

MILITARY *RELIGIO*: CAESAR'S RELIGIOSITY VINDICATED BY WARFARE

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Gaius Julius Caesar remains one of the most studied characters of antiquity. His personality, political career, and military campaigns have garnered numerous scholarly treatments, as have his alleged aspirations to monarchy and divinity. However, comparatively little detailed work has been done to examine his own personal religiosity and even less attention has been paid to his religion in the context of his military conquests. I argue that Caesar has wrongly been deemed irreligious or skeptical and that his conduct while on campaign demonstrates that he was a religious man. Within the Roman system of religion, ritual participation was more important than faith or belief. Caesar pragmatically manipulated the Romans' flexible religious framework to secure military advantage almost entirely within the accepted bounds of religious conduct. If strict observance of ritual was the measure of Roman religiosity, then Caesar exceeded the religious expectations of his rank and office. The evidence reveals that he was an exemplar of Roman *religio* throughout both the Gallic Wars (58-51BC) and the subsequent Civil Wars (49-45BC).

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: *RELIGIO* AS RITUAL

“For I think that these four qualities are indispensable in a great general – knowledge of military affairs, valor, authority, and good fortune.”¹ It should be added to Cicero’s appraisal that, in the case of Gaius Julius Caesar, the ability to employ and exploit religion and superstition contributed as much to his martial success as any of the qualities the orator enumerates. Throughout each of the six major campaigns in which Caesar held independent command, the general augmented his strategic, operational, and tactical brilliance with a percipient talent for wringing military advantages from the metaphysical milieu of the ancient world. Although historians cite his manipulation of religion and superstition to argue that Caesar was an unbeliever, and thus irreligious, that assessment requires reexamination. Roman religion, in fact, required from its constituents participation, not belief, so Caesar’s faith or lack thereof does not constitute impiety or irreverence. He, in fact, was a religious man and as such pragmatically manipulated the flexible framework of Rome’s ritualistic religion to manufacture military advantage almost entirely *within* the accepted bounds of proper religious conduct.

It is critical to establish firm definitions of religion and superstition to attain a clear understanding of the religious framework in which Caesar operated. The bounty of Cicero provides such, paraphrased as follows: *Religio* denotes the ritual participation of an individual in the accepted and regulated collective state cult, while *superstitio* refers both to the unregulated, occasionally unseemly, activities attached to state-sanctioned worship and the

¹ Cic., *Man.*, 10.28. *Ego enim sic existimo in summo imperatore quattuor has res inesse oportere scientiam rei militaris virtutem auctoritatem felicitatem.*

practice of *religio* without proper reverence.² In agreement with most of the literature of Republican Rome, Cicero considers *superstitio* to be a pejorative term, the negative counterpart to *religio*.³ More narrowly, Cicero locates every Roman on a spectrum with *religio* at one end and *superstitio* at the other. When the reverence and worship of the gods was performed with dutiful virtue, worshipers practiced *religio*, but when the same rituals became infused with irrational hopes or fears, the subject slid into *superstitio*. Cicero argues that a citizen who prayed and sacrificed excessively embraced superstition, whereas a citizen who carefully rehearsed and performed precise ritual practiced religion.⁴ What mattered was not how many times the man prayed, but the “attitude of the prayer; that is, whether religion was used instrumentally... which for Cicero was superstition.”⁵ The compulsive supplicant apparently sought a more efficacious response by appropriating the proper ritual and repeating it in the irrational hope that quantity would produce greater effects. Conversely, the religious prayed out of virtue and duty rather than as a means to secure desired ends.⁶ *Religio*, then, depended on the dutiful performance of ritual.

Roman state cult required the performance of specific rituals to establish and maintain the right relationship between the gods and the people, and to induce the gods to cooperate

² Cic., *Nat. D.*, 1.117-18.

³ René Gothóni. “*Religio* and *Superstitio* Reconsidered.” *Archiv für Religionpsychologie* 21, no. 1 (1994), 40; Ursula Heibges. “Cicero, a Hypocrite in Religion?” *American Journal of Philology* 90, no. 3 (1969), 311; Arnaldo Momigliano. “The Theological Efforts of the Roman Upper Classes in the First Century B.C.” *Classical Philology* 79, no. 3 (1984), 208; Robert C. Ross. “*Superstitio*.” *Classical Journal* 63, no. 8 (1969), 356.

⁴ Cic., *Nat. D.*, 2.71-2.

⁵ Gothóni, “*Religio* and *Superstitio* Reconsidered,” 41.

⁶ Gothóni, “*Religio* and *Superstitio* Reconsidered,” 43.

with, or at the least not obstruct, the successful pursuit of Roman interests.⁷ Often this relationship is reduced to a contractual puppeteering exercise wherein Roman supplicants by means of ritual performance obliged, and perhaps, coerced, the gods to give in return. However, it is more accurate to portray this as a long-term relationship. By sacrificing, a Roman did not necessarily expect an immediate return. Instead, they expected a “long-term gift-equilibrium.”⁸ The reciprocity of Roman religion does not appear to have claimed any control over the gods. Rather, Romans selected a path, submitted the destination and route to the gods for approval and, barring any ominous divine “response,” set out absent anxiety. Romans but “offered honor and worship in return for divine benevolence; the gods were free to be benevolent or not.”⁹ This does not disavow any notion of the contractual nature of Roman religion; yet, it is clear that the Romans, Caesar foremost among them, were not content to sit and wait for the gods to deliver on the request. The gods’ active labor on behalf of the Romans was ever welcome, but likely not counted on and, “because Rome was content with the gods’ neutrality, she strove to avoid their hostility.”¹⁰ That the Romans did not wait for the gods to deliver suggests that state religion was ritualistic in nature and required neither human belief nor divine participation. So long as the rituals were observed, state religion was satisfied. As we will see, Caesar during the Gallic and Civil Wars met the ritual requirements of *religio* by performing correctly the ceremonies expected of his rank.

⁷ R. M. Ogilvie. *The Romans and Their Gods in the Age of Augustus*. New York: Norton, 1969, 53; Greg Woolf. *Rome: An Empire’s Story*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, 115.

⁸ Jörg Rüpke. *Religions of the Romans*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007, 102.

⁹ Valerie M. Warrior. *Roman Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 6. See also Mary Beard, John North, Simon Price. *Religions of Rome: Volume 1 – A History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 34.

¹⁰ Jeffrey W. Tatum. *Always I Am Caesar*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008, 62.

State cult in Rome consisted of four major priesthoods who, among various other sacred tasks, served as advisors to the Senate regarding all manner of supernatural things. Of first importance among the priesthoods of Rome were the *pontifices* and the *augures*, both of which included Caesar.¹¹ The college of pontiffs, led by the *pontifex maximus*, served as the stewards, and occasionally creators, of all religious law, performed ritual sacrifices, supervised all official religious duties to ward against error, and held sole responsibility over the management of the calendar. They also possessed and guarded sacred records of rites and rituals, allowing them to serve as the primary means through which the Senate could ascertain the appropriate words or rituals by which to appease the gods after prodigies. The *pontifex maximus*, though considered the chief priest of Roman civic religion, did not hold absolute power or even the final word in all religious matters – the combined efforts of at least three pontiffs could override him.¹² Nonetheless, his was an especially prestigious and powerful role, speaking for the college regarding voting, consecrations, adoptions, wills, marriages, and funeral rites among his other duties.¹³ As *pontifex maximus*, Caesar's religious authority bears closely on the question of his alleged neglect of signs and omens.

Augurs served as the means through which the Senate could discover the will of the gods. Interpreting the auspices, typically through observation of bird flight, thunder and lightning, and the activity of certain animals, augurs determined whether the gods agreed or

¹¹ George J. Szemler "Religio, Priesthoods and Magistrates in the Roman Republic." *Numen* 18, no. 2 (1971), 105.

¹² Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 9, 19-21, 24-5; Gothóni, "Religio and Superstitio Reconsidered," 38; Szemler, "Religio, Priesthoods and Magistrates in the Roman Republic," 108; Warrior, *Roman Religion*, 48.

¹³ Szemler, "Religio, Priesthoods and Magistrates in the Roman Republic," 107.

disagreed with a chosen path.¹⁴ Most political, social, and military undertakings required the taking of the auspices before commencement, so as to establish the current attitude of the gods towards the endeavor.¹⁵ In the case of a particularly challenging religious quandary, such as catastrophic events or difficulty interpreting prodigies, the Senate could turn to the *decemviri*. The decemvirs alone had access to the Sibylline books, a collection of oracular statements purchased from a Greek sybil by Rome's last king. Should the Senate require additional input on a challenging situation, they could direct the issue to the decemvirs, who would consult the books to discover the proper rite or sacrifice to suit the occasion.¹⁶ Finally, the *fetiales* performed the ancient rituals by which a just war could be declared properly, occasionally accompanying the army into battle.¹⁷ All four priesthoods served for life, but the fetials and decemvirs did not command as much prestige or authority as the pontiffs and augurs. Prestige and authority aside, priests in Rome did not hold final authority in religious matters – that honor lay with the Senate. Pontiffs, augurs, decemvirs, fetials, and the occasional *haruspex* might be summoned to advise the Senate on an issue, but the decision rested with the Senate itself. However, as most priests were also senators, priestly advice was taken seriously and nearly always followed.¹⁸

The Roman conception of sacrifice, which Caesar observed as a politician, priest, and

¹⁴ Beard, North and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 21-22.

¹⁵ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 23; Burriss, "The Roman and His Religion," 596; Warrior, *Roman Religion*, 56.

¹⁶ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 27, 62-3; Ogilvie, *Romans and Their Gods*, 63; Szemler, "Religio, Priesthoods and Magistrates in the Roman Republic," 111.

¹⁷ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 26; Eli Edward Burriss. "The Roman and His Religion." *Classical Journal* 24, no. 8 (1929), 596.

¹⁸ Szemler, "Religio, Priesthoods and Magistrates in the Roman Republic," 106, 120.

commander, centered on the exchange of gifts. When the occasion called for it, or in a demonstration of piety, a Roman offered an animal to be slain in honor of the gods. Because “the gods were essentially gods of activity,” constantly occupied with protecting crops from hail, lending aid to Roman armies, and the like, they required sustenance, lest their benevolent activity waver.¹⁹ More critically, a sacrifice served as a demonstration of pious generosity towards the gods who, morally bound to do so, eventually honored the sacrifice with a gift in return. Sacrificing was not a purely commercial exchange, but a ritual act of duty that reminded the gods of one’s fidelity to the prescribed forms of worship, and hopefully served to draw the gods’ attention and interest to one’s purposes.²⁰ Additionally, expiatory sacrifices might be performed to avert an evil omen or to exculpate an error, likely inadvertent, that may have arisen during a ritual.²¹ While pontiffs conducted state sacrifices on behalf of the Roman people, individuals could offer sacrifices for their own purposes, and generals were expected to sacrifice frequently while in the field.²²

Caesar also observed augural rituals while on campaign. Because Roman religion focused on establishing and maintaining the right relationship with the gods, it was essential for citizens to be able to determine if their prayers or sacrifices had been accepted.²³ While the holders of high political office were permitted to take the auspices, often only a member of the

¹⁹ Ogilvie, *Romans and Their Gods*, 42.

²⁰ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 34; Rüpke, *Religions of the Romans*, 102, 140-1, 149.

²¹ Rüpke, *Religions of the Romans*, 80; Warrior, *Roman Religion*, 18.

²² Arthur Darby Nock. “The Roman Army and the Roman Religious Year.” *Harvard Theological Review* 45, no. 4 (1952), 191, 195.

²³ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 27; Rüpke, *Religions of the Romans*, 228.

college of augurs could divine its meaning.²⁴ Citizens of Rome reported the occurrence of portents directly to the Senate.²⁵ If the Senate struggled to decipher its meaning, they consulted the augurs. Once the augurs determined the proper interpretation, they submitted their findings to the Senate and recommended a course of action. Many of the fundamental aspects of life in Rome relied on augural divinations, and “assemblies, meetings of the Senate, even battles could not begin until the auguries had been taken.”²⁶

Despite Rome’s general tolerance and occasional willingness to absorb aspects of foreign religions and superstitions, the essential elements of state cult – the four priesthoods, sacrifice, augury – remained the core of Roman religion and Caesar diligently observed them. Conversely, according to Cicero, superstition could be either (1) the appropriation of state religion as an instrument to acquire a specific outcome, or (2) the addition to state religion of strange rites.²⁷ To supplement Roman religion was a departure from *religio* in part because *superstitio* was not regulated as closely by the Senate or tradition. Deregulation left superstition open to individual interpretation and application, whereas senatorial control of state religion produced collective ritual.²⁸ Particularly common components of Roman superstition were the *haruspices*, the individual interpretation of portents and omens, and dreams.

²⁴ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 37; Rüpke, *Religions of the Romans*, 229.

²⁵ Szemler, “*Religio*, Priesthoods and Magistrates in the Roman Republic,” 119-20.

²⁶ Szemler, “*Religio*, Priesthoods and Magistrates in the Roman Republic,” 109-10; Woolf, *Rome*, 118; Warrior, *Roman Religion*, 56.

²⁷ Ross, “*Superstitio*,” 356.

²⁸ Patrick Kragelund. “Dreams, Religion and Politics in Republican Rome.” *Historia* 50, no. 1 (2001), 91; Rüpke, *Religions of the Romans*, 29.

Subject to marginal senatorial oversight, the *haruspices* were an Etruscan import. Although they were never an official priesthood in Rome, and thus never won the same prestige or authority as Roman priests, they were quite common.²⁹ By examining specific organs of sacrificial victims, a *haruspex* was thought to be able to divine the significance of events, present and future. Moreover, the *haruspices* were experts in the interpretation of prodigies, events which the Romans “regarded as ‘unnatural’ and took as dangerous signs or warnings.”³⁰ Whereas *haruspices*, along with prodigies, managed to gain widespread acceptance into the popular superstition of Rome, dreams did not fit the religious or political structure of Rome. State religion, regulated by the Senate, was a collective and controlled activity. Dreams, being exclusively personal in nature, fell outside the Senate’s control.³¹ While dreams were not dismissed out of hand, and were never labeled anything like heresy, they were “only taken into account if there seemed to be no alternative.”³² Dreams and individually interpreted portents and prodigies bypassed the sanctioned ritual of state religion. Lacking a firm ritualistic foundation and requiring the participant to exercise faith or belief, Cicero would deem them *superstitio*. On Cicero’s *religio-superstitio* spectrum, Caesar leaned strongly on the *religio* side, but some superstitious behavior may be present in his interactions with *haruspices*.

The ritual nature of Roman religion was a crucial factor that provided Caesar with latitude in his observation of *religio* in warfare. State religion called Roman citizens to

²⁹ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 19-20; Ogilvie, *Romans and Their Gods*, 65.

³⁰ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 19-20, 22, 37; M. D. Goodman and A. J. Holladay. “Religious Scruples in Ancient Warfare.” *Classical Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (1986), 151-2.

³¹ Kragelund, “Dreams, Religion and Politics in Republican Rome,” 54.

³² Kragelund, “Dreams, Religion and Politics in Republican Rome,” 77; Nock, “The Roman Army and the Roman Religious Year,” 212.

participate in collective ritual regulated, and frequently performed, by the Senate. Ritual participation did not require faith or belief – if the precise forms of worship, prayer, sacrifice, or divination were properly performed, the faith of the participants mattered little. Cicero’s writing shows him to have held little obvious faith in the gods or the efficacy of ritual, but that did not stop him from expressing pride in his election to the college of augurs or pouring himself into mastering the rituals.³³ Despite his unbelief, he still concluded that Crassus’ disaster at Carrhae in 53 resulted from the general’s neglect of the proper ritual ceremonies.³⁴ Likewise, honorable Cato did not condemn Caesar for expressing disbelief in traditional views of death and afterlife, despite the fact that he held religious authority in his capacity as a *pontifex*.³⁵ Although Sallust, like all ancient historians, probably composed the bulk of Caesar’s speech himself in retrospect, he likely represents accurately the general course of the debate. Even belief in the gods they worshipped counted little in the execution of ritual. Romans were “able to feel emotionally excited about the traditional stories of the gods, even when, with the rational side of their minds, they would dismiss them as fiction.”³⁶ Proper performance of ritual, then, had little to do with faith or belief – action was everything.³⁷

By way of comparison, consider the presidential election in modern America. Many citizens believe earnestly that their vote matters, while many others do not. Yet, belief is secondary to action. A good citizen, a good politician, votes. They participate in the collective

³³ Cic., *Fam.*, 3.9.3. Burriss, “The Roman and His Religion,” 526; Rüpke, *Religions of the Romans*, 124.

³⁴ Cic., *Div.*, 1.24; Ogilvie, *Romans and Their Gods*, 22.

³⁵ Sal., *Cat.*, 51-2; Ogilvie, *Romans and Their Gods*, 2.

³⁶ Ogilvie, *Romans and Their Gods*, 1-2.

³⁷ Rüpke, *Religions of the Romans*, 87.

social ritual whether they hold any belief in its efficacy. Negligent citizens are lambasted less for their opinion of the vote than for their failure to participate. Roman ritual was similar. Some Romans believed and others did not, but a good citizen and politician was judged on the basis of whether they participated in collective ritual because action mattered more than belief.

Religious action, however, had to be performed correctly, and here Caesar again exceeded the standard. Precision was of primary importance in ritual. A prayer, if it were to be successfully delivered to the intended god, had to be worded perfectly. Any discrepancies in the formula, like a typo in an address, resulted in an undelivered prayer. Sacrifice, too, required absolute precision. If any stage of the ritual went awry, for instance an escaped beast or a botched kill, the entire performance needed to be begun anew. Because “formulaic invocations were like passwords that opened communications with the gods,” they had to be executed carefully.³⁸ Pontiffs ensured that the correct formulae were employed, and augurs determined if the ritual had been received and approved by the gods. Priestly, and thus senatorial, oversight ensured that ritual, and thus religion, was performed correctly.

Senatorial control facilitated the regulation of Roman religion. Most priests held high political office or, like Caesar, would be elected soon after securing a priesthood as the first rung on the political ladder.³⁹ There was no semblance of separation of church and state because, in Rome, they were not separate entities.⁴⁰ State religion was so integral to the state

³⁸ Ogilvie, *Romans and Their Gods*, 49; Warrior, *Roman Religion*, 18.

³⁹ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 99, 103.

⁴⁰ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 29; Momigliano, “The Theological Efforts of the Roman Upper Classes in the First Century B.C.,” 203; Rüpke, *Religions of the Romans*, 7, 29; Szemler, “*Religio*, Priesthoods and Magistrates in the Roman Republic,” 103; Tatum, *Always I Am Caesar*, 30; Warrior, *Roman Religion*, 7.

itself that, having fled Rome, Pompey and the members of the Senate who accompanied him, established a shadow government complete with augurs so as to maintain a modicum of propriety.⁴¹ Placing the responsibility for collective ritual in the hands of the Senate permitted the masses of Rome to satisfy the participatory requirements of ritual without needing to be present. Rather, through state religion, the citizens of Rome “[delegated] responsibility for ensuring that divine approval was won to official authorities.”⁴² Citizens, participating by proxy, did not even have to attend most ceremonies. Consequently, with no emphasis being placed on the faith or belief of the citizenry, their participation, even vicariously, was the measure of their religiosity.

