

Julius Caesar: *De Bello Gallico*

Some of the best prose of the late Republic comes from politicians concerned with enhancing their own position in a world racked by civil conflict. In his *Commentarii de bello gallico* (*Commentaries on the Gallic War*), Julius Caesar (100-44 BCE) who wrote in a straightforward and concise style—and referred himself in the third person!—kept his popularity alive by sending home year by year a diary of his military successes as he conquered Gaul (58-51 BCE). In the following excerpt (the opening words of this commentary), he introduces to his Roman readers the people he will subdue and absorb into the melting pot that is soon to become the great Roman Empire under his successor Augustus.

Text and Translation

Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres; unam partem incolunt Belgae,
All Gaul is divided into three parts; the Belgians inhabit one part, the Aquitanians

aliam Aquitani, tertiam qui ipsorum linguā Celtae, nostrā Galli,
(inhabit) another (part), (those) who are called Celts in their language, in ours Gauls,

appellantur. Hi omnes linguā, institutīs, legibus inter se differunt.
(inhabit) the third (part). All these differ amongst themselves in language, customs, (and) laws.

1. **Gallia:** *Gallia, -ae, f.:* Gaul (modern France)
divisa: *divido, -ere, divisi, divisum:* divide
tres: *tres, tria:* three
incolunt: *incolo, -ere, -ui:* inhabit; live
Belgae: *Belgae, -arum, m.:* the Belgians; the *Belgae* were a tribe which inhabited northern Gaul (France) in Caesar's day
2. **Aquitani:** *Aquitani, -orum, m.:* the Aquitanians; the *Aquitani* were another Gallic tribe
tertiam: *terius, -a, -um:* third
lingua: *lingua, -ae, f.:* language
Celtae: *Celtae, -arum, m.:* Celts; another name for the Gauls
Galli: *Galli, -orum, m.:* Gauls
3. **appellantur:** *appello, -are, -avi, -atum:* call (by name)
institutīs: *institutum, -i, n.:* custom
legibus: *lex, legis, f.:* law
differunt: *differo, differere, distuli, dilatatum:* differ; with *ab* ("from")

Gallos ab Aquitanīs Garumna flumen, a Belgīs Matrona

The Garonne river (separates) the Gauls from the Aquitanians, the Marne and Seine separates

et Sequana dividit. Horum omnium fortissimi sunt Belgae,

(the Gauls) from the Belgians. Of all these (tribes) the Belgians are the bravest,

propterea quod a cultū atque humanitate provinciae longissimē absunt,

for the reason that they are the furthest away from the refinement and civilization of the Province,

minimēque ad eos mercatores saepe commeant atque ea quae ad

and least (often) do the merchants often go and come to them and import those things

effeminandos animos pertinent important, proximique sunt Germanīs,

which tend to weaken (men's) courage, and they are nearest to the Germans,

4. **Garumna:** *Garumna*, -ae, f.: the Garonne river
flumen: *flumen, inis*, n.: river
Matrona: *Matrona*, -ae, f.: the Marne river
5. **Sequana:** *Sequana*, -ae, f.: the Seine river
dividit: singular, because the two rivers are imagined to constitute one boundary
fortissimi: *fortis, forte*: brave; here, the superlative degree of the adjective, “bravest”; it modifies *Belgae* as a predicate adjective
6. **propterea quod:** (adverb) for that reason that
cultū: *cultus, -ūs*, m.: refinement
humanitate: *humanitas, -tatis*, f.: civilization
provinciae: *provincia, -ae*, f.: the Province; the only Roman settlement in Gaul before Caesar conquered Gaul. Known now as Provence, it lies on the southern coast of France.
longissimē: *longus, -a, um*: a long way off; here, the superlative adverb (“furthest”)
absum: *absum, abesse, afui*: be away
minimē(que): least of all; superlative degree of the adverb *parum* (“little”)
mercatores: *mercator, -oris*, m.: merchant
commeant: *commeo* (1): come and go
7. **ad effeminandos animos:** the gerundive in a prepositional phrase; translate “to weaken (men's) courage”
pertinent: *pertineo, -tinere, -tinui*: tend; + *ad* (“toward”)
important: *importo* (1): import
proximi: *proprior, -ius*: near; here, in the superlative degree (“nearest”); + dative

qui trans Rhenum incolunt, quibuscum continenter bellum gerunt.
who live across the Rhine River, with whom they regularly wage war.

8. **Germanīs:** *Germani, -orum, m.:* the Germans
Rhenum: *Rhenus, -i, m.:* the Rhine river
continenter: (adverb) regularly