the druids among the Gauls throughout the narrative sections of the *Gallic War*. According to Caesar's account, the druids held almost supreme authority in Gallic society: they were able to decide verdicts "in almost all disputes, public and private" (*Gal.* 6.13) and were required to undergo twenty years of training, memorizing a vast ancient lore and learning Greek letters for other writing (*Gal*. 6.14). Furthermore, the druids convened yearly at the center of Gaul in order to resolve larger tribal disputes (*Gal*. 6.13). All of these features imply a level of organization and training among the druids that would almost certainly have brought them power and influence in Gallic politics, but aside from these passages, the druids are entirely absent in the rest of Caesar's narrative.[35] The Aeduan leader Diviciacus, for example, figures prominently in the first four books of the *Gallic War*, but we have to turn to an offhand mention of him by Cicero to learn that he was, in fact, a druid (Cic. *Div*. 1.41), a detail Caesar never mentions despite his close dealings with the man. This omission suggests an effort on Caesar's part to downplay the importance of the druids in the political hierarchy of Gallic society. Any implication that the Gauls do not rely entirely on fractious citizen assemblies for their political dealings—that they are in fact presided over by a highly trained, collegial body of educated priests who convene yearly—would suggest a much more organized and powerful Gaul than Caesar thought it in his interest to depict. Caesar's brief explanation of the druids' role in Gallic society in this ethnographic section is an intriguing example of his ability and inclination to censor information about barbarian society.

Unlike the brief account found in Book 1, the ethnography of Book 6 does feature a fair number of θαύματα, which mostly appear either to have been lifted from Posidonius, as Tierney suggests, or simply to have confirmed Posidonius' findings with Caesar's own. According to

[35] Woolf (2011) 88.

Posidonius and Caesar, the Gauls regularly sacrificed both convicted criminals and innocent men in exotic and terrifying giant wicker men, as well as by more conventional means (*Gal*. 6.16; *FGrHist* 87, F 55 = Strab. 4.4.5).[36]   Unique to Caesar—so far as we know—is a description of Gallic funeral practices, which featured immolation of a deceased person's valuables, slaves, and favored dependants on the funeral pyre, although the burning of slaves and dependants had ceased under recent Roman influence (*Gal*. 6.19). Caesar then juxtaposes the long-attested savagery of the Gauls with the recent inroads of Roman culture on Gallic society. Regardless of whether or not the Gauls had truly been corrupted and weakened by contact with Roman culture, the image of a disorganized Gaul that is at the mercy of the much stronger Belgae and Germans is crucial to Caesar's ethnographic framework; in light of this, his silence about the implications of the druids' sophisticated organization and descriptions of how the Gauls had abandoned their savage customs keeps the reader's attention focused on the threat posed by the Germans.

German Ethnography II

Caesar's ethnographic account of the Germans immediately follows that of the Gauls in Book 6, and many of the categories examined seem to parallel features attributed to the Gauls so that this juxtaposition therefore reinforces the distinction between the two ethnic groups. By presenting the Germans' strange cultural practices in contrast to the more civilized customs of the Gauls, Caesar emphasizes the Germans' primacy as the most savage and fearsome barbarian people. German religion, for example, is very simple when compared to that of the Gauls: they worship deities associated only with those natural powers they can see and from which they

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[36] Probably one of the more lurid methods of human sacrifice to emerge from the Greco-Roman ethnographic tradition, the burning of sacrificial victims by the Gauls through the use of so-called wicker men—large, anthropomorphic effigies made of intertwined branches—is first attested in Posidonius' work (Tierney (1960) 198, 201). As with many other accusations of human sacrifice and cannibalism, however, evidence for the practice is sparse, and it is likely that the idea was promulgated simply as a means of embellishing ethnographic accounts (see Wells (1999) 59-60).

directly benefit—the sun, the moon, and fire—and they care little for making sacrifices to these gods, so there is no formally constituted priestly class like the Gauls' druids (*Gal.* 6.21). Also in contrast to their Gallic neighbors, the Germans have no regular military leaders and no sophisticated social hierarchy to facilitate such leadership; instead, the Germans simply rally behind heroes at their pleasure whenever such men come to them with an interesting proposal (*Gal.* 6.23). The primary function of the Germans' chieftains, then, seems to reside in facilitating their strange system of land-tenant rotation, which mandated that land assignments would be changed yearly so that individual tribe members spent every other year away from their land fighting and hunting, a practice intended to prevent the Germans from developing a rather unsavage taste for agriculture that would deprive them of their fighting spirit (*Gal*. 6.22). As a final nod toward their predilection for fighting, Caesar notes that the Germans, true to their implied role as outland savages, prefer to have large swathes of vacant land surrounding their own territories, since this acts as a testament to their *virtus* (*Gal*. 6.23).[37]