Providing Caesar with still more flexibility in his military application of *religio*, Roman religion was largely absent any specific ethical code, treating immorality more as a violation of tradition than sacred sanctions.⁴³ At its core, Roman religion “was concerned with success not with sin.”⁴⁴ Cicero’s observation that “Jupiter is called Best and Greatest because he does not make us just or sober or wise but healthy and rich and prosperous,” reveals a similar attitude.⁴⁵ Because Roman religion depended on correct performance of ritual, behavior outside the scope of state cult did not impact religious observation. Philosophy and tradition served as the ethical goals.⁴⁶ Religion, through ritual, focused instead on securing the gods’ benevolent cooperation.

⁴¹ Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 41.43.2-4.

⁴² Ogilvie, *Romans and Their Gods*, 21.

⁴³ Warrior, *Roman Religion*, xiv.

⁴⁴ Ogilvie, *Romans and Their Gods*, 17.

⁴⁵ Cic., *Nat. D.*, 3.87; Ogilvie, *Romans and Their Gods*, 17.

⁴⁶ Cic., *Div.*, 2.10-11; Ogilvie, *Romans and Their Gods*, 27.

So long as a Roman followed the prescribed methods scrupulously, their moral behavior did not matter, for “prayers will be heard if they are correctly formulated rather than if they come from a penitent and unselfish heart.”⁴⁷ Bound by few religious constraints on his ethics, most of Caesar’s questionable deeds did not affect his religiosity.

Within this framework of religion as ritual and superstition as excess, Julius Caesar was extraordinarily talented at fulfilling the prescribed requirements of state cult while enjoying its inherent flexibility to expand his military and political opportunities. During his thirteen years of campaigning across three continents, Caesar appears to have observed every ritual expected of his station while avoiding any serious accusations of neglect, impiety, or irreverence. Nonetheless, historians tend to label him as skeptical or irreligious.

Assessing the religiosity of any historical figure is complex.⁴⁸ Given a subject such as Caesar, an immensely intelligent man who was a career politician accustomed to adopting roles in the interest of seizing advantages, the attempt to affix a label to him with full confidence is nigh impossible. Ancient scholars reached no consensus regarding Caesar’s religion, so it is unsurprising that modern scholars proffer a broad range of interpretations. That Caesar mentions religion, superstition, and ritual rarely in his own writing exacerbates the difficulty of categorization. Caesar the man, the politician, the general – these have all received uncouth treatments, as have his campaigns. Considerable ink has also been expended examining his alleged aspirations to divinity and monarchy. However, few authors endeavor to narrow their

⁴⁷ Ogilvie, *Romans and Their Gods*, 19.

⁴⁸ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 125; Ian Haynes. *Blood of the Provinces: The Roman Auxilia and the Making of Provincial Society from Augustus to the Severans*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 213.

focus to his personal religious leanings, or lack thereof, and fewer still examine his military activities from the perspective of Roman religion. However, by examining the research of historians concerned with Roman religion or Caesar's career, it is possible to detect trends that relate to his religious performance in warfare.

Jörg Rüpke describes religion as ritual, noting that morality was guided by tradition and philosophy instead of religion.⁴⁹ Action, not belief, was of primary importance. He presses against what he calls the simplistic interpretation of sacrifice as *do ut des*, or "I give so that you will give," preferring to see sacrifice as an investment into a long-term relationship with deity. Rüpke argues that precise observation of ritual was required, and because ritual centered on performance, personal beliefs did not contradict religious activity. R. M. Ogilvie bases his book, *The Romans and Their Gods in the Age of Augustus* on the same principle, claiming that there was no cognitive dissonance in a Roman's ability to believe one thing and perform another.⁵⁰ He adds that Roman religion was concerned with success, not sin, and that proper performance of ritual did not require "ethical" motives. In agreement, Valerie M. Warrior and Greg Woolf each observe that the absence of ethical requirements in Roman religion highlighted the formulaic nature of ritual.⁵¹ Religion, then was about maintaining a right relationship with the gods through precise observance of state cult rather than reproducing divine qualities in humans.

⁴⁹ Jörg Rüpke. *Pantheon: A New History of Roman Religion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018; *Religions of the Romans*; "Historicizing Religion: Varro's *Antiquitates* and History of Religion in the Late Roman Republic." *History of Religions* 53, no. 3 (2014): 246-68.

⁵⁰ Ogilvie, *Romans and Their Gods*.

⁵¹ Warrior, *Roman Religion*; Woolf, *Rome*.

Writing within the concept of religion as ritual, René Gothóni addresses the distinctions between *religio* and *superstitio*.⁵² Relying heavily on Cicero, Gothóni delineates between the two on the basis of duty and state acceptance. *Religio*, according to Gothóni, is the proper observation of state approved and regulated collective ritual, whereas *superstitio* constitutes the irrational or instrumental appropriation of *religio*, or the addition to *religio* of unregulated external components. He claims that superstition, falling outside the realm of state cult, and senatorial oversight, was the negative opposite of religion. According to Gothóni's understanding of *religio*, David Wardle's Caesar demonstrated outstanding adherence to state religion.⁵³ Wardle observes that the critical component in evaluating Caesar's religiosity was his activity and whether it was compatible with ancestral religious practice.

George J. Szemler expands the concept of *do ut des*, that Romans offered sacrifice in exchange for divine activity, and applies a stronger commercial interpretation to the arrangement.⁵⁴ Sacrifices were not down payments or investments, but transactions which carried an expectation of rapid exchange. Ritual, then, described an economic exchange of favors. Performed with precision, Roman ritual sought to induce the gods to cooperate, and *religio* was the proper implementation of the *commercium* between gods and men. Aligning with Szemler's conception of *do ut des*, Jeffrey W. Tatum attaches the exchange directly to the *pax deorum*, the peace treaty with the gods.⁵⁵ The Romans purchased, aside from favors, the

⁵² Gothóni, "Religio and Superstitio Reconsidered."

⁵³ David Wardle. "Caesar and Religion," in *A Companion to Julius Caesar.*, ed. Miriam Griffin. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2009.

⁵⁴ Szemler, "Religio, Priesthoods and Magistrates in the Roman Republic."

⁵⁵ Tatum, *Always I Am Caesar*, 62.

gods' cooperation with sacrifice. However, because they feared the mighty gods, they were just as likely to seek their neutrality. Tatum notes that Caesar did not face much criticism regarding his religiosity during his own day, likely because he conformed to the ritualistic obligations of his rank and office most of the time. Because *religio* required no evidence of belief, Caesar measured up to the standards of Roman religion.

Noting the importance of ritual to state management, Patrick Kragelund argues that the ritual of Roman religion was geared to facilitate senatorial control.⁵⁶ Likewise, Arnaldo Momigliano contends that the purpose of ritual was civic cohesion.⁵⁷ Both stress that ritual, as opposed to faith, was the critical component. In Sara Elise Phang's study of Roman military discipline, she argues that the commander's observance of religious rituals was considered essential by the soldiers – the general's belief was not required.⁵⁸ Andrew M. Riggsby, studying the *Bellum Gallicum*, demonstrates that Caesar approached ritual along the same lines. He honored the requirements of his position, observing every ritual, and his victories gave evidence of the gods' approval.⁵⁹

Historians apply a variety of metrics in determining Caesar's place within Roman religion. While John H. Collins' perceptive and important article, "Caesar and the Corruption of Power," aptly analyzes Caesar's character and political motives, he does not engage with the dictator's religiosity beyond suggesting that some truth resides in claims that Caesar

⁵⁶ Kragelund, "Dreams, Religion and Politics in Republican Rome."

⁵⁷ Momigliano, "The Theological Efforts of the Roman Upper Classes in the First Century B.C."

⁵⁸ Sara Elise Phang. *Roman Military Service: Ideologies of Discipline in the Late Republic and Early Principate*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

⁵⁹ Andrew M. Riggsby. *Caesar in Gaul and Rome: War in Words*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006.

deliberately pursued a divine monarchy.⁶⁰ Eduard Meyer criticized attempts to either glorify or vilify Caesar, rejecting the notion that the dictator had nurtured monarchical aims his entire life.⁶¹ Instead, he argued that Caesar, grown fond of his power, developed a plan to institute a Hellenistic monarchy that included his own deification. Yet, deification did not denote respect for the gods. Meyer describes Caesar as a brilliant opportunist. His Caesar had no ideals and fought only to obtain and expand his power. According to Meyer, Caesar held no personal beliefs and was not a pious man. He saw religion as a useful tool to accomplish his political ends, but nothing more. Zwi Yavetz likewise concludes that Caesar's use of religion served only to establish and maintain a useful public image.⁶²

H. H. Scullard and Theodore Ayrault Dodge observe that Caesar did not shrink from ruthlessness, eschewing religion. They argue that religious traditions were of no value to him beyond their ability to manipulate weaker minds.⁶³ Along similar lines, Paul R. Murphy, Bernard F. Dick, and Elizabeth Tappan claim that, while he employed Fortune as a tool, Caesar did not hold any belief in Fortune as divinity.⁶⁴ Eli Edward Burris and Luciano Canfora scathingly accuse Caesar of irreligion, contending that Caesar's undertook service to state religion only in the

⁶⁰ John H. Collins "Caesar and the Corruption of Power." *Historia* 4, no. 4 (1955): 445-65.

⁶¹ Eduard Meyer. *Caesars Monarchie und das Principat des Pompejus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

⁶² Zwi Yavetz. *Plebs and Princeps*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969; *Julius Caesar and His Public Image*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983.

⁶³ Theodore Ayrault Dodge. *Caesar: A History of the Art of War among the Romans Down to the End of the Roman Empire with a Detailed Account of the Campaigns of Caius Julius Caesar*. Boston: Da Capo Press, 1997; H. H. Scullard. *From the Gracchi to Nero*. 5th ed. New York: Routledge Classics, 1982.

⁶⁴ Paul R. Murphy. "Caesar's Continuator and Caesar's 'Felicitas'." *Classical World* 79, no. 5 (1986): 307-17; Bernard F. Dick "Fatum and Fortuna in Lucan's *Bellum Civile*." *Classical Philology* 62, no. 4 (1967): 235-42; Elizabeth Tappan. "Julius Caesar's Luck." *Classical Journal* 27, no. 1 (1931): 3-14.

pursuit of political power.⁶⁵ Burriss names Caesar a virulent disbeliever, while Canfora remarks that he maintained a totally secular cast of mind.

Several historians, cautious of committing to an “irreligious” label, conclude that Caesar was too complex for simplistic designations. W. Warde Fowler argues that Caesar from the outset of his career resolved to either restore or reform the traditional religious practices of the Roman state. Yet, Fowler also sees little mysticism in Caesar, though he concedes that, reflecting on the incredible success he had enjoyed throughout his career, Caesar may have developed a reverence for Fortune.⁶⁶ Similarly, Victor Ehrenberg observes a transformation in Caesar’s behavior.⁶⁷ He argues that as Caesar’s personal power expanded, he began to add non-Roman elements to his religious reforms.

Conceding that Caesar carefully tailored his own public image through his writing, Hubert Martin Jr. claims that Caesar showed himself meticulously faithful to all Roman interests and policies, including state cult.⁶⁸ He adds that Caesar’s use of religion served as propaganda, complicating evaluations of his religiosity. Sir Ronald Syme did not believe in theorizing about Caesar’s motives or future plans.⁶⁹ Writing about the Empire, he argued that Caesar set in motion a progression to monarchy which lasted long after his death. He refused to treat Caesar

⁶⁵ Eli Edward Burriss. “Cicero and the Religion of His Day.” *Classical Journal* 21, no. 7 (1926): 524-32; “Cicero’s Religious Unbelief.” *Classical Weekly* 22, no. 13 (1929): 101-03; “The Misuse of Sacred Things at Rome.” *Classical Weekly* 22, no. 14 (1929): 105-10; “The Nature of Taboo and Its Survival in Roman Life.” *Classical Philology* 24, no. 2 (1929): 142-63; “The Objects of a Roman’s Prayers.” *Classical Weekly* 23, no. 14 (1930): 105-09; “The Roman and His Religion.”; Luciano Canfora. *Julius Caesar: The Life and Times of the People’s Dictator*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

⁶⁶ W. Warde Fowler. *Julius Caesar and the Foundation of the Roman Imperial System*. New York: Putnam’s, 1892; “Caesar’s Conception of *Fortuna*.” *Classical Review* 17, no. 3 (1903): 153-6.

⁶⁷ Victor Ehrenberg. “Caesar’s Final Aims.” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 68 (1964): 149-61.

⁶⁸ Hubert Martin. “The Image of Caesar in *Bellum Gallicum* 1.” *Classical Journal* 61, no. 2 (1974): 63-7.

⁶⁹ Syme, Ronald. *The Roman Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939.

in isolation of his peers or his time, calling the dictator a rigorous purist and an expert on religious ritual who loved ceremonies, characteristically avoiding speculation on the subject of Caesar's personal religiosity. Likewise, hesitant to draw a line in the sand, Christian Meier observes that, although Caesar performed the necessary rituals, there is no concrete evidence of religious faith.⁷⁰ He postulated that Caesar's adherence to ritual may have been a concession to propriety. Meier also offered the perceptive consideration that Caesar's religiosity may have changed over time, and that the mental exercise of religion in his early life may have become a real experience over time.

Most of Caesar's modern historians do not appear to offer much critical analysis regarding Caesar's religiosity, and many are content to accept Suetonius' claim that "religious scruples never deterred Caesar for a moment" without complaint or further comment.⁷¹ Research that examines Caesar's use of religion or superstition in warfare is even less common with no apparent clues as to why that is the case. Scholars universally accept that Roman military command required some measure of fluency in religious ritual to facilitate the general's obligation to perform the necessary ceremonies. Historians also frequently allow that even Caesar likely observed religious ceremonies while on campaign. Moreover, that he served as *pontifex maximus* is as close to an established fact as is possible given the nature of ancient sources. Yet, historians tend to treat his pontifical role only insofar as it demonstrates the corruption of Republican elections, and discussions of his observation of ritual during war tend to devolve into debates about his treatment of either the Gauls or the tribunes.

⁷⁰ Christian Meier. *Caesar*. 1st ed. New York: Basic Books, 1982.

⁷¹ Suet., *Jul.*, 59.

The dearth of research directed towards Caesar's participation in religion while on campaign requires an explanation. I posit that, while there is broad consensus that Roman religion focused on ritual participation, the same consideration has not been extended sufficiently to a study of Julius Caesar. If dutiful and precise adherence to ritual was the mark of reverence, then Caesar exceeded the standard. If ethics and motives factored little into the proper observance of ritual, then Caesar is unimpeachable on the basis of modern scruples. If faith and belief were divorced from *religio*, then Caesar's supposed skepticism is a fascinating digression from the point. It is my intention in this thesis to demonstrate that Caesar's conduct in war provides firm evidence that he exemplified the requisite qualities of a pious Roman within the flexible bounds of a polytheistic religion founded on ritual performance.

CHAPTER 2

CAESAR AND RELIGION DURING THE GALLIC WARS

In warfare, Caesar showed himself to be an exemplar of Roman *religio* while manipulating the flexibility of Roman state-sanctioned worship to diminish his enemies, secure military advantage, bolster his own reputation, and establish a religiously acceptable just cause for his conquests.⁷² Religion served as a powerful tool to supplement his already formidable military acumen. Caesar exposed enemy impiety and *superstitio* and contrasted it with his own reverence, effectively casting himself as the embodiment of *religio* and thereby resisting the irreligious Gallic, German, and British barbarians. By highlighting examples of his and his troops' observation of rituals and religious norms, Caesar tailored his reputation as a man of *religio*. To seize or create advantageous opportunities, he played on the religion and superstition of both his enemies and his army, thereby demonstrating his skillful exploitation of the flexible Roman religious system. His own account of the Gallic Campaigns is the most reliable extant account of the period. However, the body of additional evidence, such as it is, confirms Caesar's self-representation as a religious man who operated within the acceptable bounds of Roman religion.

Caesar employed religion and superstition to undermine his opponents' resolve, and his army's apprehension, by refusing to credit enemies with skill or admirable tactics. Rather, he tended to conclude, at least publicly, that enemy successes originated from the fickle favor of Fortune and chance. Prior to the outbreak of war in Gaul, he warned the belligerent Helvetii

⁷² Wardle, "Caesar and Religion," 110.

against further provocation, noting that their recent string of good fortune should not be seen as a reliable gauge for their future prospects against Rome. Instead, he asserted that the gods, conspiring to multiply the Helvetii's future suffering, had deigned to grant them fleeting success.⁷³ Although Marius had effected some measure of revenge against the Helvetii for their defeat of Lucius Cassius a generation earlier, Caesar did not consider the books balanced.⁷⁴ He invoked the whims of divinity to discourage his future enemy by minimizing their victories and bolstered his troops' spirit by explaining that the gods were not blind to the Gallic affront against Rome and Roman friends. He also may have been suggesting that he himself might serve as the instrument of divine wrath, should the Helvetii continue to abuse the Aedui.⁷⁵

Invoking religion to explain a setback, Caesar refused to attribute Ambiorix's escape to the Gaul's own ingenuity or agency, claiming instead that Fortune had explicitly engineered his successful flight.⁷⁶ Ambiorix had already given ample evidence of his elusiveness and Caesar likely recognized the man's talent for evasion. Yet, it did not serve his purposes to proffer anything close to praise for such a treacherous enemy. Instead, he transferred the credit to Fortune, utilizing inscrutable chance to diminish his opponent and provide a suitable explanation for his soldiers' failure to capture the renegade.

Citing Fortune again, Caesar uses religion to attack his German enemies' military

⁷³ Caes., *BGall.*, 1.14.4-5; *Consuesse enim deos immortales quo gravius homines ex commutatione rerum doleant quos pro scelere eorum ulcisci velint his secundoiores interdum res et diuturniorem impunitatem concedere*; Adrian Goldsworthy. *Caesar: Life of a Colossus*. 1st ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006, 215; Meier, *Caesar*, 240; Martin, "The Image of Caesar in *Bellum Gallicum*," 66.

⁷⁴ Caes., *BGall.*, 1.12.4-5; Riggsby, *Caesar in Gaul*, 176-7.

⁷⁵ Martin, "The Image of Caesar in *Bellum Gallicum*," 66.

⁷⁶ Caes., *BGall.*, 6.30.2-3; Dodge, *Caesar*, 218.

reputation. In pursuit of the remnants of two German nations, Caesar divided his legions into three forces to cover more territory, leaving a garrison under the command of Quintus Tullius Cicero at Atuatuca. Quintus Cicero, bowing to pressure from his soldiers, permitted them to leave the camp against Caesar's orders to collect forage. Caesar the narrator notes that the subsequent events reveal the immense power wielded by Fortune in warfare. German cavalry fortuitously (for them) learned that Atuatuca was lightly held and managed to assault the camp the instant the foragers lost sight of it behind a hill. Although the German horsemen nearly carried the defenses, Quintus Cicero's centurions held long enough for the foragers to return and turn the battle.⁷⁷ Caesar, having already admitted that the Germans gained access to critical intelligence that pointed them to the fort, determined that the calamity occurred by no German stratagem. Rather, "Fortune had exercised her great power in the sudden arrival of their enemy," delivering to the horsemen an opportunity that they themselves could not have devised.⁷⁸

Caesar is equally fastidious in identifying opportunities to cast a negative light on the *superstitio* and *religio* of his enemies, appearing to note with satisfied, but subtle, scorn any occasion when their beliefs became hinderances.⁷⁹ Plutarch and Dio Cassius corroborate Caesar's account of victory over Ariovistus at the Battle of Vesontio. A German king who had recently been named a Friend of the Roman People at Caesar's urging, Ariovistus drew the proconsul's ire by carrying his conquest into the lands of other Roman allies. He engaged

⁷⁷ Caes., *B Gall.*, 6.35-40.

