Caesar's Battle-Descriptions
and the Defeat of Arilovistus

Caesar's military descriptions mark him out among ancient writers. He paints them in the firmest lines, he is uniquely able to communicate to his audience the important strands in the strategy of a campaign, or the tactics of a battle. This tends to inspire modern scholars with an unfortunate confidence. We have a clear and definite picture of the course of events: we expect it to be an easy matter to fit Caesar's narrative to the terrain, and to determine the exact theatre of the campaigns and battles which he describes. Most of the modern topographical discussions of his campaigns are confident and precise. And yet our expectations have proved delusive. Archaeology alone has been genuinely successful in deciding topographical issues, as (it may be argued) at Gergovia and Alesia. Where archaeological evidence is not to hand, scarcely one of Caesar's battlefields has been determined in such a manner as to quell dispute.

It is time to stop considering topographical questions in isolation, and to adopt a new approach. Caesar painted his pictures firmly, but how concerned was he to give accurate and precise detail? He was writing for an audience at Rome. That audience had no more than the vaguest notion of the geography of Gaul, and that audience had no useful maps. 'Every day', Caesar's successes brought new names of races, tribes, locations to Roman ears (1); 'no writing, report, or rumour' had ever celebrated the regions which Caesar now conquered for Rome (2). Who really knew anything of the Nervii, where their country lay, how far removed from Italy and Rome (3)? Such an audience would find it extraordinarily difficult to grasp the complexities of terrain, or of fortification, or of

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(2) Jh., 33; cf. his similar remark concerning Cilicia, Att., 5. 20. 1.
(3) Cc., Q. Fr., 3. 6 (83). 2.
strategic manoeuvre; it would soon grow impatient with the effort. It would be very odd, if Caesar had not sought to ease their path. A flood of complexities might too easily obscure the important points of the narrative. Caesar would naturally suppress many of the details of terrain or of military movements, and present his audience with a very simplified model.

The first part of this paper will illustrate this point from three of Caesar's more routine battle-descriptions. The second will turn to the most difficult and controversial of all his topographical accounts, that of the war with Ariovistus.

CAESAR'S NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

We may begin with the battle of the Aisne, fought against the Belgae in 57 B.C. (I, 21-11). After his arrival at the Belgic frontier, Caesar remained for some days in the territory of the Remi; he was probably based on Durcorturum, the main town of the Remi, for that period (1). When news arrived that the Belgae were marching against him, he hurried to cross the Aisne, and encamped close to the river's right bank. *Quae res...latus unum castorum ripis fluminis muniebat* (2. 5. 5). Nearby there was a bridge over the Aisne, presumably the bridge by which Caesar had crossed. He defended this with a praesidium on the right bank and a camp of six cohorts, commanded by Titurius Sabinus, on the left. The approaching Belgae meanwhile attacked the oppidum Bibrax, some eight miles away from Caesar's main camp; but Caesar sent a lightly-armed detachment to its defence, and the town was saved. The Belgae then arrived before Caesar's main camp, and occupied a position less than two miles distant. Their camp was more than eight miles in width.

Caesar at first restricted his troops to cavalry skirmishes: *Vbi nostris non esse inferiores intellecti, tunc pro castris ad aciem instruendum natura opportuno atque idoneo, quod is collis ubi castra posta erant paululum ex plantice editus tantum adversus in latitudinem patebat quantum lac acies instructa occupare poterat, atque ex uraqua parte lateris delectatus habitabat et in frontem lenienti festigatus pudigabat ad planticiem reditabat, ab utraque latere eius collis transversam fossam obluxit circiter passus quadrungentorium, et ad extreimas fossas castella constituit bique tormenta cillumque ne, cum acieni instructam, hostes, quod tantum multitudine praterat, ab lateribus pugnantes suos circumveniunt present (2. 8. 2-4). Both sides then drew up the bulk of their forces in front of their camps: a marsh then separated the two armies. Still no pitched battle was fought, and, after an indecisive cavalry engagement, Caesar led his men back to their camp. The Belgae next found a ford and tried to cross the Aisne, hoping to attack the smaller Roman camp. Titurius informed Caesar of the danger, and Caesar vigorously attacked the enemy army, wreaking such slaughter that the entire enemy force decided to withdraw. Caesar pursued on the following day with devastating effect.

This battlefield ought to be identifiable: we could scarcely hope for more detailed information. It must be very close to the right bank of the Aisne (2. 5. 5); and, if Caesar started from Reims, the battlefield should not be far from there. It probably lies close to an ancient road, for the Belgae were marching on Caesar and would naturally have taken the easiest route (6). We have perhaps the most explicit natural description in the Commentaries to help us locate Caesar's camp. Two miles further from the river there should be sufficient room for the Belgic position, eight miles wide. Between the two there should be a marsh, but there should also be ground firm enough to permit cavalry manoeuvres. There should be a ford close to the battlefield. Even if Bibrax cannot be securely identified (7), we should surely have enough material to fix the site.

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(5) HOLMES, 669, cf. B.G., 6. 44. *Durcorturum* seems to be the modern Reiins; see HOLMES, 354, and JULIUS, iii, 408.

(6) Though it is not clear where the *belgæ* started from; perhaps *La Ferue* or further north (HOLMES, 658-9), rather than Soissons (JULIUS, iii, 251, n. 5).