Caesar's account of German dietary habits and other elements of their lifestyle further strengthens their fierce and primitive image. German boys hunt and fight from their early youth through adulthood, and their diet consists principally of milk, cheese, and meat (*Gal*. 6.22)—traits that are frequent *topoi* in Greco-Roman ethnographers for the inhabitants of northern Europe and that testify to this culture's implied impatience with agriculture. Caesar himself believes that the Germans' size, strength, and ferocity derive from their free-ranging, carnivorous lifestyle, but he says the Germans maintain that these traits are a product of sexual abstinence, which they pursue with such competitive vigor that only great shame awaits the German man who has sex before the age of twenty (*Gal*. 6.21). These two traits, combined with the Germans'

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[37] See also Potter (1992) 269-274. On *virtus* among the barbarians of northern Europe, see Lendon (2015), esp. 15-19; for *virtus* among the Romans, McDonnell (2006), esp. 290-300.

use of animal skins and habit of communal bathing in rivers (*Gal.* 6.21)—more *topoi*—adds to an image of savagery and oddness that is characteristic of ethnographies of peoples in far-off locations.

Caesar underscores this characterization of the Germans as outlandish with a description of the boundless Hercynian forest and the θαύματα to be found within it. By Caesar's reckoning, the Hercynian forest is effectively measureless; even the Germans themselves have no idea how far it extends (*Gal.* 6.25). This boundlessness contrasts sharply with the detail of Caesar's much more precise geographic description of Gaul from Book 1. According to Krebs and Schadee, this understanding is a calculated effort on Caesar's part to capture the sense of mystery and otherworldliness that characterized many ethnographies of the edges of the known world and to suggest to the reader that Germany was a place that Caesar—and Rome—were exploring for the first time.[38] The Hercynian forest is also said to be the home of fantastic beasts, such as what seems to be a unicorn (*Gal.* 6.26), a peculiar elk that apparently lacks joints in its legs (*Gal.* 6.27), and the huge aurochs that is supposedly "somewhat smaller than [an] elephant" (*Gal.* 6.28). Although the aurochs was an actual species known to have inhabited that region of northern Europe, its size is likely an exaggeration, making it a fitting companion to the two other fantastic beasts.

Caesar's inclusion of these wondrous animals, and his direct engagement with earlier writers concerning the size and name of the Hercynian forest, are both strong indications of his knowledge of the Greek ethnographic tradition. Their inclusion at the end of an ethnographic account that is designed to strengthen the clear dichotomy that Caesar has sought to create between the Gauls and Germans is another telling example of his dedication to the ethnographic framework established in the first sentence of the work. By showing how much more Roman-

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[38] Krebs (2006) 113-14; Schadee (2008) 170, 178.

like and less savage the Gauls have become, Caesar works to transfer the fear of the Gallic

Menace to the Gauls' German neighbors, whom Caesar, by emphasizing their savagery and

fierceness, wants his readers to believe are the great new threat to Rome. This distinction and

the inclusion of the Germans' own peculiar customs and fantastic fauna further entrench their

position on the very edge of the known world as a place far away, and as different from Roman

civilization, as possible. There are, by contrast, no fantastic beasts in tamed Gaul.

German Ethnography I

Caesar's decision to devote over half of Book 6 to ethnographies of the Gauls and

Germans is a curious one, given his inclusion of a near-identical ethnography of the German

Suebi at the beginning of Book 4. In this brief section, which comprises four chapters compared

to the eight found in Book 6, Caesar attributes many of the same savage characteristics to the

Suebi that he later applies to all of the Germans. The yearly agriculture-warfare rotation exists

among the Suebi, which Caesar says provides evidence for why the Suebi are the most warlike of

the Germans. They also wear skins and bathe in rivers, hunt incessantly, and eat mostly milk and

meat (*Gal*. 4.1). Finally, the Suebi also have the same desire to maintain an uninhabited space

around their own territory, which Caesar says is as large as six hundred miles on one side (*Gal*.

4.3).

There are, however, a few features that Caesar includes in his ethnography of the Suebi

that do not appear in the lengthier description of the Germans as a whole in Book 6. To begin

with, the Suebi are said to allow traders to move into their territory only so that they might buy

items the Suebi have taken while plundering the territories of their enemies, and in this way they

prevent the import of wine, since they believe that "men are thereby [i.e. by drinking] rendered

soft and womanish" (*Gal*. 4.2). Similarly, the Suebi also refuse to buy horses from traders,

instead stubbornly using only those horses native to their own territory, which Caesar says are rather small and shabby-looking, and it is probably because of these scrawny mounts that the infantry of the Suebi are able to run alongside their cavalry as Caesar describes (*Gal*. 4.2). Most significant here is Caesar's devotion of the better part of two of the four chapters of this excursus to making clear distinctions between the different tribes of Germans: the Suebi, the Ubii, the Usipetes, and the Tencteri (*Gal*. 4.3-4). Curiously enough, Caesar stresses that most of the ethnography in Book 4 applies specifically to the Suebi, who have subdued by their native fierceness the Ubii, Usipetes, and Tencteri, all of whom have been weakened through commerce with the Gauls (*Gal*. 4.4). This distinction presents a divergence from the German ethnography Caesar presents in Book 6, which attributes to all of the Germanic tribes those traits that were restricted to the Suebi in Book 4.

