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Gregory P. Stringer
Burlington (MA) High School

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Caesar and Labienus: A Reevaluation of Caesar's Most Important Relationship in *De Bello Gallico*

Gregory P. Stringer
Burlington (MA) High School



Titus Labienus served with distinction under Caesar for the entirety of the future dictator's 9 year governorship of Gaul. Labienus was indispensable to Caesar's success in Gaul. However, for reasons that can no longer be fully uncovered or understood, when civil war broke out between Caesar and Pompey in 49 BCE, Labienus sided with the latter against his former commander.¹ While scholars for more than a century have primarily focused on attempting to solve this intriguing question, Labienus can also serve as an interesting case study for approaching various questions about the work of literature that is, ultimately, our best source for knowledge of the man—Julius Caesar's so-called *De Bello Gallico*.²

For this study, I have chosen to largely ignore questions of Labienus' previous or subsequent political allegiance and, for the most part, other external ancient sources.

1 This has been the primary topic of interest about Labienus for scholars, receiving several dedicated studies in the first half of the 20th century, but relatively little interest lately. The most recent extended treatment of this topic remains Tyrrell (1972). Timeless and important is Syme (1938).

2 Although we do not know what Caesar actually called his works, most modern scholars are content to refer to this one by the designations *De Bello Gallico*, *Bellum Gallicum* or *Gallic Wars*. I have chosen to stick to either *De Bello Gallico* or *Gallic Wars*. On the topic of the traditional names of the works, see Kelsey (1905).

Instead, I focus primarily on what Caesar wrote in order to shed light on what was, ultimately, Caesar's most important military relationship in Gaul. In fact, the result of a close analysis of the phrasing, vocabulary and rhetoric used by Caesar when describing the actions of Titus Labienus, as well as what he included versus what he left out, has uncovered a relationship between the *imperator* and his chief lieutenant that was much more complex and variable than heretofore believed. By retracing the appearances of Labienus in the text of *De Bello Gallico* and the language Caesar uses both to address the man and describe his actions, a more accurate portrait of a volatile relationship emerges, one marked by cycles of estrangement and rapprochement, leading up to the final break in 49 BCE.

RHETORIC IN *DE BELLO GALLICO*

Any reading of Caesar's *Comentarii* must address some fundamental questions about composition and authorial intent. In recent decades, the identification and explication of the subtextual rhetoric of Caesar's seemingly direct prose has become one of the main preoccupations of *Commentarii* scholarship and has shown that Caesar's Latin is not so "plain" or "straightforward" as once believed.³ Therefore, before an analysis of the specific episodes involving Labienus, we will look at some of the main questions of the text in which consensus has, and has not, been reached.

Perhaps the most notable, and now universally recognized potentially insidious aspect of both the *Gallic War* and the *Civil War* is the author's consistent use of the third person. Caesar seemingly adopted the practice from Xenophon's *Anabasis* with the purpose of, in the words of Kenney, "giv[ing] an air of objectivity to what is a personal, autobiographical account."⁴ However, Conte has seen the same feature rather as a tactic of "emotional detachment."⁵ It may, indeed, be both. As this relates to Labienus, as will be seen, the third person narrator allows Caesar the author to put some interesting commentary about Caesar the commander in the mouth of his

3 E.g. see the comments of Gardner: "the *Gallic Wars* is perhaps not altogether a straightforward account of events." (1983a, p. 25).

4 Kenney (1983, p. 283).

5 Conte (2004, p. 227). It is also interesting to note that the use of the third person led some earlier readers to believe that the texts had been written by Suetonius, not Caesar. Likewise, evidently because it is such a well known feature of the work, neither the editor of the Loeb nor the Penguin edition felt the third person narration even worthy of comment.

lieutenant.⁶

Rhetoric in Caesar, however, goes far beyond the choice of narrator. In a 1956 paper Siedler identified no less than sixteen different rhetorical devices at play in Caesar's writings, including multiple and striking instances of alliteration, assonance, verbal symmetry, anaphora, asyndeton, and dramatic ellipsis, among others.⁷ This was followed by Rasmussen's important if flawed 1963 study, *Caesars comentarii - Stil und Stilwandel am Beispiel der direkten Rede*, which focused on the use of rhetoric in the *oratio recta* of Caesar's works.⁸ While Rasmussen succeeded in demonstrating that direct speeches were not later interpolations into the text, his attempt to use this discovery to prove synchronous composition falls flat.

A landmark in the study of rhetoric in Caesar was Rambaud's *L'Art de la Déformation Historique*.⁹ As the title implies, Rambaud operates under the assumption that Caesar's works are entirely and intentionally distorted. Rambaud therefore interprets Caesar's every word about Labienus as an attempt to belittle or undermine his lieutenant's achievements so as not to interfere with the aggrandizement of his own deeds. Shortly after that followed Tyrrell's doctoral thesis, which collected all known relevant information about Labienus.¹⁰ Unlike Rambaud, Tyrrell was reluctant to read into what is written in *De Bello Gallico* and generally reported whatever Caesar had written without scrutiny.

