

In sum, this is a suggestive and insightful book. My only major issue with its argumentation is one of scale. How profound is the influence of Roman comedy on the poetry of Catullus? Here I am a little less sanguine than the author of this book. On the level of style and vocabulary, Catullus' debt to Roman comedy is considerable. There are resemblances in motifs, and in patterns of behaviour, self-presentation and characterization. There is also a limited number of clear textual parallels. On the other hand, allusions that can be clearly identified as such (cf. p. 35) do not appear to be numerous at all.

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CHRISTOPHER B. KREBS, *Caesar: Bellum Gallicum Book VII*, Cambridge Greek and Latin classics, Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press, 2023, xvi+386pp., 30,33€, ISBN 978-1-009-17714-6.

It is in some ways very difficult to write a review of Christopher Krebs' new commentary on Julius Caesar's *Bellum Gallicum Book VII*, because so much about the volume is self-evident. While there is some variation across individual texts, most classicists know what to expect from a Cambridge Green and Yellow commentary. And certainly no one who works on Latin historiography needs a reviewer to tell them that Krebs is one of the most thoughtful readers of Caesar of our time. My aim here, rather, will be to outline Krebs' general approach and to illustrate the range and depth of Krebs' work with a case study.

As scholarly interest in the "literary" Caesar has increased rapidly over the last two decades, there has been an increasingly urgent need for new commentaries on Caesars' writings that address the issues which concern contemporary scholars. The magisterial commentaries produced by the likes of T. Rice Holmes and other luminaries in the 19th and early 20th century cannot be surpassed in their detailed treatment of topography, strategy, weaponry, and battles and their meticulous interrogation of the historical facts of Caesar's account. But this is not how we read Caesar anymore, at least not exclusively. The publication of Kathryn Welch and Anton Powell's edited volume *Julius Caesar as Artful Reporter* in 1998 opened a door to scholarship that took Caesar seriously as a writer, a literary artist on the level of Thucydides (hence the volume's title, a play on Virginia Hunter's classic). Krebs himself has had much to do with the renaissance of Caesar the author, both through his own scholarship and with his oversight of 2018's *Cambridge Companion to the Writings of Julius Caesar* (along with Luca Grillo). While some capital-h Historians may still bristle at the notion of poetic allusions in Caesar's commentaries or scoff at the idea that their rhetorical sophistication

goes beyond political propaganda, regarding Caesar as a literary artist is no longer a fringe position among classicists (and certainly not among those who identify as students of historiography). Now that the literary approach to Caesar has become mainstream, there is need for commentaries that support scholarship in this area. Krebs makes explicit in the introduction that his approach is literary and historiographical; his goal, he says, is to “appreciate C. as a writer and the seventh book of his *BG*...within its ‘horizon of expectations’ and especially in its historiographical aspects is the foremost goal of this commentary (3).” This distinguishes this volume from any commentary that is currently available for Book VII.¹

The volume contains the customary features: in addition to the text and commentary, it features an extensive Introduction and a collection of well-produced maps and figures. Krebs’ Introduction covers the expected topics, focusing in most detail on material most specifically pertinent to Book VII. For example, Krebs opts not to include a full biographical overview of Caesar’s life and career (reinforcing that the commentary’s intended audience is not a beginner one), limiting himself to a brief discussion of Caesar’s career before Gaul that sets up the circumstances of his appointment (pp. 6-10). Krebs briefly introduces the concepts of Gaul and the Gauls (10-12) before outlining the events of Book VII in both narrative and timeline form (12-18). Krebs signals early on that, in his discussion of the Roman campaigns, he will not make the once-common mistake of falling under Caesar’s spell and viewing his victories as the triumphant and beneficial expansion of civilization. Krebs reminds us in the Introduction that Caesar waged “a brutal, imperialistic war (5),” and the rest of the Introduction and the commentary do not lose sight of the suffering inflicted for reasons of self-interest. Caesar the author is rightly admired, but Caesar the general is never lionized.