The key to explaining these discrepancies lies in discerning Caesar's overall motives for each section of the *Gallic War*. Book 4 documents Caesar's first crossing over the Rhine into Germany, which he does specifically for the purpose of pushing the Usipetes and Tencteri, who are fleeing from the Suebi, out of the territory of the Belgic Menapii and back into Germany—all the while attempting to contain the Suebi. The distinctions Caesar makes between the Suebi and other Germans like the Usipetes and Tencteri are necessary in order for the narrative of Book 4 to make any sense: because the Suebi are the fiercest of the Germans, the Usipetes and Tencteri, although comparatively fierce according to the metric established by the ethnographic framework, are forced to flee from them. This aspect of Caesar's portrayal of barbarian groups reveals that Caesar extends the distance = savagery schema in order to make clear to his readers which groups, even among their savage cousins, are the most savage and therefore represent the greatest threat. In Book 4, Caesar's fight is principally with the Suebi, who are responsible for

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pushing the other German tribes into Belgic territory; as such, the Suebi are Caesar's enemy for this section of his work and they are described specifically in terms that Caesar has come to associate with only his fiercest opponents. Just as the Helvetii, the closest Gallic tribe to Roman territory, were able to escape Caesar's otherwise general dismissal of the Gauls' fighting abilities thanks to their continual fighting with the fierce and savage Germans, so too are the Usipetes and Tencteri separated from the Suebi in order to identify the Suebi as the most salient threat and to magnify the glory attached to their defeat at Caesar's hands.

The second German ethnography in Book 6 is nestled in the middle of Caesar's recounting of his movement to cut off Ambiorix from potential aid and asylum in Germany. In this instance, Caesar perceives all of the different Germanic tribes as a potential threat, since they would undoubtedly have been more sympathetic to Ambiorix and his Belgic rebels than to Caesar and the Romans. In keeping with the formula prescribed by his ethnographic framework, then, Caesar applies the same qualities by which he identified the Suebi as fierce and dangerous foes to the entirety of Germany.[39] This in turn marks all the German tribes as his prospective enemies, not just the Suebi, and justifies Caesar's crossing of the Rhine in order to neutralize the threat they pose in the context of the escalating uprisings in Gaul. Whether or not this characterization is a deliberate way of indicating a shift in Germanic culture and interaction with the Gauls or is simply a generalization on Caesar's part is impossible to tell; either way, both

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[39] The similarity between Caesar's German ethnographies has long been seen as evidence that the ethnographic sections of the *Gallic War* did not originate with Caesar, but were the interpolations of later authors. Argued most strenuously by the Germans, this position holds that because of words, phrases, or narrative choices that conflict with Caesar's prosaic style, the *Gallic War* was likely altered by one or more other writers—particularly suspect are late-antique editors—who added the ethnographic and geographic excurses in part or in whole (Gesche (1976) 83-87). While the abrupt shifts from the main narrative to ethnographic and geographic excurses like those found in Caesar's work are certainly jarring, they are also a common feature of the Greek tradition, and are therefore insufficient proof of later additions. Also, as I argue, one of the primary functions of these excurses is creating, maintaining, and expanding the ethnographic framework; as such, the noticeable difference between them and the rest of the *Gallic War* only serves as proof that they served a special purpose in Caesar's retelling of his Gallic campaigns and were original to him.

ethnographic accounts of the Germans operate within the established confines of the ethnographic framework of Book 1 and continue to assert its distance = savagery metric, using the limited fierceness of the Gauls as a reference point by which to make the Germans seem more dangerous and threatening.[40]

British Ethnography

The sections of the *Gallic War* describing the Britons provide an interesting challenge (brilliantly overcome) to Caesar's ethnographic framework. On the one hand, the Britons are a truly unknown people—the only account of Britain or its peoples of which we are aware before Caesar's time was that of Pytheas, and it was stingy with ethnographic details. Thus, to the Romans, Caesar was effectively the first to travel to Britain, and the new, unknown qualities of the distant island and its inhabitants begged to be paired with the ethnographic markers of fierceness and savagery that typically characterized far-away peoples in Caesar's work. Yet the people Caesar found there were, he admits, surprisingly civilized given their distance from Roman territory. This unexpected find necessitated some careful maneuvering on Caesar's part in the way that he describes the Britons in his work, lest he disrupt his ethnographic framework altogether.