(7) Perhaps *Bléliers* (LEHMANN, *Klio*, art. cit., 247-81), perhaps *Vieux-Lian* (NAPOLÉON, ii, 101, n. 1; HOLMES, 398-400); M. G. L., *Blaibert*, comm. on B.G., ii-iii [PAPET, 165], 55; BEURIEUX (JULIUS, iii, 253, n. 2 and 254 n. 2) is not plausible: see HOLMES, *ibid.* WHEELER and RICHARDSON, *Hill Forts of Northern France* (1957), 13 and n. 2, followed by SCHMITTLEIN, 299-300, identify *Bibrax* with *Vieux-Reims*, close to the modern Coins-pre-Sappey. This is hardly plausible in view of Caesar's *ex sine* (2. 6. 11), suggesting strongly that *Bibrax* was close to the Belgic line of march, and surely excluding the possibility that the *Bellgae* crossed the Aisne to attack *Bibrax*, then re-crossed to face Caesar. Once the *Belgæ* had crossed the river, why should they not have moved instead on the unprotected lands of the *Remi*, about which Caesar was so anxious (2. 5. 5)?
But we do not. We can certainly narrow the possibilities to just two candidates. Berry-au-Bac (Mauchamp) and Chaudardes (see Figure 1). The main road from Reims to the north seems to have passed through Berry-au-Bac, sufficiently close to both possible sites. Whether the site be fixed as Berry or Chaucarades, a very plausible ford can be found at Gernicourt. Both locations have plausible marshes. Both can afford eight-mile tracts suitable for the Belgic camp. But both sites also have difficulties, and the merits of the two cases are still very evenly balanced.

(1) Napoleon thought that his excavations had constituted decisive proof for Berry-au-Bac; he discovered remains of a camp and two entrenchments (see Figure 1). But his discoveries do not really meet the demands of Caesar's description. The Roman army was drawn up pro castris and faced the enemy; we naturally assume that the Romans stood between their camp (behind them) and the Belgic army (before them). Yet Napoleon's reconstruction implies that the entire acies stood to the left of the Roman camp. Caesar certainly leads us to expect fortifications at both sides of the hill and the battle-line (ab utroque laterae eius collis), and suggests that both flanks needed protection from attack (ne ab lateribus — note the plural — pugnantes suos circumvente possent); Napoleon leaves the left quite denuded. It is perhaps possible that a further earthwork

(8) See the judicious discussion of Holmes, 659-66.
(10) Holmes, 667-8.
(11) Cf. esp. Lehmann, N. Jb., art. cit.; Holmes, 660-4; Stenzen, LFC, 19 (1951), 209-16 (on the implications of Caesar's language); Hough, C.J, 36 (1841), 337-45, and, more elaborately, Peyre, REL, 56 (1778), 175-215, argue that Caesar's language can be reconciled with Napoleon's discoveries, but both are forced into strained and unconvincing interpretations of the Latin; see following notes. Rambaud therefore speculates that Napoleon's fortification may represent ibervna of 52-1 B.C., and prefers the Chaudardes site (Comm. on R.G. ii-iii, 52-3). Napoleon's discoveries have recently been confirmed by aerial photographs (cf. e.g. Peyre, 188-93 with Plates 4-5), but these do not prove that this was Caesar's camp in 57.
(12) Unless we assume that the Roman battle-line faced west, rather than north (Julian, iii, 255, n. 1): this is not plausible (Holmes, 661-2). If the main gate of the Roman camp faced S.W. rather than N.W., there is perhaps a certain sense in which the acies was drawn up pro castris (so Hough and Peyre). Yet no-one would have guessed from Caesar's account that the line was drawn up in this way, and as Hough, 340, admits, Caesar has certainly written in a misleading and simplified way.
(13) Mr Morgan reminds me that the curve of the Aisne would give some protection to the left, and suggests that fortification would have been unnecessary: cf. Holgh, 343. But (1) any advance of the Roman army would leave the left unprotected, and extremely
remains undiscovered in the region of Gernicourt, at the west of the proposed line: but Napoléon’s fortifications are much too complex simply to be the right-wing construction (14). Nor does the nature of the terrain correspond to Caesar’s description: lateris dejectus probably implies that the west and east of the hill are marked by fairly steep slopes. It has long been noticed that the western slope is much too gentle (15), and in fact the eastern slope is little better. The plateau itself seems rather too wide for Caesar’s line of six legions. All this is hardly satisfactory.

(2) Chaudardes would be a more obvious site to fortify, and certainly has much to recommend it. Its descents to west and east are much steeper than the equivalents at Berry, and (pace Holmes) the plateau is almost exactly the right size to accommodate the line of six legions. That line should naturally occupy a little more than two kilometres (16); Chaudardes plateau is approximately 2.5 km wide. But it too has its disadvantages. The plain to the north is today heavily forested, and it is hard to believe that it was ever good cavalry country. Nor does Caesar’s in frontem levier fassignas peditum ad plantiennem redibat accurately reflect the complexities of the terrain. The ground immediately north of the ‘plateau’ slopes noticeably upwards from east to west. At the east the plateau frons is rather too steep, while at the west it is in parts lower than the ground immediately to the north.

vulnerable to the overlapping Bdgic right; and (2) – the important point here – Caesar’s language ab utrque lateri, lateribus would anyway remain simplified and misleading. Most implausibly, Hough and Peyre take ab utrque lateri eaeus collis to be the N.W. and S.E. sides of the hill. Hough adds that the frons would not be the ‘front’ which faced the enemy, but the S.W. side of the hill. If they were right, Caesar’s account would again be extremely obscure and misleading: without knowledge of the country, none of his audience would have guessed that both these latera lay to the right of his aevic (as Peyre insists), or that the frons did not face the enemy and the plain (as Hough). But in fact we surely take the latitudinis of the hill facing the enemy (8, 21) to be the distance between the two latera; if so, the latera can only be the ‘sides’ to the N.E. and S.W.

