

Subverting Caesar: Cassius Dio and the creation of an alternative ethnography of the North

From the time of the earliest Greek writers interested in the outlying peoples of the Mediterranean basin there existed in the Greek worldview essentially two barbarian people groups in the vast amorphous "North", the Scythians and the Celts. This view persisted in Hellenistic thought in the works of writers such as Ephorus all the way down through Posidonius, one of the most influential ethnographers for the development of Roman views of the North (Tierney 1959). Caesar, however, beginning with those first iconic words of the *De Bello Gallico*, introduced a revolution in viewing the North, a fundamental re-conceptualization of the meaning of northern space(s) (Krebs 2010). Thenceforth writers of both Latin and Greek were compelled to negotiate a new ethnographic landscape and discourse, to position their thought in relation to the Caesarian creation of the *Germani*, a people invented to be an *ethnos* distinct from the Celts, meaningful only as a Roman intellectual response to their own imperial experience (cf. e.g. Roymans 2004).

Interestingly, the third-century historian Cassius Dio is unique among the Greek writers of the imperial period in his complete abstention from usage of the ethnic appellation *Germanoi* and of the place name *Germania*. He goes so far as to completely invert the prevailing geographic and ethnographic norms, calling, almost perversely, the space across the Rhine not *Germania* but *Keltica* - the name almost ubiquitously reserved by all other writers for the Roman province(s) of Gaul - and designating the people living there *Keltoi*. Caesar's Germans are essentially written out of his history. This is a remarkable feature of Dio's work that has never received scholarly study, only confused caveats in the footnotes of translators (Cary 1914).

Through a targeted analysis of Dio's treatment of place, space, and peoples in his narrative of Caesar's Gallic wars (books 38 and 39), this paper will examine the interplay of

ethnography, history, and authority in the text, and will argue that this historian consciously constructs an alternative, anti-Caesarian view of the North as a means of reinterpreting, and ultimately undermining, the figure of Caesar himself. Particular focus will be given to the speech that Dio puts into the mouth of Caesar in book 38, its context within the narrative, and its intertextual relationship with the version of the same address as recorded by Caesar in the first book of the *De Bello Gallico*. More broadly, this paper hopes to offer, if only on a small scale, an alternative to more simplistic readings of Dio that attribute to him too little capacity for subtlety of insight or originality of historical interpretation (e.g. Gabba 1955 and Millar 1964).

Select Bibliography

Cary, E. (ed.) (1914) *Dio Cassius: Roman History*. Cambridge, MA.

Gabba, E. (1955) 'Sulla "Storia Romana" di Cassio Dione.' *RSI* Vol. 67, p. 289ff.

Krebs, C. (2010) 'Borealism: Caesar, Seneca, Tacitus, and the Roman discourse about the Germanic North,' in: Gruen, Erich S. (ed.), *Cultural Identity and the Peoples of the Ancient Mediterranean*. Los Angeles.

Libourel, J.M. (1974) 'An Unusual Annalistic Source Used by Dio.' *American Journal of Philology*, Vol. 84 No. 4, p. 383-93.

Millar, F. (1964). *A Study of Cassius Dio*. Oxford.

Roymans, N. (2004) *Ethnic Identity and Imperial Power*. Amsterdam.

Tierney, J.J. (1959) 'The Celtic Ethnography of Posidonius.' *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, Vol. 60, p.189-275.