In the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, the study of Caesar largely turned to the deconstruction of various themes in his work. In a 1977 article, Murphy illustrated several textual themes he had detected through each of the books of the *De Bello Gallico* via the striking repetition of key vocabulary, such as "*persuasio*" and "*timor*" in Book I, "*perturbatio*" in Book IV or "*celeritas*" in Book VI.¹¹ In her introduction to the reprinted Penguin edition of *The Conquest of Gaul* [i.e. *De Bello Gallico*], Gardner introduced the thematic concepts of the "German menace" and "Gallic menace."¹² Gardner expanded on these ideas in a 1983 follow-up paper in which she argued that the central, guiding principle of the *De Bello Gallico* was, through a portrayal of

6 On Labienus' speech and its rhetorical significance, see below.

7 Siedler (1956).

8 Rasmussen (1963).

9 Rambaud (1966).

10 Tyrrell (1970).

11 Murphy (1977, pp. 235, 238, and 240).

12 Gardner, (1983a, pp. 25-26).

Caesar's actions in Gaul in the light of reasonable reaction to foreign provocation, to provide Caesar with the political justification he needed to escape prosecution and secure his second consulship.¹³ In a 1998 study of Caesar's lieutenants, Welch attempted to balance earlier approaches to rhetoric in Caesar. While she did not refute the possibility of distortion, Welch believes that Caesar generally gave credit where credit was due, including to Labienus.¹⁴

In the succeeding years ever more detailed studies of Caesar's language and themes have followed, examining the author's use of specific words and constructions or the import of particular episodes. In this vein, Batstone's linguistic study of the use of *etsi*, which he called a "subtle and effective piece of rhetoric," leaned support to Gardner's notion of the *Gallic War* as a work of political justification.¹⁵ More recently, scholars have become increasingly creative (and increasingly tendentious) in their attempts to better understand Caesar via linguist theory, such as Erickson's unconvincing 2002 study of the sea battle with the Veneti via the lens of gendered language or Brown's unpersuasive 2004 exploration of Caesar's "superhuman ego" through a detailed analysis of the so-called "centurions contest" at *De Bello Gallico* Book V.44.¹⁶

A central and seemingly irresolvable issue lay at the center of many of these studies—the dates of composition and publication of the two works.¹⁷ While the dates for the *De Bello Civili* are, for obvious reasons, less in doubt and more circumscribed, those of the *De Bello Gallico* remain an open question, often leading to circular arguments.¹⁸ Some have proposed that internal contradictions and an evolution from "bare, unadorned style of the *commentarius*" towards one "that increasingly allows the typical ornaments of *historia*" supports the notion of annalistic composition at the end of each campaigning season, while others have used essentially the same evidence to assert that it was composed altogether in the winter of

13 Gardner (1983b).

14 Welch cites Holmes' assertion "Caesar gave all his lieutenants, and especially Labienus, full credit for their exploits" (1911, p. 230) but rightfully questions how we can know how much or how little credit he gave or how much they deserved (1998, p. 100).

15 Batstone (1990, pp. 348-360). See nn. 18-19 below.

16 Erickson (2002). Brown (2004).

17 Conte (2004, p. 227).

18 Many of them, including several of the studies cited above, reading essentially like this: "if we imagine that *Bellum Gallicum* was written/published in 52/51, then we can read in them Caesar's self-justification to avoid prosecution and campaigning for the consulship, which thereby proves they were written in 52/51."

52/51 BCE, though perhaps from field notes gathered year by year.¹⁹ In the absence of further external evidence, scholars are left to hypothesize about the date and nature of the composition and publication based on close readings of the texts themselves.

So while the dates of composition remain controversial, there is now an almost universal consensus that the *Commentaries* contain, as Grant puts it, “a good deal of distortion, not so much of the actual historical facts...but of motives, impressions and implications.”²⁰ For example, it is difficult not to read Caesar’s preemptive strike against the Helvetii in Book I of the *De Bello Gallico* as largely the result of provocative actions on the part of the Roman proconsul, recast in his *Commentary* as defensive measures.²¹ Likewise, Book IV sections 20–38 give the strong impression of special pleading written *ex post facto* to explain both the motive for his aggressive first expedition to Britain and the reasons for its relative lack of success.²² However, justification is always useful and therefore one need not necessarily read either of these episodes as anticipatory defenses against potential accusations, as Gardner and others have claimed.

Regardless, even if inclined to a more literal reading of the texts, one should certainly be aware of the fact that, as one of the day’s leading speakers and a man of literary tastes, oratorical and literary rhetoric unquestionably informed Caesar’s themes, grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. For example, Nordling, Grillo, and others have amply demonstrated that one need not adhere to some of the more extreme positions, such as Rambaud’s, to recognize that the *Commentaries*, and especially the speeches imbedded within, are rich with rhetoric.²³ As an important and successful politician, Caesar’s need for justification, for specific political goals or otherwise,

19 The comments are those of Conte who falls firmly in the first camp (2004, p. 227). He continues, “The interpretation is unquestionably a forced one that regards the latter [BG] as written and published for the purpose of supporting Caesar’s candidacy for his second consulship,” (2004, p. 229) in opposition to the opinions of Gardner (1983a, p. 24; 1983b, pp. 188–189) and Rasmussen (1963).