As we might expect from Krebs’ stated aims, the section on *BG* as text and literature comprises the largest section of the Introduction (pp. 23-57). Krebs gives a balanced account of the questions surrounding the *BG*’s composition. He acknowledges the arguments for both serial and unitary composition before settling on something of a middle ground; he suggests that Caesar began writing the commentaries on the traditional annual basis but came to conceive of them as a unified whole and later (in 51 BCE or later) lightly revised and distributed them as a single text (p. 28). The related and vexed question of the *BG*’s genre is handled with subtlety. Krebs acknowledges the difficulty posed by our lack of

¹ The Aris and Phillips Classical Texts series has recently published translations and commentaries of *BG* V-VI and I-II (full disclosure: this reviewer is their author) that have also sought to highlight the literary qualities of Caesar’s work. Fortunately, there is room for all of these books; the Aris and Phillips volumes have an undergraduate audience very squarely in mind, while Krebs notes in his introduction that this readership is not his primary focus (39). Indeed, while some Green and Yellows could be used in the advanced undergraduate classroom, this is clearly a commentary for professional scholars and graduate students.

surviving examples of *commentarii*, but points to several stylistic features of the *BG* that align with other forms of official and bureaucratic documents (29). At the same time, the *BG* (particularly Book VII) is characterized by historiographical features like direct speech and digressions on geography and ethnography. The final verdict: “His *commentarii* are a magistrate’s report of historical ambition; and as such *sui generis* (31).”

The discussion of Caesar’s style (which builds on Krebs’ chapter in the 2018 *Companion*) is clear, concise, and indispensable. Krebs identifies those features of Caesar’s prose with which students of Latin have long been familiar: his regularization of orthography, morphology, and syntax; his economy of expression and preference for common vocabulary rather than the novel; and his almost obsessive use of the ablative absolute. But Krebs also discusses some of the underappreciated elements of Caesar’s style. For example, despite claiming to “avoid the strange or uncommon word like you would a cliff (*tamquam scopulum, sic fugias inauditum atque insolens verbum*, Gell. *NA* 1.10.4),” Caesar does make occasional strategic use of technical, archaic, non-Latin, and rare vocabulary. As Krebs notes, this specialized vocabulary serves at times to heighten Caesar’s rhetoric and at other times to create a sense of precision (34); as is discussed below, Caesar makes especial use of agricultural terms in his ekphrasis on the fortifications at Alesia. The section of the introduction focused on Caesar’s narrative (39-44) is also a high point, and reflects contemporary interest in narratological approaches to historiography. The illustrations, maps, and figures are exceptionally useful and beautifully produced. In addition to general, topographical and battle maps, there are figures illustrating the circumvallations at Alesia, which are very beneficial for readers (like this reviewer) who struggle to visualize Caesar’s descriptions. The text of Book VII is based on Hering’s Teubner, currently the best available text of the *BG*. Krebs has offered 36 alternative readings, noted on pp. 61-2; there are also minor changes to Hering’s paragraph breaks and interpunctuation, and some spellings have been regularized (60).

To illustrate the general approach of Krebs’ commentary, I offer his treatment of Caesar’s ekphrasis of the fortifications at Alesia (7.72-4) as a case study. When Caesar learned that Vercingetorix was withdrawing within Alesia while he sent for reinforcements from the rest of Gaul, he constructed his now-famous double wall at Alesia, a countervallation to pen in the stronghold and an outer circumvallation to protect Caesar’s men against attacks from the outside. Caesar devotes two chapters to an extended description of the rationale behind and construction and function of these fortifications. Krebs’ discussion of Ch. 72-4 is organized around three main ideas, which together highlight Caesar’s accomplishments as both *actor* and *imperator*. First, Caesar’s description of the project is meant to highlight his *scientia militaris* and his ability to bring order to bear on any situation. Second, the ekphrasis is narratively useful insofar as it slows the story down and creates drama. Third, this passage highlights Caesar’s literary experience and ambitions through its abundance of references to both literary and technical writing.