⁷⁸ Caes., *B Gall.*, 6.42.1; *Multum fortunam in repentino hostium adventu potuisse iudicavit.*

⁷⁹ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 139.

Caesar's army in indecisive skirmishing in September of 58, but inexplicably refused to offer battle. Caesar learned from captives that Ariovistus had been deliberately avoiding a decisive battle in deference to the holy women of his tribe, a group of seers who claimed that their sacred lots and divinations precluded a successful battle until the new moon.⁸⁰ Exploiting German scruples, Caesar compelled Ariovistus to accept battle under inauspicious conditions, turning his enemy's superstitious compunctions to his own advantage.⁸¹ Caesar's conduct, from a Roman standpoint, remains unimpeachable because German ritual did not accord with Roman *religio* and was thus *superstitio*.

Exploiting *superstitio* to undermine enemy resistance, Caesar notes carefully the irrational reactions of his opponents when they faced unfamiliar military technology. Having pinned the Atuatici within a strongly fortified town in 57, Caesar circumvallated the settlement and ordered the construction of a ramp, protective sheds, and a massive, mobile siege tower. Although they initially had mocked Roman engineering, doubting that the Romans could ever move such an enormous tower to the walls, the sight of the formidable and unknown machine rolling forward terrified the Atuatici. They promptly proffered their surrender, convinced that Caesar waged war with divine assistance. Caesar, taking advantage of the opportunity, did not disavow the Gaul's of their superstition and accepted their surrender, confiscating their weapons.⁸² Notwithstanding a final desperate attempt by the Gauls to escape, Caesar effectively eliminated the last serious threat of the campaign by playing on enemy superstition.

⁸⁰ Caes., *BGall.*, 1.50; Dodge, *Caesar*, 94-5; Goldsworthy, *Caesar*, 230; Meier, *Caesar*, 246.

⁸¹ Caes., *BGall.*, 1.51-53; Dio Cass. *Hist.*, 38.48.1-4; Plut., *Caes.*, 19; Matthias Gelzer. *Caesar: Politician and Statesman*. 6th ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968, 112.

⁸² Caes., *BGall.*, 2.31; Dio Cass. *Hist.*, 39.4.2-4; Dodge, *Caesar*, 123; Gelzer, *Caesar*, 115-16; Meier, *Caesar*, 250.

While the Gauls eventually grew acclimated to Roman engineering to the point of successful emulation, early in the Gallic Wars they appear to have viewed siege weaponry with an eye to the supernatural.

Six years later, the exploitation of enemy superstition assisted Caesar with yet another siege at the Gallic settlement at Uxellodunum. Ample experience facing the proconsul had eroded the Gallic fear of metaphysical engineering, and Caesar's circumvallation, siege weapons, and towers no longer brought submission on sight. The denizens of Uxellodunum had amassed a stockpile of grain and enjoyed perpetual access to water through a subterranean spring within the walls, so they felt confident in their ability to withstand a protracted siege, Roman engineering be damned. Caesar directed the construction of a sixty-foot-high ramp on which a ten-story tower gave the Romans a commanding view of the spring. As the Gauls demonstrated their developing acumen for siege warfare by setting ablaze the tower, Caesar ordered his engineers to undermine the source of the spring in secret. When their water supply mysteriously dried up, having been diverted by human efforts, the Gauls attributed the development to the will of the gods and surrendered.⁸³ Caesar's account suggests that irrational superstition in the face of unfamiliar military technology hampered the Gallic war effort on multiple occasions.

Embracing the opportunism inherent in Roman religion and war, Caesar capitalized on every chance to expose enemy breaches of sacred tradition and norms while justifying any of his own questionable actions.⁸⁴ Resisting Roman occupation in 56, the Veneti disregarded the

⁸³ Caes., *BGall.*, 8.40-43; Dodge, *Caesar*, 332; Gelzer, *Caesar*, 166.

⁸⁴ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 139.

envoys' sacrosanct status in flagrant violation of international norms. As Caesar tells it, "They had detained and cast into prison envoys, men whose title had always been sacred and inviolable among all nations."⁸⁵ Caesar habitually excoriates his enemies for transgressions involving heralds and envoys, confident that his Roman readers likewise held envoys to be inviolable. That members of states other than Rome may have observed varying rules of conduct in war and religion does not appear to have been a realistic concern to Caesar. At the outset of his first British expedition, Caesar sent Commius ahead as an envoy. Perhaps overconfident, the Britons arrested him and placed him in chains. Defeated by Caesar in the subsequent battle, the Britons returned Commius and pleaded ignorance, apologizing for their transgression. Caesar rebuked the Britons, citing his own benevolent treatment of Briton's envoys, before deciding to forgive their ignorance. However, his forgiveness on this occasion did not exempt his enemies from punishment – Caesar required them to send hostages as a pledge of good faith.⁸⁶ Caesar justified multiple campaigns on the basis of enemy violations of envoys because an affront against an envoy was an affront against Rome and thus the gods. He wrangled a religious pretext for war out of the "ignorance" of foreign people, enabling him to carry Roman campaigns across the sea. Dio Cassius lends support to this notion by claiming that, despite the fact that Caesar won nothing concrete from his expedition against the Britons, the Roman people, like their beloved proconsul, attached religious significance to his actions by

⁸⁵ Caes., *BGall.*, 3.9.3; Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 39.40.1; Dodge, *Caesar*, 92, 139; Gelzer, *Caesar*, 112; Meier, *Caesar*, 278; *Legatos quod nomen ad omnes nationes sanctum inviolatumque semper fuisset retentos ab se et in vincla coniectos.*

⁸⁶ Caes., *BGall.*, 4.27; Dodge, *Caesar*, 170; Gelzer, *Caesar*, 130.

voting an unprecedented twenty days of public thanksgiving.⁸⁷

Not all Romans approved of Caesar's methods, but the sources appear to acquit him. Caesar's conquests through Gaul, Briton, and Germany had earned him glory and, with it, powerful enemies in Rome. Led by Cato, they were eager to seize any charge against the general with the aim of undermining his power or, if possible, eliminating him entirely. Receiving word that Caesar had arrested envoys from the Tencteri and Usipetes nations before destroying their people in a surprise attack, Cato went so far as to propose that Caesar be relieved of his command and handed over to the Germans to be tried and executed, thereby clearing Rome of the guilt of breaking a truce.⁸⁸ Plutarch's account offers some context for the alleged violation, claiming that the Germans initially used envoys as a deception, attacking Caesar on the march during the agreed truce.⁸⁹ Dio Cassius relates a slightly different version, claiming that the Germans requested Caesar's approval for a trans-Rhine migration that they had already begun. When he refused, they persisted in the crossing, only sending additional envoys when it became apparent that Caesar was marching towards them. Despite their promise to return home, the Germans broke the armistice to ambush Caesar's cavalry. When the Germans sent elders to apologize, Caesar detained them and pressed his assault on the migrating nation.⁹⁰ Plutarch's and Dio Cassius' accounts of Caesar's alleged religious violation suggest that Cato's outrage at Caesar's actions was unwarranted.

⁸⁷ Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 39.53.1-2.

⁸⁸ Canfora, *Julius Caesar*, 104; Dodge, *Caesar*, 154-5; Gelzer, *Caesar*, 129; Goldsworthy, *Caesar*, 266, 274-5; Meier, *Caesar*, 275, 278; Robert Morstein-Marx. "Caesar's Alleged Fear of Prosecution and His 'Ratio Absentis' in the Approach to the Civil War." *Historia* 56, no. 2 (2007): 159-78, 161.

⁸⁹ Plut., *Caes.*, 22.

⁹⁰ Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 39.47.2-39.48.2.

As expected, Caesar justifies his behavior further in his *Campaigns*, exerting great effort to demonstrate that his treatment of the German “envoys” was not irreligious. According to the proconsul, the Germans sent envoys three times as his army approached their town. He concluded that the ambassadors were not negotiating in good faith and were seeking only to delay him while the absent German cavalry made the trek to rejoin the main body of infantry.⁹¹ Caesar graciously agreed to slow his march to accommodate ongoing negotiations and sent messengers to order his advance cavalry to halt. During the truce, as Caesar names it, the Germans ambushed and scattered his horsemen.⁹² Caesar concluded that “he should neither give a hearing to envoys anymore nor accept any terms from those who had first through deceit and treachery sought peace and then willfully started a war [and that] it would be absolutely insane to wait until the enemy forces were augmented by the return of their cavalry.”⁹³ Perhaps recognizing their error or, as Caesar tells it, attempting a final deceit to buy time, the Germans sent a final batch of envoys and elders to sue for peace, whom Caesar promptly arrested and put in chains. His subsequent victory brought the German war to a close and earned him public thanksgiving in Rome seasoned with Cato’s enmity.⁹⁴

Honoring the rights of decidedly deceptive envoys did not serve his military purposes and would not bolster his reputation for *religio* if it brought about a defeat. Of the evidence available, Caesar provides the only eyewitness account, possibly suggesting that he weighted the facts in his favor. Yet, Plutarch and Dio Cassius each corroborate aspects of the general’s

⁹¹ Caes., *BGall.*, 4.9, 11.

⁹² Caes., *BGall.*, 4.12.1-3.

⁹³ Caes., *BGall.*, 4.13.1-2.

⁹⁴ Caes., *BGall.*, 4.13.4-4.15.

outline of events. It seems most likely that Caesar, desiring either a German withdrawal or a pretext for battle and frustrated at what he perceived to be German recalcitrance, inflated a factual event to the point of undeniable sacrilege. His subsequent arrest of the envoys was militarily justifiable if the Germans truly did weaponize ambassadorial sacrosanctity, and only marginally questionable in the religious sphere. Roman religion was geared to favor the Romans especially in warfare, and an effective general needed to be able to operate shrewdly within the freedom it offered – for example, knowing when to acknowledge an envoy. As Goodman and Holladay observe, “there is no certain evidence that the observance of religious scruples ever acted to Rome’s detriment.”⁹⁵

Gallic, German, and British violations of truces exemplified enemy impiety and, when juxtaposed with Caesar’s observance of cease-fires, rendered the general’s own fidelity even more impressive. After extending forgiveness to the Britons for violating an envoy, Caesar demanded hostages. Agreeing to the terms, the Britons claimed they needed time to retrieve the unfortunate citizens. In the meantime, Caesar’s expeditionary force suffered greatly at the onset of a massive storm and, sensing an opportunity, the Britons broke the truce to ambush Roman foragers.⁹⁶ Caesar’s claim to have anticipated the manner, if not the timing, of British infidelity, served to reinforce concepts of barbarian dishonesty to his readers. Additionally, by publicizing their atrocity, Caesar purchased latitude in his subsequent punishment of the tribes, having demonstrated just cause. After redressing the setback and dispersing the rebels, Caesar

⁹⁵ Goodman and Holladay, “Religious Scruples in Ancient Warfare,” 160.

⁹⁶ Caes., *B Gall.*, 4.29-32; Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 39.52.1-2.

doubled the number of hostages required.⁹⁷ Similarly, after the Roman siege tower drove the superstitious Gauls to surrender at Atuatuca, the Gauls sent envoys to the Roman lines, begging mercy. Caesar granted it but demanded they surrender their weapons. That evening, Caesar camped his men outside the walls to prevent his troops from abusing the Gauls. Despite the armistice, the Gauls retrieved hidden weapons and assaulted the Roman lines during the night. Caesar, having anticipated such an event, repulsed the attack and enslaved the entire populace to punish them for breaking the truce.⁹⁸ That Caesar does not omit the sale of the townspeople from his own account suggests that he thought his response to be proportionate to the crime.

Providing Caesar with yet another opportunity to castigate the Gauls for impiety, the greatest disaster of Caesar's military career found its origin in treachery. Ambiorix, a particularly clever Gallic leader, approached Quintus Titurius Sabinus and Lucius Aurunculeius Cotta, safely ensconced within their winter fortifications. He told the legates that he had been forced to participate in the uprising against the Romans, but that he sought only to help them by bringing word of an impending assault. Sabinus and Cotta accepted the Gaul's oaths of guest-friendship and safe-passage and led their soldiers out of the camp. Ambiorix launched an ambush that nearly wiped out the Roman army and, sending an envoy to quell the fighting, drew Sabinus away from his troops where he mercilessly slaughtered him.⁹⁹ Ambiorix's allies repeated the same ruse against Quintus Cicero but the Roman stolidly refused to abandon his post, compelling the Gauls to lay siege.¹⁰⁰ While Caesar was not present, he devotes a great

⁹⁷ Caes., *BGall.*, 4.36.

⁹⁸ Caes., *BGall.*, 2.31-33; Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 39.4.2-4.

⁹⁹ Caes., *BGall.*, 5.27, 36-7; Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 40.5.2-40.6.3; Dodge, *Caesar*, 196; Gelzer, *Caesar*, 143.

¹⁰⁰ Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 40.7.2.

deal of ink to the calamity so as to absolve his guilt for the loss of two legions. By exposing Gallic violations of truces and misuse of envoys, he avoided incurring Roman wrath for Roman defeat. His account refers to Ambiorix's oaths repeatedly to drive home the point that, even though the Romans lost, it occurred due to Gallic impiety and treachery.

Caesar's soldiers appear to have shared his disgust towards Gallic irreverence, handing the proconsul the opportunity to exploit their religious fervor. The outset of Vercingetorix's revolt was punctuated by the slaughter of Romans discovered in every Gallic town. Confident in the truce brought about by the proconsul's victories, many Roman merchants dwelling in Gallic towns like Cenebaum were caught completely off guard and slaughtered.¹⁰¹ When Caesar became bogged down by the difficult siege of Avaricum, he proposed to raise the siege to spare his soldiers' suffering. They rejected his offer, claiming that "it was better to endure every hardship than to forgo making a bloody sacrifice of the dead for the Roman citizens who had perished at Cenebaum through the treachery of the Gauls."¹⁰² His soldiers hoped to appease the massacred Roman citizens by offering a bloody sacrifice of slaughtered Gauls. According to Caesar, they placed religious importance on avenging their compatriots and bringing justice to those who flouted the armistice.

Conversely, Caesar demonstrates a penchant for exemplifying his own and his soldiers' strict adherence to sacred and religious norms. Recognizing the inestimable value of a reputation for piety, he spared no effort in presenting himself as a reverent Roman who

¹⁰¹ Caes., *BGall.*, 7.3; Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 40.33.1.

¹⁰² Caes., *BGall.*, 7.17. *Praestare omnes perferre acerbitates quam non civibus Romanis qui Cenabi perfidia Gallorum interissent parentarent.*

honored the gods by his conduct and leadership. Careful to observe the rituals expected of a Roman general and pontiff, at the close of the Gallic Wars Caesar gathered his legions and performed a cleansing ceremony called a *lustratio*, which was typically performed either at the close of a campaign or at the outset of a critical phase of the war.¹⁰³ Ceremonially removing the stain of blood, the *lustratio* absolved the troops of any guilt incurred throughout the war and, quite possibly, the civil war he anticipated.¹⁰⁴ The ritual served to demonstrate to his soldiers and the people of Rome that Caesar was a man of *religio* – and there is reason to believe he carried out the ceremony more frequently than he recorded.¹⁰⁵ Logically, Caesar likely performed the *lustratio* after every campaigning season in Gaul and before major battles, as he appears to have done during the Civil War. However, it served Caesar’s political objectives to present the Gallic Wars as a single conflict comprised of many battles. By recording a single *lustratio* near the end of his governorship, Caesar may have been attempting to preemptively limit the number of wars he would have to justify on his return to Rome. Religious in nature, the *lustratio* served to remind his troops that the he honored the gods and that they, in turn, held no crime against the soldiers.

Recognizing that much of his power and reputation derived from his devoted soldiers, Caesar was also deliberate in publicly praising particularly impressive individual behavior. From the disastrous massacre of Sabinus’ and Cotta’s legions, Caesar managed to extract a

¹⁰³ Hirtius, *BGall.*, 8.52.1; J. S. Reid “Human Sacrifices at Rome and Other Notes on Roman Religion.” *Journal of Roman Studies* 2 (1912), 46.

¹⁰⁴ Burriss, “The Roman and His Religion,” 596; Wardle, “Caesar and Religion,” 107; Nock, “The Roman Army and the Roman Religious Year,” 191.

¹⁰⁵ Goldsworthy, *Caesar*, 464; Wardle, “Caesar and Religion,” 107; Nock, “The Roman Army and the Roman Religious Year,” 191; Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 89-90; Tatum, *Always I Am Caesar*, 64.

praiseworthy anecdote. He reports that an intrepid eagle-bearer named Lucius Petrosidius found himself hard pressed in the ambush and, realizing that his end was nigh, valiantly hurled the sacred standard over the ramparts into the Roman camp, temporarily saving the eagle from capture before bravely dying.¹⁰⁶ The legionary eagles stood as the most sacred Roman military standard, an emblem of glory and power, and Roman citizens would have recognized and appreciated the soldier's dedication to its preservation.¹⁰⁷ Again, during Caesar's invasion of Britain, Caesar notes the individual devotion of a soldier. Attempting an amphibious landing under heavy pressure from Britons ensconced on the beach, the standard-bearer of the famed Tenth legion leaped overboard into the shallows, urging the frightened troops to follow him to glory or risk allowing the sacred eagle to fall into enemy hands. Galvanized to action, the legionnaires to a man stormed the beach.¹⁰⁸ Although true worship did not become attached to the legionary eagles during the Republic, some measure of *superstitio* appears to have been associated with the standards and savvy generals utilized soldierly beliefs.¹⁰⁹ Incidentally, Caesar could not have been ignorant of the fact that positive reviews of his own troops reflected favorably on his own reputation. He appears to have publicized his soldiers' piety and virtue to bolster his own claims to *religio*.

Further supporting Caesar's claim to be a religious man, his inclusion of the extended ethnographic digression in Book Six showed his readers that, even in the field surrounded by enemies, Caesar's *religio* did not waver. The digression serves not only to thrill Roman readers

¹⁰⁶ Caes., *B Gall.*, 5.37.5; Goldsworthy, *Caesar*, 300.

¹⁰⁷ Nock, "The Roman Army and the Roman Religious Year," 241.

¹⁰⁸ Caes., *B Gall.*, 4.25.3-5; Dodge, *Caesar*, 168-9; Meier, *Caesar*, 281.

¹⁰⁹ Haynes, *Blood of the Provinces*, 193; Nock, "The Roman Army and the Roman Religious Year," 241.

with exotic fables of foreign cultures, but to exemplify Caesar's constant awareness of religion as well as his discernment. Within the fascinating section are found descriptions of Gallic and German sociopolitical systems, punitive measures, and religious and superstitious characteristics. Caesar the author reveals that the Gauls and Germans generally had little use for proper ritual sacrifices or the gods but that they worshipped some of them under different titles.¹¹⁰ Proximity does not imply precision, and Caesar seems to construct the passage to assist readers in concluding that, though the Gauls and Germans got some things right, their *religio* remained incomplete and inferior.¹¹¹ All the more glory to Rome, however, that Roman gods were clearly evident to the proconsul even in such exotic environs.¹¹² As Caesar dispassionately records instances of human sacrifice, he allows his readers to conclude that the enemies he faced did not quite measure up to the *religio* of the soldiers he led. The Germans and Gauls served as a foil with which to extol the *religio* and virtue of Roman legions and, of course, their pious commander. The ethnographic digression demonstrated that Caesar managed to win battles while keeping the gods so firmly in mind that he recognized every enemy difference, yet still proffered some measure of respect towards their incomplete observation of the gods.