20 Grant (1977, pp. 216–217).

21 For example, the forced march to the frontier, the requisitioning of troops throughout Provence, and the destruction of the bridge at Geneva (*DBG* I.7).

22 Justification for aggression: *quod omnibus fere Gallicis bellis hostibus nostris inde sumministrata auxilia intellegebat*, and explaining the relative lack of success: *exigua parte aetatis reliqua Caesar, etsi in his locis ... tamen in Britanniam proficisci contendit... et, si tempus anni ad bellum gerendum deficeret, tamen magno sibi usui fore arbitrabatur, si modo insulam adisset et genus hominum perspexisset, loca, protus, aditus cognovisset*. See also the aforementioned article by Batstone about the rhetorical nature of *etsi* and *tamen* constructions in Caesar (1990, *passim*).

23 Nordling (1991); Grillo (2012).

undoubtedly colored his writing. However, since there remains uncertainty as to when and how the *Commentarii* were composed and published, it would be unwise to give oneself over too easily to programmatic and dogmatic statements as to why they were published.

Therefore, although I am thoroughly indebted to the contributions of all of these scholars (and many others) for insight on how to read Caesar's *Commentarii* intelligently, upon close study of all of the passages which refer to Labienus in *De Bello Gallico*, I have found the few specific analyses of the relationship between Caesar and Labienus to be incomplete. For example, Tyrrell's preoccupation with Labienus' later career with Pompey, Rambaud's unwavering commitment to reading everything Caesar wrote in the most negative light possible, and Welch's attempt to generalize about Caesar's relationships with his subordinates has led to an imperfect understanding of Labienus as he is presented in *De Bello Gallico*. In fact, scholars seem to operate under a notion that the relationship between the two men during Caesar's proconsulship was essentially static.²⁴ Rather, a close reading of the text suggests quite the opposite — a dynamic and changing interaction with noticeable variations in what Caesar asked of his lieutenant and even how he asked.

LABIENUS IN THE SOURCES, ANCIENT AND MODERN

As stated above, most of what we know about Titus Labienus has been collected by Tyrrell.²⁵ The most salient facts for our purposes are that he was likely born about 99 BCE, making him nearly an exact contemporary of Caesar and, having probably reached the praetorship in 60 or 59 BCE, he would have held *imperium pro-praetore* while in Gaul with Caesar and probably entertained reasonable hopes of one day achieving the consulship.²⁶

24 In the secondary literature I reviewed, I uncovered no references to difficulties between the two men prior to Labienus' departure. The statement of Welch is indicative: "We cannot assume from these narratives that Caesar had any inkling of Labienus' future disaffection. The chief legate continued to be trusted until the very end. Caesar is consciously demonstrating to his Roman audience the amount of cooperation and loyalty which existed among the high command in Gaul." (1998, pp. 99-100)

25 Tyrrell (1972).

26 Tyrrell (1970, p. 425). There remains some question about Labienus' praetorship. Since Caesar only refers to Labienus with this title, I am prepared to accept the conjecture of others that Labienus had held one of the at least 8 unknown praetorships of either 61, 60, or 59 BC; for comparison, Caesar had been praetor in 62, meaning that if Caesar was indeed born in 100 and Labienus in 99, then Labienus had in

The most extensive information about Labienus comes from what Caesar wrote about him, both in *De Bello Gallico* and in *De Bello Civile*. However, the manner in which Caesar describes the man and his actions naturally differs markedly between the two works, since the second was composed after Labienus' departure to Pompey in 49 BCE.²⁷ Although all of Caesar's lieutenants are confined to a pronounced secondary role, as we will see, Labienus is the only person apart from Caesar to appear in every book of the *Commentarii* and he is the Roman (other than Caesar) whose name appears most frequently. He is also the only one of Caesar's officers who is given a further description beyond *legatus* (he is specifically designated *legatus pro praetore*) and the only one who is ever directly assigned a subordinate officer.²⁸ Furthermore, Caesar addresses Labienus, directly and indirectly, in ways reserved only for him and entrusts him with unique commands.²⁹ The text of *De Bello Gallico* makes clear that Labienus was an important figure in (and even outside of) Caesar's camp.

As to Labienus' time in Gaul from sources other than Caesar, Labienus appears occasionally in the letters of Cicero, although almost entirely after his break from Caesar, in Plutarch's biographies of Caesar and Pompey, and in the historians of Imperial times who, by and large, did little more than retrace the steps of Caesar.³⁰ Cicero makes frequent reference to Labienus' abilities, but unfortunately adds no new details to his service record in Gaul. Writing much later, Plutarch calls Labienus "one of Caesar's greatest friends" and, along with Appian, gives him a greater share of the credit for the victories over the Helvetii and the Germans in Book I than Caesar does.³¹ Finally, the later historians Dio, Orosius, and Frontinus add nothing that had not already appeared in Caesar, whereas Florus at one point inexplicably confuses

fact been following a similar career trajectory as Caesar. On Labienus' hopes for the consulship, see the extended discussion in Syme where he treats the issue with his customary confidence in the authority of his own assumptions (1938, pp. 113-125, especially pp. 121-123).