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[40] Riggsby ((2006) 58-60) argues that Caesar imitates Herodotus' depiction of the nomadic Scythians for his German ethnography. The milk-and-meat diet is a key indicator of a nomadic lifestyle, he asserts, and of the peoples whom Herodotus places on the outside edges of the known world (ibid., 58). As such, Riggsby believes Caesar's German ethnography actively emulates those ethnographic sections of Herodotus that cover savage, far-off dwelling barbarians by including the milk-and-meat diet and emphasizing "themes of mobility and fluidity" (ibid.). This is problematic when one considers the full extent of Caesar's German ethnography, since Caesar relates in both German ethnographies their odd affinity for having large swathes of uninhabited land around their territories (*Gal.* 4.3, 6.23) and the land-tenancy rotation system used by the Germans to minimize agricultural production and keep their soldiers active and mobile (*Gal.* 4.1, 6.22). Although nomads can certainly move around within a general, pre-determined area, and the Germans do appear to have placed great emphasis on mobility in their military undertakings, the Germans' possession of land that they cultivate, and their active pursuit to define their own borders as clearly as possible, do not align with Riggsby's assertion. Furthermore, while it is possibly foolish to trust entirely Caesar's ethnographic sections, it is perhaps even more so to dismiss them completely—it is important to remember that Caesar was the *only* eyewitness of German culture to have provided a written account in the Greco-Roman world at this juncture, and as such his observations might have some merit of truth, regardless of their similarity to earlier ethnographies.

The first ethnography of the Britons comes when Caesar's troops, having successfully invaded Britain, first skirmish with the terrifying chariot fighters that the Britons used in great numbers (*Gal*. 4.33-34). Caesar mentions twice that his soldiers were rather frightened by the Britons' use of these machines (*Gal*. 4.33, 5.15), observations that seem to place emphasis on the Britons' difference from the Romans while also stressing a fierceness and exoticism that would accord with their status as far-off barbarians. Also contributing to Caesar's portrayal of the Britons as savage barbarians is his description of the British practice of painting their bodies with the indigo dye of the woad plant to give them a fiercer appearance (*Gal*. 5.14). Finally, to round out the image of savagery Caesar also includes the familiar skin-wearing, milk-drinking, and meat-eating *topoi* of his various German ethnographies (*Gal*. 5.14).

As another means of fleshing out his British ethnography, Caesar includes various θαύματα in the account. In addition to the Britons' habit of painting themselves with woad they also shave their bodies entirely, save for the hair on their heads and upper lips. Lest he fail to include an account of strange sexual practices (a vital element of sound ethnography, if Herodotus is to be believed), Caesar also relates that the Britons observe the peculiar custom of wife-sharing, which he says is most common among groups of fathers, sons, and brothers (*Gal*. 5.14). Lastly, Caesar outlines the size, shape, and climate of Britain using information that was most likely taken from Pytheas and then augmented by his own experience. He relates that the island is triangular and has shorter nights than the continent, a phenomenon that, he says, only becomes more apparent the further north one travels—on some islands off the northern coast of Britain, for example, he observes that midwinter night lasts for thirty days (*Gal*. 5.14). Much like the description of the Hercynian forest and the Germans' predilection for chastity, these details serve to signal that this section of the *Gallic War* is an ethnography, and, regardless of

their truth, provide a necessary sense of distance and foreignness. This sense, coupled with the

distance = savagery *topoi* used by Caesar to build up and maintain his ethnographic framework,

places the excursus within the ethnographic tradition and constructs the sort of Roman-barbarian

dichotomy the genre was intended to produce.

Caesar is, however, unable to cast the entirety of the British population as stereotypical

savage meat-eaters. He relates that those Britons who reside along the eastern coast are

comparatively a civilized group because of interaction with the Gauls that dates back to the

Britons' initial migration from Belgium (*Gal*. 5.12). The population of these coastal tribes is

"innumerable" according to Caesar, and they have many closely placed farm buildings

constructed and arranged in the Gallic style that are used to house "a great number of cattle" (*Gal*.