Caesar consistently proved himself to be aware of his own public image and did his utmost to project a pious front. It is interesting that of all Caesar's ancient historians, Suetonius alone claims that the general evinced palpable disrespect towards his enemies' temples and

¹¹⁰ Caes., *BGall.*, 6.17.

¹¹¹ Riggsby, *Caesar in Gaul*, 122, 151.

¹¹² Nock, "The Roman Army and the Roman Religious Year," 206.

shrines in Gaul. Suetonius writes that Caesar “plundered large and small temples of their votive offerings, and more often gave towns over to pillage because their inhabitants were rich than because they had offended him.”¹¹³ However, the context of the passage confirms that greed, not impiety, was Suetonius’ focus. He reserves his scathing review of Caesar’s religiosity for a later section and, even in that vituperative account, he levels no accusation of temple robbery in Gaul.¹¹⁴ Viewed in context, Suetonius’ uncorroborated claim of temple plunder is not critical of Caesar’s *religio*. Plutarch records only one example of Caesar’s interaction with Gallic religion. In a fascinating and, like Suetonius’, uncorroborated story, the historian reveals that Caesar’s troops happened on an Arverni temple. Apparently raised in honor of a Gallic triumph over Caesar, the temple contained a sword the Gauls claimed to have taken from the proconsul as he retreated. His soldiers wanted to destroy the temple and reclaim the sword for their commander, but Caesar smiled and refused, declaring that the temple was consecrated.¹¹⁵ That Caesar himself would deign to omit validating accounts for either Suetonius’ or Plutarch’s stories is understandable. The one countered his carefully constructed narrative of a pious general leading honorable soldiers and the other, while exemplifying his respect for Gallic religion, also gives evidence of what must have been a singularly embarrassing defeat.

If Caesar was adept at using superstition and religion to expand his own reputation, he was a virtuoso at employing them as instruments to motivate his legions. Primarily writing a military history with strong notes of propaganda throughout, Caesar expends little ink on

¹¹³ Suet., *Iul.*, 54; Burriss, “The Roman and His Religion,” 595; Gelzer, *Caesar*, 168; Goldsworthy, *Caesar*, 252.

¹¹⁴ Suet., *Iul.*, 59.

¹¹⁵ Plut., *Caes.*, 26.

religious matters directly. Thus, he only mentions burial rites once – he set aside three days for the task following the particularly heavy casualties of the Battle of Bibracte in 58.¹¹⁶ However, it is almost certain that he honored traditional Roman burial rites throughout each of his campaigns. Romans took seriously the care of the dead, and a general and politician of his stature, not to mention his priestly office, would recognize the ritual's importance to soldiers.¹¹⁷ Knowing that their general would ensure that, should they fall, they were properly cared for, helped motivate soldiers.¹¹⁸

Caesar appears to have been intimately aware of his soldiers' morale and deployed religious and superstitious motivation when it wavered. Prior to the Battle of Vesontio in 58, Caesar's troops grew intensely afraid of Ariovistus and his army, having heard rumors of the German king's prowess. Caesar assembled the legions and delivered a speech to restore morale. His account contains glowing reviews of his own generalship and German defeats and concludes with his confident assessment that soldiers only mutiny in the case of bad leadership, financial corruption, or bad luck, none of which they had suffered from to that point.¹¹⁹ Dio Cassius' version gives the speech a bit more flavor, asserting that Caesar invites his soldiers to "obey Fortune and not repel her," especially because "she now abides with us."¹²⁰ Caesar's personification of Fortune aside, the general understood that his legionnaires required additional motivation before confronting the Germans. In addition to pluming his own combat

¹¹⁶ Caes., *BGall.*, 1.26.5; Goldsworthy, *Caesar*, 223.

¹¹⁷ Ogilvie, *Romans and Their Gods*, 104.

¹¹⁸ Goldsworthy, *Caesar*, 222-3; Goodman and Holladay, "Religious Scruples in Ancient Warfare," 151-2.

¹¹⁹ Caes., *BGall.*, 1.40; Martin, "The Image of Caesar in *Bellum Gallicum*," 66-7; Meier, *Caesar*, 244.

¹²⁰ Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 38.39.3.

record, he selected religious and superstitious means to provide the necessary jolt. Both his and Dio Cassius' accounts reveal the efficacy of Caesar's speech, as the troops immediately repented and enthusiastically prepared for battle.¹²¹

Bolstering morale before a battle must have been a challenge, but restoring morale following a defeat even more so, and here Caesar's use of *religio* comes to the fore once more. After Ambiorix deceived and massacred Sabinus' and Cotta's legions, Caesar again turned to metaphysical means to redress brittle courage. Commenting on Caesar's remarkable camaraderie with his soldiers, Suetonius reveals that the general swore an oath to neither cut his hair nor trim his beard until the disaster had been avenged. Suetonius avers that the gesture injected the soldiers with immense courage and won the general their loyalty.¹²² While it seems unlikely that this was the only occasion on which Caesar swore such an oath, no other source includes a similar account while he was in Gaul. After tracking down and defeating the perpetrators of the massacre, Caesar encouraged his soldiers, claiming that the enemy received due vengeance by the agency of the gods and Roman courage.¹²³ He had not remained unshorn for long, and neither should his soldiers linger in despair. Even though he rarely records any mention of the gods in his Campaigns, divine invocations appear to have been a useful tool when addressing his troops.

Although Caesar remained aware of his army's trepidation, soldierly superstition never compelled the general to discard an advantage. One year after Sabinus' and Cotta's disaster, he

¹²¹ Caes., *BGall.*, 1.41; Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 38.47.

¹²² Suet., *Iul.*, 67-8; Dodge, *Caesar*, 753; Gelzer, *Caesar*, 144; Goldsworthy, *Caesar*, 303; Meier, *Caesar*, 295.

¹²³ Caes., *BGall.*, 5.52.

divided his army and ordered a portion to reoccupy the fort the unfortunate legates had been lured away from. Because the massacre occurred on the road, the defenses remained intact and Caesar desired to spare his soldiers the unnecessary labor of constructing a new fort.¹²⁴ He must have been aware that his soldiers might perceive evil omens, yet he was no slave to *superstitio* and disregarded their irrational fear. On this occasion, he may have erred. While he led his division in pursuit of the Germans, the soldiers garrisoning the ill-omened fort came under assault. Utterly surprised, the chaos reignited their fear, and “a large number of the people in the camp succumbed to superstitious imaginings, because of the place where all this was happening, and vividly recalled the disaster of Cotta and [Sabinus], who, they claimed, had perished in that same fort.”¹²⁵ *Superstitio* supplanted reason and the ambushed Romans lent merit to terror by incorrectly identifying the fort as the location of the previous massacre. Although they managed to repulse the Germans, the beleaguered soldiers wallowed in fear until their general returned to relieve them.¹²⁶ He rebuked the garrison only for leaving the fort, noting that “not even the smallest opening should have been left to chance,” and concluding that Fortune had gifted the Germans the opportunity. As always, Caesar directly addressed the men following a setback and, as on several other occasions, he invoked religious and superstitious factors to restore motivation.¹²⁷

Caesar’s decision to favor pragmatism over superstition in refortifying the ill-omened camp shows him able to maneuver within the flexibility offered by Roman religion. He weighed

¹²⁴ Caes., *BGall.*, 6.32.

¹²⁵ Caes., *BGall.*, 6.37.8.

¹²⁶ Caes., *BGall.*, 6.41.4.

¹²⁷ Riggsby, *Caesar in Gaul*, 204. Dodge, *Caesar*, 351.

the costs against the benefits and chose to disregard superstition in favor of a concrete military advantage, as he had done at Vesontio. Ariovistus, handicapped by the lots of his tribe's old women, chose not to risk battle under inauspicious circumstances. Caesar turned his adversary's *superstitio* – for Romans were free to construe “barbaric” rites as *superstitio* - into his tangible military advantage. He deployed his legions, threatened the German position, and compelled Ariovistus to accept battle. Prior to learning of the German seers' divinations, Caesar remained content to take a defensive position inviting Ariovistus to assault him. After it became clear that superstition gripped the enemy, Caesar rapidly abandoned the defensive and pressed the attack, knowing that the Germans would be fighting at a disadvantage, irrationally believing victory to be precluded by the lots.¹²⁸

Superstition provided an opportunity to secure advantage, and he took it. Romans during the Republic certainly recognized similar *dies atri*, “black days,” on which major undertakings were prohibited.¹²⁹ However, a shrewd commander could “excuse his breaking of the taboo by claiming that it was only forbidden to attack, not to defend oneself, on such days,” which goes far in explaining why “the taboo on a particular day is never mentioned as a reason for not having fought.”¹³⁰ In this case, Caesar assumed an offensive position that prompted a German assault, allowing him to claim he fought in defense, thus deflecting any accusations that he had violated a *dies atri*. Unpropitious days deterred his enemies, but not him. Had he or his own priests identified a day as inauspicious, it is highly unlikely that he would have allowed

¹²⁸ Caes., *B Gall.*, 1.50-1; Plut., *Caes.*, 19; Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 38.48.1-4.

¹²⁹ Rüpke, *Religions of the Romans*, 196-7, 200.

¹³⁰ Goodman and Holladay, “Religious Scruples in Ancient Warfare,” 152, 161-2.

scruples to negate tactical advantages, given that his pontifical prerogative extended to the management of the calendar and holy days.¹³¹ Doubly so when the scruples belonged to his enemies.

In providing justification for his Gallic Wars, Caesar employed religious concerns no less than he did in fighting them. Roman religion and politics being inextricably conjoined, every war they chose to pursue was essentially a holy war.¹³² To ward off prosecution, Caesar had to demonstrate just cause for his conquests that satisfied religious prerequisites. As Riggsby notes, “even a general who hypothetically put no personal stock in the idea of the just war still exposed himself to potential criticism back home if he failed to follow the forms.”¹³³ Caesar’s *Commentaries*, likely composed and published during the winter following each season, served an apologetic purpose and were designed to present the proconsul and his actions in the most favorable light possible.¹³⁴ In defining a just war, Caesar appears to have aligned with Cicero, who implies that a war is just that has been undertaken to avenge an injury or prevent future wrongdoing against Rome.¹³⁵

Anticipating that his enemies in Rome would charge him with impious aggression, Caesar preempted potential political attacks by treating each new campaign as the

¹³¹ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 24-5. Goodman and Holladay, “Religious Scruples in Ancient Warfare,” 162; Szemler, “*Religio*, Priesthoods and Magistrates in the Roman Republic,” 107.

¹³² Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 44-5; Shirley Jackson Case. “Religion and War in the Graeco-Roman World.” *American Journal of Theology* 19, no. 2 (1915); 181; Goodman and Holladay, “Religious Scruples in Ancient Warfare,” 152.

¹³³ Riggsby, *Caesar in Gaul*, 164.

¹³⁴ Goldsworthy, *Caesar*, 190; Meier, *Caesar*, 254.

¹³⁵ Cic., *Off.*, 1.33-35; G. A. Harrer “Cicero on Peace and War.” *Classical Journal* 14, no. 1 (1918); Riggsby, *Caesar in Gaul*, 159.

continuation, not the initiation, of warfare.¹³⁶ Despite Caesar's enduring declaration that "Gaul, as a whole, is divided into three parts," the author exerted considerable literary effort to convince his readers that the Gallic Wars were a single extended conflict against the collective nations of Gaul.¹³⁷ Assigning unity to his enemies allowed Caesar to accuse them of collective culpability, justifying the expansion of his conquests.¹³⁸

Each of Caesar's major campaigns in Gaul receives a clear declaration of cause, most of which strongly suggest a single war initiated by his enemies and exonerating Caesar of charges of waging war unjustly, and thus impiously. Having already defended his initial Gallic incursion by virtue of Helvetii provocation, Caesar opens Book Two with the claim that the Belgae were fomenting unrest in Gaul with the aim of driving out the Romans.¹³⁹ Caesar assumes the posture of an aggrieved party, drawn into further conflict by a nation that picked up where the Helvetii left off. Caesar's third campaigning season began after the Seduni and Veragri attempted to take advantage of Caesar's absence by assaulting a single, understrength legion under his legate, Galba.¹⁴⁰ Again, Caesar contends that the Gauls on their own volition chose to reignite hostilities. His fourth campaign brought him into conflict with the German nations of the Tencteri and Usipetes, who migrated across the Rhine and sowed violence among Rome's Gallic allies.¹⁴¹ A few months later, Caesar planned the first expedition against the Britons to

¹³⁶ Riggsby, *Caesar in Gaul*, 178.

¹³⁷ Caes., *BGall.*, 1.1.1; *Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres.*

¹³⁸ Riggsby, *Caesar in Gaul*, 30.

¹³⁹ Caes., *BGall.*, 2.1-2.

¹⁴⁰ Caes., *BGall.*, 3.1-2.

¹⁴¹ Caes., *BGall.*, 4.1-6.

punish them for having sent auxiliary troops against him in nearly every Gallic campaign to that point.¹⁴² According to Caesar the author, both the Germans and Britons chose to pursue war against Rome, lending him just cause to retaliate. He closes Book Four with the ominous observation that only two of the British nations sent the promised hostages, providing him with ample reason to return the following season.¹⁴³

During his fifth season in Gaul, all five outbreaks of Gallic hostility found their origins in Gallic treachery. The Treveri balked from their previous pledge of submission to Rome, the Carnutes assassinated their own king, whom Caesar had restored to the throne, and the Reveri and Indutiomarus attempted to draw more Germans into their rebellion.¹⁴⁴ That same year, Ambiorix deceived the Romans and initiated multiple rebellions.¹⁴⁵ Although Book Six reveals Caesar to be expanding his armies with the aim of impressing on Gaul the futility of resisting Roman resources, his preparations appear prudent. Much of Gaul and all the Germans west of the Rhine took up arms against him, launching the largest rebellion yet seen.¹⁴⁶ In his final appearance before vanishing from the record, Ambiorix succeeds in drawing more allies away from the Romans and into open revolt.¹⁴⁷ Caesar consistently demonstrates his pragmatism in preparing for war, his *religio* in awaiting a just cause to pursue it. Defined by the tremendous might of Gaul unified in revolt, Book Seven reveals that the uprising began with the slaughter of

¹⁴² Caes., *BGall.*, 4.20.

¹⁴³ Caes., *BGall.*, 4.38, 5.1.

¹⁴⁴ Caes., *BGall.*, 5.2, 25, 55.

¹⁴⁵ Caes., *BGall.*, 5.26, 38.

¹⁴⁶ Caes., *BGall.*, 6.1-2.

¹⁴⁷ Caes., *BGall.*, 6.44.

Roman civilians in Cenebaum. Believing the civil unrest in Rome would distract the proconsul, and perhaps compel the reallocation of his forces, the Gauls hoped to catch Caesar off guard.¹⁴⁸ Even Caesar's continuator, Hirtius, describes the eighth campaigning season as the pursuit of the remnants of Vercingetorix's revolt.¹⁴⁹ Like his commander, Hirtius conceived of the current campaign as the continuation of the previous one, delineated only by the forced cessation brought by winter.

All Gaul may have been divided geographically into three parts, but Caesar the author frequently claims that they acted in political unity, strengthening his claim to have waged just, and thus pious, warfare. His famously premature claim that "all Gaul was reduced" at the close of Book Two proved woefully inaccurate, but it succeeded in painting the Gauls with a single brushstroke.¹⁵⁰ Likewise, his assessments that "almost all the states of Gaul began to think about war" and, later, that "all Germans had taken up arms" confirm that the general sought to assign unitary motivation and action to his enemies.¹⁵¹ If all Gaul premeditated hostility, any Gaul bore the guilt and could be punished justly. If all Germans took up arms against Caesar, every German he encountered had incurred Roman wrath. He abrogated the need to provide justification piecemeal by claiming that his enemies had acted concomitantly against him first. Collective Gallic or German guilt freed Caesar from the minutia of justifying independently each of his campaigns and allowed him to exact Roman justice indiscriminately. Leaving no room for Roman doubt, he argues that "by the consent of all, the command was bestowed on

¹⁴⁸ Caes., *BGall.*, 7.1-4.

¹⁴⁹ Hirtius, *BGall.*, 8.1.

¹⁵⁰ Caes., *BGall.*, 2.35.1; *Omni Gallia pacata*.

¹⁵¹ Caes., *BGall.*, 5.53.4; *Civitates de bello consultabant*; Caes., *BGall.*, 6.2.3; *Omnibus Germanis esse in armis*.

[Vercingetorix],” effectively transferring culpability for the massacre at Cenebaum and the subsequent Gallic rebellion to the ledger of all Gauls.¹⁵² Because the Gauls uniformly consented to Vercingetorix’s leadership, they uniformly shouldered the guilt of his actions, bestowing on Caesar the right to punish all. According to Caesar, the Roman massacre of the citizens of Avaricum should not be labeled an atrocity, but justice, regardless of whether they had personally participated in the crime at Cenebaum.¹⁵³ Collective guilt, exemplified in Caesar’s use of “all Gaul” and “all Germany,” created a collective war, permitting multiple campaigns backed by a singular charge.

Caesar’s account inscribes a trail of continuity through each campaign, driving home the conviction that he fought a solitary war that required a single just cause. Cicero’s assertion that a just war is fought either in pursuit of vengeance or to prevent future crimes against Rome deserves closer attention. It is arguable whether vengeance and preventative action are different. Romans do not appear to have sought vengeance for purely personal reasons. Rather, vengeance seems to have been geared to prevent future reoccurrences of aggression against Rome.¹⁵⁴ By punishing an offender harshly, the Romans hoped to deter future wrongdoing. If the belligerent continued in their aggression, clearly Rome had not sufficiently punished them yet, which demanded additional action to prevent additional offense. The circular reasoning permitted shrewd generals to gain satisfactorily religious justification for nearly any war using either pretext. Either the potential enemy posed an impending threat, or they had once

¹⁵² Caes., *B Gall.*, 7.4.7; *Omnium consensus ad eum defertur imperium.*

¹⁵³ Caes., *B Gall.*, 7.28; only 800 of the 40,000 citizens escaped the slaughter at Avaricum.

¹⁵⁴ Riggsby, *Caesar in Gaul*, 173.

committed atrocities and were thus likely to do so again.¹⁵⁵ Caesar navigates the convoluted religious nature of Roman just war theory adeptly, invoking vengeance and prevention to support his actions against the Helvetii. Citing their defeat of Lucius Cassius a generation earlier, and their slaying of his relative, Lucius Piso, Caesar suggests that they remained capable of similar acts of aggression. He concludes that defeating the Helvetii served to avenge an affront against Rome and his family, and that it would prevent a similar incursion into Roman Gaul.¹⁵⁶ Proving by their recent atrocities that they had not been sufficiently punished, the Helvetii gifted Caesar with a twofold justification for conquest. If past Gallic crimes did not sway his audience, claiming the Helvetii boasted 368,000 citizens and 92,000 soldiers must have put a thumb on the scales, demonstrating the incredible danger he had averted just beyond Roman borders.¹⁵⁷ Moreover, the Aedui, Roman allies, had requested Caesar's aid.¹⁵⁸ Honoring Roman pledges of friendship kept Caesar well within the sphere of acceptable religious justifications for war because in doing so he upheld a sacred oath.