27 For a discussion of Labienus in *De Bello Civile*, see Tyrrell (1970, pp. 424-440).

28 Labienus is so designated at *DBG* I.21 and assigned a subordinate, Marcus Sempronius Rutilus, at *DBG* VII.90.

29 See below.

30 See, for example, Cicero *Att.* 7.13a.1 and *Fam.* 16.12.4; Suetonius, *Divus Iulius*.

31 On "greatest friend," see Plutarch, *Caesar* 33. On Labienus' share of the victories, see Plutarch, *Caesar* 18; Appian, *Gall.* 1.8. Tyrrell also rightly points out that Caesar in 58 BC is not the Caesar of later campaigns - his army and his officers were new to him and relatively untested so this may account for some of Caesar's reliance of Labienus in Book I (1970, p.18).

Labienuis with Dolabella.³²

As Tyrrell records, modern historical opinion of Labienus has generally been negative.³³ Mommsen's scathing criticism of the man, largely centered on his decision to support Pompey over Caesar in the civil war, set a precedent which has never been fully overturned.³⁴ Syme was more measured, arguing that Labienus was most likely returning to an allegiance with Pompey that predated his friendship with Caesar, whereas Tyrrell preferred to interpret that Labienus, although somewhat embittered by slighted ambition, merely "joined the legitimate government in its struggle against a revolutionary proconsul who placed his own *dignitas* above his country."³⁵ Welch declined to comment on Labienus' motives, although she did note that "it is probable that Caesar felt his generosity as an author as well as his patronage as a general had been betrayed dreadfully when Labienus deserted him for Pompey in 49."³⁶ It would seem that this estimation, of disenchantment resulting from ambition stunted by Caesar, still prevails today.³⁷

LABIENUS IN *DE BELLO GALLICO*

So leaving aside his posterior decision to fight with Pompey, who is Titus Labienus in the pages of *De Bello Gallico*? First, as stated above, he is clearly distinguished from any of Julius Caesar's other subordinates in terms of the number of references and the amount of text dedicated to him. Second, Labienus' commands are unique for their size, type, and importance. And finally, he is differentiated by the actual words and phrases which Caesar uses to describe him. We will look at each of these three elements in turn.

Labienuis is, after the *imperator* himself, the Roman who appears most frequently in the seven books of *De Bello Gallico* ascribed to Julius Caesar, referenced by

32 Florus I.45.

33 Tyrrell (1972, p. 439). Holmes stands somewhat apart - among many other laudatory statements he concludes that "the genius of Labienus has not been adequately appreciated" (1911, p. 161). However, he also felt that Caesar had recognized his services: "but it needs little insight to see that Caesar placed him in a class by himself" and that, nevertheless, "Caesar's was the directing mind." (1911, pp. 161-162).

34 Mommsen (1958, p. 392).

35 Syme (1938, pp. 113-125); Tyrrell (1972, p. 439).

36 Welch (1998, pp. 100-101).

37 See, for example, Goldsworthy (2006, p. 383).

name a full 51 times, on 45 distinct occasions, and referred to obliquely in a handful of other places.³⁸ These references are somewhat unevenly distributed, as Labienus appears seven times in Book I, but then virtually disappears until Books V, VI, and VII, in which he is named 15, 9, and 14 times, respectively. Despite being less prominent in Books II, III, and IV, he nevertheless remains the only legate mentioned in all seven books. For comparison, the next most frequently named *legati* are Quintus Tullius Cicero and Quintus Titurius Sabinus, who appear about half as much, on 23 and 20 occasions respectively. Cicero only appears from Book V on and Sabinus is absent from Book I and killed in dramatic fashion in Book V.³⁹ Moreover, the vast majority of the references to Cicero (20 of 23) occur in Book V, scene of his dramatic hold-out and eventual rescue by Caesar and all but two of the mentions of Sabinus occur during his two prolonged adventures in Books III and V.

Caesar further distinguishes Labienus in *De Bello Gallico* by the commands with which he was entrusted, in terms of their nature, size, and importance. Whereas, at least from what Caesar shares with us, rarely are the other *legati* given anything more than the responsibility of a single legion's winter camp, Labienus was on several occasions put at the head of multiple legions, such as when he commands the united winter camp of all the legions after the first season's campaigns in Book I or when Caesar has him lead four legions against the Parisii and Senones in Book VII.⁴⁰ Likewise, Labienus is one of only a few soldiers sent on independent missions and is the only legate which Caesar ever specifically instructs to "make plans as he sees fit."⁴¹ Finally, the importance of Labienus' commissions is generally of the highest order, although this does seem to vary over the course of the war, as will be discussed below.

