

## Epicurean Self-Fashioning in Caesar's *Commentarii*

Julius Caesar's relationship to the philosophy of Epicurus has long been the subject of scholarly debate (Belliootti 2009:107-9). In Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae*, the speech attributed to Caesar by the historian famously relies upon the Epicurean doctrine that the soul does not survive after death (Bourne 1977; Mulgan 1979). In his personal life, too, Caesar's closest allies were known for their allegiance to the Garden, including his father-in-law, Calpurnius Piso, patron of the Epicurean philosopher Philodemus and probable founder of the Epicurean library in Herculaneum's Villa of the Papyri. The presence of Epicurean support among Caesar's followers was apparently so strong that, after a single winter in his camp in Gaul, Cicero's friend C. Trebatius Testa became a committed convert (Cic. Fam. 7.12). These biographical connections have led scholars to argue for or against Caesar's own status as an Epicurean, claiming that his affiliation with the school can be seen in his political activities (De Witt 1954:343), or, conversely, that it is incompatible with his political life (Belliootti 2009:109).

Lacking, as we do, any direct evidence of Caesar's philosophical affiliation, this debate is unlikely to be satisfactorily settled. What is clear, however, is that Caesar was embedded within an elite, Roman community which was highly schooled in, and well-disposed towards, Epicurean teachings. It will be the contention of this paper, therefore, that the current scholarly debate, with its perhaps irresolvable disagreement over the impact of Epicurean teachings upon the historical Caesar's political and personal activities, can be usefully refocused towards a consideration of the influence that this Epicurean intellectual context had upon Caesar's literary output. As such, it will consider not whether Caesar himself was an Epicurean, but how he chose to present himself to his Roman readers in relation to the teachings of this Greek philosophical sect.

In order to illustrate the value of this approach, this paper will firstly consider the relationship between Caesar's self-representation as an ideal leader in his *Bellum Gallicum* and *Bellum Civile*, and that provided by the contemporary Epicurean Philodemus in his *On the Good King According to Homer* (Murray, 1965). It will consider the centrality of ἐπιείκεια and ἡμερότης (each of which is used by Plutarch to translate the Latin *clementia*) to Philodemus' account of the virtue of the good leader, alongside Caesar's emphasis on his own *clementia* in his commentaries. It will also consider Philodemus' claim that the good king should be "warlike" but "not a lover of war" (Col. IX.14ff) alongside Caesar's self-representation as a reluctant but competent general in his *Bellum Civile*. Next, this paper will consider Caesar's description of his actions as aimed at removing *periculum* and providing *securitas* (e.g. *BG* 1.10 where hostilities with the Helvetii are begun to prevent *magnum periculum*), in light of the Epicurean doctrine that ἀσφάλεια is the aim of an ethical life (e.g. *Kuriai Doxai* 7). Finally, it will consider the relationship between Caesar's accounts of noble death in reference to the Epicurean doctrine as presented in Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* to argue that Caesar's accounts of his military and political career are fashioned in such a way as to resonate with and gain sympathy from a Roman audience sympathetic to Epicureanism.

### Bibliography

- Belliotti, R.A. 2009. *Roman Philosophy and the Good Life*. Lanham, MD.
- Bourne, F.C. 1977. "Caesar the Epicurean." *Classical World* 70.7, 417-32.
- De Witt, N.W. 1954. *Epicurus and his Philosophy*. St. Paul, MN.
- Mulgan, R.G. 1979. "Was Caesar an Epicurean?" *Classical World* 72.6, 337-9.
- Murray, O. 1965. "On the Good King According to Homer" *JRS* 55, 161-182.