5.12). Among all of these peoples, Caesar singles out the Cantii of Kent as the most civilized,

such that they "do not differ much from the Gallic way of life" (*Gal*. 5.14). Caesar cements the

separation of the Cantii and their coastal kin from the inland-dwelling tribes of Britain by

attributing the anti-agricultural attitude, meat-eating and milk-drinking diet, and skin-wearing

entirely to the inlanders, and from this point on in his British ethnography it is difficult to

determine whether body-shaving and wife-sharing are found among just the inlanders or are

characteristic of all Britons. In spite of this lack of clarity, the distinction between the more

civilized coastal peoples and the inlanders is a significant example of the ethnographic

framework in action. Caesar seems to imply that the frequent commerce between the Gauls and

Cantii (*Gal*. 5.13), coupled with the coastal Britons' origins in Belgic Gaul, is the cause of their

relative level of civilization. Since Gaul acts as the baseline of the distance = savagery metric in

the ethnographic framework, the coastal peoples' proximity to Gaul, Gallic heritage, and

interaction with the Gauls would logically produce a more civilized group in comparison to the

inlanders, who had no such interactions, claimed to be indigenous, and lived further away from Gaul and Rome (*Gal*. 5.12). Therefore, Caesar effectively creates here another, smaller ethnographic framework specifically for Britain—Gaul takes the place of Rome as the corrupter of pristine barbarian strength, and proximity to Gaul, not Rome, is the standard by which a British tribe's fierceness can be gauged.

In sum, what we see from the first chapter of the *Gallic War,* and its more detailed ethnographic sections in Books 4, 5, and 6, is that Caesar actively sought to create, maintain, and expand an ethnographic framework in his work. He accomplished this by creating a distinctive position for himself with the traditions of Greek ethnographic and geographic writing. His journeys to Germany and Britain alone were likely enough to have done this, but the inclusion of θαύματα from both regions and the challenges he presented to traditions concerning the Hercynian forest and the climate and geography of Britain offer further evidence of Caesar's engagement with the Greek tradition. In the same spirit, then, he took the *topoi* and patterns used by his predecessors to craft a familiar framework that would furnish the characteristics necessary to distinguish between Roman and barbarian. Caesar eschewed the use of Hippocratic climatology as a means of explaining the cultural and physical characteristics of barbarian peoples, and instead focused entirely on a system that equated a given people's distance from civilization with the degree of their savagery and implied fierceness in battle. This metric, for which Caesar used Rome as the civilized center and Gaul as the beginning of barbarian territory, provided a convenient means by which he could identify in his work those barbarians who posed the greatest threat to Rome. Of course, it was also intended to show that the removal of these threats was at Caesar's own hand.[41]

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[41] Gardner (1983), 181-82; Rawlings (1998) 173, 180-81; Riggsby (2006) 101-2.

The confinement of the Germans to the eastern banks of the Rhine, the pacification of the Belgae, and the exploration of Germany and Britain were great and glorious achievements for an intrepid Roman commander like Caesar. Furthermore, Caesar likely hoped that the subjugation of the Gauls and their more savage neighbors that was implied by the ethnographic framework would prove to be no less great an accomplishment. Just as Marius had gained his greatest fame among the Romans for his defeat of the terrifying Cimbri and Teutones—whom Caesar makes sure to name as the ancestors of the Aduatuci whom he defeated (*Gal*. 2.29)—so too would Caesar have obtained lasting fame as the one who had finally put the Gallic Menace to rest and ensured that Rome's former enemies remained enfeebled subjects. That is, until the fiction of subjugation evaporated and a surprisingly Roman-like group of Gauls emerged from the mist to bring Caesar's ethnographic framework crashing down around him.

IV. GALLIC REBELLION AND THE FAILURE OF THE ETHNOGRAPHIC FRAMEWORK

Until the beginning of Book 7, Caesar's narrative has recounted the rebellions of multiple Belgic and Gallic tribes in which Roman troops were attacked in winter quarters, but these rebellions were, with the exception of that instigated by Ambiorix, put down with relative ease because of their small size. The revolt of Book 7 differs from these, however, because a troubling majority of the Gauls break away from Roman control and rally behind Vercingetorix, who, as others have pointed out, [42] leads his Gauls in a surprisingly Roman-style military campaign. Of all the campaigns recounted in the *Gallic War*, this is the one—this rebellion— that Caesar seems to have the greatest difficulty putting down. None of Caesar's previous

[42] Rawlings and Riggsby both argue that Vercingetorix displays distinctly Roman qualities in his leadership style and tactical decision-making. Rawlings contends that what we read is likely a toned-down version of what actually occurred, since Caesar shows signs of having underplayed the Gauls' skills in combat in order to lend his narrative a greater sense of triumph and to downplay the Gauls as a threat (Rawlings (1998) 180-81). Riggsby also accuses Caesar of tampering with his narrative: by depicting the Gauls' assimilation of Roman technology and culture, Caesar, Riggsby argues, attempts to increase the impressiveness of his victory over the Gauls (Riggsby (2006) 101-2).