As noted previously, while Labienus is the most consistently appearing actor in the *Gallic Wars* other than Caesar, he nevertheless nearly disappears for long stretch-

38 Labienus is referenced by name at *DBG* Book I.10, 21, 22, 54; II.1, 11, 26; III.11; IV.38; V.8, 11, 23, 24, 27, 37, 46, 47, 48, 53, 56, 57, 58; VI.5, 6, 7, 8, 33; VII.34, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 86, 87, 90.

39 Cicero first appears at V.24 and Sabinus dies at V.53.

40 In charge of the winter camp, I.54; against the Parisii and Senones, VII.34. While Dio (41.4.3) obviously over-generalizing from Book I that Labienus always was in command of all the legions when Caesar was gone at the end of the campaigning season, Caesar explicitly tells us otherwise at the end of each book. Tyrrell suggests that Caesar did not repeat this experiment after the first year for fear of the familiarity and affection it would have perhaps allowed between Labienus and Caesar's legions (1970, pp. 22-23).

41 Labienus is instructed to *consiliumque pro tempore et pro re caperet* at V.8.

es of the work. For example, after his aforementioned important contributions in Book I, Labienus is almost wholly absent from Books II, III, and IV, despite, according to Tyrrell and others, having made important contributions to the war with Belgae (the subject of Book II) and the overall heightened presence of Caesar's legates in Book III, as illustrated by Welch.⁴² At the opening of Book III Caesar sends (*mittit*) Labienus to the Rhine with only some cavalry in order that he prevent (*prohibeat*) the Germans from crossing.⁴³ Tyrrell suspected, and I agree, that this assignment hints at a demotion, as these types of assignments were typically reserved for the youngest officers.⁴⁴ Although we do not know how serious the German threat at that moment really was, it is difficult to see how Labienus, with only a small detachment of cavalry, could have truly kept them in check if they indeed attempted to cross in force.⁴⁵ Caesar did not record the result, so we can only imagine that Labienus was successful in preventing a German incursion. If so, perhaps it was because the threat never actually materialized or had not really existed in the first place.

After being sent to the Rhine at the beginning of Book III, Labienus again goes missing from the text until the final paragraph of Book IV when he is once again entrusted with multiple legions to subdue the Morini.⁴⁶ If there had been a falling out between Caesar and his lieutenant, it evidently had been resolved by this time. Caesar reports that Labienus was successful, but he does so with a *caveat* of the type that Rambaud feels is indicative of Caesar's belittling of his subordinates and, in this particular case, explaining away his own failure to conquer the same people in the preceding year's campaign: "The enemy had no place of retreat, by reason of the dryness of the marshes, their refuge in the previous year."⁴⁷ Or, in other words, yes, Labienus won, but so would have Caesar, had it not been for the weather.

42 Welch (1998, pp. 91-94).

43 *DBG* III.11.

44 Tyrrell (1970, pp. 21-22). Cf. *DBG* I.52 in which Publius Crassus is sent with a detachment of cavalry and he is explicitly described by Caesar as *adulescens*: *Id cum animadvertisset P. Crassus adulescens, qui equitatu praerat, quod expeditior erat quam ii qui inter aciem versabantur, tertiam aciem laborantibus nostris subsidio misit*. Publius Crassus was born somewhere between 86-82 BCE, making him between 23 and 28 at that time. Labienus, on the other hand would have about 41 or 42 years old, or consular age, and had almost certainly held the praetorship.

45 Tyrrell (1970, pp. 21-22).

46 *DBG* IV.38.

47 *DBG* IV.38. Rambaud (1966, p. 297). Tyrrell (1970, p. 29) disagrees.

The relationship still shows evidence of strain at the opening of Book V. Although Caesar once again decides not to take Labienus with him to Britain, which in and of itself is perhaps noteworthy, he does leave an important commission for his marshal—to defend the ports and acquire grain for the armies.⁴⁸ It is also significant that Caesar entrusts Labienus to “make plans as suiting the moment and the situation,” a phrase that Caesar does not use elsewhere for any other legate and is perhaps indicative of a greater level of trust in Labienus’ independent military judgement.⁴⁹ Furthermore, when Caesar needs ships to return to the continent he “writes to Labienus” (*Labienu scribit*) that he build as many ships as he can.⁵⁰ There are only two other occasions on which Caesar uses the verb *scribere* in reference to his communication with one of his legates, instead of the his more usual *iubere* or *mittere* - to Labienus, as will be discussed below, and to Quintus Cicero, where Caesar is not giving orders to his legate, but is instead encouraging him to maintain his valor until help arrives.⁵¹ It is significant that Caesar reserves this more polite tone of conveying his wishes only for Labienus.⁵²

Caesar was disappointed in his rediscovered trust in Labienus. Most of the requested fleet never arrived and Caesar does not hide his displeasure upon not receiving the ships: “for which Caesar waited in vain for quite some time.”⁵³ The words *aliquamdiu* and *frustra* carry a distinct negative thrust. This is followed immediately by the re-division of winter assignments and whereas previously Caesar has always listed Labienus’ assignment first; here he is fourth, after Fabius, Cicero, and Roscius, and he is only given one legion to command.⁵⁴ It is hard to imagine that these slights