(14) Nor do the distances seem to correspond to Caesar’s passum quadringentorum (Hkams, 663; Peyre, 206). But Mr. Morgan, referring to Caesar’s Nouvelle carte de la France (1744), observes that the Aisne changed its course between then and 1866, when Napoléon wrote. Cf. also Peyre, 192–3. This change may have obliterated the furthest extremity of the southern trench: passum quadringentorum may thus be an accurate description.

(15) Holmes, 662–3. The attempts of Hough and Peyre to refer the dejectus to the steeper N.W. and S.E. slopes are misconceived: cf. n. 13 above.

(16) Holmes, 665–6; cf. J. STEFFEL, Guerre civile (1887), ii. 327–8; RAMBAUD, Comment on B.G., iiii. 59–60) seems to over-estimate.

It is impossible to decide between these two locations, but that is not our present concern. The important point is that, on either account, Caesar has given us a simplifici model. If the battle was fought at Berry, he has disguised the position of his camp, and exaggerated the slope at the east and west ends; he has misinterpreted the nature of his dispositions, which must have left gaps between both flanks and the edges of the plateau; and he has simplified the detail of his fortifications. If the battle was fought at Chaudardes, he has obscured the complexities of the fronts and its relation to the adjacent terrain; and there is something odd about the description of the cavalry fighting. There is nothing surprising or sinister in this. Caesar was simply trying to help his readers. Wherever the battle was fought, the true complexities would be extraordinarily difficult and distracting to explain. Caesar preferred to concentrate on the main points of the battle, and to simplify his natural description in a manner which would make these points easier to grasp.

The next example is the battle ad Sabion, fought later in 57, where Caesar defeated the Nervii (B.G., 2. 16–28). Most discussions of this battle have started from the assumption that the Sabii should be the Sambre, but none of these reconstructions could give a plausible strategic pattern to the campaign (17). It now seems likely that the equation Sabii = Sambor is no more than a fourteenth-century conjecture, and possesses no authority (18).

It seems most likely that Caesar, after receiving the submission of the Ambiani (2. 15, 2), was marching along the road from Amiens through Cambrai to Bavay, the Nervian capital (19). The site should presumably be sought on or near this road. The choice lies between a position on the Escuat (near Cambrai) or a position on the Selle (near Saulzoir). The Escuat site would probably be the stronger point of defence (20). But it is

(17) E. JULLIAN, iii. 261, n. 2; HOLMES, 671–7; G. BOULMONT, RBPF, 3 (1924), 19–34; M. LIZIN, LEC, 22 (1954), 401–6; cf. the list of P. TURQUIN, LEC, 23 (1955), 115. SCHMITTEN, Avec Cesar en Gaule, i. 318, 390, retains the Sambre identification (cf. R.O. 15 (1963), 133–49 and 161–83, but he is not more convincing than his predecessors).

(18) M. ARNOULD, RBPF, 20 (1941), 39–40, esp. 84–5, 91–5. The objections of SCHMITTEN, R.O, 15 (1963), 142–49 are inconclusive. However, Arnould’s further attempt to connect phonetically Sabii and Selle is less cogent; cf. SCHMITTEN, art. cit., 134–6.

(19) Cf. SCHMITTEN, art. cit., 134–6. For the line of this road, see A. LEBOIGNE, Esquisse de topographe historique sur l’Ambiane (1792), 134–6; LEC, 23 (1955), 138–9.

hard to find topographical details which answer at all plausibly to Caesar's description, and the Escaut identification would imply that Caesar here confused Sabis and Scaldis. The elaborate discussion of P. Turquin marks out a very plausible site in the environs of Saulzoir, and swings the balance of probability heavily in the Selle's favour. If so, Caesar's description of latissimum flumen et allissimae ripae would be hyperbolic (27. 5) ; but that, perhaps, would be no surprise.

The main difficulty for both the Escaut and the Selle identifications is presented by 2. 16. 1 : cum per eorum finis triduum fier fecisset, iueniebat a captivis Sabiiiam flumen ab castris suis non amplius milia passuum decem abesse. As Schmittlein insists, eorum there should certainly = Neruorum (7). The western boundary of the Neruui was probably not far west of Cambrai (49). This does not make any sense at all if Sabis refers to the Escaut. Caesar could barely have crossed the frontier before he received his information, and a 'three-day march' is quite ridiculous. Even Saulzoir is only 16 km from Cambrai. Turquin's site can hardly have been more than 36 km from the Nervian frontier, and it should follow that three days' march had taken the Roman army only twenty kilometres. It is true that they were marching through hostile territory, and that their progress was impeded by the Nervian barriers (27. 4). But this still seems far too short a distance. It is more likely that Caesar is again giving a simplified version, as he seeks to keep his reader's mind on essentials. He had been marching for three days against the Neruui ; that was what mattered. His audience would not know or care where the Nervian frontier lay (7). Caesar may not have known himself. He certainly did not want to introduce strag complications, and preferred to obscure the fact that a considerable part of that three-day march had been outside Nervian territory, before he reached the frontier. Per eorum

fires was a pardonable simplification, which would at the same time erophase the dangers of the march. He had presumably started at Amiens, or perhaps a little to the east of that city (76).