Krebs' commentary on the Alesia ekphrasis takes into account recent excavations and points out where Caesar's narrative aligns or diverges from the archaeological evidence. Many details are accurate: Caesar describes the advance ditch as having vertical sides (*derectis lateribus*, 72.1), which is "more or less" confirmed by excavations; it appears to be the case that the inner trench was designed to be filled with water, as Caesar claimed (*aqua. . . compleuit*, 72.3); and Caesar's reckoning of the perimeter of the outer fortification (*quattuordecim milia passuum*, 74.1) is accurate. Where Krebs' discussion differs from earlier commentaries is in his framing of the discrepancies between Caesar's account and the material record. Rather than bluntly treating the differences as Caesarian self-aggrandizement, Krebs highlights how Caesar's account aligns with standard military and agricultural practices; Caesar knew how it *should* be done, even if the irregularity of the landscape and practicalities of warfare prevented him from precisely making theory into reality. For example, Caesar says the siege works were set back four hundred paces (*pedes quadringentos*, 72.2) from the first trench; the actual distance was further, but Krebs points out that Caesar has used a "standard agricultural measure." In other places, the differences between Caesar's description and the archaeological evidence can be attributed to Caesar's emphasis on order and regularity. Thus, for example, Caesar tells us that the two fortifications were "matching, of the same kind (*pares eiusdem generis munitiones*, 74.1)" when in reality "the archaeological record is more complicated."

Consistent with his overall emphasis on the literary qualities of Caesar's work, Krebs also uses the commentary on Alesia to show how Caesar uses language to create narrative effects. As Krebs notes, the passage as a whole has a "retardatory" effect, heightening the sense of dramatic tension by halting the narrative just before the climactic face-off at Alesia; as Vercingetorix waits for his reinforcements, we wait for the next thing to "happen," too. However, within the ekphrasis, there is no stagnation, but rather a rush of activity, and Caesar evokes the cacophony and commotion of construction through mimetic language. As Krebs demonstrates, swift, orderly prose reflects the swift, orderly work of Caesar's men; thus, at 73.1, a "tricolon of polysyndetic infinitives suggests breathless action, its effect enhanced by the enclosing word order of *erat* and its unusually delayed complement *necesse*." Krebs points out sound-effects, as well (e.g., *praeacutis cacuminibus* at 73.2, which in turn may be inspired by the "smashing alliteration and assonance in *Enn. Ann.* 187-91").

The highlights of Krebs' commentary, for me, are his notes demonstrating Caesar's engagement with a wide variety of texts and literature. Throughout the commentary Krebs highlights echoes of, allusion to, and verbal repetitions with other sources, some expected and others perhaps less so. Krebs does a particularly fine job drawing out the depth and complexity of Caesar's engagement with Polybius, which to this point has not been widely discussed in the literature; this commentary will be the starting point for all further research on intertextuality and allusion in Caesar's works. In the Alesia ekphrasis, Krebs calls attention to

echoes of technical and agricultural writing. As we have seen, Caesar's description of the siege works sometimes aligns with the archaeological evidence, and in other cases has been distorted. As was discussed above, often where Caesar has rounded or regularized his figures he has done so in a manner consistent with standardized agricultural measurements, suggesting that he had some familiarity with the treatises of Cato and others. That Caesar knew these writings directly is further suggested by his use of technical vocabulary unknown or highly unusual in historiography but common in agricultural treatises. Caesar's description of rows of pits dug in a quincunx pattern (73.5-8) seems to be drawn from this tradition; the arrangement itself comes from agricultural practice, as described by Cato (*Agr.* 45, regarding olive planting) and later Vergil and Columella (*Georgics* 2.277-8 and *Rust.* 3.13, on planting vineyards). The depth of the pits (*tres in altitudinem pedes*, 72.1) is standard in the horticultural writings. Contrary to Caesar's general practice of avoiding unusual words, he employs specialized vocabulary in the ekphrasis: his uses of *scrobis* (72.1) *praeurere* (73.6), *disserere* (73.9) are all borrowed from the agricultural lexicon, while his use of *labra* (72.1) parallels that in Vitruvius (9 *praef.* 11). This reflection of non-historical, non-military technical works in Caesar's writing gives us a glimpse of the vastness of his intellectual curiosity.

In his Introduction, Krebs remarks that his decision to highlight the literary qualities of Caesar's work "will come at a price (4)." To "admit" that the *BG* is, in some degree, a work of literary imagination is to grapple with the realization that our long-cherished ideas about the "facts" of Caesar's campaigns and the events and characters we came to view in a certain way might exist as we know them only within the confines of the *BG* itself. I am not sure that this is such a great loss. If what we gain in exchange for relinquishing a version of Vercingetorix that was no more than a phantom to begin with is a fuller appreciation of Caesar as a gifted and challenging literary artist, this is a price I think we should be willing to pay.

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