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THE SUPPRESSION OF THE DRUIDS IN CAESAR'S *GALLIC WAR**

ABSTRACT

Ancient testimonia on the Druids are few in number and sparse on details, and they have yielded a broad range of scholarly opinions on the Druids' function among the Gauls. This article examines the suspiciously limited role played by the Druids in Julius Caesar's Gallic War *(=* BGall*.). Considering the work of both classicists and archaeologists, it argues that, given Caesar's demonstrated propensity for tailoring his portrayals of northern Europeans to fit with his narrative objectives, he deliberately omitted the Druids from nearly all of the* Gallic War *save for a brief ethnographic digression on the Gauls. This he did in order to downplay the sophistication of the Gauls, and the threat they posed to the Romans, since the Druids were likely a potent source of anti-Roman sentiment during Caesar's time in Gaul, just as they seem to have been in the Early Imperial period.*

Keywords: Julius Caesar; *Gallic War*; ethnography; Druids; Gauls; Diviciacus; Dumnorix; Vercingetorix

From the yearly gatherings at Stonehenge of Neo-Druids to the shape-shifting, naturalist wizards of popular fantasy, modern conceptions of the Druids, the enigmatic priestly class of the ancient Gauls and Britons, are marked by both imagination and variety. The same can be said, however, of ancient sources for the historical Druids, as well as for the scholarship that has attempted to interpret them. This variation stems largely from the nature of the surviving sources on the ancient Celts and the disciplinary cross-over necessary to study them—the typical scholar who works on the topic is either a Celtic archaeologist who dabbles in Greek and Latin or a Classicist who dabbles in Celtic archaeology. Interpretations of the sparse and challenging source base are most often thus divided along disciplinary lines: archaeologists generally trust the ancient evidence more in the hopes of understanding better ancient Celtic ritual and society, while philologists and historians typically view the sources with much greater scepticism, with some even arguing that all literary sources discussing the ancient Druids are so riddled with literary tropes and ethnographic topoi as to effectively divorce them from historical reality. Consensus is understandably difficult to achieve with such interpretative breadth, a struggle compounded by the problematic dominance of the literary tradition by fragmentary or otherwise lost sources. While I will not attempt here to examine comprehensively the treatment of the Druids in the Graeco-Roman corpus, I believe we can gain some clarity on the Druids of the first centuries B.C. and A.D. through a closer examination of one of our earliest and most important surviving literary sources to discuss them, Julius Caesar's *Gallic War*.

Scholars over the last several decades have noted Caesar's tendency to actively censor or alter information in his account of Gaul,[1] and many have grown increasingly

* My thanks to J.E. Lendon for his encouragement, first in setting aside and then in pursuing the idea that led to this article. All translations (as well as any errors) are my own.

[1] For general discussions of this tendency in the *Gallic War*, see C.E. Stevens, 'The *Bellum Gallicum* as a work of propaganda', *Latomus* 11 (1952), 165–79; G. Walser, *Caesar und die Germanen* (Wiesbaden, 1956); M. Rambaud, *L'art de la deformation historique dans les*

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sceptical of his ethnographic digressions on northern European peoples.[2] Perhaps because of the relatively limited scope of enquiry so far into Caesar's ethnographic passages and Caesar's general terseness on the matter, little has been said of the depiction of the Druids in the *Gallic War*, and no earnest attempt has been made to consider ancient literary and archaeological evidence for the Druids in full view of Caesar's apparent mendacity.[3] Accounting for these factors, this paper will show that, similar to how Caesar downplays the martial prowess and threat posed by the Gauls throughout much of his narrative, he also actively omitted the Druids as well. In light of this, we see that the Druids of the first centuries B.C. and A.D. likely played a decisive role in Gallic politics, interacted regularly with Roman officials, and, both during and after the Gauls' subjugation by the Romans, were likely among the most active agitators for resistance to Roman imperialism.

Caesar's *Gallic War* is our earliest surviving source on the Druids, but it and the other principal surviving works from Graeco-Roman antiquity that discuss the Druids in any significant detail, those of Diodorus Siculus, Strabo and Ammianus Marcellinus, have long been thought to share a common source in Posidonius of Apamea.[4] A Greek polymath and older contemporary of Caesar, Posidonius was well regarded and frequently cited in his own time; his work, which survives only in the passages of the abovementioned authors that can be feasibly attributed to him, is believed to have documented his travels in and around first-century B.C. Gaul and to have served as the foundation for most other ancient authors' ethnographic descriptions of the Gauls.[5]

commentaires de César (Paris, 1966[2]); K. Welch and A. Powell (edd.), *Julius Caesar as Artful Reporter* (London, 1998).

[2] For sceptical examinations of Caesar's digressions on the Gauls, see J.F. Gardner, 'The Gallic menace in Caesar's propaganda', *G&R* 30 (1983), 181–9; G. Walser, 'Zu Caesars Tendenz in der geographischen Beschreibung Galliens', *Klio* 77 (1995), 217–23. For the Germans, see C.B. Krebs, '"Imaginary geography" in Caesar's *Bellum Gallicum*', *AJPh* 127 (2006), 111–36; E. Allen-Hornblower, 'Beasts and barbarians in Caesar's *Bellum Gallicum* 6.21–8', *CQ* 64 (2014), 682–93. For the ethnographic digressions more generally, see H. Schadee, 'Caesar's construction of northern Europe: inquiry, contact and corruption in *De Bello Gallico*', *CQ* 58 (2008), 158–80; T. Creer, 'Ethnography in Caesar's *Gallic War* and its implications for composition', *CQ* 69 (2019), 246–63.

[3] M. Aldhouse-Green, *Caesar's Druids* (New Haven, 2010) uses passages from Caesar as jumping-off points from which to examine relevant archaeological evidence, but is generally more trusting of Caesar and other ancient authors than the majority of classicists.

[4] A subject of considerable speculation. Although Caesar is our earliest surviving source on the Druids, there is some evidence of accounts about Gauls and Druids by Timaeus (~356–270 B.C.) and Pytheas of Massalia (350–285 B.C.), both of whom may have been sources for Posidonius and the later Alexandrian tradition (*contra* R. Wiśniewski, 'Deep woods and vain Ooacles: Druids, Pomponius Mela and Tacitus', *Palamedes* 2 [2007], 143–56, at 144; summarized by N.K. Chadwick, *The Druids* [Cardiff, 1966], 32–4). Diogenes Laertius also cites Aristotle's apocryphal *Magicus* and Sotion's lost *Diadochai* as authoritative texts on the Druids (*Vit. Phil.* 1.1), which, if true, would make these the earliest Graeco-Roman sources to mention Druids (R. Hutton, *Blood and Mistletoe* [New Haven, 2009], 2; A.C. Johnston, *The Sons of Remus* [Cambridge, 2017], 252). For more on the Celtic ethnographic tradition, its earliest authors and Posidonius' place within it, see A. Lampinen, 'Fragments from the "middle ground"—Posidonius' northern ethnography', *Arctos* 48 (2014), 229–59.