The final example is Caesar's battle against the Vispetes and Tonteri. Much of the discussion must be concerned with the manuscript text of B.G. 4. 15. 2 : the defeated Germans fled ad confluentes Mosae et Rhini. Can those words mean what they say? Or must we assume that Caesar wrote (or at least should have written) Moselloe? If the text can be defended, the battlefield will presumably be near to Kleve or Goch (77) — though the featureless nature of the country and the variations in the course of the Meuse exclude any great precision. If Caesar means the Moselle, the battle will have to be transferred to the vicinity of Koblenz (78).

This is no place for a full discussion. The point is that, on either account, Caesar has left a very great amount unsaid. The last topographical indication of the German position was 4. 6. 4: Germani latius ucegeabantur et in finis Eburonum et Construorum ... pertuerunt. Even that is not very clear: it is uncertain whether Caesar is there referring to the whole German army, or simply to a few wandering detachments. But it is anyway a great surprise for us to find ourselves near either Koblenz or Kleve. If the battle was near Koblenz, Caesar has left it quite obscure why the Germans chose to go there. Their detachment among the Ambiani (4. 9. 3) will find it difficult to rejoin them; and the natural strategy would surely be to retreat northwards, crying Caesar as far as possible away from his reliable allies, lengthening his lines of communication. If it was the main force of the Germans that had reached the Eburones and Constru, we should expect them to retreat; if the main force was still near Kleve, we should expect them to stay there. Instead, we are asked to

(21) Cf. B.G., 6. 33. 3 (though that is itself confused) and the discussion of Verdehaie, RBPh. 53 (1975), 48-51.
(22) LEc. 21 (1955), 113-56.
(25) Cf. Cic. Q. Fr. 3. 68(3).
(26) Turquin, 125-6 makes Caesar start from Amiens itself, which would certainly be the natural place to receive the submission of the Ambiani. But, if the Selle identification is right, this would imply a march of 76 km. in three days, with the last day's route leading through hostile territory. We should not underestimate Caesar's celeritas, but, even leaving the Nervian obstacles out of account, 76 km seems too much. See works cited at n. 36 below. If the Escaut identification is preferred, Amiens would be a more plausible starting-point.
(28) See e.g. Cluver, Long. van Golze, Holmes.
assume that they struck off south-eastwards, deep into the country of the Treueri. If they did, it is eloquent that Caesar did not think it worth explaining — or even mentioning.

But, of course, there are severe difficulties in the way of defending the manuscript text. The notion of a 'confluence of the Meuse and the Rhine' may itself be something of a nonsense, for 4. 10. 1 seems to make it clear that the stream of the Rhine which met the Meuse was called the Vacalus (i.e., the Waal) (29). We might also be concerned by Caesar's silence about the German retreat from the Eburones and Condorci: or by the fact that he tells us nothing of a long Roman march up the Rhine to make their bridge, which seems to have been near Andernach: or by the uncomfortably large distance of the return journey to the Vbi, which the German envoys promise to cover in just three days (4. 11. 2-3) (30). These problems are just as real as those which face the Moselle identification, but in both cases the problems are of the same kind (31). They rest on Caesar's silence: they rest on topographical difficulties which we, with the aid of autopsy and detailed maps, can expose. That is surely the wrong approach. Caesar's immediate audience would find no difficulty in these silences. They would not know where the Eburones and the Condorci were to be found: they would not know how far it was to the Vbi: they would not be able to tell exactly where Caesar built his bridge. Caesar could again safely simplify his account, and omit marches and movements which would complicate his narrative and confuse the reader. Whichever location we choose, it is clear that this is what he has done.

(29) Caution is here necessary. The paradox seems to be Mosa profuit ex monte Vosgos, qui est in finibus Lingonorum, et parte quaedam from Rheno recepta, qua appellatur Vacalus inulamigne efficit Batavorum, in Oceanum influit, neque longius ab Oceanus milibus passuum LXXX in Rhenum influit. This is evidently corrupt. The traditional healing is the deletion of: quae sitra insularum, and of in Oceanum influit. But T. Berres, Hermes, 98 (1978), 154-6, argues that Caesar wrote Mosa... Lingonorum, neque longius ab Oceanus milibus passuum LXXX in Rhenum influit, and that the alternative conception and formulation ex parte quaedam... in Oceanum influit is owed to an early recursion, not to Caesar himself. Cfr. Rambaud, id loc. Berres' argument is not cogent in detail (cf. e.g. n. 31, below), but this is not the place for a full discussion.

(30) See the detailed discussion of Horsley, 691-706, esp. 695-702. Grisart, i.e., rates these silences as decisive in favour of the Moselle.

(31) Except for the surprise of Caesar's calling the Waal the Rhenus. That is a looseness, but no more: it is clear from the paradox of 4. 10. 1 itself that the Waal was envisaged as a part, or a continuation, of the Rhine. Cfr. Tac., Ann., 2. 6. 4, verso cognominem Vaalenum acclive distat, with Fornoux's note. Bhunn, art. cit., exaggerates the difficulties presented by Caesar's formulation.