Caesar also emphasizes the universality of German religious inferiority. The dearth of enemy *religio* supported Roman notions of a just war because the gods certainly would not have favored Gauls and Germans who refused to honor them. Although enemy treachery provided a trove of material for military justification, Caesar explicitly cites it only once, allowing his readers to follow the implications of Gallic infidelity that permeate the text.¹⁵⁹ Far

¹⁵⁵ Susan P. Mattern-Parkes. "The Defeat of Crassus and the Just War." *Classical World* 96, no. 4 (2003).

¹⁵⁶ Caes., *BGall.*, 1.12.5-7.

¹⁵⁷ Caes., *BGall.*, 1.29.2-3; Gelzer, *Caesar*, 131-2.

¹⁵⁸ Caes., *BGall.*, 1.11.

¹⁵⁹ Caes., *BGall.*, 7.17.7; Riggsby, *Caesar in Gaul*, 62; Martin, "The Image of Caesar in *Bellum Gallicum* 1," 64.

more frequently he alludes to the cultural and religious superiority of Rome in subtle support of his conquests. As Caesar's negotiations with the Tencteri and Usipetes stagnated, the Germans warned him against crossing them and claimed even the immortal gods could not match their strength.¹⁶⁰ Caesar's inclusion of the German claim lent weight to his just cause, for nations who boasted of impiety and irreverence must be barbaric.¹⁶¹ Consequently, Caesar's ethnographic digression in Book Six also serves to delineate between Roman *religio* and Gallic and German sacrilege. Although he describes the Gallic practice of punishing petty crimes with human sacrifice with apparent objectivity, offering no editorial comments, he sets the Gauls up as a foil against Roman piety and honor. Romans did not practice human sacrifice, but the Gauls did, revealing them to be a perverse and corrupt people whose conquest was morally legitimized, even required.¹⁶² Moreover, Caesar's description of Gallic torture, frequently perpetrated in the name of their religion against their own kin, calls attention to moral failings absent from the Roman camp.¹⁶³ Deploying a favorite literary tactic, he describes the Gauls collectively, presenting the entirety of Gallic culture and religion as barbaric and irreverent to the gods. Showing no more regard for German religious practices than Gallic, Caesar posits that the Germans had no priests and their rituals failed to acknowledge most of the gods.¹⁶⁴

Divine approval for Caesar's wars, and thus for Caesar himself, appears to have been borne out by the fact that he won them.¹⁶⁵ Roman processes for acquiring just cause were

¹⁶⁰ Caes., *BGall.*, 4.7.5.

¹⁶¹ Riggsby, *Caesar in Gaul*, 62.

¹⁶² Caes., *BGall.*, 6.16.3-5; Riggsby, *Caesar in Gaul*, 63-4, 73.

¹⁶³ Caes., *BGall.*, 6.17.3-5; Riggsby, *Caesar in Gaul*, 103.

¹⁶⁴ Caes., *BGall.*, 6.21.1-2; Riggsby, *Caesar in Gaul*, 122.

¹⁶⁵ Morstein-Marx, "Caesar's Alleged Fear of Prosecution and His '*Ratio Absentis*' in the Approach to the Civil War,"

heavily weighted in the favor of the Romans, who perceived themselves as more devoted to the gods than any other people.¹⁶⁶ However, fetial rites did not automatically approve war, for that was not their purpose. Instead, they “stated their case [for war] to or before the gods. The gods showed their approval by granting victory to the Romans.”¹⁶⁷ Because Roman religion primarily concerned itself with success, victory in warfare could easily be interpreted as divine approval granted retroactively, especially because the gods were assumed to disapprove of and punish unjust wars.¹⁶⁸ Within the flexibility inherent in Roman religion, successful generals must have been difficult to impeach on the accusation of an allegedly unjust war. Military success being attributed to the favor of the gods, Caesar’s victorious Gallic Campaigns served as proof of his adherence to *religio*.¹⁶⁹

If a general observed the proper rituals and demonstrated a just cause, his motives for declaring war factored little into the equation. Crassus’ doomed invasion of Parthia receives ample criticism from most sources. However, ancient historians rarely cast a negative light on his motives – to accrue military glory comparable to his fellow triumvirs. Instead, they castigate him for neglecting the prerequisite ritual formulae.¹⁷⁰ Consequently, although Caesar exhibits a desire to gain a pretext for war, or to conquer Gaul before any provocation, that he observed proper rituals and awaited a pretext is a credit to the general. He quelled his desires and

161; Warrior, *Roman Religion*, 56.

¹⁶⁶ Cic., *Nat. D.*, 22.8.

¹⁶⁷ Riggsby, *Caesar in Gaul*, 167; Beard, North, and Price, *Religions in Rome*, 44.

¹⁶⁸ Ogilvie, *Romans and Their Gods*, 17; Riggsby, *Caesar in Gaul*, 168.

¹⁶⁹ Warrior, *Roman Religion*, 56; Woolf, *Rome*, 114.

¹⁷⁰ Mattern-Parkes, “The Defeat of Crassus and the Just War,”; Ogilvie, *Romans and Their Gods*, 22.

watched for a just cause, satisfactorily submitting to the rituals and procedures of *religio*.

Romans, like other ancients, nurtured no ideals of common humanity or moral equality, and it is problematic to condemn them for seizing the universally accepted right of conquest.¹⁷¹

Caesar certainly hoped for the opportunity to win glory and riches, but he arguably pursued them with honor and in full compliance with Roman *religio*.

From 58 to 50, the Gallic Wars showed Caesar to possess an impressive array of qualities valued by Roman society – he was an immensely talented general, a skillful administrator, a courageous warrior, an inspiring leader, a master of propaganda, and, not least, a man of *religio*. Caesar's ancient biographers found ample demerits to flavor their work, but Suetonius alone levels a grave charge against the general's religious leanings, and that is unconnected to his Gallic campaigns.¹⁷² Caesar exemplified *religio* by observing the rituals pertaining to his office, yet he utilized *religio* and *superstitio* to secure military advantages as well. The second claim does not counter the first; rather, Caesar's pragmatic use of metaphysical concepts strengthens the argument that he upheld Roman religion in warfare. Because Roman religion centered on ritual, Caesar need not have exhibited faith or belief, but precise participation. There is no evidence in any of the primary sources that suggests that he failed to observe any of the proper rituals while in Gaul – sacrifices, divinations, prayers, and the like – and plenty of evidence that supports the notion that he honored the expectations attached to his rank to the full. His beliefs simply are not to the point. His actions demark him as satisfactorily religious.

Mere participation may be viewed as a low standard for religion today, exploitable and

¹⁷¹ Dodge, *Caesar*, 133; Riggsby, *Caesar in Gaul*, 162.

¹⁷² Suet., *Iul.*, 59.

vulnerable to manipulation; such was the Roman threshold for *religio*. In practice, so long as the rituals were performed punctually and precisely, Romans enjoyed latitude regarding their behavior and ample freedom to interpret events sympathetically. Exploiting aspects of the state cult did not violate any religious code of laws, for there was no such codification of religious ethics. Manipulating others through *religio* crossed no sacred boundary, so long as it did not induce them to neglect ritual. Even *superstitio*, in the hands of a savvy Roman, could win the approval of the people rather than a denunciation for heresy, for Roman religion carried no theological dogma. Operating within the accepted and regulated framework of Roman *religio*, Caesar masterfully explored and utilized the freedom inherent in the state cult and, because he remained dutiful in his observance of ritual, he remained an exemplar of *religio*.

Recognizing the opportunities religious latitude presented, Caesar employed superstition and religion to secure military advantages repeatedly during the Gallic Wars. He diminished his enemies by attributing credit for their victories to supernatural or divine causes, called attention to the inferiority of enemy superstition when it backfired on them, and publicized every enemy breach of religious norms. Caesar weaponized religion and superstition not only to reduce his opponents, but also to elevate himself and his soldiers, presenting them as pious Romans who conducted warfare with honor. Religion also served as Caesar's goad to prick his soldiers into action and overcome their fears. Lastly, the general deployed religion as a shield to protect him from accusations of impiety by demonstrating that his wars were just and that they met with divine approval. As his conduct during the impending Civil War confirms, Caesar respected Roman ritual, yet consistently considered religion and superstition to be effective tools.

CHAPTER 3

CAESAR AND RELIGION DURING THE CIVIL WAR

Caesar's Gallic Campaigns reveal a man dedicated to the ritual expectations of Roman religion. He observed every ceremony expected of his station and creatively applied religion and superstition to undermine his enemies, motivate his soldiers, and justify his conquest. However, Caesar himself serves as by far our most expansive and reliable source for the period, as the Gauls left us no accounts from their perspective, and the potential for creative license hovers over any reading of *Bellum Gallicum*. When he crossed the Rubicon, he declared war against fellow Romans who could write nearly as well as he did. Thus, the sources for the Civil War are far more varied and include counterpoints to Caesar's claims, allowing historians to compare accounts. Moreover, the Civil War eliminates the issue of international relations, which are prevalent in the Gallic Campaigns. Because Roman combatants shared religious and military norms, it follows that Caesar would experience greater difficulty explaining away any transgressions or wrongfully accusing his opponents of violations. The *Bellum Civile*, then, should serve as a control, exposing or confirming Caesar's claims to religiosity in Gaul. Overwhelmingly, Caesar's conduct during the Civil War corroborates accounts of his *religio* during the Gallic Wars.

During the Civil War, Caesar refines the manipulation of religion and superstition he practiced in Gaul while managing to accrue fewer serious accusations of impiety. He reprised familiar methods – using religion and superstition to undermine enemies, motivate his troops, and justify his warfare – expanding his arsenal to enable assaults on the enemy's irrational fears. Additionally, Caesar harnessed religion to gain tactical, operational, and strategic

advantages in unique ways. Throughout, his implementation of clemency became his hallmark, enshrining him in the hearts and minds, and eventually a temple, of the Roman people. The Civil War, like the Gallic Wars, confirms that Caesar was a religious man who exercised the freedom inherent in Roman state cult to manipulate religious and superstitious sentiment in support of his own designs.

As he had in Gaul, Caesar throughout the Civil War calls attention to the divine approval granted to his actions and withheld from his opponents'. During the summer of 49, Caesar's army besieged Massilia and laid down Caesar's hallmark circumvallation on the landward side of the city. Decimus Brutus led Caesar's navy in an attempt to cut off Massilian supply or escape by sea. Convinced that the impending naval battle carried their last hope of deliverance, the young men, women, elderly, and children of Massilia lifted their hands and cried out to the gods in supplication, pleading for victory.¹⁷³ Brutus clawed a close victory from the Massilians, demonstrating that the gods had spurned the frantic prayers of the city. After Caesar's army breached the walls, the citizens of Massilia recognized the locus of divine favor in the enemy camp and swarmed out of the gates dressed as supplicants to beg Caesar's mercy.¹⁷⁴ Caesar's continuator records a similar contest for divine assistance during the Alexandrian War of 48. As Caesar's navy prepared to engage the Alexandrian fleet in the Battle of Eunostus Harbor, civilians and soldiers of both factions lined the rooftops to watch the engagement, promising offerings to the gods and begging for divine assistance.¹⁷⁵ Caesar's victory, as at Massilia,

¹⁷³ Caes., *BCiv.*, 2.5.3.

¹⁷⁴ Caes., *BCiv.*, 2.11.4.

¹⁷⁵ [Caes.], *BAlex.*, 1.15.8.

proved that the gods, having heard the supplications of both sides, chose to favor Caesar and his army. Obtaining the gods' approval and assistance fortified Caesar's reputation as a man of *religio* while undermining his enemies' claims to the same.

Perhaps doubting their martial capabilities, or their commander's leadership, Caesar's enemies frequently attempted to employ *religio* and *superstitio* to shore up their deficiencies. In particular, Caesar observes on several occasions that his opponents relied on the spontaneous swearing of oaths to ensure the loyalty of their troops as they prepared for combat. Caesar does not denigrate wholesale the swearing of oaths, for oaths in the proper context fell within *religio*; rather, he merely implies that only commanders and armies that wavered in their courage or loyalty employed such methods to steel themselves for war.¹⁷⁶ Requiring an oath to convince soldiers to follow into battle revealed that the Pompeians treated oaths instrumentally, as a means to coerce activity, which carried the oath away from *religio* and into *superstitio*. The purpose of loyalty oaths was to prevent desertion and dereliction of duty when soldiers lacked confidence in their general. Oaths to remain loyal to the commander or to pursue victory to the point of death did not correspond in the slightest to the more traditional *sacramentum* sworn to new commanders and later to emperors.¹⁷⁷ Rather, Caesar avoided spontaneous oaths as the superstitious application of a religious ritual.

Reflective of the average Roman soldier's general distaste for internecine conflict, several loyalty oaths are recorded during the Civil War. In an effort to galvanize Pompeian devotion, Petreius demanded that the entire army swear a solemn oath not to desert before

¹⁷⁶ Caes., *BGall.*, 1.40; Haynes, *Blood of the Provinces*, 305; Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 119.

¹⁷⁷ Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 119.

commanding them to murder the Caesarian troops that had been fraternizing in the Pompeian camp during a truce.¹⁷⁸ Petreius may have been convinced that such an order invited mutiny and sought to bolster his soldier's resolve before issuing the command. Taking matters further, Varro required the entire province of Farther Spain, soldiers and civilians all, to take an oath of allegiance to himself and to Magnus.¹⁷⁹ Fearful of desertion and insurgency, he appropriated the sacred nature of the oath to help maintain local peace and military dedication to the Pompeian cause. Caesar seized on the opportunity to rebuke his enemies when he perceived they were failing their obligations to *religio*.

Revealing a tinge of bitterness towards his erstwhile right-hand man, Caesar's portrayal of Labienus' use of oaths draws attention to his enemy's reliance on *superstitio*. As Pompey's terrified army entrenched themselves near Dyrrachium in January of 48, Labienus sought to bolster the army's resolve by voluntarily swearing that he would "not desert Pompey but that he would submit to whatever outcome Fortune had granted to his commander."¹⁸⁰ Pompey's legates, military tribunes, and eventually the entire army eagerly followed suit. Dodge and Goldsworthy each attribute this oath specifically to the negative effect on Pompeian morale caused by the unexpected advent of Caesar's army.¹⁸¹ Later that year, as the two belligerents prepared to engage in the Battle of Pharsalus, Labienus publicly swore that he would return to the camp without first securing victory and pressed the gathered army to swear likewise.

¹⁷⁸ Caes., *BCiv.*, 1.76.2-4.

¹⁷⁹ Caes., *BCiv.*, 2.18.

¹⁸⁰ Caes., *BCiv.*, 3.13.3-4; Dodge, *Caesar*, 499.

¹⁸¹ Dodge, *Caesar*, 499; Goldsworthy, *Caesar*, 412.

Pompey approved and voiced his own oath, rapidly echoed by his soldiers.¹⁸² Caesar implies that his opponents suffered a deficiency of loyalty and natural valor, and that they were forced to rely on oaths to ensure the dedication of their soldiers. Caesar's issue lay less with the swearing of oaths than the need for them.

That Caesar elected to omit similar spontaneous oaths from his own account suggests that he viewed such superstitious measures as diminutive of both his and his army's innate virtue, valor, and *religio*.¹⁸³ However, Appian and Lucan record oaths of loyalty, albeit never initiated by the general himself. Following the nearly catastrophic defeat at Dyrrachium, Caesar censured his deflated army. To prove, and possibly renew, their devotion, Caesar's legions begged him to punish them harshly according to tradition. When he refused, increasing their shame, the soldiers on their own volition swore that if he led them into battle again, they would not return absent victory.¹⁸⁴ Likewise, Lucan reports that, just after crossing the Rubicon, the oak-leaf decorated first centurion, Laelius, swore to obey any command Caesar chose to issue, be it noble or sacrilegious; such was his devotion to his master's cause. Unprompted, each cohort echoed Laelius' oath, unifying them under Caesar in anticipation of the impending maelstrom.¹⁸⁵ In both cases, Caesar neither called for nor participated in the swearing of an oath. However, if Appian is to be believed, he may have utilized them nonetheless, calling his legionnaires to fulfill their voluntary oath just before launching his attack at the Battle of

¹⁸² Caes., *BCiv.*, 3.87.5-6; Dodge, *Caesar*, 558; Gelzer, *Caesar*, 239.

¹⁸³ Caes., *BGall.*, 1.40.

¹⁸⁴ App., *BCiv.*, 2.63.

¹⁸⁵ Luc., *BCiv.*, 1.374-388.

Thapsus.¹⁸⁶ Caesar's omission of mass oaths from his *Commentaries* reinforces the idea that he construed such measures as *superstitio* and preferred instead to rely on his and his army's martial prowess and adherence to *religio*.

Regarding his manipulation of *religio* and *superstitio*, we can recognize one of the load-bearing pillars of Caesar's wartime political strategy in his tenacious determination to foment negative popular sentiment against his irreverent enemies. Embracing the flexibility and opportunism present in Roman religion and politics, Caesar capitalized on chances to expose enemy breaches of sacred tradition and norms while diligently justifying any of his own questionable actions.¹⁸⁷ He eviscerates the Pompeian Senate for their illegal treatment of the tribunes of the plebs, reporting that the Senate debated and rejected the tribunes' veto before threatening their lives.¹⁸⁸ Tribunes of the Plebs held sacrosanctity and those who harmed a tribune were declared accursed, forfeiting life and property – Caesar's accusation carried religious as much as legal significance.¹⁸⁹ Moreover, he claims that, by the sacrilegious will of the Pompeians, "every law, divine and human, was turned upside down," and that the consuls had even neglected to take the ritual auspices before leaving Rome.¹⁹⁰ Embracing what appears to have been a thematic element of Civil War propaganda, Caesar denounces Varro for stealing offerings and sacred furnishings from a Herculean shrine, and accuses Scipio of planning to

¹⁸⁶ App., *BCiv.*, 2.73.

¹⁸⁷ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 139.

¹⁸⁸ Caes., *BCiv.*, 1.2.7-8, 5.1-5.

¹⁸⁹ Eric Kondratieff. "Tribuni Plebis." In *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, ed. Roger S. Bagnall, Kai Broderson, Craige B. Champion, Andrew Erskine, and Sabine R. Huebner. Oxford: Blackwell, 2013, 6849.

¹⁹⁰ Caes., *BCiv.*, 1.6.8.

plunder the shrine of Diana at Ephesus.¹⁹¹ Lucan and Dio Cassius record a reprise of Gallic habits in Egypt, observing that Achilles persuaded the Alexandrians to apprehend and murder Caesar's envoys.¹⁹² In his own published records, Caesar repeatedly recognized and adroitly exploited every opportunity to expose enemy impropriety and impiety to the superstitious and religious fury of the masses.¹⁹³

Contrasting his piety with his opponents' irreverence, Caesar gives equally venomous treatment to enemy violations of pledges of safe conduct. After Petreius forced the Pompeian army to swear a loyalty oath, he dragged Caesar's soldiers, who had been enjoying the armistice by mingling with their countrymen across the lines, before the army and slaughtered them. Caesar pulls no punches, labeling them "savage murderers."¹⁹⁴ As the last of his troops made the crossing from Brundisium in pursuit of Pompey, two ships became separated from the main body. Otacilius, a Pompeian commander, deceitfully promised safety if Caesar's troops surrendered but apprehended and slaughtered all who trusted his word. Again, Caesar does not spare Otacilius' reputation, claiming the soldiers were "sadistically murdered before his eyes" in violation of his binding oath.¹⁹⁵ While guarantees of safety may not have been quite on the level of ritual law, they were commonplace and universally considered inviolable, and Caesar did not neglect the opportunity to publicize his enemies' disregard of such pledges.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹¹ Caes., *BCiv.*, 2.18.2, 3.33.1.

