

David KOVACS

"Gaul, in the widest sense, is divided into three parts": the fib at the beginning of Caesar's De Bello Gallico

This paper argues that one of literature's most famous opening lines is a lie, and that its falsity provides a clue to the point of the proem and also the manner and timing of the publication of the various books of *BG*. According to the proem, the three parts into which Gaul is divided are the regions inhabited by the Belgae, the Aquitani, and the Celtae. But there is no evidence that anyone before Caesar ever considered the territory of the Belgae to be part of Gaul. Before Caesar *Gallia* refers to various entities: Cisalpine Gaul, Gallia Provincia, and Gallia Comata. All three of these parts of Gaul were populated by Celts, who in Latin were called *Galli*, as Caesar notes. In standard usage, *Gallia* is the region where the *Galli* live, and this is recognized by Caesar when he says that the third part of Gaul is inhabited by "those who in their own language are called *Celtae* but in ours *Galli*." But the Belgae were non-Celtic, different from the *Galli* in language and customs. No one before Caesar calls them *Galli*. The parts of the world Caesar was to govern (Cisalpine Gaul and the Province) and keep an eye on (Gallia Comata) did not include *Belgium*.

It has been noted (Williams 1989) that Caesar in the first two books (the preface apart) uses *Galli* and *Gallia* in the standard Roman fashion, to refer to the Celtic peoples and their land. When he speaks of the Belgae, he doesn't call them *Galli* and often distinguishes them from the *Galli* (e.g. 2.1.2, 2.3.1, 2.6.2). In the third book, however, his usage changes, and he refers to specific Belgic tribes as Gauls. My hypothesis is that the difference in usage between the proem and Books One and Two show that the latter were originally published without the proem, and that the proem and the usage of Books Three and following represent a later stage of Caesar's self-presentation. Extending the boundaries of *Gallia* defends Caesar against the charge that he has vastly exceeded his brief. In Book Three he goes beyond keeping an eye on Gallia Comata to actively protecting Gallia Comata against the incursions of the Belgae. That seems already a considerable expansion of his duties. But there was more to come. In 55 B.C. Caesar invaded Britain, an enormous undertaking that had nothing to do with the policy of the Roman state and much to do with his own personal ambition. It is this, I suggest, that called for a new strategy. Caesar could justify making war on the Belgae since they were threatening Gallia Comata. But his justification for the invasion of Britain is that the Britons were coming to the aid of the Belgae. Doing something about that would be more easily justifiable if the Belgae were in some sense a part of Gaul. Hence he calls them Gauls.

Wiseman 1998 has argued that the work was published in installments instead of being written or published all at once in 52. My argument confirms this view. There are two possibilities for the location of the proem, that it was written for an installment containing, say, Books Three and Four, then later transferred to the beginning of the whole work, or that it was written as the preface to a republication of the whole. The preface in its present form is closely intertwined with the Helvetian campaign, so the most obvious hypothesis is that it was written for a republication of the whole.

R. S. Williams, "Caesar BG 1.1.1 once again," *LCM* 14 (1989) 156; T. P. Wiseman, "The Publication of *De Bello Gallico*," in *Julius Caesar as Artful Reporter: The War Commentaries as Political Instruments*, ed. K. Welch and A. Powell (London, 1998), pp. 1-10.