

## BOOK REVIEW

*Caesar's Civil War: Historical Reality and Fabrication.* By RICHARD W. WESTALL. Mnemosyne Supplements 410. Leiden, NL and Boston, MA: Brill, 2017. Pp. xvi + 400. Hardback, \$134.00. ISBN 978-90-04-35614-6.

This stimulating and widely researched book deliberately straddles history and historiography by seeking to question and challenge the historical claims of Caesar's narrative of the civil war of 49–48 BCE at the same time that it explores the historical context and socio-economic ramifications of the events Caesar describes. A further notable feature of the book is its geographic structure. After an introduction and a narrative summary of the war in the first two chapters, the book devotes the next seven chapters to the regions in which the Civil War transpired, in chronological order: Italia, Hispania, Gallia, Africa, Macedonia, Asia and Aegyptus. The cumulative effect is a tour of the Roman world at the moment of historical transition between Republic and Empire. The variety of topics discussed is even greater than the range of the regions explored. Westall notes at the opening of his introduction that he was loosely inspired by Herodotus, and the comparison is appropriate on many levels. Some sections verge on digressive even as the reader recognizes their connection to the whole. Even when one cannot entirely trust the explicit claims of the historical narrator, it is still possible to explore his claims for understanding the realities of the world he describes. Most importantly, in order to understand why and how the main protagonists fought each other, one needs to understand their larger world as completely as possible.

The level of scholarly documentation is admirably high throughout. Footnotes are plentiful and contain interesting digressions in themselves. Citation of relevant ancient sources is a constant. Eight detailed maps and six helpful indices are included at the back. Westall is often judgmental in his analysis (e.g., Caesar's attempt to recross the Adriatic in a small boat in the winter of 49–48 is a "malicious invention on the part of a hostile historian"), but he explains his reasoning and cites modern bibliography as well as the ancient evidence (for this example, see page 29; further discussion, more clearly speculative, on pages 200–3). Even

when one disagrees with him, therefore, he provides the reader with the evidence to do so. His tone is exploratory and he seeks to amplify the significance of the topics he has chosen to discuss more than insist that he is right. For these reasons I enjoyed reading the book and learned much from it.

As a demonstration of the range and relevance of the topics Westall discusses, I offer representative examples from each of the geographical chapters. Particularly good in Chapter 3 (Italia) is Westall's discussion of the plundering of the *sanctius aerarium* in order to fund the war. He explores the ways that Caesar's misleading rhetoric seeks to exculpate his own actions, and then he posits that Caesar's need for money suggests that his massive victories in Gaul had not rendered him wealthy enough to fund the war on his own (a point to which Westall returns in the closing pages of Chapter 9). Caesar's account of the war in Spain (Chapter 4) downplays the mineral wealth of the region as well as his own personal connections to it, while emphasizing the novelty and ineffectiveness of Pompey's use of *clientela* as a commander *in absentia*. The importance of Massilia for Rome's history in Gaul is the theme of Chapter 5, (especially given the omission of any mention of it in Caesar's commentaries on the Gallic War), in particular its status as a free city and thus its symbolic significance within a civil war fought over *libertas*.

The first two sections of Chapter 6 offer a revisionist reconsideration of Caesar's sources for Curio's failed campaign in Africa, and a study of the chaos inherent to the legitimacy of command when five different men claimed administrative authority over Africa in the year 49. The final section stresses the importance of African grain for feeding the Roman populace and the consequent economic risks for Caesar and Rome after Curio's annihilation. In Chapter 7 (Macedonia), Westall's reconstruction of a Pompeian strategy to invade Italy in the spring of 48 is particularly interesting, as is his discussion of army life and the workings of supply lines during the Dyrrachium campaign. The Pharsalus narrative, surprisingly, is not discussed. Chapter 8 (Asia) emphasizes the cultural significance of Ephesus as it follows Caesar's pursuit of Pompey to wealthy Egypt (Chapter 9), at which point Westall takes seriously Caesar's desire to bring peace to Egypt and posits its literary value as the intended ending of the *Civil War*.

The very breadth of Westall's inquiries entails that not all are equally satisfying, but in combination they demonstrate how historically rich Caesar's often misleading narrative can be. The subsections of the chapters are not designed to build to a particular conclusion, yet the successful prevailing argument of each

chapter is that Caesar's partisan literary text is also a revealing socio-economic historical source.

REX STEM

*University of California, Davis*, srstem@ucdavis.edu