[5] Posidonius is considered the fountainhead of Celtic ethnography because of the similar descriptions of the Gauls given by ancient authors (see n. 6 below), who generally cite Posidonius as a source. While scholars have long agreed on the topics Posidonius wrote about, they differ on what precisely his work contained and how much later authors relied on Posidonius or on their own experience with the Celts. J.J. Tierney, 'The Celtic ethnography of Posidonius', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 60 (1960), 189–275 sought to reconstruct Posidonius' Celtic ethnography from fragments found in later authors, believing that most of these other ethnographies were copied

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Aside from his earlier date and reputation in the Graeco-Roman world, much of the reason Posidonius is considered the origin for most of the Gallic ethnographic tradition is that many later authors' accounts of the Gauls, and even more so of the Druids, feature several similar elements that could reasonably have been drawn from the same source. Most conspicuous among these is the division of the Gauls' religious classes into three groups: bards, Druids and seers.[6] Each of the authors considered part of the Posidonian tradition also tends to describe the Druids' involvement in philosophy, astronomy and teaching, as well as their belief in the transference of the immortal soul from one body to another after death; most sources also typically mention human sacrifice and/or the Gauls' use of severed heads in their poorly understood ritual practices. The philosophical teachings of the Druids also tend to be the focus of a relatively small but distinct tradition centred around the academics of Alexandria, who likely had access to Posidonius' work, but some believe their work to have been based on the writings of the much earlier Greek explorer and geographer, Pytheas of Massalia. Apart from these two groups, a small number of Roman imperial authors, including Pliny the Elder, Lucan and Tacitus, mention the Druids only in passing, and, while they seem to have drawn on both the Posidonian and the Alexandrian traditions, their focus on both the mystical elements of Druidism and the greater emphasis on human sacrifice suggests a shift in Graeco-Roman perceptions of the Druids during the Imperial period.

While the other authors in the Posidonian tradition almost certainly did not travel to Gaul themselves and thus relied on second-hand accounts of the area and its people, Caesar's possible use of Posidonius is more complicated given his prolonged personal experience with the region—he remains the only one of our sources for the Druids who we are certain actually travelled to Gaul and interacted with the natives. The degree to which Caesar drew from Posidonius' work or mingled it with his own material has been debated elsewhere,[7] but it seems most reasonable to assume that he relied primarily on his own experience, since the majority of Caesar's description of the Druids is unique to him and several of the core features of the Posidonian version are absent from the *Gallic War*.[8] Whereas the Posidonian tradition describes the Druids as but one of three groups of religious professionals in Gallic society, Caesar places them at the top of the Gallic

from Posidonius. Tierney's work met initially with acceptance (Chadwick [n. 4], 6–7; S. Piggott, *The Druids* [New York, 1985], 97–8; more recently Wiśniewski [n. 4], 144–5), but was heavily criticized by classicists beginning with D. Nash, 'Reconstructing Poseidonios' Celtic ethnography: some considerations', *Britannia* 7 (1976), 111–26, who pushed back against the idea that an entire ethnographic tradition should be blithely ascribed to a lost work, a view shared by J. Webster, 'At the end of the world: Druidic and other revitalization movements in post-conquest Gaul and Britain', *Britannia* 30 (1999), 1–20; Hutton (n. 4), 10; Lampinen (n. 4), 244.

[6] The terms βάρδοι/*bardos*, δρυΐδαι/*drysidas* and μάντεις/ὀυάτεις/*euhagis* are used in the same way by the three primary authors of the Posidonian tradition, Diodorus, Strabo and Ammianus Marcellinus (Diod. Sic. 5.31.2–3, Strabo 4.4.4, Amm. Marc. 15.9.8), and the functions attributed to the three by each author are more or less identical. The debate on whether to classify Ammianus' digression on the Druids as a fragment of Posidonius (because of the similarity of its content to other Posidonian sources) or of Timagenes (because Ammianus names Timagenes as a source for the origins of the Gauls [Amm. Marc. 15.9.2]) remains unresolved, although, given Ammianus' frequent tendency to copy earlier ancient authors without attribution (T. Creer, 'Ethnography and the Roman digressions of Ammianus Marcellinus', *Histos* 14 [2020], 255–74, at 256, 264–7), it seems likely that his account of the Druids was derived primarily from earlier Posidonian sources. For a detailed table of every mention of the Druids in Graeco-Roman literature, complete with dates and summaries of their content, see Webster (n. 5), 2–4.

[7] See n. 5 above.

[8] Laid out clearly by Webster (n. 5), 2–6.

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social hierarchy, alongside (and perhaps even slightly above) another group he dubs the *equites* (*BGall*. 6.13.3). Reflective of this high position, Caesar claims that the Druids command significant respect from other Gauls, and are highly sought after by the sons of the elite as teachers of ancient lore and wisdom (6.13.4), which they hand down entirely through oral tradition in a process that takes twenty years (6.14.2–6)—for more mundane matters, he says, the Druids will deign to write using Greek letters (6.14.3). The Druids of the *Gallic War* are also exempted from taxation and compulsory military service (6.14.1), and enjoy absolute authority in matters both legal and religious (6.13.4–5), allowing them to mete out weighty punishments such as barring individual Gauls from participating in religious rites, effectively rendering them outcasts (6.14.6–7). More similar to the Posidonian tradition, Caesar says that the Druids also officiate at sacrifices (6.13.4, 6.16.2), and have supreme authority in judging the correctness of ritual procedure and in interpreting signs and portents (6.13.4).[9] Finally, Caesar claims that the Druids convene yearly in the territory of the Carnutes, which is considered the centre of Gaul, where they discuss important matters and pass judgement on any disputes brought before them (6.13.10). Caesar does mention the Druids' association with human sacrifice while discussing these responsibilities, but glosses over it quickly and never mentions again the link he makes in the ethnographic passage between executing criminals by immolation (1.4.1, 7.4.10) and the ritual practice of burning large wicker effigies filled with human victims (6.16.4–5).

Much of this information is unique to Caesar, especially those about the Druids' importance and primacy within the Gallic social and political hierarchy. Moreover, several elements in Caesar's account differ markedly from the Posidonian tradition, a point made all the more striking by the fact that the *Gallic War* was one of the earliest sources on the Druids and seems to have been known to many of the later authors of the tradition, who nevertheless decided to favour Posidonius' account over Caesar's. Yet several aspects of Caesar's portrayal of the Druids complicate dramatically our ability to understand who this group was and what they actually did in ancient Gallic society. Perhaps most conspicuous of all, Caesar ascribes significant and wide-ranging influence to the Druids in nearly every aspect of Gallic life, including politics, ritual and elite education, but he never mentions a single Druid outside of the ethnographic digression in Book 6. Caesar also claims that Druidism originated in Britain (6.13.11) and that, even in his time, Gauls who wished to be initiated into the Druids' deepest mysteries would travel to the island for a period of study (6.13.12); yet he elsewhere claims that the Gauls are almost entirely ignorant of Britain (4.20.2) and, when his forces cross the Channel to visit the island in Books 4 and 5, he never mentions the presence of Druids there and avoids entirely any discussion of British religion. The oddity of Caesar's general silence on the Druids deepens, however, when we discover from one of Cicero's philosophical dialogues that one of Caesar's closest allies in Gaul, the Aeduan aristocrat Diviciacus, who features prominently in the first two books of the *Gallic War*, was a Druid (Cic. *Diu.* 1.90).