The choice must be made on other grounds. All Caesar's narrative has suggested a site close to the Meuse. The introduction of the river's name (4. 9. 3) is immediately explained at 4. 10. 1. That explanation has its obscurities and its inaccuracies, but, given Caesar's penchant for geographical vagueness and simplification, it need not follow that it is seriously corrupt. 4. 10. 1-5 has directed our attention to the Meuse and the Rhine. If Mosellae is read at 4. 15. 2, the sudden transfer of the reader to the area of the Moselle, with the unheralded and unexplained introduction of so important a river, would be as artistically inelegant as it is strategically obscure. The incoherence is the more important point, for it is a roughness which Caesar's audience would have noticed in his narrative, and therefore a roughness which he would have taken pains to avoid. He would not have made so much of the Meuse, or he would at least have introduced a similar excursus on the Moselle itself. It seems likely that the manuscript reading at 4. 15. 2 must stand, and Caesar's silences must simply be accepted. It would follow that the battle was fought near Goch or Kleve.

The moral of all this is clear enough. As we turn to Ariovistus, examining the topography of a new campaign and a new battle, we must be prepared to find a far more complex and irregular terrain than Caesar's language would imply. We must not always expect an explanation of difficulties which are only discerable to those who know the country, or who can consult a detailed map. We may expect Caesar to have sketched the main lines, but no more, of the strategic background or of the course of the battle. We are entitled to look for a theatre which fits those main lines - but we may never be sure that Caesar has told us the whole story, and we must be particularly wary of resting any argument on Caesar's silences. It is evident that the investigation will be a difficult and delicate one, and that many questions may only be decided with a greater or smaller degree of probability.

CAESAR AND ARIOVISTUS

(a) The narrative.

These features of Caesar's technique evidently complicate topographical inquiry, and many cases will be quite hopeless. But, within limits, progress may still be made. The Ariovistus campaign has provoked more
discussion and less agreement than any other (32); but even here the possibilities may at least be narrowed.

Immediately after the army’s panic at Vescantio, Caesar set out to march against Arriovistus: et itinere exquisito per Diociacum, quod ex alis ei maximam fidem habebat, ut milium amplius quinquagintae circitum locis aperitis exercitum duceret de quartis vigintu, ut dixerat, profectus est. spectatu die, cum iter non interveniret, ab exploratoribus certior factus est Arriovistis copias a nostris milibus passuum quattuor et uiginti abesse (1. 41. 4-5). Arriovistus then invited Caesar to parley, and this meeting was held at a place where planitiae erat magna et in ea tumulus serrenus suis grandis (1. 43. 1). No agreement was reached. A few days later Arriovistus treacherously arrested two envoys of Caesar (1. 47), and eadem die castra promouit et milibus passuum sex Caesaris castris sub monte consedit (1. 48. 1). There is good reason to think that Caesar, too, had by now moved closer to Arriovistus (33).

Postiride eius diei (Arriovistus) praebet castra Caesaris suas copias traductas et milibus passuum duobus ultra eum castra fecit. eo consulit utraque comateaque qui ex Sequanis et Aeduis supportaretur Caesarem intercluderet (1. 48. 2). For the following five days Caesar offered battle, but Arriovistus declined, restricting himself to cavalry skirmishes. Vbi eum castris se tenere Caesar intellexit, ne diutius commetae prohiberetur, ultra eum locum, quo in loco Germani conderant, circiter passus sescentos ab his, castris idoneum locum delegit acieque triplici instructa ad eum locum venti (1. 49. 1). Arriovistus attacked, but the camp was successfully fortified. Caesar left two legions

(32) The modern bibliography is vast. The most important items are: STOEHEL, Guerre de Cesar et d’Arrioviste (1890); P. STOEHEL, Was schlug Caesar den Arrioviste (1899); JOLLIEN, iii. 221-41, esp. 231, n. 4; HOLMES, 57-68 and 636-57; A. BAZZERI, REL, 14 (1936), 28-9; with a necessary correction by A. DAIN, REL, 15 (1937), 269-72; F. MILLER, Klio, 34 (1941), 181-95; CH. JORDAN, Arrioviste et les Germanes chassés d’Alsace en 58 av. J.-C. (1951); R. SCHMITTGEN, La première campagne de César contre les Germanes (1956), with extensive bibliography but omitting Miller’s important article. J. H. COLLINS review of Schmittgen, Gnomon, 30 (1958), 300-305; J. J. HATT, REL, 49 (1971), 281-1; J. D. MORGAN, Caesar’s defeat of Arrioviste, to appear.

(33) It is hard to believe that there would be one day for Caesar’s legates to ride twenty-four miles to Arrioviste’s camp; for Arrioviste ostentatiously to arrest them; for the Germans to break camp; for the full body of their force (apparently including women and children, 1. 50, 4-5, 51, 3, 53, 41 to march eighteen miles; and for them finally to pitch a new camp. Shorter distances must be involved, and it is easier to assume that Caesar had moved nearer the enemy. Cf. esp. MILLER, art. cit., 189-92.

there with some of the auxiliaries; the other four legions returned to the larger camp. On the following day Caesar tried again to provoke a battle, but did not succeed. He returned to camp around noon. Arriovisus then attacked the smaller camp with vigour, and fighting continued until evening.