opponents in Gaul, Germany, or Britain had been well-organized or strategically sophisticated: it was a *topos* about European barbarians that although they are fearsome fighters, they lack the discipline necessary for tactical maneuvers and rely solely on brute force to win their battles. The Gauls of Book 7 do not fit this profile. Not only do they undertake an uncharacteristic scorched-earth campaign that required a high degree of organization, seeking to destroy Caesar's potential supplies in order to starve him out of Gaul (*Gal*. 7.14, 16, 55), but they also resist Caesar's attempts to lure them onto unfavorable ground on two separate occasions (*Gal*. 7.35, 51), elsewhere a reliable tactic for dealing with Gallic foes (*Gal*. 5.50-51). Caesar even experiences a *bona fide* defeat at Gergovia when the Romans are taken in disarray and forced into retreat while attempting to pillage the town (*Gal*. 7.50-52)—he blames the loss on a break in discipline among his soldiers (*Gal*. 7.52).[43] The Gallic sack of Noviodunum is more disastrous still, since all of Caesar's Gallic hostages, grain supply, money from the state, and a substantial portion of the army's and his own possessions are either stolen or burned when Eporedorix and Viridomarus lead the inhabitants of the town in killing the garrison, seizing the Romans' goods, and then burning the town and all the grain that they were unable to carry away themselves (*Gal.* 7.55). As Cunliffe rightly observes, this potentially serious blow to Caesar's logistical capabilities in Gaul is passed over so blithely as to make it seem of little or no importance to the rest of the campaign.[44] The more likely reality was that Caesar had to go to remarkable lengths in order to secure the necessary supplies to keep his men in Gaul, which he seems to attempt to portray as an example of his fine generalship and *celeritas* rather than as a narrow escape from a disaster of his own making (*Gal*. 7.56).[45]

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[43] This is in keeping with one of the explanations pointed out by Rosenstein ((1990) 94-97) that defeated Roman generals would regularly use to shift blame for a defeat from themselves to the common soldiery.
[44] Cunliffe (1988) 120.
[45] Rawlings (1998) 180.

Through their assimilation of Roman military discipline and tactics, Vercingetorix's Gauls present the first challenge to Caesar's ethnographic framework with which it cannot cope. Perhaps Caesar's effort to emphasize the *Romanitas* of Vercingetorix is a last attempt to salvage the ethnographic framework[46]—if he can convincingly show that Vercingetorix behaves in a Roman way, then he can assert that the Gauls were temporarily lifted up by a culture that was already understood to have been superior, but that they are not naturally and permanently made powerful by it. But too many of the actions taken by Vercingetorix's troops are executed at a level of coordination unprecedented for the Gauls, and Vercingetorix's rebellion, culminating in Caesar's defeat at Gergovia and loss of Noviodunum, provides an all-too-compelling rebuttal of Caesar's earlier assertions that the Gauls were a comparatively weakened people surrounded by vicious enemies. By the implicit reasoning of the ethnographic framework and its presentation of the Gauls as harassed and dominated by their neighbors (*Gal.* 1.1, 6.24), Caesar's forces should have no problem defeating the Gauls under Vercingetorix because when Caesar defeated the Germans or Belgae, he claimed victory over the Gauls—whom those barbarians had defeated—by proxy. Yet as soon as Caesar's forces in Gaul meet the threat of Vercingetorix, the Germans' martial superiority is called into question, because under Vercingetorix the Gauls actually prove to be a more formidable opponent of the Romans than any of the other barbarians, and victory over them is much more hard-won. Caesar seems to have downplayed the fighting prowess of the Gauls in order to exaggerate the strength of the other, more distant tribes, but now real Gauls and real events undercut his ethnographic framework. As Rawlings asserts, the likely truth is that the Gauls were actually good at fighting from the very beginning of Caesar's time in Gaul and that he actively sought to suppress this information for political reasons.[47] I would add

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[46] Rawlings (1998) 180.
[47] Rawlings (1998) 181.

to this that such suppression was intended to bolster artificially the impressiveness of Caesar's victories over the Gauls' neighbors in the narrative of the *Gallic War*, and that he was compelled to do so by the likely temporary nature of his assignment to the *provincia* of Transalpine Gaul. The fact that this suppression comes to an abrupt halt in Book 7 turns our attention to the *Gallic War*'s composition—for if Caesar composed the entirety of his work at the same time, why does there appear to be such a strong disconnect between Books 1-6 and Book 7? This is the most important question illuminated by the identification of the ethnographic framework, and its answer lies in the interplay between Caesar's writings and his political career.

Implications for Composition

Three main points arise from looking to the ethnographic framework as a means of explaining the composition question. First, the presence of the ethnographic framework in the *Gallic War* suggests that Caesar had an eye toward further conquest beyond Gaul from the time that he began writing. That Caesar establishes the ethnographic framework in the first chapter of Book 1 and ventures well into Belgic territory in Book 2 is perhaps enough to imply this, but the fact that his journeys reach increasingly further and further to the west, east, and north in Books 3 through 6—all while introducing new information in ethnographic passages intended to strengthen the framework—further demonstrates that Caesar had much more in mind than just the Helvetii when writing the first chapter of his work.