[9] *illi rebus diuinis intersunt, sacrificia publica ac priuata procurant, religiones interpretantur* (*BGall.* 6.13.4). *administrisque ad ea sacrificia druidibus utuntur* (6.16.2). The verbs in these passages (*intersunt*, *procurant*, *interpretantur*) and the noun *administris* suggest that the Druids were integral to Gallic ritual, but they remain too ambiguous for us to be certain whether the Druids were performing the rituals or just supervising them. Chadwick (n. 4), 28 argued that the Druids were administrators of Gallic rituals, especially human sacrifice; Piggott (n. 5), 100–2 and Aldhouse-Green (n. 3), 11 are more emphatic that the Druids carried out rituals, including sacrifices, rather than just overseeing them.

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Caesar's reticence on the Druids has been interpreted by scholars in a variety of ways, but among the most dominant positions are either that Caesar did not mention the Druids outside of his ethnographic digression on the Gauls because, contrary to what he relates in his account of them, the Druids of his time were in reality socially and politically irrelevant,[10] or, worse yet, that he simply chose to elaborate creatively on information he drew from Posidonius or fabricated entirely his own account of the Druids.[11] According to either line of reckoning, Caesar's information about the Druids is little more than a fanciful literary exercise rather than a reliable description of an actual group of people, and the most radical proponents of these theories hold that we should largely disregard Caesar's account and, in some cases, the entire literary tradition on the Druids.[12] I contend, however, that Caesar's silence on the Druids throughout the *Gallic War* was a deliberate act of censorship, and that it was specifically aimed at downplaying the power and influence of the Druids as well as the sophistication of Gallic society. Both of these elements would have made the Gauls appear more dangerous than Caesar desired, since he seems instead to have been much more focussed on making more distant, less well-known barbarian groups, such as the Germans, coastal Gallic tribes and the Britons, seem like more urgent threats to Roman rule in northern Europe.

As several scholars have noted, Caesar relies heavily throughout the *Gallic War* on a framework that effectively ranks the levels of ferocity of the different barbarian peoples he encounters against one another, and for much of the work this system seems aimed at downplaying the danger posed by the Gauls closest to Roman territory while simultaneously exaggerating the threat posed by more distant barbarians.[13] Indeed, each book of the *Gallic War* seems to present a new group as the latest and most urgent threat to the Romans, and these threats are often conveniently located wherever Caesar's troops are stationed or where he is hoping soon to move them.[14] Thus, even though Caesar is constantly striving in his narrative to present the Gauls as conquered and tamed, a newer, more menacing threat always looms over the horizon, an arrangement that justifies Caesar's continued presence in Transalpine Gaul—and beyond—long after the expiration of his initial assignment to that province.[15]

Book 7, in which Vercingetorix's revolt engulfs the vast majority of Gallic territory, rather forcefully reverses the image of a pacified Gaul that Caesar has so studiously cultivated for the preceding six books. Here a substantial confederation of Gauls, acting on news of political unrest in Rome (*BGall.* 7.1.1–2), determines to rebel against the Romans (7.1.3–8). Caesar reports that the conspiracy originated in 'remote places in the woods' (7.1.4 *siluestribus ac remotis locis*), and finally came into the open 'after

[10] Piggott (n. 5), 202; Wiśniewski (n. 4), 152.

[11] Chadwick (n. 4), 6–17; Piggott (n. 5), 202; Wiśniewski (n. 4), 144, 156.

[12] Expressed most forcefully by Wiśniewski (n. 4) and Johnston (n. 4), 247–58. Johnston in particular argues that the Druids were 'in large part an ethnographic myth' (253), and that representations of the Druids in Roman literature were 'subordinated to and determined by the requirements and constraints of particular imperial narratives' (253). He also contends that Caesar's depiction of the Druids embodies this trend, since the Druids 'are entirely invisible, and are given no real agency' in the narrative of the *Gallic War* (253–4), a view incompatible with the present argument.

[13] Krebs (n. 2); Schadee (n. 2); Allen-Hornblower (n. 2); Creer (n. 2).

[14] Beginning with the Helvetii near Cisalpine Gaul, followed by the Germans under Ariovistus, the Belgae of north-eastern Gaul, the Veneti of the western coast, the Britons and, finally, the Germans.

[15] The *lex Vatinia* of 59 B.C. granted Caesar Cisalpine Gaul and Illyricum as his consular provinces for five years; his assignment to Transalpine Gaul was intended only for the temporary purpose of dealing with the Helvetii.

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much debate' (7.2.1 *his rebus agitatis*) among the Carnutes,[16] who decided to begin the revolt after the leaders of the Gauls had sworn sacred oaths to support them in the endeavour (7.2.1–3). As news of the Carnutes' decision spreads among the other Gallic tribes, Vercingetorix of the Arverni quickly assumes leadership of the Gallic confederation (7.4, 7.63), which soon grows to include no fewer than forty-four different tribes from across Gaul, including several notable former opponents of Caesar's, such as the Helvetii, the Nervii and the Veneti, as well as erstwhile allies such as the Aedui and the Atrebates (7.75). Aside from spurring the majority of Gaul into open revolt against the Romans, however, Vercingetorix also is able to orchestrate several significant setbacks for Caesar's forces, first by enacting a scorched-earth campaign aimed at eliminating Roman supply lines (7.14, 16.3, 55.8), then by actually defeating Caesar's forces—whom Caesar was leading personally—at Gergovia (7.50–2), and finally by culminating in Caesar's embarrassing loss of a substantial number of hostages, supplies and horses at Noviodunum to the Aedui (7.55), whom Caesar had counted as his most steadfast Gallic allies in earlier books of the *Gallic War*.[17] These manoeuvres display real strategic skill on the part of Vercingetorix and his associates, and Caesar's portrayal of Vercingetorix and the Gauls through the course of the revolt shifts remarkably from their depiction in earlier books of the *Gallic War* to show them now as cunning, courageous and able opponents.[18]

A closer look at Caesar's military encounters with the Gauls and the far-off barbarians he insists are so dangerous further accentuates the oddity of this sudden shift in Caesar's portrayal of the Gauls, and also supports the idea that Caesar was probably downplaying the political organization and military danger posed by the Gauls, as well as the role played by the Druids in both spheres, throughout most of the *Gallic War*. For although Caesar builds up the fierceness and strangeness of the Britons and the Germans with ethnographic passages meant to highlight their savagery,[19] his battles against them (when they actually occur) seem rather underwhelming. In Caesar's first landing in Britain in 55 B.C., for example, chieftains of the Britons capitulate to the Romans after a brief but exciting struggle on the beach (4.24–7), and even after the Britons betray the Romans' trust a few chapters later and attack them (4.30–3), when the Romans march out from camp to meet them in pitched battle they are 'able to bear the assault of [Caesar's] men only briefly before they turned their backs' (4.35.2 *diutius nostrorum militum impetum hostes ferre non potuerunt ac terga uerterunt*).