The next day saw the decisive battle. Caesar drew up all his alarum in front of the smaller camp, quod minus multitudine militum legionariorum pro hostium numero valebat, ut ad speciem alarum uietur (1. 51. 1). He himself, triplici instructa acie, advanced to the enemy camp. This time the Germans were compelled to accept the challenge. Caesar himself a dextra cornu, quod eam partem minime firmam hostiam esse animadvertet, proelium commissit (1. 52. 2); in se quidem, cum hostiam acies a sinistro cornu proficiscens in fugam consuerat, a dextro cornu uenerunt multitudine suorum nostram aciem premebant (1. 52. 6). These two items seem to give a coherent picture. Dextra cornu in 52. 2 seems clearly to refer to the Roman right, while sinistro and dextra in 52. 6 should naturally describe events from the German viewpoint. If so, the battle followed a characteristic pattern, and both right wings succeeded in forcing their enemy to retreat.

Roman cavalry reinforcements led by P. Crassus saved the day, and the Germans were driven into flight. The distance of their flight is important and problematic. The manuscripts of the B.G. give five miles: aquae annies hostes tergo converterset seques priscus fugere desideraret quam ad flumen Rhenum milia passuum ex eo loco circiter quingue peruenitur (1. 53. 1). But Plutarch (Caes., 19, 11) and Orosius (6. 7. 10) both give figures which indicate a distance of fifty miles for this flight to the Rhine (επιγείως τιτανος και quinquaginta milia). Both writers ultimately derive much of their material from Caesar’s account (34). It is a natural possibility that they here reflect an early reading quinquagintae in Caesar’s text. Equally, it is possible that the figure of fifty represents an error made by an intermediate source (perhaps Pollio), and inherited by Plutarch and Orosius; or the two later authors may even have suffered an identical easy corruption (35). Either ‘five’ or ‘fifty’ should remain possibilities, and only the identification of the battle-field itself can decide between the two.

(34) Plutarch probably found Caesar’s account transmitted in Pollio: cf. my article in ἹΣ, 99 (1979), 74-96, esp. 84-91 with nn. 77, 108. Orosius presumably derives from Livy, who himself based parts of his account on Pollio: cf. art. cit., nn. 73, 124.

(35) Thus Bryan conjectured τιτανοςκω in Plutarch’s text.
Caesar thus gives only two place-names, Besançon at the beginning and the Rhine at the end. It is not surprising that a multitude of sites have been suggested. Figure 2 shows the five most favoured candidates: (1) a site just south of Ribeauvillé (Stoffel, with many followers); (2) a site some fifteen kilometres east of this, near Ohnenheim (Jordan); (3) a series of sites around Cernay (many scholars since Napoléon III, especially Julian, Hatt: the most plausible reconstruction is that of Jullian); (4) a site between Mulhouse and Basel (Bazouin, Miltner, Morgan); (5) a site in the environs of Belfort, as suggested by Napoléon I and elaborately argued by Schmittlein.

(b) The indications of the site.

The evidence is very tenuous, and it may be helpful to list the principal pointers to the battle's location.

(1) The time taken to march from Vesontio: on the seventh day of his march, Caesar was twenty-four miles from Ariovistus' first camp. When pressed, an army could doubtless move at 15 miles a day or more; but the most likely average figure for a day's march is perhaps 10-13 Roman miles (36). Caesar's speed on this occasion was probably close to the average. He was marching cautiously: he did not know of Ariovistus' precise location until the news arrived on the seventh day (37), and he was sufficiently apprehensive of ambush to follow his circuitus rather than the direct route. But, equally, he would not want to dawdle. He did not grant his troops their customary rest-day (cum iter non intermittere), doubting whether to reach open country as soon as possible (38). We might expect him to cover something like sixty to eighty miles on the first six days; the length of the seventh march is unknown.

(2) The general probabilities of the line of march. It seems likely that Ariovistus is starting from Upper Alsace: Caesar is setting out from

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(36) This is no place for a full discussion of this complicated problem. SCHMITTLEIN, La première compagnie, 105-24, overstates the case for a short daily march of less than 20 km (cf. esp. RAMBAUD, REL., 35 [1977], 400, and REL., 50 [1972], 581), but some of his arguments are difficult to dismiss. Cfr. STOELL, art. cit., 27-40.

(37) This is the natural inference from 1.41.5. Note that Caesar had earlier feared that Ariovistus might reach Vesontio before the Romans (1.38). As he eventually marched over fifty miles beyond Vesontio before establishing Ariovistus' position, it is clear that his intelligence of the German movements was limited.

(38) I owe this point to Mr. Morgan. Roman troops were normally rested every fifth day.
Vesontio. This prima facie makes a site as far north as Ribeauvilî, or as far south-east as Mulhouse-Basel, hard to explain (39). Of course, here we must be careful. Any number of strategic considerations may have intervened to draw the armies away from their natural route, and we cannot be sure that Caesar would have told us about them. But this remains a factor which favours Cernay or Belfort, both of which would be natural positions for Ariovistus to reach and occupy.

(3) Sub monto at 1. 48. 1. There must be a mountain or hill in the region, and this should look over the site of Ariovistus' second camp.