¹⁹² Luc., *BCiv.*, 10.467-472; Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 42.37.1-2.

¹⁹³ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 134, 137; Canfora, *Julius Caesar*, 326; Dodge, *Caesar*, 736; Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 88.

¹⁹⁴ Caes., *BCiv.*, 1.76, 85.

¹⁹⁵ Caes., *BCiv.*, 3.28.

¹⁹⁶ Goodman and Holladay, "Religious Scruples in Ancient Warfare," 151-2.

Having justified his Gallic conquests on similar grounds, Caesar reprises the technique, casting his enemies, and their neglect of norms, in a barbaric and impious light.

Juxtaposed against the Pompeians' deceptive behavior, Caesar's actions support the claim that he honored religious norms in warfare. He rebuked his own soldiers for seeking plunder from Roman temples and villages and developed a surprising tendency towards mercy during the Civil War.¹⁹⁷ The citizens of Massilia, fearing reprisal for their defection from Caesar's cause in 49, flooded out of the gates in supplication, begging for clemency. With the general temporarily absent, his soldiers granted a truce until Caesar arrived to render his verdict. However, the Massilians deceived them, treacherously putting the Caesarian siege works to the torch after securing the armistice. When Caesar finally arrived, he accepted the Massilians' full surrender despite their duplicity and ordered no punitive measures, honoring the truce agreement struck by his army.¹⁹⁸ Dio Cassius supports the notion that Caesar both honored truces and expected them to be honored in turn. When the garrison of Hispalis falsely agreed to align with Caesar and accept a garrison, they violated the agreement and ambushed Caesar's soldiers. The ambushers met with swift vengeance as Caesar laid an ambush in return, exacting harsh punishment for breaking the truce.¹⁹⁹ His leniency certainly had limits, but, more often than not, the conqueror favored mercy.²⁰⁰

Caesar's *Bellum Civile*, perhaps even more than the *Bellum Gallicum*, carried an apologetic purpose, seeking to exonerate Caesar of any accusations of warmongering;

¹⁹⁷ Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 41.32.5.

¹⁹⁸ Caes., *BCiv.*, 2.11-15, 22.5-6; Dodge, *Caesar*, 480.

¹⁹⁹ Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 43.39.3-4.

²⁰⁰ Cornelia Catlin Coulter. "Caesar's Clemency." *Classical Journal* 26, no. 7 (1931), 523.

accordingly, as an author he strives to cast his actions and those of his soldiers as pious. Desiring to exhibit his respect for *religio*, Caesar claims to have returned offerings and sacred furnishings to a Herculean shrine and the temple of Diana at Ephesus that the Pompeians had plundered.²⁰¹ Mingling respect for enemy religion with the superiority of Roman *religio*, Caesar refuses to demolish an enemy trophy that memorialized a victory over Roman troops, instead building a more impressive trophy nearby to overshadow and overthrow the other.²⁰² Lucan claims that Caesar's troops mutinied because they were not permitted to enrich themselves by plundering temples²⁰³ However, Appian, Dio Cassius, Lucan, and Plutarch all castigate the general for plundering the Capitoline treasury, and Dio Cassius expands the charge of temple robbery to include temples in Egypt, Tyre, and Gades.²⁰⁴ Caesar's claim that the Pompeian flight reached such a fever pitch that they accidentally left the treasury doors unlocked does not convince, and it appears that, despite his omission of any such accounts, Caesar occasionally did not quail from replenishing his war chest using consecrated funds. That he did not disclose damning evidence indicates that he, too, recognized the irreverence of his actions and sought to preserve his reputation as a man who observed Roman *religio*.

Retaining his *imperium* as proconsul, dictator, and consul throughout the Civil War, not to mention his *auctoritas* as *pontifex maximus*, Caesar's obligation to observe Roman rituals properly remained in force as well. Caesar appears to have taken his religious obligations

²⁰¹ Caes., *BCiv.*, 2.21, 11.105.

²⁰² Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 42.48.2.

²⁰³ Luc., *BCiv.*, 5.270.1

²⁰⁴ App., *BCiv.*, 2.41; Luc., *BCiv.*, 3.167-8; Plut., *Caes.*, 35; Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 41.17.2, 42.34.1-2, 48.2, 43.39.4; Canfora, *Julius Caesar*, 269; Meier, *Caesar*, 453.

seriously. With frustrating consistency, however, Caesar the author abstains from filling his history with accounts of rituals the Roman people assumed he was honoring. Fortunately, other sources supply the balance. Appian and Plutarch provide a glimpse at the general's prebattle ritual, both public and private. On the eve of Pharsalus, Caesar conducted personal sacrifices, invoking Mars and Venus, vowing a temple in Rome to Venus if he won. Moreover, as a meteor streaked across the night sky from Caesar's camp to Pompey's, Caesar interpreted the portent to indicate that he would extinguish the Pompeian cause in the ensuing battle.²⁰⁵ Before deploying his soldiers, Caesar conducted the *lustratio* ceremony over the army, repeating the ritual prior to the Battle of Thapsus.²⁰⁶ Appian credits Caesar with reserving two days for sacrificing following his victory, and notes that Caesar fulfilled his vow to Venus, consecrating her promised temple on his return to Rome.²⁰⁷ In the midst of the war, during a brief sojourn in Rome, Caesar dedicated eleven days to hold the Latin games and fill vacant priesthoods. While Appian contends that Caesar acknowledged he was leading soldiers into sacrilege by crossing the Rubicon, the words are Appian's. Suetonius' remark that Caesar drilled his soldiers even on religious holidays and festivals does not appear to differentiate him from the behavior of other commanders.²⁰⁸ Likewise, Suetonius' claim that the general disregarded the auspices carries little water compared to the numerous sources to the contrary.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁵ App., *BCiv.*, 2.68-9; Plut., *Caes.*, 44.

²⁰⁶ Plut., *Caes.*, 43; [Caes.], *BAfr.*, 13.75.

²⁰⁷ App., *BCiv.*, 2.88, 102.

²⁰⁸ Suet., *Iul.*, 65; Goodman and Holladay, "Religious Scruples in Ancient Warfare," 162; Haynes, *Blood of the Provinces*, 198.

²⁰⁹ Suet., *Iul.*, 30. Here it is helpful to compare Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 41.39.1-4, who examines the case of the escaped sacrifice that Suetonius refers to in *Iul.*, 59. Suetonius claims that Caesar disregarded the bad omen of the escaped sacrifice and left to pursue Pompey. Dio Cassius claims that the seers interpreted the sign to indicate that Caesar needed to pursue Pompey with haste, lest he meet with misfortune. In Dio Cassius' version, Caesar submits to

Ancient historians find scant agreement regarding Caesar's treatment of the dead but on balance he appears to have upheld this ritual central to the proper observance of Roman *religio*. Appian's Caesar orders Pompey's head buried in Alexandria and consecrates a shrine for his nemesis. After the Battle of Munda, he extends the same rites to Magnus' son, Gnaeus Pompey. Lucan and Dio Cassius each confirm Caesar's honorable and reverent treatment of Pompey's remains.²¹⁰ However, Dio Cassius notes that, while Caesar received praise for mourning his friend, he also received ridicule for his hypocrisy in allegedly politicizing the ritual burial.²¹¹ In a striking and fascinating passage, the poet Lucan argues that Caesar, succumbing to bloodlust after Pharsalus, brought forth a table to feast in the midst of his slain enemies, refusing to grant them funeral rites.²¹² Entirely unsupported by other sources, Lucan's macabre Caesar is certainly divorced from reality. Yet, Caesar's alleged disrespect of the fallen Romans at Munda reveals that the general may not have boasted a pristine record on this front. Driving the enemy into their fortifications, and lacking materials to circumvallate the palisade, Caesar directed his legionnaires to block potential escape routes by piling corpses, securing them to the ground with spears.²¹³ Caesar's burial of Pompey's remains served a political purpose, but it is unfair to denigrate Caesar's tears for a man who was once his friend and son-in-law. Likewise, the brutality at Munda seems out of character and, if it happened, must have been an isolated

their interpretation and immediately leaves the city to resume his pursuit. This is not to claim that Dio Cassius is more reliable than Suetonius, but to suggest that absolute claims about Caesar's respect for auspices and omens should be considered in the light of accounts that suggest the contrary.

²¹⁰ Luc., *BCiv.*, 9.1089-1104.

²¹¹ Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 42.8.1-2.

²¹² Luc., *BCiv.*, 7.796-9.

²¹³ App., *BCiv.*, 2.105; Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 43.38.4.

incident. Beyond these accusations, and Lucan's darkly intriguing fable, no ancient source refers to any other example of Caesar's disrespect for the dead. Regarding funerary rites, Caesar upheld his *religio* by observing the obligations of state cult incumbent on his rank and office.

Caesar's observation of ritual norms went so far as to introduce clemency as a unique expression of *religio* that was eventually enshrined in a Roman temple. Viewed as a virtue before the Civil War, Caesar's serial implementation of clemency may have led to its acceptance as a component of *religio*. His clemency became his hallmark, and the commander did not fail to recognize the military and political utility of such displays of mercy.²¹⁴ By showing public mercy repeatedly, Caesar sought to enshrine himself in Roman hearts and minds as a noble, pious man, thus grooming his audience to be sympathetic to his strategic objectives.

Notwithstanding the sheer cost in human lives Caesar's Gallic Wars exacted, before he ever crossed the Rubicon he began carefully cultivating the reputation for clemency that came to define his conduct during the Civil War.²¹⁵ Gauls and Germans, having heard of his famous mercy, begged for and received it with more frequency than is typically remembered by Caesar's detractors. Throughout the Civil War, he expanded drastically the scope with which he offered clemency to defeated enemies. As Suetonius notes, to Pompey's declaration that anyone not actively with him stood against him and the state, Caesar countered that "all who were not actively against him were with him."²¹⁶ As a rule, Caesar forgave and freed any Roman, and many allies, who fought against him so long as they pledged an oath against taking

²¹⁴ David Konstan. "Clemency as a Virtue." *Classical Philology* 100, no. 4 (2005), 340.

²¹⁵ Caes., *B Gall.*, 2.12.5, 14.5, 28.3, 31.4, 32.1, 8.38.6, 44.1. Plut., *Caes.*, 15.

²¹⁶ Suet., *Iul.*, 75.

up arms for Pompey again. Repeat offenders forfeited their right to mercy, having broken their oath; yet, Caesar's policy did not bind him, and often he released captured enemies multiple times.²¹⁷ While the suggestion that clemency was an act of *religio* during the war is tenuous, the eventual construction of a temple to Caesar's Clemency suggests that the Romans attached religious significance to the act of showing mercy and indicates that the concept deserves further study. It is clear, however, that Caesar by the end of the Civil War successfully presented his clemency as *religio*, whether it merited the designation at the beginning of the war.

Although ancient historians posit justly that Caesar reaped tangible benefits by establishing clemency as a wartime policy, they neither disavow a religious purpose nor abstain from lavishing him with praise for the results.²¹⁸ Appian argues that Caesar dispensed his mercy instrumentally to induce future enemies to surrender rapidly and to gain diffuse popularity with his enemies.²¹⁹ Dio Cassius concurs, claiming that Caesar enjoyed a boost to his reputation.²²⁰ However, to seek renown among Romans was not a criminal offense. On the contrary, it would be more deserving of negative attention if Caesar did not seek to enlarge his own *dignitas*. Furthermore, Caesar's hope that future enemies would surrender quickly was not exclusively, or even primarily, a pragmatic benefit. Swift surrender in the Civil War limited Roman casualties. It is not beyond reason to accept Caesar's own explanation, that he desired to spare his army further bloodshed and that he grew overwhelmed with pity for the doomed fellow

²¹⁷ [Caes.], *BAfr.*, 1.64.

²¹⁸ Meier, *Caesar*, 374.

²¹⁹ App., *BCiv.*, 2.38, 42.

²²⁰ Dio. Cass., *Hist.*, 41.23.1-2.

citizens across the lines.²²¹ That Caesar's own soldiers threatened mutiny at his reticence towards superfluous slaughter fortifies the veracity of his version. Caesar placed admirable value on the lives of his countrymen out of dedication to his state and *religio*. Pragmatic benefits did not negate the religious nature of his clemency and, with the notable exception of Cato's noble stitch-picking, the potential recipients of his favor did not seem to quibble over the distinction.²²² Lucan's claim that Caesar's clemency towards his enemies earned him greater dishonor than would their murder remains poetically poignant, but impotent, propaganda.²²³ Clemency, employed by Caesar as *religio*, enhanced his pious reputation.

Reprising methods familiar from his Gallic Campaigns, Caesar utilized *religio* and *superstitio* to seize advantages at every stage of warfare. From his observance of proper burial rites to his ability to convince his soldiers that Pompey's luck had run dry, the general commanded superstitious and religious sentiment nearly as effectively as he did armies.²²⁴ Roman religion being *religio*, the observance of proper ritual, Caesar enjoyed latitude in how he chose to utilize it. When he needed to secure an operational advantage, Caesar often looked to metaphysical manipulation.

Caesar approached the Rubicon in need of such an advantage and he found it in the manipulation of his soldiers' *superstitio*. With but a single legion readily available, his only hope in the looming Civil War rested on the speed and determination of his advance and, thus, on his soldiers. According to Suetonius, a beautiful, superhumanly sized apparition raced to the

²²¹ Caes., *BCiv.*, 1.72.

²²² Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 43.10.3; Yavetz, *Julius Caesar and His Public Image*, 193.

²²³ Luc., *BCiv.*, 2.518-19; Konstan, "Clemency as a Virtue," 240-1.

²²⁴ Canfora, *Julius Caesar*, 241; Gelzer, *Caesar*, 246. Goldsworthy, *Caesar*, 222-3.

riverbank, swapped its flute for a trumpet, let loose a resounding note, and crossed. Caesar immediately seized the opportunity, exclaiming, "Let us accept this as a sign from the gods and follow where they beckon... The die is cast."²²⁵ Canfora deems the whole episode a "carefully crafted device," suggesting that "it would not have been difficult, with so many prisoners, to find a giant Gaul to act out such a scene."²²⁶ Canfora's skepticism of the event is appropriate, but he does not take it far enough. It is extremely unlikely that Caesar either witnessed or concocted an inspirational ghost. When Caesar's legions required a prod, the general uniformly relied on his own personal magnetism and leadership to extract action from the men. He may have invoked supernatural assurances and examples in such speeches to lend additional motivation, but he provided the impetus to act. Suetonius' ghost story divests Caesar of both the credit and the blame for crossing the Rubicon. It is far more likely that Caesar and Dio Cassius report nearer the facts, arguing that general's pre-Rubicon speech focused on the Pompeians' violation of the tribune's sacred rights and their assault against his own *dignitas*.²²⁷ However, in either story, religion and superstition form the common denominator. Caesar desperately needed to shore up his army's resolve and devotion, and he played on either his soldiers' *superstitio*, by way of the large and lovely ethereal flautist, or their *religio*, by appealing to the tribune's rights, to provoke swift action. Exploiting the metaphysical to extract an operational advantage, he stole a march on the Pompeians, and the rapidity of his advance directly caused the panicked evacuation of Rome.

²²⁵ Suet., *Iul.*, 32; Goldsworthy, 378.

²²⁶ Canfora, *Julius Caesar*, 144-5.

²²⁷ Caes., *BCiv.*, 1.7; Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 41.4.1-2.

A few months later, Caesar narrowly missed trapping Pompey at Brundisium and, again, employed *superstitio* to gain an operational advantage and catch up to his former son-in-law. Aiming to surprise Pompey, Caesar prepared his army to sail from Brundisium after the typical close of the campaigning season, setting his luck as their guarantor against the winter weather.²²⁸ Following their successful voyage, he declared his claim vindicated, for his luck had certainly been responsible for helping them survive the storm.²²⁹ Dio Cassius adds that Caesar, believing Pompey to be distracted, seized on the “chance of war,” utilizing fickle fortune to gain an edge.²³⁰ By playing on his army’s superstitious belief in their commander’s luck, Caesar gained an operational advantage and outmaneuvered his unsuspecting adversary. At Thapsus, his soldiers insisted that the omens in Scipio’s camp demanded an immediate charge. That he refused to bow before their superstition, bellowing that he did not want a battle to develop from impulsive action, typifies the flexibility inherent in *religio* and *superstitio*. That his soldiers disregarded his orders on this occasion and leapt to the attack exemplifies the sincerity with which many soldiers viewed *religio* and *superstitio*.²³¹

Caesar applied Roman religion to warfare with vigor, but historians who claim that he manufactured opportunities, such as the Rubicon apparition, ignore his steadfast adherence to *religio*. The circumstances of the Sibylline oracle suggesting that Parthia would only be subdued by a Roman king remain shrouded, but it has been suggested that Caesar had a hand in its origin. If there is any truth in that rumor, Caesar would again be seeking an operational

²²⁸ App., *BCiv.*, 2.53.

²²⁹ App., *BCiv.*, 2.54.

²³⁰ Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 41.44.2.

²³¹ [Caes.], *BAfr.*, 1.82; App., *BCiv.*, 2.64.

advantage through religious means. Ostensibly, the rumor would lead to his coronation so he could conquer Parthia, and his coronation would reassure his soldiers that they possessed what Crassus had not: divine approval of their campaign. That Caesar's supporters kindled the rumor without their master's knowledge is a more probable explanation.²³² While Caesar never shied from employing *religio* and *superstitio*, he does not appear to have devised parlor tricks in imitation of *religio*. The Sibylline Books being a crucial part of the state cult, it is doubtful that he would risk high censure by tampering with its rituals. Cicero himself condemns the rumor as false.²³³

Operations having brought his army within striking distance of the enemy, Caesar prepared his soldiers for battle, bolstering their morale through ritual and custom in adherence to *religio*. At Pharsalus, the general made his sacrifices and vows and favorably interpreted a meteor as a portent of victory, word of which spread through the camp, calcifying resolve.²³⁴ Declaring to his assembled army that Pompey's luck had waned, he exhorted them to remember their sacred oath not to return without victory before giving the watchword, "Venus Victrix," to commence battle.²³⁵ Caesar frequently assigned deities as the watchword, alternating between "Venus," "Venus Victrix," and "Fortuna."²³⁶ Mingling their religious affiliation with both Venus and Felicitas, Caesar assured his soldiers that the gods and goddesses favored his cause.

²³² J. P. V. D. Balsdon, "The Ides of March." *Historia* 7, no. 1 (1958), 85.

²³³ Cic., *Div.*, 2.110; published in 44 BC, possibly after Caesar's death.

²³⁴ App., *BCiv.*, 2.68-9; Plut., *Caes.*, 43.

²³⁵ App., *BCiv.*, 2.73-4, 76.

²³⁶ App., *BCiv.*, 2.76, 104; Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 43.43.3-4; [Caes.], *BAfr.*, 1.83.

If Caesar saw an opportunity to wheedle a military advantage out of an omen, he took it. Arriving in Africa in pursuit of Scipio, he tripped and fell on his face on the beach and his soldiers grew disheartened by the clear evil omen. Keeping his presence of mind, Caesar bear-hugged the sand and exclaimed, “Africa! I embrace you and hold you fast!” His soldiers regained their composure, satisfied that their clumsy general had outflanked the omen.²³⁷ Suetonius’ version in context suggests that Caesar disregarded the bad omen, but it is unclear why the common practice of averting an omen should be considered irreligious on this occasion.²³⁸ Likewise, Suetonius reports that Caesar, to ridicule a prophecy embraced by his enemies claiming that the Scipios could never lose in Africa, devised a workaround by identifying a worthless scion of that house and placing him on the general’s staff so as to appropriate the benefit.²³⁹ Dio Cassius adds that Caesar only pilfered the oracle after he realized his own soldiers believed it, and Plutarch is unsure whether the general claimed the prophecy out of mockery or sincerity.²⁴⁰ Caesar’s religious record thus far supports no notions of mockery, and it is best to treat these as examples of the pragmatic and acceptable use of omens typical of the Roman elite.

