

HIRTIVS AND THE *BELLUM ALEXANDRINUM*

Caesar left off writing *de Bello Gallico* at the end of the Alesia campaign in 51 B.C., and his account of the civil war begins in January 49. There was therefore a gap of a year and more between the narratives in the two collections of Caesar's own *Commentaries*. Some time soon after Caesar's death, his officer A. Hirtius decided to knit together these unlinked narratives, supplying a preface to account for his procedure. It is usually assumed, and it is assumed here, that this *Preface*, which appears at the start of *B.G.* 8 in the MSS, should be taken to mean that its author was the author too of the book immediately following, which connects *de Bello Gallico* with *de Bello Civili* by narrating, essentially, the transactions of the year 50.

The *Preface* soon throws up notorious difficulties, however. Taken literally, Hirtius' words 'novissimumque imperfectum [sc. 'Commentarium'] ab rebus Galliae confeci usque ad exitum non quidem civilis dissensionis, cuius finem nullum videmus, sed vitae Caesaris' (*B.G.* 8 *praef.* 2) appear to imply that he not only composed *B.G.* 8 to link the *Bellum Gallicum* with the opening of the *Bellum Civile*, but also wrote an account of the period from the end of the *Bellum Civile* just after Pharsalus until the Dictator's death in 44. On which basis Hirtius ought, *prima facie*, also to be the author of the *Bellum Alexandrinum*, which takes up the story where the *Bellum Civile* breaks off, describing Caesar's campaigns in Egypt, against Pharnaces and in Spain until his return to Rome in autumn 47, and indeed of the two other war narratives of the *corpus Caesarianum*, the *Bellum Africum* and *Bellum Hispaniense*, if not of a further, lost, account of events from Munda to the Ides of March. It was, however, already doubted in antiquity that Hirtius wrote these works (Suet. *D.J.* 56.1), and both historical and stylistic considerations have dissuaded many modern scholars from believing it. I am not here concerned with the last two books of the *corpus*, but as regards the *Bellum Alexandrinum* more needs to be said. Despite Suetonius' doubts, Hirtius' authorship of this book has had distinguished advocates, notably Nipperdey, Klotz and Barwick; on the other hand, a recent detailed study of the *Preface* to *B.G.* 8 has now formed the basis for an uncompromising rejection (A. Patzer, 'Aulus Hirtius als Redaktor des *corpus Caesarianum*', *WJA* 19 (1993), 111ff., esp. 122f.). There is much to admire in Patzer's painstaking examination of the *Preface*, but his two main arguments against Hirtius' responsibility for the *Bellum Alexandrinum* are not convincing, and it is my purpose in this note to show why.

I. HIRTIUS' ABSENCE FROM EGYPT

In his *Preface*, Hirtius felt obliged to defend his decision to publish supplements to Caesar's *Commentaries*. Among other things, 'mihi ne illud quidem accidit, ut Alexandrino atque Africano bello interesssem' (*B.G.* 8 *praef.* 8: 'It did not befall me even to be present during the Alexandrine and African war'), though he goes on to say that he knew something of these hostilities from Caesar himself: 'quae bella quamquam ex parte nobis Caesaris sermone sunt nota ...' ('Although these wars are known to me (?us)¹ partly from conversations with Caesar ...').² Patzer refers to this

¹ Rather than being a purely conventional literary plural (as for example in Cic. *ad fam.* 5.12), however, *nobis* may reflect the fact that both men will have heard Caesar talk of these campaigns.

² Or 'are partly known ...', if *ex parte* be taken with *nota*. In another context, *Caesaris sermone* might be taken to mean 'in Caesar's own words', thereby implying as much written as

passage, then points out that in the *Bellum Alexandrinum* the personal pronoun *nobis* crops up twice in contexts that imply that the writer was not merely an eyewitness but a participant in the fighting there.³ Therefore, it appears, that author cannot be Hirtius.

