

## PDF hosted at the Radboud Repository of the Radboud University Nijmegen

The following full text is a publisher's version.

For additional information about this publication click this link.

<http://hdl.handle.net/2066/28573>

Please be advised that this information was generated on 2019-06-24 and may be subject to change.

J.M. CARTER, *Julius Caesar, The Civil War*. Books I & II and Book III. Warminster, Aris & Phillips, 1991 and 1993. 242 and 254 pp. Pr. £ 32,— (limp £ 12,50) and £ 35,— (limp £ 13,50).

Caesar's *Libri de bello civili* have always been overshadowed by *The Gallic War* as the specimen of *commentarii*. If read at all, the *Civil War* is regarded as more of the same or as falling far behind the author's début. The relative lack of scholarly interest is demonstrated by the lack of satisfactory commentaries. With this edition John Carter has more than met the needs of modern Caesarians.

The publication in two volumes contains introductions, a revised Latin text, a parallel translation and a commentary. Very effectively—in only 29 pages—the author initiates the reader in the main trends in Late Republican History, in Caesar's and Pompey's positions and strategies, in the structure, style and textual problems of the *Bellum Civile*. Here and in the commentary all the qualities of the experienced teacher are noticeable: not too much is taken for granted, but the student never will feel offended or oppressed by the author's mastery. Due attention is given to the stylistic peculiarities on all levels such as the avoidance of certain very common words, the balanced sentences and the ways in which the appearance of objectivity in the work is achieved.

The Latin text that is presented is conservative; Carter is rightly reluctant to accept a modern or ancient emendation if the primary text makes sense. A good example is found towards the end in III, 112, 2 where the editor maintains the reading '*a regionibus*' against M and modern '*a regibus*', not only arguing that the meaning 'from higher grounds' is defensible, but also pointing at the context which is not a history of the Alexandrian harbour, but a description of its present state. In such a detail Carter shows his familiarity with the text as a whole, combining arguments from different spheres of argument: textual tradition, textual intention, historical background and geographical circumstances. It requires all the skills of an accomplished classicist to do justice to the subtlety of this clever text.

The ability which enables the author to shift easily from one domain of knowledge to the other makes him the ideal commentator. The moment the reader feels puzzled the commentary furnishes him with just the kind and amount of information that is wanted. The only problem the reviewer experienced during the

reading was the handling of the limp edition whose back is rigidly glued. This made it very difficult to go from the text to the comment in the back and then return. For intensive use the cloth edition is a must; presumably this will not have the oddity of difference in size that the two paperback volumes show when shelved.

The comments are of high quality throughout, not only when they give clarifications, but especially when they point at things which Caesar passes over, e.g. in II, 22, 6 where Caesar simply says that he set off for Rome, without referring to the serious crisis brought about by the mutiny of the Ninth Legion. To my taste the author lays too much stress on 'deliberate falsifications' (Vol. 1, p. 179). Both in the introduction and the commentary Carter is rather eager to unmask Caesar as a deceiver without paying due tribute to the skill of the masterly creator of his own public reputation. A creative handling of dates in I, 11 is styled 'an outright lie' (I p. 169).

The translation is correct and clear, up to the point of being more outspoken than the Latin text. Sometimes this is a rather harmless variation like 'in the nick of time' for '*opportunistissime*' in III, 101, 4 or 'stratagems' for '*consilia*' (I, 82, 1) or 'with stoical bravery' for '*virtute et patientia*' (I, 45, 6). But translating '*hospites*' as 'contacts' (III, 102, 4) to neutralize an ironical connotation goes too far. Then the suggestion of the commentary to print 'friends' between inverted commas is preferable. The laudable need to explain the sense in general makes the English text 'fuller' than Caesar's crisp Latin—if it is permitted for a foreigner to criticize a native speaker.

As the Latin text seemingly just runs parallel to the course of events that are being described with feigned detachment, Carter's summaries before each group of chapters are very helpful in disclosing the general course of events and Caesar's intentions in stressing or silencing certain topics. In this way too the modern student of the *Corpus Caesarianum* has been furnished with an excellent instrument.