(4) Ariovistus' manoeuvre of 1. 48. 2. This is rather odd: Caesar allows the German horse to march past his flank and cut his communications. Caesar of course had exploratores, who had been active a few days earlier (1. 41. 5), and he surely knew that Ariovistus had been on the move the day before. He must have been unusually negligent to allow this manoeuvre to succeed unimpeded — unless the Germans were in some way protected by the tie of the land (40). Again, not a decisive point. There may have been more to this march than Caesar's language would suggest: Caesar may even have been negligent, or he may simply have suppressed mention of a unsuccessful cavalry engagement. But it would be reassuring to find a site which provided a natural explanation.

(5) Quinque or quinquinginta. This is the most specific indication, and discussion must start from here. At first sight nec priscus fugere desitterat seems to favour quinque in Caesar's text: it is hardly possible that the exhausted Germans could have fled without respite for fifty miles. But is it not equally unlikely that Caesar would adopt so emphatic a tone, if the Rhine were a mere five miles distant (41) ? Fuga need not have all the breathless and hectic connotations of the English 'flight' or the German 'Flucht'; fuga can be a fairly measured and prolonged affair (42). Caesar quite possibly means that the Germans made no attempt to regroup, and did not stop for any length of time, before reaching the Rhine. The 'flight' does not in fact seem to have been too hectic: the Germans have time to look for boats (1. 53. 2-3), and it is likely that the cavalry pursuit was somewhat delayed (1. 53. 3, cf. perhaps Frontin. Strat.. 2. 1. 16). The picture of 'the Germans diving into the Rhine like lemmings' (43) should anyway be abandoned. It may be that this flight was similar to that of the Helvetii (1. 26. 5), who fled day and night for four days, covering over 50 miles. Quinquinginta at 1. 53. 1 should certainly remain a possibility.

Whether 'five' or 'fifty', we should not be too confident of its accuracy. Caesar would not have known the exact distance: he would hardly instruct his legions to count their paces as they pursued, and the cavalry would have little idea of how far they had ridden. The figure is likely to be impressionistic guesswork, probably too low rather than too high: Caesar had no interest in minimising this fuga. Brackets of 3. 5-5. 5 miles, or 35-55 miles, might be realistic. Nor should we assume that the Germans withdrew in a single body; nor that they all took the most direct route to the Rhine.

Discussion should be based on these five points. But, before proceeding further, we should dismiss some other factors which do not provide reliable indications.

(1) In his elaborate argument for Belfort, Schmittekin rested much of his case on miliurn amplius quinquinginta circuitu (1. 41. 4). Following Stolle, he thought that this 'detour of more than fifty miles' should represent the whole length of Caesar's march (44). Caesar certainly does not mean this. The clause u... disceret defines and explains itinere exquisito: it specifies the length of detour which Diviciacus' informants recommended to Caesar when he was still at Vesontio (45). A detour through open country was needed to avoid the dangerous road mentioned at 1. 39. 6, and Caesar duly informed himself of this alternative route. But he certainly would not envisage halting as soon as this detour was complete. He would stop when he received news that Ariovistus was in the same place, and this news eventually arrived on the seventh day. He could not know how far he would march while he was still at Vesontio, and could merely concern himself with avoiding the difficult early part of the route. Diviciacus' recommendations provide no pointer to the total distance which Caesar eventually marched, and Caesar's language leaves

(40) This point is well made by STOLLE, 94.
(41) Cf. STOLLE, art. cit., 10-11. Particularly after the massive Helvetian flight of 1. 26. 5, five miles does seem too small a distance to be remarked.
(42) E.g. B.G., 1. 27. 4. B.C., 3. 94. 4. with my article in His.. 22 (1973), 259. n. 67.
(43) The phrase of COLLINS, art. cit., 305.
(44) LA première campagne, 143-8, of. 105-24; STOLLE, art. cit., 3-10.
(45) Itinere exquisito et Diviciacum suggests that Diviciacus did not know the route himself, but was asked to make inquiries on Caesar's behalf. Pace STOLLE, art. cit., 6-7, there is no difficulty there.
it quite possible that, once the detour was complete, his troops marched on a considerable way.

The distance by the direct route from Vesontio to Belfort is about 57 Roman miles; to Montbéliard, about 54. This circuitus would naturally add to that figure, but, as the reconstruction of Caesar’s route can only be guesswork, the distance from Vesontio to either Belfort or Montbéliard by this route cannot be known.

(2) Another favourite argument has rested on the plantites magna of 1. 43. 1: most have thought that this should be the plain of Alsace, in one sense the only ‘great plain of the region. This need not follow: “Gross” ist ein sehr dehnbarer Begriff (Stolle), and takes its colouring from its context. A plain such as that proposed by Schnittlein, on the site of the present Belfort-Chaux airport, would certainly be possible; in the foothills of the Vosges, any plain large enough to accommodate two cavalry forces and leave room for a gap of 400 paces (1. 43. 2-3) could be described as magna (46).

(3) Many searchers have started from the tumulus terrenus of 1. 43. 1, and assumed that this should still be visible. The oddity of the phrase was noticed by Holmes (47), why should Caesar bother to specify terrenus? Holmes suggested that this might be an earthen barrow or mound, an artificial construction which might easily have now disappeared. This is surely possible, though equally Caesar may be constraining this tumulus with nearby rocky eminences (cf. Livy, 38, 20. 4). Most of the suggested sites can in fact provide a tumulus, but we cannot demand this as a sine qua non.