[16] The Carnutes seem to have been among the least submissive to Roman rule of the Gallic tribes, and their territory was home to several legions' winter quarters (*BGall*. 2.35.3, 5.25.4, 8.4.2–3, 8.46.4). They probably began planning the revolt of 52 when they killed their king Tasgetius, Caesar's ally (5.25.1–3), and sought the support of other tribes (5.56, 6.2–3). Their rebellion persisted even after Vercingetorix's defeat at Alesia, and they were among Caesar's primary opponents in 51.

[17] The Aedui had been considered 'brothers and kinsmen' (*BGall*. 1.33.2 *fratres consanguineosque*) of the Romans since 121 B.C., when they had appealed to the Romans for aid against the Arverni and the Allobroges (see also Cic. *Att*. 1.19.2, *Fam*. 7.10.4). Caesar relies heavily on the Aedui for support in the first several books of the *Gallic War* (*BGall*. 1.15.1, 1.35.4, 1.43.6–9, 5.54.4, 6.4), and reminders of his favours nearly prevent them from joining in the revolt of 52 (7.41.1, 7.54.3–4).

[18] L. Rawlings, 'Caesar's portrayal of Gauls as warriors', in K. Welch and A. Powell (edd.), *Julius Caesar as Artful Reporter* (London, 1998), 179–92; A.M. Riggsby, *Caesar in Gaul and Rome* (Austin, 2006), 97–102; Creer (n. 2), 260.

[19] For historians using ethnographies to build narrative anticipation, see G. Woolf, *Tales of the Barbarians* (Malden, 2011), 87–90. For Caesar's ethnographies and use of ethnographic topoi, Creer (n. 2) examines each digression in detail.

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The following year sees Caesar describing the dangers of the Britons' war chariots for a second time, but the Romans again prove themselves superior and incur few losses in the several skirmishes preceding the Britons' surrender (5.15–22).

Caesar's efforts against the Germans, whose courage and ferocity he describes several times,[20] are even more anticlimactic. Aside from two brief and easily resolved struggles, first against the German warlord Ariovistus (1.51–3) and later against the Sugambri, a tribe intent on raiding one of Caesar's forts at Atuatuca (6.35–42), Caesar actually fights the Germans far less frequently than he does the Gauls. This is in spite of two separate incursions across the Rhine that seem aimed at doing battle with the Germans in their home territory, first in Book 4 against the Suebi, who receive an ethnographic digression of their own that emphasizes their ferocity (even in comparison with other Germans),[21] and again in Book 6, when Caesar seeks to prevent the Gallic rebel Ambiorix from reaching safety in Germany and to punish any Germans he finds coming to Ambiorix's aid. Even though in each of these instances Caesar spends several chapters on ethnographic digressions intended to hype up the savagery of the Germans (and the implied glory that will come from defeating them) and to exoticize the unknown lands into which he and his men are venturing, neither expedition results in an actual battle. Instead, the Suebi both times gather deep within their own territory to await Caesar's forces (4.19.3, 6.10.4), while Caesar seems to interpret their unwillingness to come and fight him as cowardice, considers himself victorious, and tears down his Trans-Rhenish bridges as he returns to Gaul (4.19, 6.29.1–3).[22] Thus, although Caesar's portrayal of the Germans is generally that of a fearsome people from whom he expects significant resistance, this portrayal is at odds with the reality of his encounters with them.

Several of Caesar's battles with Gallic tribes contrast sharply with those against Europe's more far-flung inhabitants. For example, Caesar stresses the ferocity of the Belgic Nervii, a tribe from the north-easternmost part of Gaul, in his description of the Romans' desperate struggle at the Battle of the Sabis River. Caesar says here that the Nervii 'were fierce men of great courage' (2.15.5 *esse homines feros magnaeque uirtutis*) and the strongest of the Gallic tribes (1.1.3). Unlike the Germans of Books 4 and 6, however, the Nervii seem to substantiate these descriptions, first, when they rout Caesar's cavalry and attack his infantry with frightening swiftness (2.19.6–8), and again when they place the Romans in dire straits by occupying Caesar's camp (2.24.1–3), terrifying his Gallic allies into retreating (2.24.4–5), and so unnerving Caesar himself that he feels compelled to hoist a shield and fight at the front of the beleaguered Twelfth Legion (2.25.2–3). By Caesar's reckoning, the battle seems lost until the Tenth, Thirteenth and Fourteenth Legions join the fight against the Nervii and raise the Romans' flagging morale (2.26.3–5, 27.1–2), yet the Nervii even here earn Caesar's admiration by fighting fiercely to the last man atop a mound of their fallen comrades (2.27.3–4); 'they most certainly ought to be judged men of such great

[20] *BGall.* 1.39.1, 4.1.9–10, 6.21.3, 6.28.1–3.

[21] For comparison of the German ethnographies of Books 4 and 6, see Allen-Hornblower (n. 2), 683–4; Creer (n. 2), 254–8.

[22] The traditional view of Caesar's anticlimactic expeditions against the Germans is that he included the digressions of Book 6 in order to distract from his failure to actually fight them, or portray the venture as if it was exploratory all along. For this view, see Schadee (n. 2), 170; Allen-Hornblower (n. 2), 683 n. 4. For Caesar considering himself the victor for scaring away the Germans, see J.E. Lendon, 'Julius Caesar, thinking about battle and foreign relations', *Histos* 9 (2015), 1–28, at 18–19; Creer (n. 2), 257.

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bravery,' he says, 'having dared to cross a very wide river, to ascend very high banks, and to attack over most uneven terrain; the greatness of their spirit had reduced these exceedingly difficult tasks to easy ones' (2.27.5).[23]

But perhaps one of Caesar's most long-lasting challenges in Gaul is dealing with the rebel Ambiorix, who is arguably an even greater thorn in Caesar's side than Vercingetorix. Beginning in the winter of 54 B.C., Ambiorix leads the Belgic Eburones in a campaign against Caesar's troops wintering in north-eastern Gaul, the success of which soon wins him the support of the other Gallic tribes in the area and even of some Germans (5.38.2–4, 6.2.2, 6.5). Ambiorix and his men display significant ferocity and cunning at the beginning of their rebellion when they successfully ambush the fifteen cohorts of Sabinus and Cotta (5.32–5), treacherously killing Sabinus along with his officers after they ask for a parley (5.37.2) and slaughtering Cotta and the remaining soldiers after their command structure has collapsed (5.37.3–5.38.1). Ambiorix then launches a ferocious attack on Q. Cicero's camp with the aid of the Nervii and the Atuatuci (5.39), and Cicero's men are only narrowly saved when Caesar arrives and manages to break the barbarian siege (5.49–51). Ambiorix afterward becomes the primary target of Caesar's campaign the following year (6.29.4), his flight toward his German allies serving as the primary impetus for Caesar's second expedition into Germany (6.9.1–2), but Caesar is unable to capture him even as the search persists well into 51 B.C. (8.24.4).

