*Magno Sibi Usui Fore Arbitrabatur*: Colonialist Surveillance in Caesar's British Expeditions

Because Julius Caesar played such an important role in the imperialist expansion of the late Roman Republic, his autobiographical writings deserve attention as evidence about Rome's interactions with its subjects. As the expansion of Rome shaped the subsequent history of ancient Europe, the imperialist expansion of modern European states has shaped modern world history. Exploring the similarities and differences of these two episodes of imperialism can lead to a better understanding of both. Spurr (1993) has identified numerous tropes that characterize nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonialist writing. My study contributes to the comparative analysis of ancient and modern imperialism by testing whether some of Spurr's findings hold true in Julius Caesar's *Gallic War*. It focuses on what Spurr calls surveillance, the privileged ability of colonialist outsiders to look at colonized people and property. This paper examines a manageable sample of Caesar's writings – namely, all the passages where Caesar mentions vision or gaze in his accounts of his two invasions of Britain (*BG* 4.20-36, 5.8-23) – to find whether and in what form surveillance occurs in it. As in the modern phenomenon, Caesar associates asymmetrical gazes with asymmetrical power relations, but in a way sensitive to the themes of his text and in particular to his self-characterization as a capable general.

A numerical tally of the passages, classifying them by ethnicity of the seer, ethnicity of the seen, and which ones benefit from the interaction, verifies the link between gaze and conquest in Caesar's narrative. The most common pattern, comprising fully half of the more than twenty passages, involves Romans seeing Britons and gaining an advantage from the interaction. The heterogeneous remainder includes some interactions among the Romans, a few cases of Britons seeing Romans, and only one hint that Romans might fail to benefit from seeing Britons.

Most commonly, the Romans benefit from their gaze because Caesar makes it a tool for strategic analysis, a pattern in keeping with his positive characterization of his own planning skills. Visual awareness of his surroundings alerts him to unexpected setbacks, arising either from human resistance or from natural causes, to which he responds by coming up with a successful countermeasure. In a typical instance (*BG* 4.32) Caesar's sentries inform him of an unusually large dust cloud that they have seen and of its direction from the camp. Caesar correctly infers ("id quod erat suspicatus") that a British uprising has broken out and is attacking one of his legions. He then reorganizes his remaining soldiers to rescue the legion. In a less frequent type of passage, Caesar mentions catching sight of British warriors as a first step to initiating a battle and killing them.

The function of vision in Caesar's narrative conforms to modern patterns in that the text privileges the conquerors' gaze over that of the conquered and shows it contributing to their dominance. However, it differs from Spurr's prototypical examples in assigning a more active and hostile role to the colonized peoples and colonized land. Spurr cites passages where Europeans survey conquered land and people as passive resources to exploit, but Caesar characterizes vision as a means of assessing human resistance and natural obstacles in order to plan how to subdue them. Furthermore, the findings of this study on the British sections of the *Gallic War* contrast with those of Riggsby (2006) for the *Gallic War* as a whole. He argues that the work hesitates to draw a sharp distinction between Romans and non-Romans, in part by incorporating surveillance in some passages but undermining it in others. But in the account of the invasions of Britain Caesar does draw a sharp distinction, involving gaze in a sociopolitical rhetoric similar to but still distinguishable from that of modern imperialists.

Works Cited

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Spurr, David. *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration.* Durham: Duke University Press, 1993.