48 DBG V.8.

49 Ibid. *consiliumque pro tempore et pro re caperet.*

50 DBG V.11: *Labienu scribit, ut quam plurimas posset eis legionibus, quae sunt apud eum, naves instituat.*

51 DBG V.48: *In litteris scribit se cum legionibus profectum celeiter adfore; hortatur ut pristinam virtutem retineat.*

52 Caesar most commonly refers his orders to his legates via the verb “*iubere*”: thrice to Labienus (II.11, VI.33, VII.90), thrice to Publius Crassus (III.9, III.11, V.46) and once each to Sabinus (II.5), Decimus Brutus (III.11), Publicus Sulpicius Rufus (IV.22), and Lucius Plancus (V.25) and once in reference to all his gathered legates (V.24). In contrast, although he often refers to himself as *imperator*, the verb the verb “*imperare*” is almost exclusively used for the Gauls, hostages, or Gallic towns, or occasionally the Roman troops *en masse*. In fact, Caesar never uses it toward Labienus but does use it twice to named Roman subordinates (Crassus at III.26 and Gaius Fabius at V.47).

53 DBG V.23: *Quas cum aliquamdiu Caesar frustra expectasset.*

54 DBG V.24.

are incidental.

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that Labienus was Caesar's best general and Caesar often relied on his abilities. The later events of Book V bring this into stark relief and Labienus returns spectacularly to prominence after the long tale of Sabinus' demise. That said, although Caesar undoubtedly highlights some of Labienus' achievements here, the narrative is not without internal tension. As he begins to make plans to relieve Quintus Cicero's besieged camp, Caesar "writes" to Labienus that he come "if he could do so in a way that was of advantage to the state."⁵⁵ This is the same phrase that Caesar reports that the Senate had used in their request to him in Book I and that Caesar himself will use again when encouraging (*hortatur*) Labienus and Trebonius to return to him to make new plans in Book VI.⁵⁶ Labienus writes back that he is unable to return safely, one of only two occasions on which a legate disobeys Caesar's orders and the only occasion on which it did not result in disaster.⁵⁷ In hindsight, the qualifying phrase of "only if . . . it was of advantage to the state" Caesar attaches to his command may be some Monday morning quarterbacking, either to cover for an error in Caesar's judgement or at least to make Labienus' direct refusal of Caesar's orders less obvious.

Caesar essentially confirms this in the following paragraph which he begins with the words "Caesar approved of his plan," but he is then quick to point out that it is the news of his own victory which forces the Treveri to retreat and makes it safe for Labienus to move again.⁵⁸ This in particular seems to be an obvious interpretative interjection by Caesar, as it is utterly unclear how Caesar the man (as opposed to Caesar the omniscient narrator) could have possibly known of Indutiomarus' aborted plans to attack Labienus' camp on the following day (if indeed he had such a plan) or that news of Caesar's victory forced him to retreat, especially since the chieftain was killed in battle, presumably taking any battle plans and motivations with him to

55 DBG V.46: *Scribit Labieno, si rei publicae commodo facere posset, cum legion ad fines Nerviorum veniat.*

56 Senate to Caesar, I.35: *si non impetraret, sese, quoniam M. Messala, M. Pisone consulibus senatus censuisset uti quicumque Galliam provinciam obtineret, quod commodo rei publicae facere posset, Haeduos ceterosque amicos populi Romani defenderet, se Haeduum iniurias non neglecturum.* Caesar to Labienus and Trebonius, VI.33: *Labienum Treboniumque hortatur, si rei publicae commodo facere possint, ad eum diem revertantur, ut rursus communicato consilio exploatisque hostium rationibus aliud initium belli capere possint.*

57 DBG V.47. Cf. the results of Sabinus' disobedience in Book V.

58 Caesar approves: *consilio eius probato* . . . (DBG V.48). Caesar's victory occupies the next 4 chapters (DBG V.48-52) and news of it reaches Labienus at V.53.

the grave.⁵⁹

Be that as it may, it is worth noting that Labienus again displays a freedom of will denied to Caesar's other legates when, of his own auspices, he requisitioned more cavalry and launched a successful counter-strike. It is here that Caesar injects the infamous phrase "fortune supported the man's [Labienus'] plan" (*comprobat hominis consilium fortuna*) which Rambaud saw as particularly derisive.⁶⁰ We are not obligated to read it as such; Caesar, like Sulla Felix before him, recognized the importance of good luck.⁶¹ Welch argues that that particular phrase is nothing more than a commonplace of Caesarian commentaries, but conjectures that Caesar was nevertheless equally able to diminish the impact of Labienus' victory by splitting the account of it over two books.⁶²

Perhaps more indicative is how Caesar chose to end Book V: "And after this was done, Caesar found Gaul a little bit quieter," (*pauloque habuit post id factum Caesar quietiorem Galliam*).⁶³ Therefore, directly after the lengthy account of Labienus' successes, the last three words in readers' eyes or listeners' ears would have been "*Caesar quietiorem Galliam*." This cannot be accidental and the choice of a sentence, with Caesar as the subject and with this specific word order, seem intended to confound as to who is the doer of these deeds and nevertheless to remind all as to who is ultimately the subject and the star of these commentaries.

