

II. Reflection and rapid action (*Gall.* 7,27)²⁸

*Postero die*²⁹ *Caesar*₃ *promota turri perfectisque operibus, quae facere instituerat, magno coorto imbri non inutilem hanc ad capiendum consilium tempestatem arbitratus, quod paulo incautius custodias in muro dispositas videbat, suos quoque languidius in opere versari iussit et quid fieri vellet ostendit, legionibusque intra vineas in occulto expeditis, cohortatus ut aliquando pro tantis laboribus fructum victoriae perciperent, iis qui primi murum ascendissent, praemia proposuit militibusque signum dedit. illi subito ex omnibus partibus evolaverunt murumque celeriter compleverunt.*

On the following day (a tower had been moved forward and the proposed trenchworks completed) heavy rain set in, weather which Caesar considered particularly suitable for taking a decision; since he saw that the watchposts were distributed rather too carelessly on the wall, he had his own men as well do the trenchwork more casually and issued his instructions. He made the legions ready for battle in secret within the 'bowers';³⁰ he urged them at long last to reap the fruits of victory for so much effort, promised rewards for those who should be first to scale the wall, and gave the soldiers the signal for battle. They flew out suddenly from all sides and quickly occupied the wall.

1. Objective style

The style of Caesar's *commentarii* is profoundly 'objective' and is thus remote from that of the speeches. It is important to point to the influence of the official language of senatorial records. One of its features is the repetition of a main clause word in the relative clause (e.g. *diem, quo die*); this is commoner at the beginning of the *Bellum Gallicum* than later.³¹ In the present text we find only a refined reminiscence of this style: *perfectisque operibus, quae facere instituerat*. Repetitions of this kind occurred in Cato to a much greater extent, but there the reason for them was different: they arose from

²⁸ Text of O. Seel (Leipzig 1961). Commentary and bibliography in F. Kraner-W. Dittenberger-H. Meusel, with an epilogue and bibliographical supplements by H. Oppermann, 3 vols. (Berlin 1961¹⁹). The passage is now discussed by H.A. Gärtner *Beobachtungen zu Bauelementen in der antiken Historiographie, bes. bei Livius und Caesar* *Historia Einzelschriften*, Heft 25 (Wiesbaden 1975) pp. 75-78, 96. In general see G. Pascucci 'Interpretazione linguistica e stilistica del Cesare autentico' *ANRW* I 3 (1973) pp. 488-522; J. Kroymann 'Caesar und das Corpus Caesarianum in der neueren Forschung. Gesamtbibliographie 1945-1970 (1972)' *ib.* I 3 (1973) pp. 457-487.

²⁹ On *postero die* and similar 'natural' connectives see J.-P. Chausserie-Laprée *L'expression narrative chez les historiens latins. Histoire d'un style* (Paris 1969) pp. 24-28, 29-32.

³⁰ On the question of emendation see below p. 67.

³¹ On this cf. also now H. Haffter and E. Römisch *Caesars Commentarii de bello Gallico* *Interpretationen - didaktische Überlegungen* (Heidelberg 1971) p. 14.

the closeness of Cato's prose to an elevated oral language.³² In Caesar on the other hand a repetition such as the one just described is an ingredient of the *commentarii* style.³³

Another feature of the official style is frequent use of the ablative absolute (which is much rarer e.g. in Sallust, Livy and Tacitus).³⁴ This standard element in prayers of thanksgiving and in the triumphal inscriptions of victorious generals is already parodied by Plautus: *hostibus victis civibus salvis re placida pacibus perfectis / bello extincto re bene gesta integro exercitu et praesidiis* (*Persa* 753-755; cf. *Amph.* 188f.).³⁵ The formulaic repetition has a certain solemnity about it; however the ablative absolute as such is quite down-to-earth and belongs to the language of military reports.³⁶ A further characteristic of this style is *oratio obliqua*: though there is only a hint of it in the present text, in general it is more popular with Caesar than with other historians and it has a parallel in the official language of the *senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus*.³⁷

Another aspect of the objectivity of Caesar's language and style is his striving for *elegantia*,³⁸ which is to be understood as *proprietas verborum*: thus it is not a search for a particularly choice form of expression, but for aptness. Consequently in this text he is not afraid of using the word *murus* as often as necessary, and he does not look for alternative wording just for the sake of variety. When he repeats words, he is generally content with slight variations: *perfectis – facere; operibus – in opere*. On the other hand the striving after *proprietas* leads in this text to such characteristic forms as *incautius*³⁹ and *languidius*,⁴⁰ which through the parallelism evoke and sustain

³² Which is to be distinguished from colloquial language, see above pp. 6f. and 16.