To this end, I think that Books 1-3, based upon their content and the years to which they correspond, form the first coherent chunk of the *Gallic War* that Caesar wrote and published. Book 1 is responsible for the initial construction of the ethnographic framework and works to strengthen it continually through its portrayal of the unusually strong Helvetii and the Germans under Ariovistus. Book 2, with its fierce battles against the Belgic Nervii, advances Caesar's

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claim that the Gauls' distant neighbors represent a more dangerous threat, and Book 3 fruther

establishes Caesar's ability to subdue the Gauls as he battles with the Veneti of the western coast.

Since these books represent the years 58 through 56 BC, they also respond well to the meeting at

Luca in 56 between Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus. At this point in time, Caesar's assignment to

Transalpine Gaul was threatened by L. Domitius Ahenobarbus, who swore that he would deprive

Caesar of the province if he were elected consul for 55 (Suet., *Jul*. 24.1; Cic., *QFr*. 36.3).[48]

Caesar's consular provinces, Cisalpine Gaul and Illyricum, would not have been under threat

because they had been granted to Caesar for five years via the *lex Vatinia* of 59. Transalpine

Gaul, however, was much less secure, since it had probably been assigned to Caesar in 59 for the

purpose of preventing Gallic migrations like that attempted by the Helvetii in Book 1. If Caesar

had in fact been sent to Transalpine Gaul to pacify the province and prevent Helvetian incursion

into Cisalpine Gaul, then he would have already completed his assigned tasks within the first

year or two of his time there and the Senate might well have felt justified in reassigning the

province. This, and the election of Domitius Ahenobarbus, the meeting at Luca prevented.

It is possible, then, that Caesar composed and released to the public the first three books

of the *Gallic War* in 56, probably just before the conference at Luca. His goal in doing so would

have been, first, to remind his readers of their ever-present fear of the Gallic Menace, manifested

in the Helvetii and the Veneti, but then to show that it was not the Gauls who were the greatest

threat to Roman rule in the north, but fearsome foes like the Germans and Belgae, whom he had

confronted and defeated in the first two years of his time in Transalpine Gaul. It is undeniable

that Caesar portrays the Germans and Belgae of Books 1-2 as much fiercer opponents than the

Gauls, and this portrayal makes sense if he were attempting to convince readers at Rome—in

particular the senators whose support he hoped to win (Plut., *Caes*. 21; *Pomp*. 51)—that he

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[48] Broughton (1952) II.194.

should be allowed to remain in Transalpine Gaul in order to combat these more powerful and more threatening barbarian tribes. Caesar was in constant contact with influential people in Rome even when he was in the furthest bounds of northern Europe (Plut., *Pomp*. 51), and there is, therefore, no reason not to suppose that one of the means he used to lure two hundred men of senatorial rank to Luca was the account of his conquests in Gaul (Plut., *Caes.* 21; *Pomp*. 51; *Cras*. 14).

The second main point illuminated by the ethnographic framework is that Caesar continued to strengthen the framework in order to justify and glorify his conquests until the Gallic revolt under Vercingetorix in 52. His command safe after Luca, Caesar then in 55 and 54 extended his campaigns into Germany and Britain—offensives often found puzzling by scholars, but conveniently represented as almost natural in the *Gallic War* by his ethnographic framework, which he elaborates in books 4 and 5 with ethnographic passages about supremely distant and thus supremely dangerous peoples. His account of the Gallic revolt of Ambiorix in the winter of 54/3 (end of Book 5 and beginning of Book 6) seems to confirm the contrast again: some Romans get in trouble because of their own stupidity, but with proper command and especially when Caesar himself appears, this rebellion of mere Gauls is put down without too much trouble. Then in 53 (Book 6), Caesar attacks the Germans again and includes his longest ethnographic passages and his most systematic contrast between the Gauls and Germans, which is, so far as success in war is concerned, very much to the advantage of the Germans.   Books 4-6, then, were presumably written and presented to the public by the winter of 53/52, since the ethnographic framework remains unchallenged, and it is attractive to suppose that the long ethnographic passages in Book 6 signal Caesar's ambitions to carry on his campaign against the ferocious Germans in 52.

The third and final point is signaled by the collapse of the ethnographic framework in Book 7. As shown above, Caesar's portrayal of the Gauls is overturned by Vercingetorix's revolt and a handful of embarrassing defeats. If the *Gallic War* had been composed at one time, Caesar would have been able either to construct a coherent framework of ethnography that did not stumble so obviously near the end of his work or to revise what he had already written to reflect the shift in Book 7. For otherwise this is a logical puzzle: if Caesar knew about the Gauls' increasing competence in Roman-style fighting from the beginning of his writing, why does his portrayal of them remain that of a weakened and corrupted people until Book 7, when these ideas are dramatically and forcibly reversed? When his ethnographic framework suddenly loses its ability to distinguish between the Gauls and their supposedly stronger neighbors, it means that Caesar either no longer needs to maintain the distinction because he has no further plans to fight the more distant barbarians, or that he is no longer able to maintain it because the viability of the Gallic threat has been made unavoidably apparent in Book 7. Whichever reason it might have been, the suddenness of the change and the undermining of the framework imply a serial composition.