Lucan, taken with a grain of salt, is replete with anecdotes of Caesar’s reliance on weaponized religion and superstition. Resolved to seek justice through war, Lucan’s Caesar told his troops to rejoice, for the Fates had given them war.²⁴¹ Addressing the ranks at Pharsalus, he

²³⁷ Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 42.58.3; Dodge, *Caesar*, 623; Gelzer, *Caesar*, 265; Goldsworthy, *Caesar*, 455.

²³⁸ Suet., *Iul.*, 59; Tatum, *Always I Am Caesar*, 64; Wardle, “Caesar and Religion,” 109.

²³⁹ Suet., *Iul.*, 59; Gelzer, *Caesar*, 265; Goldsworthy, *Caesar*, 460.

²⁴⁰ Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 42.57.5-42.58.1; Plut., *Caes.*, 52.

²⁴¹ Luc., *BCiv.*, 3.360-1.

instructed the soldiers that prayer would be unnecessary on that occasion and that their swords would summon fate in battle. He concludes by reassuring the men that the gods had never been as close to him as in that moment and, galvanized by his speech, they rushed forward, leaving all to Fate.²⁴² Deciphering the shade of real events in Lucan is singularly challenging given that the poet may have subordinated precision to artistic license.

Nonetheless, the trend survives even in verse, that Caesar used *religio* and *superstitio* to fortify his soldiers' resolve before battle.

Once battle had been joined, Caesar remained alert to opportunities to harness religion and superstition, incorporating them into his tactical arsenal to support his troops. After repulsing Pompey's powerful cavalry at Pharsalus, Caesar's army sensed the enemy lines beginning to fracture, and they shifted into pursuit. Realizing that the victory, if properly managed to the end, could conclude the campaign, Caesar raced to the front and redirected the exhausted soldiers towards Pompey's camp, exhorting them to take advantage of Fortune's gift.²⁴³ Soldiers flush with success were notoriously difficult to rein in, but Caesar's invocation of Fortune succeeded in converting the tactical pursuit into the occupation of a strategic objective. Facing desperate straits during the Battle of Munda, Caesar publicly upbraided Fortune for wavering after bringing him through so many trials and rushed to the front to encourage his soldiers.²⁴⁴ Dio Cassius notes Caesar's prayer, and Appian expands on the story, claiming that Caesar lifted his hands to the heavens, praying aloud to the gods and asking them

²⁴² Luc., *BCiv.*, 7.247-333; Canfora, *Julius Caesar*, 235.

²⁴³ Caes., *BCiv.*, 3.95; Luc., *BCiv.*, 7.731-6; Dodge, *Caesar*, 566.

²⁴⁴ Vell. Pat., *Hist.*, 2.55.3-4;

to preserve his combat record. Having stated his case before the gods, he cast off his helmet, seized a shield from a soldier, and ran to within ten feet of the enemy lines, shouting to his legions that his death approached.²⁴⁵ It is tempting to read *devotio* into Caesar's maneuver, that perhaps the commander, despairing of victory, had dedicated his life to the gods as a sacrifice to purchase victory for his army. However, his subsequent behavior makes it clear that he had every intention of surviving and that he was exploiting religious tradition to his advantage. Caesar's army watched him dodge and deflect more than 200 hurled spears before his noble and pious example drove them to courage and combat.²⁴⁶ Caesar later remarked that on many occasions he had fought for victory, but at Munda he had fought for his life.²⁴⁷ He used courage and *religio* to alter the tactical situation and induce his soldiers to imitation.

However, Caesar's appeals to Roman virtue and *religio* did not always meet with success. Perhaps reflective of the superior martial skill of his Roman opponents over the Gauls and Germans, Caesar's army suffered reverses more frequently during the Civil War. Reprising a favored literary tactic, Caesar highlighted the conduct of a legionary standard-bearer who, as he died, called out to a passing cavalryman and asked him to return the eagle to Caesar, lest he be thought derelict.²⁴⁸ The eagles being the most august of Roman military symbols, their preservation was of paramount importance. However, repeatedly during the Civil War, even this familiar tactic failed to restore morale and cohesion. What is more, Caesar appears to have been compelled to take up the mantle of the heroic standard-bearer personally on several

²⁴⁵ App., *BCiv.*, 2.104.

²⁴⁶ App., *BCiv.*, 2.104.

²⁴⁷ App., *BCiv.*, 2.104.

²⁴⁸ Caes., *BCiv.*, 3.64.

occasions. Appian and Plutarch record multiple instances of Caesar attempting to turn a retreat by seizing a standard and running to the front with the aim of inspiring his soldiers to follow the intrepid eagle back to combat and glory. Each attempt failed.²⁴⁹ During the rout at Dyrrachium, Caesar's attempt to restore order provoked a fleeing standard-bearer to take a swing at the general and, in the confusion, Caesar nearly lost his life.²⁵⁰ While Caesar's appeals to *religio* did not always produce a favorable result, it is clear that Caesar considered religion to be a useful tool in accomplishing his tactical objectives.

When Caesar suffered a setback, religion and superstition provided an effective means by which to explain the defeat to his soldiers, thereby restoring their deflated morale. Following his disastrous loss at Dyrrachium, Caesar gathered his army to inform them that Fortune exercised "overwhelming power in all our affairs and most strikingly in warfare."²⁵¹ According to the general, Fortune caused his soldiers to raid the wrong camp, a "seemingly trivial thing [that had] great impact."²⁵² He continued, reminding his men that their previous string of victories confirmed their own luck, and admonishing them that Fortune had given them everything they had needed to win. They lacked only courageous effort to finish what Fortune had started.²⁵³ In his speech, Caesar appealed to Fortune to explain the defeat and relieve his soldiers of a portion of the guilt, thereby shoring up their brittle morale. Yet, he also invokes Fortune to rebuke his men for their insufficient effort, thereby steeling their resolve for the

²⁴⁹ App. *BCiv.*, 2.62, 95; Plut., *Caes.*, 39, 52.

²⁵⁰ Plut., *Caes.*, 39; Dodge, *Caesar*, 537.

²⁵¹ *Caes.*, *BCiv.*, 3.68.

²⁵² *Caes.*, *BCiv.*, 3.70.2.

²⁵³ *Caes.*, *BCiv.*, 3.73; Gelzer, *Caesar*, 235-6.

next fight.

On the rare occasions when Caesar's efforts failed to maintain troop discipline, the leader often used *religio* and *superstitio* to cajole the soldiers back into line. To quell the mutiny at Placentia, Caesar included in his speech references to his own divine ancestry through Venus. He rhetorically asked if his soldiers believed he had sprung from divinity only to be thwarted by disobedient troops, rebuking them for their obstinance and simultaneously reminding them that their commander enjoyed a distinct relationship with deity.²⁵⁴ He played on their *religio* and called them to honor the gods by honoring him, their descendant. Before accepting the mutineers' renewed devotion, Caesar had the penitent soldiers draw lots, executing the unfortunates to punish the whole. Dio Cassius reveals that Caesar rigged the lots, ensuring that only the ringleaders drew the short straw.²⁵⁵ The rigged lots at Placentia may be the most manipulative way he ever employed *superstitio*. That only the leaders of the mutiny were executed must have reinforced in his soldiers' minds that Caesar had chance on his side.

Dio Cassius gives the only evidence of a separate incident, which is uniquely difficult to explain. Caesar's soldiers rioted after the general's triumphal games, convinced that the general must have siphoned their own pay to finance the extravagant events. Caesar shut down the rioting by executing the first man he approached before slaying two others "as a sort of ritual observance."²⁵⁶ The historian himself cannot explain the significance of the ritual, but he does leave us with the tantalizing claim that they were "sacrificed in the Campus Martius by the

²⁵⁴ Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 41.34.1-5; Beard, North, and Price, *Religions in Rome*, 144-5.

²⁵⁵ Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 41.35.5.

²⁵⁶ Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 42.34.3.

pontifices and the priest of Mars.”²⁵⁷ The nature of this punitive ritual, if it occurred, remains unclear.²⁵⁸ However, the concept of wielding *religio* as a means to enforce obedience aligns with Caesar’s usual behavior. While Lucan claims that Caesar would have let his troops plunder temples and commit sacrilege if it kept them under arms, he merely records a speculation absent any concrete accusation.²⁵⁹ In the only mutiny Lucan records, his Caesar bends the recalcitrant legionnaires to his will by claiming that Fortune cared little for common soldiers, and that she would find no lack of replacements to replenish Caesar’s ranks and give him victory.²⁶⁰ Caesar’s appeals to the supernatural appear to have been a reliable and acceptable tool in maintaining troop discipline, demonstrating the general’s talent for using religion for his own benefit.

Caesar’s ability to operate within the flexibility of Roman *religio* is exemplified to an even greater degree in his religious justifications for war. The apologetic nature of Caesar’s *Bellum Civile* is exposed in the first sentence; indeed, the opening chapters are replete with appeals to the just cause of his march on Rome.²⁶¹ He employed religion in declaring war as much as in fighting them. Caesar’s case for a just, and thus a religious, war follows four primary lines: (1) the Senate violated the rights of the tribunes; (2) the Senate broke many laws, both religious and civic; (3) the Senate selfishly denied Caesar of his rights and insulted his *dignitas*; and (4) the Senate pursued war while demanding Caesar submit to an unfair peace. Three of

²⁵⁷ Dio Cass., 43.24.4.

²⁵⁸ Reid, “Human Sacrifices at Rome and Other Notes on Roman Religion,” 41.

²⁵⁹ Luc., *BCiv.*, 5.300-7.

²⁶⁰ Luc., *BCiv.*, 5.325-7.

²⁶¹ Caes., *BCiv.*, 1.1.1.

the injuries Caesar claims to have sustained relate directly to Roman *religio*.

Tribunes were imbued with sacrosanctity in Rome and Caesar's claim to a just cause found easy evidence in the publication of the Pompeian affront against the gods. Ignoring sacred law, the Senate violated tribunes' rights. Attempting to force Caesar to dismiss his army, the Senate decreed an ultimatum – if the proconsul did not disband his legions before a set date, he would be branded a traitor to the state. Two tribunes, Mark Antony and Quintus Cassius, imposed their vetoes. The Senate first debated and then disregarded the tribunes' vetoes, an act Caesar denounces as beyond the evil of even Sulla, before threatening the tribunes' lives.²⁶² Addressing his legion before crossing the Rubicon, Caesar laments that Roman politics had sunk so low, urging his soldiers to follow him in defense of their religiously violated political representatives.²⁶³ His later treatment of tribunes aside, Caesar made the sacred rights of the tribunes the cornerstone of his just war against Pompey and the Senate, calling up the *religio* of his soldiers to restore the tribunes' sacrosanctity.²⁶⁴

Perhaps of equal importance to Caesar, but less prominent in his published justification, were his accusations that the Senate had denied him his lawful rights and assaulted his *dignitas*, an injury that provided ample cause for war.²⁶⁵ Cataloguing the personal motives his enemies

²⁶² Caes., *BCiv.*, 1.2-5.

²⁶³ Caes., *BCiv.*, 1.7.

²⁶⁴ Morstein-Marx, "Caesar's Alleged Fear of Prosecution and His 'Ratio Absentis' in the Approach to the Civil War," 164. Caesar's treatment of the tribune Metellus casts a shade over his claim that Pompeian abuse of tribunes justified his advance. However, the sources are not unified in their condemnation of Caesar, some claiming that his soldiers committed the violence against Metellus. Caesar's claim that the temple had been left unlocked is extremely unlikely. Either way, the story certainly besmirches his record. However, it does not alter the apparent fact that Pompeian abuse of tribunes occurred and provided Caesar with just cause.

²⁶⁵ Collins, "Caesar and the Corruption of Power," 462; Morstein-Marx, "Caesar's Alleged Fear of Prosecution and His 'Ratio Absentis' in the Approach to the Civil War," 164.

harbored for war, Caesar accuses Cato of reviving his old hatred of the proconsul, Lentulus of jockeying for leverage to address his financial woes, Scipio of seeking to accumulate position and honor at Caesar's expense, and Pompey of being unwilling to suffer a rival in glory.²⁶⁶ In short, Caesar believed they had grown bitter at his success and hoped to reduce him. He urged his soldiers to defend his reputation, and their glory, which the Senate diminished by obstructing his wish to both celebrate a triumph and stand for consul. In an attempt to avert the war, Caesar wrote to Pompey, claiming that his rights were being stripped yet again. Caesar still resented being denied the opportunity to celebrate a triumph for his exploits in Spain in the late 60s and perceived a Catonian sequel in the senatorial attempt to force Caesar to decide between a triumph or the consulship.²⁶⁷ In support of his rights, Caesar cites the law of the Ten Tribunes, which permitted him to run for office in absentia.²⁶⁸ By demanding that Caesar dismiss his army and appear in person to run for office, the Senate violated that law. In addition, Caesar had every reason to believe a request for a triumph might result in his being kept waiting outside the city, and thus unable to run for office, for years. In the past eighteen years, only one triumph had been held within a year of the general's return to Rome – that of Pompey for his Mithridatic and Pirate victories – and four other generals had been compelled to remain outside Rome for several years.²⁶⁹ Caesar was justly angry after having himself submitted to the proper ten-year gap between consulships.

²⁶⁶ Caes., *BCiv.*, 1.4.

²⁶⁷ Morstein-Marx, "Caesar's Alleged Fear of Prosecution and His '*Ratio Absentis*' in the Approach to the Civil War," 169.

²⁶⁸ Caes., *BCiv.*, 1.9

²⁶⁹ Morstein-Marx, "Caesar's Alleged Fear of Prosecution in His '*Ratio Absentis*' in the Approach to the Civil War," 169.

Caesar exhibits no hypocrisy when he excoriates the Senate for breaking religious and civic laws to justify his march on Rome. Prior to leading his soldiers across the Rubicon, Caesar had himself broken no law in his dealings with the Senate. Beyond their refusal to abide by the law of the Ten Tribunes, Caesar accuses the Senate of assigning provincial command to unqualified men against tradition and refusing to submit those nominations to the popular assembly for confirmation. As for senatorial *religio*, Caesar was not impressed, arguing that the consuls left the city without first taking the auspices and that the Senate plundered Roman shrines to finance their military preparations.²⁷⁰ In a brusque phrase, Caesar leaves no room for misinterpretation, asserting that “every law, divine and human, was turned upside down.”²⁷¹ Caesar cites senatorial neglect of *religio* to both justify his own aggression and to undermine any claims that the Senate pursued war piously.

His final point of justification, that the Senate pursued war while demanding he submit to an unfair peace, calls attention to the senatorial deficiency of virtue rather than *religio*. While Caesar stood intractable on the point of his right to seek office in absentia, he frequently reiterated his willingness to reach a compromise, sending several proposals to his future enemies. He appears to have considered the Senate to be negotiating in bad faith, however, noting that they began levying soldiers to bolster Pompey’s legions months before the Civil War appeared inevitable, even going so far as to recruit foreign allies against him.²⁷² Having complied with the Senate’s request that he send two legions to support operations against

²⁷⁰ Caes., *BCiv.*, 1.6. Dodge, *Caesar*, 414.

²⁷¹ Caes., *BCiv.*, 1.6.8.

²⁷² Caes., *BCiv.*, 1.3.2-5, 6.3, 8, 9.9-10.

Parthia, Caesar watched with chagrin as his former soldiers were held in reserve in Italy before being called up to join Pompey outside Rome.²⁷³ When he offered a reasonable proposal, that he and Pompey simultaneously dismiss their troops and return to their provinces, the Senate refused to negotiate, insisting that Caesar disarm and return to Gaul first. Plutarch notes that the Senate was “confirming one man in the tyranny which they accused the other one of aiming at.”²⁷⁴ They expected Caesar to divest himself of his leverage and protection while persisting in levying troops for Pompey.²⁷⁵ Caesar viewed senatorial animosity as the product of envy. While he attached no obvious religious charges in their refusal to negotiate in good faith, his scathing treatment of their abuse of tribunes, assault of his *dignitas*, and violation of laws is religious in nature, unrelenting, and credible.

The case against Caesar’s just cause was couched in similarly religious terms, but with less substantial evidence. Arrayed against Caesar, Pompey suggested that Caesar may have run out of funds to pay off those he had bribed and marched on Rome to ease his burden through chaos.²⁷⁶ Given the sheer volume of loot Caesar accumulated in Gaul, Pompey’s assessment seems uninformed at best, slanderous at worst. Suetonius pours the foundation for the religious case against Caesar with the suggestion that Caesar may have marched on Rome because he feared becoming a private citizen and exposing himself to prosecution for his alleged irreverence as consul a decade earlier.²⁷⁷ In substantiation, he cites the history of

²⁷³ Caes., *BCiv.*, 1.9.

²⁷⁴ Plut., *Caes.*, 30.

²⁷⁵ Caes., *BCiv.*, 1.10.

²⁷⁶ Suet., *Iul.*, 30.

²⁷⁷ Suet., *Iul.*, 30; Morstein-Marx, “Caesar’s Alleged Fear of Prosecution and His ‘*Ratio Absentis*’ in the Approach to the Civil War,” 159-61.

Asinius Pollio, which claimed that Caesar stood among the dead at Pharsalus and exclaimed, “They brought it on themselves. They would have condemned me regardless of my victories – me, Gaius Caesar – had I not appealed to my army for help.”²⁷⁸ Caesar acknowledges that he had cause for trepidation but not as a result of his alleged misconduct, and he offers military rather than religious evidence. The Senate’s decision to take two of Caesar’s legions and keep them in reserve for Pompey was a show of force that intimidated the proconsul.²⁷⁹

Suetonius’ claim that Caesar feared prosecution for religious crimes is a representation of other people’s speculations formed a century and a half after the events in question. Suetonius’ own opinion is that Pollio’s corroborating evidence gives the story some credence, but he does not outright claim fear of prosecution to be Caesar’s motive. Regardless, the claim seems unmerited. Our most important contemporary sources, Caesar and Cicero, never mention the possibility of a suit being brought against the proconsul. Despite Cato’s unmitigated hatred of Caesar, his threat to bring Caesar to trial carried no edge. When he suggested handing Caesar over to the Germans for his alleged crimes, the Senate responded by voting sacrifices and holidays to celebrate Caesar’s achievement.²⁸⁰

Moreover, the accusation that Caesar disregarded the auspices, laws, and vetoes during his first consulship in 59 deserves closer scrutiny. As for the auspices, Suetonius seems to be alluding to Caesar’s refusal to postpone the passage of his agrarian law in light of Bibulus’ announcement that he was going to watch for lightning.²⁸¹ *Obnuntiatio* was a legitimate

²⁷⁸ Suet., *Iul.*, 30.

²⁷⁹ Caes., *BCiv.*, 1.11.3.

²⁸⁰ Plut., *Caes.*, 22.