As Welch had already pointed out, at the beginning of Book VI Caesar picks up what is in fact the second part of Labienus' same campaign in 53 BC.⁶⁴ Labienus is still apparently acting largely of his own initiative, but Caesar halts the account to insert a speech in direct discourse (*oratio recta*), one of only two given to a legate and the only one that is positive in tone and outcome.⁶⁵ It is in this oration that Cae-

59 DBG V.58.

60 DBG V.57. Rambaud (1966, p. 298).

61 See the discussion of *fortuna* in Grant where he cites Lucan, *Pharsalia* I.148-149 and *De Bello Africano* 10 (1974, p. 18). Similarly, Cicero discusses the importance of *felicitas* to a good commander at *Leg. Man.* 47-48.

62 Welch (1998, pp. 98-99).

63 DBG V.58.

64 Welch (1998, pp. 98-99).

65 The other speech in the mouth of legate is that of Sabinus at V.30 and can hardly be considered flattering. In it, Sabinus' pouts and attempts to deflect blame for the coming defeat and slaughter onto his associate Lucius Aurunculeius Cotta. Caesar, not surprisingly, is nowhere to be seen in this speech. For more on speeches in Caesar, see Dalström (2015).

sar puts into Labienus' mouth a reminder that they are fighting for Caesar: "display under our command the same valor that you have often displayed in the presence of the *imperator*."⁶⁶ As others have discussed, whether or not Labienus ever said words to this effect is unlikely and unknowable, yet the presence of almost the exact same exhortation by Labienus in indirect discourse (*oratio obliqua*) later in Book VII certainly makes it suspect.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, by the presence of this speech, Labienus clearly had been restored to a leading place among Caesar's legates. The next time Caesar addresses him, he is again in command of multiple legions and Caesar exhorts (*hortatur*) him, along with Trebonius, also sent with three legions, to return in seven days so that they can formulate upcoming strategy. This command is again qualified by the statement *si rei publicae commodo facere possint*.⁶⁸

Toward the end of the campaigns in Gaul, Caesar occasionally placed his newest legate, Gaius Trebonius, on seemingly equal footing with Labienus.⁶⁹ Yet it is worth noting some subtle differences in the commands they received. Trebonius did in fact twice receive command of three legions, at V.17 to gather food for the legions, and at VI.33 to ravage the lands of the already defeated Atuatuca.⁷⁰ However, only Labienus ever gets more than three legions, and the magnitude of his missions - independent attacks against the Menapii (VI.33) and the upcoming decisive campaign against the Parisii (VII.34, 57) - clearly distinguishes these commands from those of Trebonius. Finally, on both of the occasions in which Trebonius had command of three legions, Labienus was also in command of three or more legions. Therefore, although Trebonius clearly received Caesar's favor in the later years of the Gallic campaigns, he never quite eclipsed Labienus' importance in the camp.

In fact, when Labienus returns midway through Book VII, Caesar sends him against the Senones and the Parisii with four legions plus cavalry, the biggest single force ever entrusted to a subordinate in the *De Bello Gallico*.⁷¹ Caesar's praise of La-

66 DBG VI.8: *praestate eandem nobis ducibus virtutem, quam saepe numero imperatori praestitistis, atque illum adesse et haec coram cernere existimate.*

67 Cf. DBG VII.62: *Labienus milites cohortatus ut suae pristinae virtutis et secundissimorum proeliorum memoriam atque ipsum Caesarem, cuius ductu saepe numero hostes superassent, praesentem adesse existimarent.*

68 DBG VI.33.

69 Trebonius joined Caesar in Gaul in 54 BCE, following his loyal service to the triumvirs during his tribunate of 55.

70 Caesar had already crushed the Atuatuca at their fort in Belgium in 57 BCE (DBG II.33).

71 DBG VII.34. Other legates had been given command of three legions on other occasions. Gaius

bienus actions at Lutetia seems authentic, although he seems to undercut some of the lieutenant's victory, once again inserting himself into the narrative via a speech attributed to Labienus.⁷² On this occasion it is delivered in indirect discourse and although the phrasing has changed slightly, the words and meaning are nearly identical: "And remember Caesar himself, in whose presence you have often conquered enemies and imagine that he is present."⁷³ Following the speech Labienus fades to the background of Caesar's prose and it is the troops and the lesser tribunes who carry out all the actions and receive all the credit win the day: "when the tribunes of the Seventh Legion were told what was afoot on the left wing, they brought out their legion in the rear of the enemy and attacked."⁷⁴

The final two acts of Labienus in Caesar's portion of the *Gallic Wars* confirm his high standing which in turn has led to the endless speculation as to why he would have broken with Caesar in 49. However, Caesar's reporting of these events exhibits his same tendency to steal the scene. At the final battle at Alesia, Labienus intervenes at a crucial moment and even offers tactical advice to Caesar, something unparalleled in all of the *De Bello Gallico*, but Caesar immediately whisks the audience back to himself who "speeds on so that he can be in the battle."⁷⁵ If that was not enough, Caesar punctuates the change of focus in dramatic fashion in very next line: "his [Caesar's] arrival was known from the color of his cloak, which he was accustomed

Trebonius received command of three legions twice: to gather food for the legions (V.17) and to ravage the lands (VI.33) of the already defeated (*DBG* II.33) Autatuci. Only Labienus ever gets more than three, and the magnitude of his missions - independent attacks against the Menapii (VI.33) and the Parisii (VII.34, 57) - clearly distinguishes these commands from those of Trebonius. Furthermore, on both occasions on which Trebonius has command of three legions, so does Labienus.