As these examples show, the details of Caesar's battles against barbarian tribes belie his portrayals of them in the ethnographic digressions of the *Gallic War*. For if the digressions actually matched up with Caesar's real-world experiences, he would have fought the Germans more often and faced much stiffer resistance across both the Rhine and the Channel than his accounts actually describe. There are plenty of indications in the *Gallic War*, then, that the Gauls were not just tougher opponents than Caesar says, but actually the most formidable foes he faced during his time in northern Europe. The fact that Caesar saw fit to continuously downplay the military threat posed by the Gauls has to make us wonder—about what else was he being untruthful or withholding?

Based on archaeological evidence and the testimony of later literary sources, Caesar seems also to have sought to alter his portrayal of, or omit entirely certain elements of, Gallic culture that might have made it appear more fearsome and less submissive to Roman control. In several instances, Caesar claims that some of the more typically savage elements of Gallic culture have been done away with under the civilizing influence of the Romans. Caesar cites proximity to Roman merchants and settlements, for example, as the primary cause behind the Gauls' supposedly diminished martial prowess (1.1.3, 2.15.4, 6.24.5–6), when they were once stronger than the Germans (6.24.1)—a legacy he claims is attested by the Volcae Tectosages, a still-fearsome tribe of Gauls living near the Hercynian Forest in Germany.[24] In the religious realm, Caesar says that until recently Gallic funeral custom included the casting of living slaves and favourite clients of the deceased onto the funeral pyre (6.19.4), and, although he mentions several times the Gauls' penchant for executing criminals by immolation (1.4.1, 7.4.10), Caesar never makes a link between this practice and his claim that the Gauls

[23] *ut non nequiquam tantae uirtutis homines iudicari deberet ausos esse transire latissimum flumen, ascendere altissimas ripas, subire iniquissimum locum; quae facilia ex difficillimis animi magnitudo redegerat.*

[24] *BGall.* 6.24.4–6. For other mentions of the Volcae Tectosages, see Woolf (n. 19), 74–6.

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believe the gods to be particularly pleased when convicted criminals are used as sacrificial victims (6.16.5), also often by burning (6.16.4).

But perhaps the most conspicuous element of Gallic ritual that Caesar fails to mention in the *Gallic War* is the Gauls' widespread ritual use of severed heads, which is attested in a more limited fashion in other ancient literary works,[25] but also archaeologically throughout the greater Celtic world before, during and after the first century B.C. While we understand little about the purpose or function of severed heads in Gallic ritual, their symbolic significance needs no explanation, for severed heads appear as a common motif in the artwork and statuary that adorned ancient Gallic holy sites, and several Gallic sanctuaries feature numerous head-sized niches where these trophies would have been displayed.[26] Caesar's silence on this custom among the Gauls is already suspicious given its attestation by most other authors in the Gallic ethnographic tradition, but it is rendered all the more so by its presence in the archaeological record in both the north and the south of Gaul during the time when Caesar would have been there. It seems highly improbable that Caesar would not have noticed Gallic priests adorning their temples with severed heads or warriors parading them around as trophies. Yet in light of Caesar's well-attested habit of

[25] Strabo, citing Posidonius, says that the Gauls hang the heads of their enemies from their horses' bridles and later affixed them to their gates, and that they valued highly the heads of notable men, which they would embalm with expensive oils (4.4.5). Diodorus gives a similar description (5.29.4–5), strengthening the belief that this feature of Gallic ethnography originated with Posidonius. Livy describes the practice among the Boii, whom he depicts in 216 B.C. decapitating the Roman consul L. Postumius and lining the head with gold to use it thereafter as a vessel for libations (23.24.11–12).

[26] Early examples have been found mostly in southern Gaul, including at Entremont the remains of a fifth-century B.C. 'head-pillar' thought to represent a large number of head trophies, along with a group of fourth-to-third-century warrior statues each of which holds one or several heads (see P. Arcelin and A. Rapin, 'L'iconographie anthropomorphe de l'Age du Fer en Gaule Méditerranéenne', in O. Büchsenschütz, A. Bulard, M.-B. Chardenoux and N. Ginoux [edd.], *Decors, images, et signes de l'Age du Fer européen* [Tours, 2003], 183–220; P. Arcelin and G. Congès, 'La sculpture protohistorique de Provence dans le Midi Gaulois', *Documents d'Archéologie Méridionale* 27 [2004], 10–12; P. Arcelin, 'Entremont et la sculpture du second Age du Fer en Provence', *Documents d'Archéologie Méridionale* 27 [2004], 71–84; I. Armit, 'Inside Kurtz's compound: headhunting and the human body in prehistoric Europe', in M. Bonogofsky [ed.], *Skull Collection, Modification, and Decoration* [Oxford, 2006], 1–14), at Roquepertuse a series of skull-niches in a portico and other head-centric statuary and painting (F. Benoit, *L'art primitif méditerranéen de la vallée du Rhône* [Aix-en-Provence, 1969]; R. Coignard and O. Coignard, 'L'ensemble lapidaire de Roquepertuse: nouvelle approche', *Documents d'Archéologie Méridionale* 14 [1991], 27–42; F. Delamare and B. Guineau, 'Roquepertuse: analyse des couches picturales', *Documents d'Archéologie Méridionale* 14 [1991], 83–6), and at Le Cailar depositions of embalmed heads alongside weapons (S. Ghezal et al., 'Embalmed heads of the Celtic Iron Age in the south of France', *Journal of Archaeological Science* 101 [2019], 181–8). Similar, simpler constructions have been found in northern Gaul at Gournay-sur-Aronde and Ribemont-sur-Ancre, where ritual pits attest to deliberate collection and deposition of human and animal heads, and head-sized niches in the porticoes adorning the shrines' entrances suggest a function similar to those in southern Gaul (see J.L. Brunaux, *The Celtic Gauls* [London, 1988], 13–23, 'Être Prêtre en Gaule', in V. Guichard and F. Perrin [edd.], *Les Druides. L'Archéologue hors série No. 2* [Paris, 2000], 5–9; B. Lambot, 'Les morts d'Acy Romance (Ardennes) à La Tène finale. Pratiques funèraires, aspects religieuses et hiérarchie sociale', *Études et Documents Fouillés 4. Les Celtes. Rites Funéraires en Gaule du Nord entre le Vie et le Ier siècle avant Jésus-Christ* [Namur, 1998], 75–87, 'Victimes, sacrificateurs et dieux', in V. Guichard and F. Perrin [edd.], *Les Druides. L'Archéologue hors série No. 2* [Paris, 2000], 30–6; G. Fercoq du Leslay, 'L'Image du Trophée', *L'Archéologue* 46 [2000], 9–13). These sites were in use up until the time of Caesar's conquest of Gaul, confirming the presence of head-taking in northern Gaul and suggesting suppression at that early date. For synthesis and interpretation of the reports on these sites, see Aldhouse-Green (n. 3), 131–6.