³³ On the repetition of colourless words in Caesar cf. also now P. T. Eden 'Caesar's Style. Inheritance Versus Intelligence' *Glotta* 40 (1962) pp. 74-117, esp. 83ff. The present writer cannot accept Eden's equation of the *commentarii* style with that of the annalist Claudius Quadrigarius; see the chapter on Livy below.

³⁴ Leeman p. 176, who in this writer's view correctly assesses the stylistic value of the ablat. absol. in Caesar.

³⁵ Cf. E. Fraenkel *Plautinisches im Plautus* (Berlin 1922) p. 236; *Elementi Plautini in Plauto* (Firenze 1960) p. 228, with additions pp. 428f. (copious examples and good discussion).

³⁶ Cf. also E. Laughton *The Participle in Cicero* (Oxford 1964) p. 151 and often. On the ablat. absol. as an 'artificial' connective see Chausserie-Laprée pp. 109-124.

³⁷ Leeman *ib.*

³⁸ On Caesar's *elegantia* and his purism see also now Eden pp. 97-106.

³⁹ The comparative of *incaute* is not attested before Caesar (O. Prinz *ThLL* 7,1,6 [1939] 852,56). Cicero knows only the comparative of the adjective (*ib.* 850,73).

⁴⁰ Cic. *Att.* 7,3,11 is the only other classical instance. Later on it occurs Sen. *dial.* 6,9,2; *benef.* 2,17,4; Curt. 4,16,4; Plin. *nat.* 37,92; 37,94 (communication of W. Ehlers, *ThLL* Munich).

one another.

The positioning of the finite verb in this text is rational and completely in line with Latin tradition. It stands invariably at the end: this is in contrast to Cicero, where the emphatic initial position and the logical middle position also play a role in the speeches and philosophical works respectively.⁴¹ On the other hand Caesar does vary the word order with the ablative absolute: in this text and elsewhere he likes to put the verbal element in front.⁴² When the verbal element stands first, the emphasis is on functional integration into the sentence; at the same time this achieves a certain animation in Caesar's characteristically discreet manner, though with him it happens so often that any one passage should not be over-interpreted. In the same way Caesar also puts the gerundive in front in our text: *ad capiendum consilium*; by means of this inversion, due emphasis is given to an idea which in its context is rather surprising.

It is noteworthy that Caesar's address to the troops even in its indirect form is very different from the objective style of the surrounding text. Here we find words with emotional overtones like *aliquando* or *tantus* (*pro tantis laboribus*) and a well-worn but effective metaphor: *fructum victoriae perciperent*. Accordingly Caesar only employs an elevated tone when it serves his purpose. In this he is like Cato; but in line with the *commentarii* style and his own unadorned manner, he is much more sparing in his use of the relevant stylistic devices.

2. Functional approach

We have already noted that the forward position of the participles in many of the ablative absolutes in this text emphasizes the functional relationship to the whole sentence. The same is true of a feature that is relatively infrequent in Cicero: a substantive that first stands alone in the ablative absolute is referred to again in the same sentence in a different case: *magno coorto imbri ... hanc ... tempestatem arbitratus*. O. Weise⁴³ explains this in terms of the striving for emphasis. One

⁴¹ B. J. Porten *Die Stellungsgesetze des verbum finitum bei Cicero und ihre psychologischen Grundlagen* (Diss. Cologne 1922). B. Borekóy 'Beobachtungen über das Verbindungsglied und die Wortfolge bei Caesar und Livius' in: I. Fischer (ed.) *Actes de la XIIe Conférence Internationale d'Etudes Classiques Eirene* (Cluj 1972) (Bucharest and Amsterdam 1975) pp. 339-347.