72 *DBG* VII.62.

73 *Ibid.* The preceding phrase *ut suae pristinae virtutis ... retinerent memoriam* also echoes Caesar's own words to his troops *uti suae pristinae virtutis memoriam retinerent* at II.21, and Caesar's earlier exhortation in a letter to Cicero *ut pristinam virtutem retineat* at V.48 (without an explicit mention of Caesar, perhaps since he is quoting from his own purported letter), and Labienus' own words *praestate eandem nobis ducibus virtutem* at *DBG* VI.8. See above, n. 45. Furthermore, the phrase is attested in Sallust, *Cataline* 58 (*memores pristinae vitutis*), so we can imagine that it might have been something of a commonplace at the time.

74 *DBG* VII.62: *cum septimae legionis tribunis esset nuntiatum quae in sinistro cornu gererentur, post tergum hostium legionem ostenderunt signaque intulerunt.*

75 *DBG* VII.87: *Labienus, postquam neque aggeres neque fossae vim hostium sustinere poterant, coactis una XL cohortibus, quas ex proximis praesidis deductas fors obtulit, Caesarem per nuntios facit certioremq[ue] faciendum existimet. Accelerat Caesar, ut proelio intersit.*

to use in battles as an insignia.⁷⁶ The narrative is all Caesar, his common soldiers, and the Gauls from then on out.

Labienus appears one final time before the close of Book VII when he is ordered to the territory of the Sequani for the winter.⁷⁷ He is again the first legate named and he even has a subordinate assigned—another unprecedented honor.⁷⁸ Therefore, at the end of the Caesarian portion of *De Bello Gallico*, Labienus is back where he began, first among equals of the always secondary Caesarian legates.

As an epilogue, when Hirtius picks up the story of the following year in Book VIII, things have changed dramatically. Mark Antony is now the first legate named and Labienus is actually asked to send back one of his two legions.⁷⁹ It is unclear how much of this is merely a shift in emphasis due to hindsight, since Hirtius wrote this appendix long after the events he recounts and certainly after Labienus had joined Pompey.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, scholars have traditionally accepted the general truth of what Hirtius recorded regarding the movement of Caesar's armies in Gaul and therefore, even if Caesar did eventually put Labienus in charge of the province, ordering the return of a legion seems to represent yet another dip in the constantly fluctuating relationship of the commander and his most able and successful lieutenant.⁸¹

In conclusion, although most scholarship on Labienus has focused on the intriguing question of why he left Caesar after such a successful career with him, these arguments have traditionally been based largely on the other contemporary or posterior documents such as the letters of Cicero or successive histories. It now seems clear that Labienus' departure from Caesar cannot simply be due to pre-existing allegiances to Pompey as Syme argued.⁸² Instead, a re-evaluation of their time together as revealed in the pages of *De Bello Gallico* exposes a relationship that was

76 *DBG* VII.88: *eius adventu ex colore vestitus cognito, quo insigni in proeliis uti consuerat.*

77 *DBG* VII.90.

78 *Ibid.*: *Titum Labienum duabus cum legionibus et equitatu in Sequanos proficisci iubet: huic Marcum Sempronium Rutilum attribuit.*

79 Hirtius, *DBG* VIII.2, 6.

80 For the date of Hirtius' composition, see especially the discussion in Holmes (1911, pp. 824-825).

81 Labienus in charge of the province, Hirtius (*DBG* VIII.52). This too, could be seen as an attempt to remove Labienus from the theater of action as to not allow him to share any credit for the ultimate victory and pacification of Gaul. Caesar undoubtedly remembered and was perhaps attempting to avoid a situation similar to that when Pompey had usurped some of Crassus' glory for putting down the slave rebellion of Spartacus by swooping in and finishing off those detachments not defeated by Crassus in the main engagement in Lucania in 71 BCE.

82 Syme (1938).

very complicated, with a an evident series of estrangements and reconciliations. While Labienus never openly broke with Caesar while in Gaul and he did, as others have said, “everything Caesar asked of him,” there are evident signs of tension in their relationship, visible even through the lens of Caesar’s writings, which make the rupture of 49 easier to understand. Therefore, scholars would do well to reconsider the tension between Caesar and Labienus and the mutable and sometimes volatile nature of their relationship revealed here as instructive when approaching larger questions about the nature of Caesar’s command in Gaul, his relationship with all his subordinate officers, the formation and dissolution of his alliances in the build up to the Rubicon, and even the degree of rhetorical distortion present in the *Comentarii*.

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