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withholding or downplaying information about the Gauls that might make them seem too fierce (and what would the Romans *not* find terrifying and barbaric about the Gauls' use of severed heads?), it is not improbable that Caesar chose to leave out any mention of the Gauls' use of heads as trophies and ritual objects in order to make them seem less savage than the Germans or the Britons, among whom widespread ritual decapitation remains relatively unattested in antiquity.[27]

With so many examples of Caesar carefully curating the information he relates about the Gauls in order to make them appear less fierce than their more distant neighbours (at least until Book 7), his failure to mention the Druids at any point in his narrative should seem significantly more suspicious. As noted above, the most conspicuous problem with Caesar's portrayal of the Druids in the *Gallic War* is Diviciacus, who Cicero, not Caesar, tells us was a Druid (Cic. *Diu.* 1.90). Scholars have offered up a variety of explanations why Caesar neglects to mention Diviciacus' status, and these include believing that Caesar exaggerated the Druids' importance,[28] that he sought (incorrectly) to make them appear as a parallel of the Roman senatorial class,[29] or that Diviciacus was not actually a Druid but cleverly played up the Druidic stereotypes Cicero and other elite Romans expected from him in order to obtain Roman aid against the Sequani.[30] While the state of our evidence does not automatically disqualify any of these arguments, each of them involves either taking Caesar at his word, a risky proposition at best (as demonstrated above), or imagining a far more complicated scenario for Diviciacus' interactions with the Romans in the years before Caesar came to Gaul, even when Diviciacus' standing among the Aedui seems to accord with much of what Caesar says about the Druids in his limited description of them.

Diviciacus plays a significant role in Book 1 of the *Gallic War*, where Caesar repeatedly emphasizes his power and influence among the Aedui and other Gauls (*BGall.* 1.3.5, 18.8, 20.2). It is in these early dealings with the Aedui that Caesar singles out Diviciacus as his most steadfast ally; Caesar showcases the closeness of their relationship by relating an emotional exchange between the two (1.18–19), commenting on how he values Diviciacus' friendship and counsel (1.31–2), proclaiming that he trusted Diviciacus most of all the Gauls (1.41.4), and emphasizing that Diviciacus possessed 'the greatest devotion to the Roman people, the highest affection toward himself, and distinguished fidelity, justice and moderation' (1.19.2 *summum in populum Romanum studium, summam in se uoluntatem, egregiam fidem, iustitiam, temperantiam*). Amidst these effusions of praise, however, we can discern a few small but important details about Diviciacus' position in Aeduan society. First, Diviciacus' and his brother Dumnorix's power appears to be tied to their posture toward the Romans: Caesar claims that Dumnorix, the leader of Aeduan opposition against him

[27] Some evidence for ritual decapitation in Britain has been found at Bredon Hill (A.G. Western and J.D. Hurst, '"Soft heads": evidence for sexualized warfare during the later Iron Age from Kemerton Camp, Bredon Hill', in C. Knüsel and M. Smith [edd.], *The Routledge Handbook of the Bioarchaeology of Human Conflict* [London, 2013], 161–84).

[28] Tierney (n. 5), 213–15, 224 argued that the Druids' role in Gallic society was unduly magnified by Caesar and that Diviciacus cannot be considered a source of information on Druidism since he could not speak Latin. His view is echoed by Piggott (n. 5), 104. See also Nash (n. 5), 126; Wiśniewski (n. 4), 145–6; Hutton (n. 4), 5.

[29] Originally proposed by S.B. Dunham, 'Caesar's perception of Gallic social structures', in B. Arnold and D.B. Gibson (edd.), *Celtic Chiefdom, Celtic State* (Cambridge, 1995), 110–15, who views Caesar's description of Druids and Gallic *equites* as Caesar's decidedly Roman perspective of Gallic society; see also B. Maier, *The Celts* (Edinburgh, 2003), 65.

[30] Posited by Johnston (n. 4), 253 among the greatest sceptics of ancient sources on the Druids.

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in Book 1, hated the Romans in part because their intervention in Gallic affairs had led to a revival of Diviciacus' influence among the Aedui (1.18.8), possibly at the cost of some of Dumnorix's own power. Next, Caesar mentions Diviciacus as a leader of the Aedui alongside a certain Liscus, whom Caesar calls a *uergobretus* (1.16.5). There has been significant speculation on the role of the *uergobretus* in Gallic society,[31] with some even tying the position to the Druids, but this remark is perhaps most interesting because of what Caesar does not say, for while he calls Liscus a *uergobretus* and gives some information about his position, Diviciacus remains lumped with the other *principes* of the Aedui and the reader still has no idea what his official position is or how he obtained and exercises the significant power and influence that Caesar so often mentions. Thanks to Cicero and to Caesar's description of the Druids' place in Gallic society, however, we know that at least some of Diviciacus' high standing must derive from his position as a Druid.

Unfortunately, Cicero and other Roman authors of the time neglect to mention by name any other Druids, so our ability to identify other possible Druids in the *Gallic War* is rather limited. Nevertheless, others have already speculated that Dumnorix might have been a Druid,[32] and some elements of Caesar's account also support these suggestions. As noted above, Dumnorix's authority and influence among the Aedui seems quite similar to that of Diviciacus, and it seems possible, based on Caesar's description of the Druids as a group, that membership was somehow tied to heredity. Indeed, Caesar's separation of the Gallic aristocracy into two groups—the Druids, who handle religious, legal and educational affairs, and the *equites*, who are chiefly concerned with military and political matters—appears fairly similar to the division between the senatorial and the equestrian classes among the Roman elite.[33] This might have been Caesar's way of intentionally signalling to his Roman readership how these two groups were related and how they shared power—in the same way that Roman aristocrats like Caesar himself could hold priesthoods and positions of significant political power,[34] perhaps Caesar's distinction between the Druids and the *equites* was meant to help the reader understand that, while the two groups had distinct powers and spheres of influence, they were not necessarily mutually exclusive. Thus Dumnorix, like his brother, could still have derived his significant influence from being a Druid while also being 'motivated by his desire for kingship and … political change' (1.9.3 *cupiditate regni adductus, nouis rebus studebat*).