⁴² In the first eleven chapters of the seventh book final position of the participle (*his rebus agitatis*) is about as frequent as initial position (in our text: *promota turri perfectisque operibus*) and intermediate position (in our text: *magno coorto imbri*); so final position of the substantive is about twice as frequent as initial position.

⁴³ O. Weise *Charakteristik der lateinischen Sprache* (Leipzig and Berlin 1909⁴) p. 156.

should add that in our case it results from the attempt to analyze the event in all its details. As an outward circumstance the start of the rain is the cause of everything that follows; this factor must therefore be isolated. Here internal logic has led to a construction that is grammatically somewhat illogical.

This same causative factor is further isolated by the two cases of hyperbaton: *magno coorto imbri* is a self-enclosed entity where what is important receives emphasis by being placed on the outside. In the words that come next the same tendency to create functional units leads to the following hyperbaton: *non inutilem hanc ad capiendum consilium tempestatem arbitratus*. This word order is mainly due to considerations that were not aesthetic, but functional. We also observe shortly afterwards how an event acquires independence by means of hyperbaton: *legionibusque intra vineas in occulto expeditis*. However Caesar's functional approach is seen most impressively in the overall structure of our passage, and to this we now turn.

3. Overall structure: economy of means

I. Subject: Caesar

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Ablat. absol.: | what was dealt with by others or happened by chance. |
| Predicative participle: | what Caesar himself thinks. |
| Subordinate clause: | what he observes (reason for what follows). ⁴⁴ |
| Two main verbs: | Caesar's instructions (content: infin. and subordinate clause). |
| Ablat. absol.: | external movement of the troops. |
| Predicative participle: | Caesar's speech of exhortation. |
| Subordinate clause: | content of the exhortation. |
| Two main verbs: | promise of rewards (with relative clause) and signal for battle. |

II. Subject: the troops

Two main verbs: rapid execution of orders.

Here too, as in the funeral oration for Julia, we find an astonishing feeling for parallelism and symmetry; this time however there is more animation inside the framework. On the other hand Caesar's report possesses the objectivity of a Catonian narrative, but combines it with an incomparably more artistic structure. Cato gains a sense of depth and perspective only from the subject and the scene of action,

⁴⁴ At the same time the reader is told of the strategic position (on this in general see H. Montgomery 'Caesar und die Grenzen – Information und Propaganda in den Commentarii de bello Gallico' *SO* 49 [1973] pp.57-92, esp. 74).

whereas Caesar does so conceptually as well. His logical mind uses linguistic resources very subtly and deploys them functionally like soldiers in a strict order of rank. The ablative absolutes express the more or less automatic execution of orders and the occurrence of external events, while the predicative participles are reserved for the thoughts and speech of the general, and the main verbs for his decisive commands.

The distribution of the subjects in this text is significant. As a man of action⁴⁵ Caesar dominates the complicated two-fold structure which forms the main part of our passage and which takes us from his understanding of the situation via the planning up to the issuing of his orders; on the other hand the troops are the subject of the final sentence, which communicates the rapid execution.⁴⁶

The arrangement is made clear by rhythmical means as well. At lesser caesuras the double trochee appears several times: *arbitratus; dispositas videbat; expeditis*. However at the end of the sentence the double cretic produces a very striking caesura: *militibusque signum dedit*. In the second sentence *evolaverunt* creates the clausula (of the type: *clausulas esse*) and *compleverunt* gives a double spondee. Even if these rhythms came about unintentionally, their occurrence at structurally important caesuras is further proof of Caesar's sure instinct in using every device functionally. The cadence effect produced by such rhythms is less directly perceptible for us than for the Romans, who always read aloud and thereby experienced the rhythmic quality of a text as real sound.

4. Facultas dicendi imperatoria⁴⁷

One is struck by the considerable difference in the length of the two sentences. What is the significance of this? In terms of content, the first sentence covers all deliberations and preparations up to the signal for battle, and the short second sentence contains the surprising and successful attack. The one action develops from the other. The first sentence forms the background for the second. The first contains no fewer than four ablative absolutes, two predicative

⁴⁵ The way Caesar brings himself and his name into the account is examined by E.D. Kollmann 'Die Macht des Namens. Beobachtungen zum "unpersönlichen" Stil Caesars' *Studii Clasice* 17 (1977) pp.45-60.