First, no matter how we interpret *Caesaris sermone* in Hirtius' preface, it is clear from the words *ex parte* that Caesar was not Hirtius' only informant, even if he was the most important. What other sources then could he have had? During the wars in Gaul, Caesar had at his disposal (it is not in dispute) the written dispatches of his subordinates (see e.g. *B.G.* 2.1.1; 5.40.1, 47.4f.): these were both of immediate importance to him for day-to-day military purposes, and source-material for portions of his *Commentaries* as they now stand. This is particularly obvious in narrative of episodes where he was not himself present.⁴ It would be surprising if quite a few of the officers who fought under him in Egypt and Africa were not well schooled in the habit of note-taking and dispatch-writing,⁵ at least sufficiently for several such reports from these campaigns to be among the papers Caesar brought back with him to Rome and then left behind at his death, even if he had himself made no efforts to compile them, along with his own observations and recollections, into a homogeneous final account bearing the stamp of his own literary personality, as he had with *B.G.* 1-7 and *B.C.* We know independently that editorial work was done on Caesar's papers after his death (Gell. 17.9.1), and that Hirtius was a senior figure in the extensive secretariat which Caesar had assembled for military and diplomatic purposes.⁶ He was just the man to have had, or, for the purposes announced in his *Preface*, to have sought, access to these documents. One might add that, if he did not write the *Bellum Alexandrinum*, then the very existence of this, and of the other works in the *corpus* not by Caesar himself, itself proves that substantial quantities of such material existed—which, in turn, it would be very odd for Hirtius not to have sought and used for the project described in his *Preface* to *B.G.* 8.

At this point an important critical principle needs to be explicitly stated, for it is one that, used as we are to the printed word as a primary vehicle of communication, with its attendant apparatus of publishing houses and copyright law (and, in scrupulous scholarship, careful observance of distinctions between exact quotation, paraphrase and referential citation), we too easily overlook. Where all documentary communication is hand written, as for any ancient writer it was, the distinctions that appear clear to us between author and scribe, copyist and commentator, editor, secretary, 'literary executor', and publisher, lose much of their significance. If one oral information. But earlier Hirtius has noted that there were no *Commentarii* by Caesar after the end of *B.C.* 3 (that is, on any reconstruction of the disputed text at *Praef.* 2, 'non ¶comparantibus† superioribus atque insequentibus eius scriptis'), and the point made in the rest of the sentence quoted in the text above ('tamen aliter audimus ea quae rerum novitate aut admiratione nos capiunt, aliter quae pro testimonio sumus dicturi'), dependent on *audimus*, would make little sense if anything other than oral information were at issue.

³ 3.1: 'ipsi homines ingeniosi ... quae a nobis fieri viderant' etc.; 19.6: 'pugnabatur a nobis ex ponte, ex mole'. In order defend their belief in Hirtius' authorship, Nipperdey and Klotz reached for their scalpels, emending *nobis* in these passages to *nostris*; but as will become clear, surgery is unnecessary.

⁴ Cf. M. Rambaud, *L'art de la déformation historique chez César* (2nd. edn. Paris, 1966), 61ff.

⁵ Temperamentally both a literary perfectionist and something of workaholic, Caesar is likely to have insisted on reports and other military documentation being meticulously kept by subordinates.

⁶ F. E. Adcock, *Caesar as Man of Letters* (Cambridge, 1956), 102, describes Hirtius as a 'literary adjutant' to Caesar; cf. Rambaud (n. 4), 58. For Caesar's secretariat, see especially J. Malitz, 'Die Kanzlei Caesars. Herrschaftsorganisation zwischen Republik und Prinzipat', *Historia* 36 (1987), 51ff.

writer excerpts or copies portions of another's work, but adds comments, supplements, appendices or insertions—or subtracts or epitomizes—then whether we regard the 'new' work thus produced as distinctively a different document in its own right, or as a 'new edition' or adaptation of the old, becomes a matter of degree only. This is especially so in an organisation such as an army, where reports typically append, excerpt or include, rather than digest and *précis*, other documents. One might add that texts dictated to scribes can contain signatures or other additions in their 'author's' own hands (e.g. Pompey's postscript in a letter to Cicero: *Att.* 8.1.1, 'in ea Pompei epistula erat in extremo ipsius manu, "tu censeo ..." etc.); that we can point to military records from elsewhere in which two or more separate hands can be identified;⁷ and that, quite literally, cutting-and-pasting was a known editorial practice (e.g. *Cic. Att.* 16.6.4).⁸ This all makes the concept of 'authorship', of passages which largely consist of nearly word-for-word transcription of earlier documents, ambiguous.