A later episode in the *Gallic War*, which ultimately leads to Dumnorix's death (5.7.9), also hints at his possible role as a Druid. When Caesar is preparing to embark on his second expedition to Britain, he decides to bring several Gallic leaders with him in order to prevent them from starting a rebellion while he is away (5.5.4). Dumnorix receives special attention among this group, however, because of his spirited protests against Caesar's demands, claiming that he cannot possibly accompany the Romans

[31] J. Drinkwater, *Roman Gaul* (London, 1983), 108; G. Woolf, *Becoming Roman* (Cambridge, 1998), 228; Aldhouse-Green (n. 3), 51–2; Johnston (n. 4), 242–5. The French bibliography is collected by L. Lamoine, 'La pratique du vergobret: la témoignage de César confronté aux inscriptions', *Cahiers du Centre Gustave Glotz* 17 (2006), 81–104 and *Le pouvoir local en Gaule romaine* (Clermont, 2009), 106–16.

[32] Chadwick (n. 4), 111; Aldhouse-Green (n. 3), 32, 49, 82.

[33] See n. 29 above.

[34] A young Caesar was elevated to the office of *flamen Dialis* by Cinna (Vell. Pat. 2.43.1; Suet. *Iul.* 1.1), then co-opted into the *collegium pontificum* in 73 (Vell. Pat. 2.43.1), and elected *pontifex maximus* in 63 (Suet. *Iul.* 13; Vell. Pat. 2.43.3).

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to Britain, first, because of his fear of sailing and, second, because 'he was hindered by his religious duties' (5.6.3 *quod religionibus impediri sese*). Obviously, there is little detail to go on in this passage, but, in light of Caesar's description of the Druids' influence among the Gallic elite, Diviciacus' own position as a Druid, and the fact that Caesar seems to take the threat posed by Dumnorix very seriously (when Dumnorix slips away during Caesar's preparations for departure, he halts all operations until Dumnorix can be apprehended or killed [5.7.5–7]), it certainly seems plausible that Dumnorix was a Druid as well.

Vercingetorix's ties to Druidism are even more difficult to substantiate, but his influence and abilities certainly seem, based on Caesar's description of the Druids, similar to what one of them might have possessed, and also align with the anti-Roman sentiment that appears to have been a dominant trait of the Druids in the century following Caesar's campaign. As highlighted above, the revolt led by Vercingetorix actually first originated among the Carnutes, a tribe which, according to Caesar, had been in a rebellious way for the better part of his time in Gaul.[35] Word of the Carnutes' attack on Roman traders at Cenabum quickly spread to the Arverni, who lived about one hundred and sixty miles from the Carnutes (7.3.3); Vercingetorix, the scion of a noble and once very powerful Arvernian clan (7.4.1), sought to stir up the members of his tribe to similar action. Despite being undermined and exiled from the Arvernian capital of Gergovia by his pro-Roman (or at least anti-revolution) uncle (7.4.2), Vercingetorix still managed to rally support among the lower classes of his people, who proclaimed him king (7.4.5), and with remarkable swiftness also gathered to his banner the majority of western Gaul (7.4.5). His confederation established, Vercingetorix was given supreme command and in this role exercised significant control over the other member states, such that he was able to exact hostages to enforce obedience, request specific numbers of soldiers, regulate arms production, and mete out severe punishments, including mutilation and immolation (7.4.10), among all the allied tribes. Finally, unlike most other Gallic leaders Caesar depicts in the *Gallic War*, Vercingetorix on several occasions is said to have shown a talent for oratory (7.20.3–12, 7.29), and his ability to persuade other Gauls, many of whom had been loyal to the Romans for decades, to join his rebellion is uncanny given their fractious nature throughout much of the *Gallic War* and their earlier history. In this regard, Vercingetorix seems to have found quite useful the oath made by the Gauls' leaders upon their gathered battle standards to support the Carnutes in their rebellion (7.2.2, 7.4.5), which Caesar says was 'the weightiest of ceremonies according to their customs' (7.2.2 *quo more eorum grauissima caerimonia*).

While far from integrated, we do have here several interesting pieces that, when considered alongside one another, suggest some association between Vercingetorix and the Druids. First, both the decision to revolt and the binding oath to support it were made at a pan-Gallic meeting in the territory of the Carnutes, the site of the yearly gathering of Druids (6.13.10), and before the meeting word of the revolt was spread through secret meetings in the woods (7.1.4), a common motif for Druid-led anti-Roman activities in the century or so after the Gallic Wars.[36] That these elements might have been

[35] See n. 16 above.

[36] Pompon. 3.2.18–19; Luc. 1.422–65; Tac. *Ann.* 14.30; Dio. Cass. 62.6–7. Most scholars have interpreted the Druids' secluded instruction as a sign of Roman persecution, and that they sought in this manner to keep the oral tradition of the Druids alive despite the government's increasing hostility toward them (see Chadwick [n. 4], 73–4; D. Rankin, *Celts and the Classical World* [London,

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associated with the Druids is hinted at most strongly, however, by Vercingetorix's surprising success at persuading most of the tribes of Gaul to join the rebellion—if the Druids did indeed have supreme authority in matters legal and religious, as Caesar reports (6.13.4–7), then an oath sworn during the yearly meeting of the Druids in the territory of the Carnutes would have carried significant weight, and this might explain how even Gallic tribes who had otherwise been faithful to the Romans, such as the Aedui and the Atrebates,[37] were among those arrayed against Caesar in 52 B.C. Moreover, Vercingetorix's ability to invoke so authoritatively and convincingly the Carnutian oath among the other Gallic tribes might also suggest that he was a Druid, as no other Gallic leaders in Caesar's accounts of the many rebellions he faced seem to have been able to gather to their cause so many allies so quickly. Next, Vercingetorix's authority over the Gallic confederation, especially his ability to inflict severe punishments, accords with Caesar's description of the Druids rendering judgement and prescribing punishments for crimes (6.13.5), as well as carrying out human sacrifices—often of criminals they themselves must have condemned—by immolation (6.16.4–5). Finally, Vercingetorix's intelligence and oratorical skill seem like the possible products of a Druidic education, which—Caesar says—consisted of memorizing a great number of verses (6.14.3) and which would have been necessary for the Druids to carry out the many other social and ritual functions Caesar attributes to them. While these qualities are far from conclusive evidence that Vercingetorix was a Druid, there are just enough tantalizing links between them, especially in light of Caesar's deliberate silence on the role of the Druids in Gallic politics, that the thought at least bears entertaining.