⁴⁶ P.T. Eden loc. cit. sees a general affinity between Caesar and Claudius Quadrigarius, which in the present writer's view does not exist in a crucial area: a clear, rational structure is lacking in the annalist (see also the chapter on Livy below). Eden also misses Claudius' own artistic qualities.

⁴⁷ Fronto *ad Verum* 2,1,8 p.117 van den Hout.

participles and five subordinate clauses. By contrast the second sentence has only two main verbs, which are connected by *-que*. Two adverbs are added to indicate suddenness and speed. The verbs themselves are also notably lively and colourful: *complere*⁴⁸ emphasizes the completeness of the success, and *evolare* its swiftness.⁴⁹ Overall we find here the same surprising sequence 'long-short', which was also characteristic of Cato.

Thus the literary presentation is adapted to the subject itself in a way that is as simple as it is effective. The thoroughness of the preparations and deliberations appears here as one of the conditions for Caesar's fast and successful action. In these two sentences the secret behind Caesar's victories has, so to speak, assumed archetypal linguistic form. Here we can actually see what Herder once formulated theoretically as follows: 'Caesar's ease of victory is also recognizable in his style.'⁵⁰ Quintilian had already expressed himself in similar terms (10,1,114): *tanta in eo vis est, id acumen, ea concitatio, ut illum eodem animo dixisse, quo bellavit, appareat.*

5. Candour or pose?

Caesar perfected his natural stylistic gifts through studies to which he received early encouragement: his mother Aurelia was an important and educated woman. Tacitus⁵¹ mentions her in the same breath with Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, and he stresses that these women took personal charge of the upbringing and education of their children, which was not always the case in noble Roman circles. Also of importance was Caesar's uncle, C. Julius Caesar Strabo: he was an educated and witty man, who appears as an expert on humour in Cicero's masterpiece on the orator.⁵² It was Strabo who instilled in Caesar the taste for linguistic purism and who thereby had a decisive influence on his style, even though he himself lacked the concentrated energy of his nephew.⁵³ The *grammaticus* who taught Caesar was the

⁴⁸ *complere murum* is noted as a peculiarity of the seventh book (G. Ihm 'Die stilistische Eigenart des 7. Buches von Caesars Bellum Gallicum' *Philologus Suppl.* 6 [1892] pp.767-777, esp. 769). Cf. also later *civ.* 3,81,1.

⁴⁹ *evolare* occurs in Caesar only here and 3,28,3.

⁵⁰ *Vom Einfluss der Regierung auf die Wissenschaften und der Wissenschaften auf die Regierung* chap. 3,25 (= Suphan vol. IX p.333). Cf. also M. Spilman 'Cumulative sentence building in Latin historical narrative' *Univ. of California Publications in Class. Philology* 11 (1930-1933) pp.153-247, esp. 241: 'Caesar's writing affords the most important illustration of the cumulative - complex sentence.'

⁵¹ *Dial.* 28,5f. ⁵² Cf. *Cic. de orat.* 2,23,98; 54,216-71, 291.

⁵³ Cf. Mar. Vict. *GL* 6,8 on the correct spelling and pronunciation of *Tecmessa*. However Caesar could not learn an energetic style of oratory from his uncle; cf. *Cic. Brut.* 48,177; see also *Suet. Jul.* 55,3.

famous M. Antonius Gniphio, who had received his education in Alexandria. Caesar also studied on Rhodes under the same teacher as Cicero, Apollonius Molo.⁵⁴

The contradiction in Caesar's works between apparent artlessness and actual perfection was already felt in antiquity. No less an authority than Cicero has expressed this in terms that cannot be bettered.⁵⁵ In his eyes Caesar's *commentarii* deserve 'strong approbation; for they are bare, upright and graceful, without any rhetorical ornament, as if they wore no garment. But while he wanted to make available to others material for their historical accounts, he has perhaps done a favour to people without taste, who will want to frizz them into shape with the curling-tongs; at all events he has frightened reasonable people away from writing; for in historiography there is nothing more attractive than pure, lucid brevity.' Caesar's general Hirtius,⁵⁶ a pupil of Cicero's, expresses himself in much the same way. Both Cicero and Hirtius assume that the *commentarii* are meant as a collection of material for historians.⁵⁷ This view also finds support elsewhere in ancient historiographical theory.⁵⁸ Caesar certainly uses the conventional form of the *commentarius* in an unconventional way; at all events he gives it literary status.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Cf. p.58 n.22 above.