For Hirtius the first task in composing an account of a campaign which he had not himself witnessed will have been to try to make sense of various military records, and to harmonize these with whatever he knew from Caesar's own lips or jottings or could glean elsewhere. Hirtius' familiarity with such records is not in dispute—witness what appears to be his editorial compilation of reports from Fabius and Caninius in *B.G.* 8.27–37.⁹ It does not beggar belief that he could transmit *verbatim* portions of reports which had originally been written by others for submission to Caesar in the course of the Alexandrine campaign. Nor, then, need it cause us any perplexity to find the apparently 'inappropriate' first-person pronouns in the text as it stands (at *B.Alex.* 3.1 and 19.6), even if it was Hirtius' mind and hand (or perhaps, Hirtius' mind and the hands of his own secretarial staff) that gave the *Bellum Alexandrinum* its present form.

II. THE 'ANNUITÄT' OF THE *COMMENTARII*

Caesar's own *Commentaries* follow a year-by-year pattern of book-division which was probably a common if not standard form for (pro)magistrates' reports or other *Commentarii*.¹⁰ There are occasional and explicable exceptions,¹¹ but this format also shapes Hirtius' *B.G.* 8 (note 2.1, 'ipse *pridie* *Kal. Ian* ... proficiscitur ...'), until he explicitly declares his intention to go beyond it—and his reasons for doing so (8.48.10:

⁷ See e.g. J. N. Adams, 'The language of the Vindolanda writing tablets: an interim report', *JRS* 85 (1995), 86–134, at 86 n. 7.

⁸ 'De gloria librum ad te misi, et in eo prohoemium id quod est in Academico tertio, id evenit ob eam rem, quod habeo volumen prohoemiorum: ex eo eligere soleo, cum aliquid σύγγραμμα institui. itaque iam in Tusculano, qui non meminisse me absum isto prohoemio, conieci id in eum librum, quem tibi misi. cum autem in navi legerem Academicos, adgnovi erratum meum. itaque statim novum prohoemium exaravi et tibi misi. *tu illud desecabis, hoc adglutinabis.*' It is further illustrative of my main point here that Cicero can doubt whether a letter purporting to come from Caesar may not in fact have been composed by Hirtius and Balbus (*Att.* 11.16.1).

⁹ 'Hirtius a peu transformé' these dispatches, and was 'peu independent de ses sources'—Rimbaud (n. 4), 76ff.; Adcock (n. 6), 102f.

¹⁰ A. von Premerstein, *RE* IV 726ff.; H. Oppermann, *Caesar. Der Schriftsteller und sein Werk* (Berlin/Leipzig, 1933), 7; F. Bömer, *Hermes* 81 (1953), 210ff.

¹¹ *B.G.* 3.1–6, at least in part, belong chronologically at the end of Book 2 but were postponed, probably because the account of Galba's undistinguished performance would have left an unsatisfactory taste in the mouth at the end of the otherwise resoundingly successful (as Caesar would have them seem) campaigns of 57; and *B.C.* 2 continues the account of the year 49 in *B.C.* 1, probably because of the unusual scale of Book 1, and the limitations of papyrus-roll lengths (Patzler, 118f.).

'scio Caesarem singulorum annorum singulos commentarios confecisse; quod ego non existimavi mihi esse faciendum, propterea quod ...'). Having drawn attention to this, Patzer goes on (pp. 122f.) to emphasize that by contrast the *Bellum Alexandrinum* fails to conform with this pattern, treating as it does the remainder of 48 from shortly after Pharsalus (August), until Caesar's return to Rome in Sept./Oct. 47; hence, he claims once more, it cannot be Hirtius' handiwork.