In light of this, a good beginning date for Caesar's composition of the *Gallic War* would range from 57 to late 56. These dates account for the possibility that Caesar constructed the ethnographic framework of Books 1-3 with an eye toward proving to his readers that the barbarians outside of Gaul were fiercer and more dangerous than the Gauls themselves, and that he needed to circulate this portion of the *Gallic War* in order to prevent the Senate from revoking his authority over Transalpine Gaul. Caesar's journeys to Germany and Britain in 55 also correspond well with the greater sense of security in command he would have had after Pompey and Crassus had extended his hold on Transalpine Gaul, and are indicative of the success of the

ethnographic framework in achieving his goals of glorifying his achievements and extending his

time as governor of the Gallic provinces. While this does not conclusively prove that Caesar

intended to venture beyond Gaul from the very beginning of his time there, it certainly does

indicate that he constructed his narrative in a manner that magnified both the threat level of his

opponents and the glory to be gained in defeating them. That he happily added to this narrative

framework until its abrupt, unexplained collapse in Book 7 is strong evidence that the *Gallic War*

was composed serially.

V. CONCLUSION

Although Caesar does not attempt to hide the Gauls' growing similarity to the Romans in

their tactics and armament in Book 7 (*Gal*. 7.50), he makes no further attempt at ethnographic

writing in the *Gallic War* apart from a fictitious speech in which the Gaul Critognatus extols the

potential advantages of cannibalism to the people of Alesia (*Gal*. 7.77-78).[49] In light of the

revelation of a renewed Gallic Menace, the ethnographic framework that Caesar has labored to

construct and maintain since Book 1 either falls or begins to work against him. Caesar is faced

with three options: he can acknowledge that the Gauls' sudden rise in both ferocity and

sophistication is at odds with the formula espoused by his framework (for how can the least

fierce and savage of the barbarians be the only ones to defeat him in battle?); confirm that it is

evidence of an uncomfortably narrow gap between Roman and barbarian; or attempt to ignore it

as much as possible. Understandably, he chooses the last option. In order to distract the reader's

attention from realizing either point, Caesar ends Book 7 and his portion of the *Gallic War* one

chapter after Vercingetorix's surrender, detailing the surrender of hostages to him by the Arverni

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[49] Although cannibalism among people who were rumored to practice human sacrifice would likely have seemed a
short logical leap for Caesar and his audience, ethnographic accounts of cannibalism—especially those written by
conquerors—have a history of exaggeration and are best approached with cautious skepticism (see Arens (1979)).

and the distribution of his forces throughout the region in his characteristically swift, terse style. His final words in the *Gallic War* relate that "when the dispatches of the campaign were published at Rome a public thanksgiving of twenty days was granted" (*Gal*. 7.90).

Despite its flaws, Caesar's ethnographic framework is still an instructive and fascinating literary construct. He was likely the first ethnographer to spend such an extended period of time among foreign peoples; where other ethnographers before him had happily traveled through foreign territories collecting θαύματα for their travelogues, Caesar's stay among the Gauls, Germans, and Britons was much more long-term. His purpose for being in Gaul, Germany, and Britain was also different from that of most other ethnographers of the ancient world—no doubt Strabo's account of northern Europe would have been significantly different had he traveled at the head of a conquering army!

Perhaps the real treat for the reader, however, is the opportunity—through the construction of the ethnographic framework and its subsequent dissolution—to witness the early stages of the Romanization of the Gauls of northern Europe. There is a clear sense of the difference and savagery of the Gauls in the beginning of Caesar's narrative as they are harried by their fiercer and more savage German neighbors. Whether or not the sudden spike in Gallic fierceness in Book 7 is indicative of a recent change in Gallic temperament and military practice or of Caesar's deception, the truth that it reveals is the same: that the dichotomy between Roman and barbarian was not as stark as Caesar and other ethnographers might have believed. By attempting to craft and maintain an ethnographic framework by which to distinguish the varying degrees of ferocity among the barbarians and, more broadly, between the Romans and barbarians throughout the course of the *Gallic War*'s likely serial composition, Caesar sought to justify and prepare his readers for increasingly far-reaching conquests in Germany and beyond. But fate

intervened. Vercingetorix revolted, the Gauls proved both brave and cunning, and when he described that war, Caesar's lovingly assembled house of intellectual cards, his ethnographic framework, fell to ruin.

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