⁵⁵ *Valde quidem probandos; nudi enim sunt, recti et venusti, omni ornatu orationis tamquam veste detracta. sed dum voluit alios habere parata, unde sumerent qui vellent scribere historiam, ineptis gratum fortasse fecit, qui volent illa calamistris inurere, sanos quidem homines a scribendo deterruit: nihil est enim in historia pura et illustri brevitate dulcius.* (*Brut.* 75,262).

⁵⁶ *Gall.* 8, praef. 4-6: *constat enim inter omnes nihil tam operose ab aliis esse perfectum, quod non horum elegantia commentariorum superetur. qui sunt editi ne scientia tantarum rerum scriptoribus deesset, adeoque probantur omnium iudicio, ut praerepta, non praebita facultas scriptoribus videatur. cuius tamen rei maior nostra quam reliquorum est admiratio: ceteri enim quam bene atque emendate, nos etiam quam facile atque celeriter eos perfecere scimus.*

⁵⁷ On the other hand the attempt has been made to derive the *commentarius* from a purely Roman tradition of keeping 'official books' (F. Bömer 'Der commentarius' *Hermes* 81 [1953] pp.210-250). Stylistic arguments can also be adduced in support of this (Leeman p.176).

⁵⁸ Lucian (*De hist. conscr.* 48) distinguishes three stages in the composition of a historical work: 1. collection of material, 2. preliminary formulation in a 'hypomnema' (*commentarius*), 3. artistic presentation. Sulla and Cicero had written such *commentarii* prior to Caesar.

⁵⁹ H. Oppermann 'Caesars Stil' (it does not deal with stylistic matters) *NJbb* 7 (1931) pp.111-125. Deichgräber loc. cit. points out that Caesar nowhere speaks explicitly of *commentarii*; however it is not clear what other name can be given to the work in Latin. On literary art in Caesar's *commentarii* see now Eden pp.107-117, though he stresses emotion more than rationality, which in the present writer's view is at least as

This brings us to the difficult problem of self-presentation, which we cannot evade, especially as the present text reveals much about Caesar's character. Here we can only touch briefly on the preliminary question of his credibility and of the objectivity of his standpoint. Can Caesar be called a historian? To the ancient way of thinking, the mostly unepic and unrhetorical style could be a reason for not assigning the work to historiography.⁶⁰ In modern times the criterion here is not so much style as bias. Mommsen⁶¹ sees in the *commentarii* an 'occasional and tendentious work drafted in the form of a military report', but not a 'historical work in the proper sense of the word'. M. Rambaud⁶² then tried to demonstrate Caesar's tendentiousness on a large scale. By contrast J.H. Collins⁶³ stressed that the most effective form of propaganda is the truth. In fact it is almost exclusively successes that Caesar has to report, and the few failures he describes are not glossed over.

Nonetheless the great formal rigour of Caesar's account cannot be equated with historical objectivity.⁶⁴ Is he always as objective as he likes to appear? Even Mommsen felt a little uneasy about the later account of the civil war, which puts so much emphasis on Caesar's

important. It has long been recognized that in Caesar emotion becomes more apparent in the course of time, and also that the *commentarii* style in the first book of the *Bellum Gallicum* is very conservative. On the *Bellum Gallicum* as a work of literature in which the material has been deliberately arranged, see H. Montgomery (cited above p.62 n.44) p.74. On Caesar's development as a writer see Haffter-Römisch (cited above p.59 n.31) p.14. A shift from *commentarii* style to historiographic style is denied by W. Görler 'Die Veränderung des Erzählerstandpunktes in Caesars *Bellum Gallicum*' *Poetica* 8 (1976) pp.95-119, esp. 95-98 (rather it is a change in perspective from a personal view to an authorial standpoint).