The year-by-year *Commentarius* was an obvious and natural format for Caesar when he compiled the published 'edition(s)' of *de Bello Gallico*, originating as it did partly in accounts to the Senate of official tenures which were themselves determined by, and usually limited to, calendar years. It lent itself too to Caesar's usual military practice in Gaul, where each campaigning season was as a rule divided from the previous, and the next, by a spell in winter quarters—time which, on the theory of year-for-year 'publication' at least,¹² Caesar will have partly devoted to the business of composition. It lent itself less well, however, when fighting began to exceed the limits of the traditional campaigning season, or (as in a sense it did with the campaign against the Veneti and the ensuing British adventures) to straddle the calendar years. Once the civil war began, this was clearly the case: campaigning, marching and counter-marching if not actual fighting, were more or less continuous from Jan. 49 until Munda, even if Caesar himself had after Pharsalus no reason to continue to publicize his side of the story. In the *Bellum Civile*, therefore, what we find is rather a series of individual campaigns, some short, some protracted, but only influenced by the seasons in so far as the weather affected the actual course of events, as in the late winter/early spring of 48 when against the elements Caesar was desperately trying to get his reinforcements under Antonius across the Adriatic. In the *Bellum Alexandrinum* (and in the *Bellum Africum* and the *Bellum Hispaniense* too), we find the same thing: sequential campaign-narratives, in which the annual calendar no longer governs the arrangement of the material.

There is more. In Gaul Caesar was the proconsul of Rome, the servant of the Senate and People. As such he observed the official calendar, by for instance recognizing the consular years of the curule officials (*B.G.* 1.2.1, 6.4, 7.5, 4.1.1, 5.1.1 etc.). By 48, however, there was no uniformly recognized political authority for him to comply with. During the fifties, moreover, thanks to carelessness or malign neglect on the part of the pontiffs responsible for intercalation, the calendar had become well out of synchrony with the natural year; soon, in 46–5, it would need Caesar's own radical reforms to sort it out. Given the anarchic state of governmental affairs in Rome itself, it is conceivable that many people had actually lost track of the official date—though of course farmers, seamen and generals need no official calendar or sacerdotal authority to tell them when to harvest crops, when it is safe to sail, or when the conditions will permit a military operation. In such circumstances, it might have been hard enough to tie even the Gallic campaigns, punctuated though they were by regular retirements to winter-quarters, down to a narrative based on consular years. For the civil war it would have been considerably more problematic, and even if it were possible, it would have made nonsense of the real shape of the strategic development of the conflict. Furthermore, once the calendar reforms were in place from the start of 45 onwards, it would not have been easy to correlate the new Julian dates with the pre-Julian which may have appeared from time to time, though probably not consistently, in the kinds of military report that Hirtius probably used when compiling the *Bellum Alexandrinum*. Caesar himself in the *Bellum Gallicum* had

¹² It is not material to my main point here whether Caesar wrote the *Commentaries* each year—which I believe—or at one sitting in late 52 or 51.

in effect related events campaign by campaign, even if some years involved him in more than one; and he had also shown that for reasons of scale or structure or political convenience (n. 11 above), a given year's events might have to be divided between books. In abandoning the year-for-year narrative, the 'author' of the *Bellum Alexandrinum* was not significantly departing either from the demands of narrative (and historical) coherence, or strategic reality, or from Caesar's own practice. And Hirtius has shown already in *B.G.* 8 (48.10) his awareness that the coherence of the subject-matter may call for that abandonment. Indeed, this passage might almost be regarded as a positive argument in favour of Hirtius' redactorship, at least, of the *Bellum Alexandrinum*. Already then perhaps to be regarded as slight in themselves, the considerations Patzer offers to justify rejecting Hirtius' responsibility for the *Bellum Alexandrinum* are confounded by other circumstances surrounding its composition and subject-matter. If Hirtius is to be absolved, it will have to be on other grounds.¹³

Highgate School, London

LINDSAY G. H. HALL

¹³ My thanks to the editors of *CQ* and to their referee for their sympathetic help in improving an earlier draft of this note.