

Constructing Empire: Julius Caesar and the Ethnography of Northern Peoples  
Bradley G. Potter (Pontifical College Josephinum)

In Book 4 of the *Bellum Gallicum*, Julius Caesar establishes the northern boundaries of the empire. In previous books, he has pushed campaigns further north, subjugating more and more Gallic tribes to Roman rule. In Book 4, he makes the Rhine and the English Channel the northern limit of the newly expanded empire. Here he describes campaigns into the territory across the Rhine, and into Britain. His purpose, he states, is to teach the peoples on the other side of the Rhine and the Channel not to interfere in Gaul, now Rome's sphere of influence. Yet, whom and what is Caesar teaching? In these accounts of military campaigns, Caesar includes ethnographical descriptions of *Germani* at 4.1-2, and of *Britanni* at 5. 12-14. Once considered interpolations, the ethnographical excursuses in the *BG* have increasingly been seen not only as Caesarian, but as making important contributions to the text and to the genre of ethnographical writing (Riggsby, Erickson, Bell). In this paper, I investigate two points: firstly, how Julius Caesar uses the ethnographies of the *Germani* and the *Britanni* to convey to his Roman readers how other-worldly these peoples are and why they are unsuitable for being Roman subjects, and, secondly, what this means in terms of the reader's relationship with the text.

The political discourse of the period regarded that which was outside of Roman territory to be a threat to that which was inside (Riggsby). In his speech *On the Consular Provinces*, Cicero makes an argument for expansion, reasoning that if what is outside the empire threatens Rome, then the less that is outside makes for fewer threats. Unlimited expansion serves to reduce external danger. While Caesar agrees with the project of expansion, he does not regard unbounded expansion as beneficial. Rather, he demarcates those he regards as worthwhile subjugating and those he does not. Thus, the ethnographical passages depict peoples as so unlike Romans that they cannot fit in. The *Galli*, while exhibiting foreign habits, still share sufficient customs with Romans to make them possible candidates for Romanization. By Caesar's account these *Germani* and *Britanni*, on the other hand, reject such civilizing customs as drinking wine, and they practice polyandry. They differ from the *Galli* to such a degree that they are presented as distinct peoples. The archeological record, however, belies this distinction, and demonstrates the culture of those whom Caesar labels *Galli*, *Britanni*, and *Germani* was quite similar and shared. Caesar's construct of these northern peoples as Other, then, serves his project of marking out what is to be Roman space and who are to be Roman subjects.

The question of why these ethnographical passages are necessary is further compounded when we consider that in the text, Caesar demonstrates to these people, who are a construct of his own narrative, the extent of Roman power by campaigning against them. The text and the story it narrates is intended for Roman consumption. Thus both the display of Caesar's military might and the ethnographical passages are meant to impress upon the reader the *potestas Caesaris*. He not only goes among these peculiar barbarians and can catalogue them, but he handily overpowers them, teaching the reader what is Roman and what is not.

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