⁶⁰ For all his recognition of Caesar's merits, Cicero himself had a different historiographical ideal (Herodotus, Theopompus, Isocrates: Leeman pp.168-197). Caesar naturally has a complete grasp of the basic principles of historiography (on this see most recently H.A. Gärtner [cited above p.59 n.28]). Yet in other historians the epic and rhetorical elements are far more prominent.

⁶¹ *Römische Geschichte* III p.616.

⁶² *L'art de la déformation historique dans les commentaires de César Annales de l'Université de Lyon*. Lettres 3,23 (Paris 1953).

⁶³ *Propaganda, ethics and psychological assumptions in Caesar's writings* (type-written diss. Frankfurt/M. 1952); cf. also later reviews of this author in *Gnomon*. Id. 'Caesar as political propagandist' *ANRW* I 1 (1972) pp.922-966 (self-presentation, not self-defence: 940f.). That Caesar had to defend his policy in Gaul is also doubted by H. Montgomery (cited above p.62 n.44) pp.80f.; however he thinks the aim could have been propaganda in the political struggle with Pompey (ib. 82). Cf. also F.-H. Mutschler *Erzählstil und Propaganda in Caesars Kommentarien* (Heidelberg 1975).

⁶⁴ It is no solution of the problem to say that 'factional history is all there is' (H. Fränkel 'Über philologische Interpretation am Beispiel von Caesars Gallischem Krieg' *NJbb* 9 [1933] pp.26-41, esp. 39); however in many respects Fränkel anticipates Collins' position.

magnanimity and love of peace; however he is able to spare his declared favourite by appealing here to general human experience: 'in Caesar's soul, as in every other, the time of hope was a purer and fresher one than that of fulfilment'.⁶⁵

What can our own interpretation contribute to this debate? In the text before us Caesar's generalship is revealed in exemplary fashion. Did the author have this effect in mind? The question can never be answered with complete certainty; however it does seem to be supported by two minor points that Meusel⁶⁶ was discerning enough to notice, even though in the present writer's opinion he drew the wrong conclusion from his observations when he changed Caesar's text. Caesar has the legions make themselves ready for battle 'in secret in the bowers'. Meusel realizes that there would not have been enough space in the bowers for all the legions, and pronounces the words spurious. He also finds *ex omnibus partibus* suspicious, for the city was only accessible from one side. Even if we think Meusel's criticism is pedantic, it must be admitted that Caesar has expressed himself in a way that is at least vague and misleading as regards the facts. But even on the assumption that there was something actually false in Caesar, the text still ought not to be changed. For Caesar achieves two things by means of the additions that have caused criticism. On the one hand mention of the bowers illustrates in an exemplary manner the secrecy of his preparations; on the other *ex omnibus partibus* illustrates the sudden as well as sweeping character of the attack. Caesar cannot be said to have downgraded historical truth; however, the 'higher truth' of self-presentation has led him to interpret it in his own particular way and through slight exaggeration to invest it with general significance.⁶⁷

What is true of the content however applies also to the mathematical clarity and functional precision of Caesar's style: in both we are justified in seeing not only candour, but also a pose.

⁶⁵ *Römische Geschichte* III p.616.

⁶⁶ Critical appendix, p.578.

⁶⁷ Minor exaggerations for the sake of emphasizing his own speed and stratagems are also noted by T. Feller *Caesars Commentarien über den Gallischen Krieg und die kunstmässige Geschichtsschreibung* (Diss. Breslau 1929). Such traits should not however be overstressed (as Feller himself appreciates). Caesar is not presenting the facts so much as his *consilia* (H. Oppermann in: D. Rasmussen [ed.] *Caesar* [Darmstadt 1967] p.522 with a reference to Hirt. *Gall.* 8 praef. 7). In any case the 7th book of the *Bellum Gallicum* is in many ways already close to the more emotional style of the *Bellum Civile* (K. Barwick *Caesars Bellum Civile* Berichte über die Verh. der Sächs. Akad. der Wiss. zu Leipzig, phil.-hist. Kl. 99,1 [Berlin 1951] pp.170f., 174). Our text can be seen in this respect as an interesting transitional stage between an austere and a more varied manner.

**MASTERS OF
ROMAN PROSE
FROM CATO TO APULEIUS**

Interpretative Studies

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