The role of the Druids as orchestrators of anti-Roman activity in Gaul, which is demonstrably obfuscated by Caesar, is also borne out by most Roman sources of the Imperial period. Even after Caesar supposedly pacified the Gauls, the Druids of Gaul and Britain seem to have presented a clear threat to several Julio-Claudian emperors, as shown by increasingly harsh imperial edicts aimed at curtailing ongoing Druidic activity. The first of these anti-Druid measures, issued by Augustus, made it illegal for Roman citizens to participate in Druidism (Suet. *Claud.* 25), which would effectively have accentuated the divide in Gallic politics already seen at work in the *Gallic War*: Diviciacus' and Dumnorix's political fortunes, for example, seem to have been tied to the respective success of pro- and anti-Roman factions (both at the time still likely associated with Druids), and much of the early tension within individual Gallic tribes, such as the Arverni in 52, was also concerned with this division. The Augustan decree thus would have forced Gallic aristocrats to choose between membership in the elite

1987], 290). Focussing on Pomponius Mela's version of this topos (probably derived from Caesar), Wiśniewski (n. 4), 147–8 argues that Mela's description of the Druids teaching in caves or deep in the forest (Pompon. 3.2.18) is not meant to be taken literally but rather as a way of conveying Caesar's description of the Druids' reliance on memory and oral instruction to prevent their teachings from being spread among Gallic commoners. On the problems presented by Lucan's description of the groves Caesar's men supposedly destroyed outside of Massilia, Hutton (n. 4), 11 provides bibliography and a brief analysis.

[37] While the alliance between the Atrebates and the Romans was not nearly as old as that of the Aedui—the Atrebates had fought alongside the other Belgae at the Battle of the Sabis River in 57 (*BGall.* 2.16.2, 2.23.1)—Caesar seems to have considered their king, Commius, a close and trusted ally (7.76.1) and worked closely with him in his British campaigns (4.21.7, 4.27.2–3, 4.35.1, 5.22.3), and seems to have rewarded the Atrebates handsomely for their services (7.76.1). For the relationship between the Romans and the Aedui, see n. 17 above.

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order of their homeland or in that of Rome.[38] After Augustus, Tiberius is said to have 'put down the Druids' (Plin. *HN* 30.4), and Pliny praises him for ending barbaric rites such as human sacrifice and cannibalism,[39] while Claudius is also said to have utterly abolished the 'religion of the Druids among the Gauls' (Suet. *Claud*. 25.5 *Druidarum religionem apud Gallos*). As further evidence that we should take seriously these decrees and their object of depriving the Druids of their demonstrated ability to galvanize anti-Roman sentiment and stir up rebellion,[40] Tacitus—not a historian known for untruthfulness or exaggeration—associates apocalyptic prophecies (*Hist*. 4.54), the clandestine survival of human sacrifice among British Druids (*Ann*. 14.30.3), secret meetings among Gallic nobles (*Ann*. 3.40.1–3), and young, educated Gallic elites (*Ann*. 3.43.1) with Gallic and British rebellions during the reigns of Tiberius and Claudius.[41]

While none of these revolts seems to have occurred at the same scale or level of severity as the Gallic one of 52, the Druids of the Imperial era are portrayed more overtly in their aggravation of anti-Roman sentiment than in the *Gallic War*, where Caesar typically attributes the role of rebellious agitator to generic Gallic aristocrats. Given the similarity between the rebellious activities of Caesar's elite Gauls and the Druids of the first century A.D., however, it seems rather problematic to believe that the Druids were content with Caesar's takeover of Gaul in the mid first century B.C., against which the rest of the Gauls offered a spirited resistance, only for them to become stridently anti-Roman within a few decades. Instead, the more likely explanation for the situation in Gaul in the first centuries B.C. and A.D., including in Caesar's *Gallic War*, is that, where there was anti-Roman sentiment, there were Druids.

To sum up, two related points emerge from accounting for Caesar's downplaying of the Gauls' sophistication and threat level when examining sources on the Druids from the first centuries B.C. and A.D. First, that Caesar was not entirely truthful in his depiction of the Druids in the *Gallic War* because he was focussed more on accentuating (and often exaggerating) the threat posed by more distant barbarians such as the Germans and the Britons, and his work routinely downplays the fighting ability of the Gauls and aims to make them seem less organized and threatening than they were in fact. This includes omitting any mention of the Druids in Gallic affairs, even though Caesar (probably) truthfully attributes significant power and influence to the Druids in his ethnographic digression on the Gauls, and other sources tell us that he spent plenty of time working closely with the Druid Diviciacus. This is so because any implication in

[38] Woolf (n. 31), 230–1. On the notion that Druidism might have been conceived of as the opposite of traditional Roman values, see Woolf (n. 31), 220–2.

[39] Most scholars are (rightly) sceptical of the allegations of cannibalism that appear in ethnographies of northern Europeans, but limited evidence of Iron Age cannibalism in Britain has been found at Alveston, Eton College and (debatably) Folly Lane at St. Albans. Aldhouse-Green (n. 3), 75–7 provides a brief discussion of the sites and relevant bibliography.

[40] J. Webster, 'A negotiated syncretism: readings on the development of Romano-Celtic religion', in D.J. Mattingly (ed.), *Dialogues in Roman Imperialism* (Portsmouth, 1997), 164–84.

[41] The rebellion of Julius Sacrovir of the Aedui and Julius Florus of the Treveri (a Belgic tribe) in A.D. 21 (Tac. *Ann*. 3.40–7), although short-lived and less successful than the revolts of the 50s B.C., may have involved all sixty-four Gallic provinces and a few German tribes (3.44.1), and this degree of involvement and Sacrovir's pressing into service of the young Gallic nobles at Augustodunum, who, Tacitus tells us, were in the midst of their education (3.43.1), strike some intriguing parallels with Caesar's account of the Druids' instruction of the youth of Gaul (*BGall*. 6.14.2–6) and with the involvement of most of Gaul in Vercingetorix's rebellion (7.75.2–4). The famous revolt of the British Iceni in A.D. 61 (Tac. *Ann.* 14.30–8; *Agr.* 16) is also loosely associated with Druids, although it mostly seems to have centred around their queen/priestess Boudica.

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the *Gallic War* that the Gauls did not rely entirely on fractious tribal assemblies for their political dealings, and that they were in fact presided over by a group of educated, well-organized elites who exercised potent religious, social and political influence in Gallic affairs would suggest a much more organized and powerful Gaul than Caesar thought it in his interest to depict. This truncated explanation of the Druids' role in Gallic society is thus another intriguing example of Caesar's ability and inclination to carefully tailor the information he relates about barbarian society.

Second, based on these criteria, it is possible that several of the other Gallic leaders Caesar mentions in the *Gallic War*, especially such notable figures as Dumnorix and Vercingetorix, were also Druids, and that this group was especially active in stirring up anti-Roman sentiment among the Gallic tribes during Caesar's time in Gaul. The Druids of the first centuries B.C. and A.D. thus seem to have fostered a continuous strain of anti-Romanness among the Gauls, which is visible in the *Gallic War* and the works of Roman authors of the first and second centuries A.D. This means that not only Caesar but also Augustus, Tiberius and Claudius had good cause to suppress the power and influence of the Druids, and that the sources of the Imperial era describing the Druids' involvement in rebellions and anti-Roman rituals were, accounting for the usual embellishments of ethnographic writing, more or less accurate.

Brigham Young University TYLER CREER
tyler_creer@byu.edu

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