²⁸¹ Ogilvie, *Romans and Their Gods*, 58.

religiopolitical maneuver. However, the alleged portents and omens needed to be properly reported and Bibulus never did so, showing Caesar to have been the traditionalist on that occasion. True, Caesar's cronies perpetrated violence to prevent Bibulus from reporting the omens, but that was not a religious crime. He did not disregard the auspices because none were properly reported according to the precise ritual requirements.²⁸² Accusations that he violated civic laws and vetoes have more merit, but it is unlikely that Caesar would have feared prosecution either way given his massive popularity in Rome.²⁸³ Against Caesar's confidence, paired with a reputation as a pious man who respected *religio*, Suetonius' charge loses its force. The most likely explanation for Caesar's decision to cross the Rubicon is that he fought in defense of his own *dignitas* and rights and, finding the mistreatment of the tribunes opportunistically repulsive, exploited the Senate's violation of sacred law to bolster his cause. Pragmatic considerations certainly factored in, but the core of his just cause appears to be *religio*.

To maintain his claim for a just war, Caesar altered the habits he had established in the Gallic Wars, crediting *religio* and *superstitio* for his own victories to lend divine approval to his conduct. Throughout the Gallic Campaigns, Caesar applied supernatural causes to enemy success, but not his own, being a jealous guardian of his own martial reputation. However, in the Civil War, it served his strategic aims to convince the people of Rome that the gods took an active hand in bringing him success. In his final communique with Pompey, Caesar urges his

²⁸² Tatum, *Always I Am Caesar*, 72-4; Wardle, "Caesar and Religion," 103.

²⁸³ Morstein-Marx, "Caesar's Alleged Fear of Prosecution and His '*Ratio Absentis*' in the Approach to the Civil War," 161.

adversary to consider peace before either side gained an advantage, granting that Fortune's awesome power in war could shift at any time.²⁸⁴ He credits Fortune for delivering his navy from an ambush, providing favorable wind to his ships but not Pompey's, and for allowing his soldiers to escape the catastrophe at Dyrrachium.²⁸⁵ Finally, in the only such example found in Caesar's *Commentaries*, the general lists a slew of omens and prodigies that predicted his victory at Pharsalus, suggesting to his readers that the gods not only approved of his victory, but they also took an active hand in announcing it and bringing it about.²⁸⁶ Addressing the Senate following his victory at Thapsus, Caesar asks them to forget the past by attributing it to the agency of divine forces beyond human control.²⁸⁷ He even refused to send out announcements of his victories so as to avoid incensing the people against him. However, although Appian, Dio Cassius, and Plutarch all approve of Caesar's policy to avoid publicizing his victories over fellow Romans, they criticize his eventual triumphs. Claiming to celebrate a triumph over King Juba did not disguise the fact that he was being honored for the destruction of Scipio's largely Roman army.²⁸⁸ With the glaring exception of the triumphs, Caesar prudently justified the Civil Wars by claiming divine approval.

Facing Roman citizens who ostensibly shared his *religio*, Caesar in the Civil War exemplified his piety using methods familiar from the Gallic Wars and introducing new policies to publicize his adherence to religious norms. As we have come to expect, Caesar did not

²⁸⁴ Caes., *BCiv.*, 3.10.

²⁸⁵ Caes., *BCiv.*, 3.14, 26, 70. Dodge, *Caesar*, 138.

²⁸⁶ Caes., *BCiv.*, 3.105; Meier, *Caesar*, 399.

²⁸⁷ Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 43.17.4.

²⁸⁸ App. *BCiv.*, 2.101; Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 42.18.1, 43.19.2; Plut. *Caes.*, 56-7; Gelzer, *Caesar*, 284-5.

neglect the chance to rebuke his enemies whenever he detected a departure from *religio*, lashing out with vituperative criticism when they revealed untoward reliance on *superstitio*. He and his own soldiers received favorable reports, as in Gaul, that highlighted their participation in and respect for the proper rituals. Caesar's striking introduction of clemency as a potential component of *religio* was a bold and ultimately successful attempt to broadcast his piety to the entire Republic. Likewise, his exposition of his just causes for war relied on ritual and *religio*, or at least his enemy's deficiency of the same. Throughout the Civil War, Caesar's use and manipulation of *religio* and *superstitio* before, during, and after combat typify his ability to exploit the flexibility of Roman religion, turning soldiers and omens to his cause. What he practiced in Gaul, he perfected in the Civil War, creating of religion an essential weapon that provided substantial military advantages. His genius and manipulative creativity no longer shock.

The principal surprise in the Civil War is that his behavior garnered so few legitimate accusations of irreligion from contemporaries as well as ancient historians. Caesar conducted four major campaigns against his own countrymen without stoking their religious ire. Each side exchanged tired cries against alleged temple robbery, yet the shared guilt effectively canceled out the right to claim moral superiority. Caesar founded his just cause on Pompeian violations of tribunes, yet he followed in their footsteps by threatening Metellus.²⁸⁹ However, beyond the shared charges of temple robbery and mistreatment of tribunes, Caesar's enemies laid no other reasonable religious transgression at his feet. It may gall modern readers to consider a civil war

²⁸⁹ App., *BCiv.*, 2.41; Luc., *BCiv.*, 5.270-1; Plut., *Caes.*, 35; Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 41.17.2; Dodge, *Caesar*, 433; Gelzer, *Caesar*, 209; Goldsworthy, *Caesar*, 396-7; Meier, *Caesar*, 380-1; Scullard, *From the Gracchi to Nero*, 115; Yavetz, *Julius Caesar and His Public Image*, 193.

to have been initiated honorably, but Caesar's contemporaries seem to concede that his conduct during the Civil War fell largely within the parameters of *religio*.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION: THE AVENGING IDES

During thirteen years of vigorous campaigning, Julius Caesar operated within the flexible system of Roman religion to seize military advantages. His adherence to proper ritual demonstrates that he embraced *religio* but utilized *superstitio* only sparingly, exemplifying Roman religiosity. Because Roman religion depended on ritual participation rather than faith, his personal beliefs have no bearing on the point of his religiosity despite being an entertaining and worthwhile line of scholarship. Many if not most modern historians tend to label Caesar a skeptic who endorsed religion only insofar as it produced a tangible benefit for him. Yet the label unwittingly and unnecessarily foists modern interpretations of faith and belief on a man who was expected to possess neither.²⁹⁰ The pragmatic nature of Caesar's *religio*, however much it violates the ethics of modern religions, does not detract from its legitimacy within the Roman system. To his contemporaries, indeed to Caesar himself, his motives and beliefs did not matter so long as he performed the rituals correctly, which he did almost without fail while on campaign.

For modern historians, labeling Caesar a skeptic also engenders interpretations critical of his behavior on the Ides of March. Judging Caesar according to the accepted paradigm, he is typically read as a skeptic who ignored the clear warning signs, dooming himself by his own irreverent disbelief. However, closer study of Caesar's *religio* as defined in his day reveals that the dictator followed religious protocol as closely on the Ides as he did during war. Because

²⁹⁰ Warrior, *Roman Religion*, xiv.

modern religions typically require some measure of belief, modern readers easily conclude that Caesar must be irreligious because he appears to exhibit disbelief. To eyes accustomed to assessing religiosity on the basis of belief, his lack of faith appears to be in opposition to religion. In the Western tradition, most readers observe Caesar from within the context of either a Judeo-Christian or a skeptical worldview, demanding belief that the Romans did not ask of him. Viewed in his proper context, Caesar exemplified Roman *religio* on the Ides of March by observing the proper rituals as he had done in each of his military campaigns – his belief does not enter into the equation and, when modern readers carelessly factor it in, the error can lead to inaccuracies.

The avenging Ides of March bring Caesar's adherence to *religio* into sharp relief. By all accounts, the dictator was supernaturally warned of danger *ad nauseam*, yet he still marched to his death. Caesar's detractors appear to enjoy recounting the many opportunities Caesar had to heed the gods and avert his demise, and they revel in the apparent fact that he cared so little for religious concerns that he doomed himself. In hindsight, as all our sources wrote, it is easy to read self-prophecy into Caesar's declaration at dinner that the best death possible would be sudden and unexpected.²⁹¹ Read in the context of Suetonius' psychoanalysis, one might conclude from such macabre dinner parties that Caesar had been meditating on his own death for some time and, growing weary of the pains of this world, even welcomed it.²⁹² Given that he died planning fresh campaigns, a plea of suicidal leanings is unwarranted.²⁹³ However, the

²⁹¹ App., *BCiv.*, 2.115; Plut., *Caes.*, 63.

²⁹² Suet., *Iul.*, 81.

²⁹³ App., *BCiv.*, 2.151.

sheer weight of the evidence does argue that, while not seeking it, Caesar saw his own death approaching.

On the night before he was assassinated, Caesar's wife Calpurnia dreamed that Caesar either died or was terribly wounded, and that the temple pediment in the house collapsed and shattered. Terrified by the dream, Calpurnia begged Caesar to remain home on the Ides to no avail.²⁹⁴ Suetonius and Dio Cassius also attribute a dream to Caesar, in which the dictator saw himself ascending to the heavens and shaking hands with Jupiter.²⁹⁵ Dreams, occupying the realm of *superstitio*, did not carry the same weight as recognized signs and omens. Consequently, Plutarch reports that Caesar grew worried because Calpurnia had never given into superstition before – the novelty of her fear caught his attention.²⁹⁶ That Caesar allegedly neglected the dreams has no bearing in a discussion of his *religio*. However, that Calpurnia's reaction gave him pause suggests that he was not immune to some measure of *superstitio*.

Likewise, Caesar's apparent neglect of the signs and omens that occurred during the night do not convince of the dictator's irreverence towards the gods or their messages. Doors and windows flying open of their own accord may have constituted legitimate omens, but as they had not been reported to the Senate, they remained superstition.²⁹⁷ The same goes for the smashed bust of the dictator and the cacophonous armament of Mars.²⁹⁸ It is tempting to read Caesar as so arrogant that he ignored the portents or gave no notice to the omens of death that

²⁹⁴ App., *BCiv.*, 2.115; Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 44.17.1-2; Plut., *Caes.*, 63; Suet., *Iul.*, 81; Vell. Pat., *Hist.*, 2.57; Kragelund, "Dreams, Religion and Politics in Republican Rome," 55.

²⁹⁵ Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 44.17.1-2; Suet., *Iul.*, 81.

²⁹⁶ Plut., *Caes.*, 63.

²⁹⁷ Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 44.17.2-3; Plut., *Caes.*, 63; Suet., *Iul.*, 81.

²⁹⁸ Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 44.18.3, 17.2-3.

surrounded him, but that is a simplistic reading.²⁹⁹ It might equally be argued that, as *pontifex maximus* and an augur himself, Caesar was ideally qualified to issue his own reading. Plutarch supports the concept of Caesar's superior interpretive prerogative, noting that a seer deferred to his judgment regarding the meteor at Pharsalus.³⁰⁰ His neglect might be more accurately seen as interpretation, especially given that Caesar does not appear to have been in the habit of ignoring omens.

Depicting the dictator as willfully ignorant of the omens, several accounts tell of repeated attempts to slip Caesar messages warning him of the impending attempt on his life. Taking together the accounts of Appian, Dio Cassius, Velleius Paterculus, Plutarch, and Suetonius, at least three people managed to get warning notes into his hand, but each message went fatally unread.³⁰¹ Plutarch and Appian build the tension by claiming that he died with a salvific note clutched in his hand. It is exceedingly rare to find broad consensus among the sources concerning a single anecdote, so it is likely that some manner of attempt to save him took place. However, the wrenching concept of the near-miss seems to be artistic license added to reinforce the notion that Caesar had put his head in the sand. In fact, Caesar's behavior on the Ides strengthens the argument that he remained a firm adherent to *religio* until the daggers struck.

Caesar's detractors also condemn him for paying no heed to the plethora of omens that permeated Rome before his death. Strange lights above the city, crashing sounds heard all over

²⁹⁹ App., *BCiv.*, 2.149, 152; Vell. Pat., *Hist.*, 2.57.

³⁰⁰ Plut., *Caes.*, 43.

³⁰¹ App., *BCiv.*, 2.116; Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 44.18.3; Plut., *Caes.*, 64-5; Suet., *Iul.*, 81; Vell. Pat., *Hist.*, 2.57.

Rome, an ethereal charge of incandescent soldiers, a slave's burning but unburnt hand – according to Plutarch, these universally acknowledged signs were supposed to have given ample warning.³⁰² The discovery of a bronze curse tablet in a distant colony, uncharacteristic equine mood swings, and the brutal evisceration of a laurel-bearing king wren – Suetonius argues that these portents were “unmistakable signs [that] forewarned Caesar.”³⁰³ Perhaps, as an augur, word of these omens did reach Caesar and, perhaps, he misinterpreted them. Yet, it would appear that his fellow augurs also failed to correctly apply their science. Dio Cassius claims that the removal of Caesar's golden throne from the Senate hall presaged the day's events, but it is difficult to posit how Caesar might have ascertained the chair's whereabouts prior to his arrival.³⁰⁴ Accounts that claim Caesar should have been aware of his danger retroactively apply prophetic significance to banal events that otherwise may have gone unremarked. They do not contribute anything beyond speculation to a discussion of Caesar's *religio* or *superstitio*.

That Caesar performed individual sacrifices the morning of his death is far more revealing. Plutarch and Appian report that the dictator offered multiple victims before attending to the Senate and that each victim produced unfavorable results.³⁰⁵ Dio Cassius explains that his morning sacrifices were expiatory in light of the disturbing omens the night before. Additionally, the historian claims that Caesar employed augury, and that the birds

³⁰² Plut., *Caes.*, 63.

³⁰³ Suet., *Iul.*, 81.

³⁰⁴ Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 44.17.3.

³⁰⁵ App., *BCiv.*, 2.115; Plut., *Caes.*, 63.

unequivocally forbid his leaving the house.³⁰⁶ That he persisted in meeting with the Senate despite the clear and personal signs strengthens arguments against his religiosity until Decimus Brutus enters the picture.

Caesar appears to have harbored genuine, and thoroughly religious, anxiety on the Ides before being persuaded to disregard his misgivings.³⁰⁷ Between the dreams, omens, sacrifices, and divinations, Caesar grew so worried that he sent Antony to cancel the Senate meeting. In repeating the ominous morning sacrifice, Caesar showed that he honored ritual and valued a favorable reading. Fearing the dictator might escape, the conspirators sent Caesar's close friend, Decimus Brutus, to fetch him. Mocking the prophets and Calpurnia's dream, Decimus Brutus warned Caesar that the Senate would not respond kindly to word that he had blown them off because of a womanly dream.³⁰⁸ Caving to pressure, Caesar went to his death. Yet, before Decimus Brutus belittled his scruples, Caesar heeded the warnings of ritual and demonstrated an acceptable Roman wariness of superstition.

Caesar's appropriate hesitation to accept *superstitio* appears again when faced by Spurinna, who delivered the most infamous of the Ides omens. The *haruspex* had previously warned Caesar to beware, for great danger approached on the Ides of March. As he neared the Senate hall, Caesar paused to mock Spurinna as a false prophet, noting that he remained unharmed, though the Ides had come. Unabashed, Spurinna responded with some variation of, "Ay, they've come, but they've not yet gone." Consensus among the major sources indicates

³⁰⁶ Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 44.17.3.

³⁰⁷ Wardle, "Caesar and Religion," 109.

³⁰⁸ App., *BCiv.*, 2.115-16; Dio Cass., *Hist.*, 44.18.1-2; Plut., *Caes.*, 63-4; Suet., *Iul.*, 81; Kragelund, "Dreams, Religion and Politics in Republican Rome," 55.

the tale carries some veracity. However, it may have been misunderstood. The *haruspices* were never part of the official state religion and its practitioners held no priestly office. Consulted by the Senate only in extremity, they squatted in the margins of Roman religion, skirting the line between *religio* and *superstitio*. Caesar outranked Spurinna as an augur and as *pontifex maximus* and was under no compulsion to abide by the *haruspex's* reading of the entrails. It is, of course, possible that Caesar derided all forms of divination and arrogantly disregarded the auspices. It is far more likely that Caesar exercised his priestly and augural prerogative in dismissing Spurinna's warning as irrational *superstitio*. Likewise, in dying, Caesar did not vindicate the *haruspex's* art; rather, he enshrined Spurinna as antiquity's greatest blind squirrel.

Observing religious custom, as we have come to expect, Caesar again sacrificed before entering the Senate hall. After the first victim was found to be either heartless or gutless, Caesar apparently laughed at the deadly portent, claiming to have heard the same before the Battle of Munda. The soothsayer told him that this omen was even more deadly, so Caesar ordered him to repeat the sacrifice. After several repetitions, Caesar allegedly grew irritated by the delay and, spurning the omens, went to his death.³⁰⁹ However, despite Appian's contention that Caesar merely made a concession to forthrightness in repeating the sacrifice, his behavior throughout the morning strongly argues that Caesar's respect for ritual was genuine. His decision to attend to the Senate, despite the omens, again falls to Decimus Brutus' account, who, as an "enemy in the guise of a friend" pressed him towards the impatient daggers.³¹⁰

Far from any battlefield, Caesar's conduct on the Ides of March mirrors the

³⁰⁹ App., *BCiv.*, 2.116, 153; Suet., *Iul.*, 81.

³¹⁰ App., *BCiv.*, 2.153.

characteristics he carried with him on campaign, suggesting that Caesar's military religiosity was representative of his typical behavior. He treated *superstitio* with due wariness, yet he performed the prescribed expiatory sacrifices. Far from being a foxhole prayer, expiatory sacrifice embodied the crux of Roman religion. Recognizing by the omens that his standing with the gods required attention, he sacrificed to restore himself to a right relationship with the gods. Greeted with inauspicious results, he repeated the sacrifice, again in keeping with standard Roman religious practice. Caesar ordered the sacrifices outside the Senate hall repeated as well, seeking a better result. His treatment of the *haruspex* Spurinna was appropriate given his own priestly office and demonstrated his proper skepticism of *superstitio*. His only questionable action on the Ides of March was his eventual capitulation to Decimus Brutus' demands. Even then, as high priest and augur, he was qualified to accept or reject the omens according to his interpretation. Despite the commonly held belief that a skeptical Caesar showed himself to be guilty of irreverence on the Ides, the evidence, in fact, vindicates his adherence to *religio*.

Seen in the context of his behavior during the Gallic and Civil Wars, Caesar's conduct on the Ides was not an isolated case; indeed, he exemplified *religio* throughout his military career. During the Gallic Wars and the Civil War Caesar honored the gods by observing every ritual expected of him. His use of *religio* and *superstitio* as a means to secure military advantages presents no contradictions. Because Roman religion relied on ritual as opposed to faith, the crucial point was his performance, not his ethics or motives. By utilizing religion and superstition to gain military advantages, he exploited religion in an acceptable manner. By calling his enemies to task for violating religious rituals, he demonstrated his full awareness of

the standard of *religio*. In his treatment of envoys and his respect of international norms, Caesar satisfied that standard. In his motivation of soldiers, he exceeded it, calling the men to honor the gods through action. In his victories, he allayed any accusation of waging war unjustly, proving divine cooperation through his unprecedented success.

Caesar's wartime conduct deserves reexamination from historians who chose to read the dictator as impious. By requiring faith, they force Caesar to be an unbeliever. However, his sustained combat record argues for a broader understanding of his *religio*, unbound by modern interpretations of religion. Viewed in the context of his own times, and with an understanding of *religio* as precise ritual participation, Caesar's military campaigns exonerate him of serious accusations of irreligion. Rather, they substantiate what Caesar confirmed on the Ides of March – here was a man deeply committed to the *religio* of his day.

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