(c) The theories.

We should start from quinque and quinquaginta. The site may be either five or fifty miles from the Rhine, and we should certainly allow a margin for erratic guesswork. Yet the traditional favourites, Ribeauvillé and

Cernay, are well outside these margins, and wilfully ignore the only numbers we have: both sites are about fifteen miles from the Rhine (48). This in itself is enough to excite them. And, in both cases, the river Ill presents a second problem. Both sites are west of the Ill, and the ‘agitatives would have to negotiate that considerable river before reaching the Rhine. I. would be the Ill which occasioned the greater slaughter, the II. which, once crossed, gave the Germans safety and respite. The only solution is to suppose that Caesar described the Ill as the Rhine: a very unlikely ‘simplification’.

Both Ribeauvillé and Cernay have further difficulties of their own:

(1) Ribeauvillé is a long way north. It is hard to see why the armies should have gone there in the first place, and even harder to believe that Caesar could march so far in seven days. Stoffel’s site is 189 km (over 120 Roman miles) from Besançon: we earlier gave limits of sixty to eighty miles for the first six days, then the seventh day’s march. Moreover, Stoffel’s reconstruction makes little strategic sense. He makes Caesar encamp on the left bank of the Fecht, between Otheim and Gernar: Ariovistus’ flank march is conducted along the heights of Zeltenberg. Caesar, we must remember, was he first to encamp. Stoffel leaves it hard to understand why he should thus occupy the featureless territory towards the Ill, allowing Ariovistus to pitch camp in the foothills of the Vosges. Caesar stood in fear of Ariovistus’ cavalry: it would be much more sensible, and characteristic, for Caesar himself to occupy a camp in the foothills.

(2) There is little to recommend Cernay. The arguments in its favour are largely a priori, for it was a junction of major roads. It is difficult to formulate a reconstruction which explains Ariovistus’ unimpeded flank march; indeed, the only attempt which squarely faces this problem is that of Jullian. He places Caesar’s castra majora some two kilometres south-west of Cernay, and thinks that Ariovistus marched along the foothills of the Vosges from Cernay to Tallan. Autopsy suggests that this is not possible. The hillocks rise sharply and steeply from the plain to form individual mounds, giving no continuous ridge. The individual hillocks would be difficult enough to negotiate, and such a march would be physically impossible. Ariovistus could not have attempted to climb these

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1. Stolle, art. cit., 12. 14; F. Kroon, Mm., 3. 5 (1937), 143; Schnittlein, La première campagne, 15. 1; Collins, art. cit., 301-2. Mr. Morgan objects that at B. G., 3. 1, 5, non magna plantitio is used of a nearby plain which extends for several square miles, and is larger than Schnittlein’s site. At that point of his narrative, Caesar is preparing the scene for the assault on Gaugamela: when he is thinking of vulnerability to such an attack, a plain of this size might well seem cramped. It need not follow that Caesar would apply the same standards when describing a plain chosen for a conference.


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(46) Hence Holmes, 657, proposed quindecim milia at 1. 53. 1; justly stigmatized by Miltner, art. cit., 183, n. 1, as ‘einer methodischen Grundlage entbehrende Wirkung’. In his edition of 1914, Holmes more cautiously read quinquaginta.
hills; he would have no choice but to conduct his march along the plain at their foot. But then nothing is explained, for his army is as exposed as ever. More recently, Hatt has claimed that archaeological evidence indicates a site slightly further east: Caesar's castra maiores should be just west of Wittelsheim, and Arianovis' flank march should have led him to a camp 3 km south-west of this. Caesar's castra minores are placed between Asperach-le-Haut and Asperach-le-Bas. A fuller presentation of this evidence may make a reconsideration necessary, but, as reported, the finds do not make the solution attractive. They seem to be quite undated. The resulting reconstruction is unsatisfactory in detail, for it leaves the German flank march exposed, and gives an implausible strategic importance to the castra minores in the battle itself.

The choice lies between quinque and quinqueaginta at 1. 53. 1. If we accept quinque, we must place the battle in the plain between the Ill and the Rhine. There is not much to be said for putting it as far north as Ohnenheim (Jordan). That makes Caesar march a very long way north; and it is hard to find a plausible mons for Arianovis' second camp. (If Caesar means one of the Vosges hills, it is difficult to understand how Arianovis' flank march could have been allowed to cross the Ill.) And, once again, Caesar would be unwise to assume such an exposed position in the plain; he would much more naturally keep to the safer hills.

These arguments may be generalised, for there are no plausible mones between the Rhine and the Ill north of Mulhouse. The quinque figure would thus lead irresistibly to the suggestions of Miltnier, and, with a different orientation. Bazoin and Morgan, preferring sites between Mulhouse and Basel. But here, too, there are difficulties. The region is fairly flat, and the German flank march would probably be exposed; and it is still hard to find a mons which convinces. The region is good for cavalry, and Caesar would be unwise to allow himself to be drawn to it. And the greatest problem is clearly seen by Miltnier and Morgan themselves, as they try to explain how the armies came to be so far to the south-east. (a) Miltnier thinks that Arianovis was anxious to link with the Helvetii, now returned to their native land after their abortive migration; that is why Miltnier places the Germans to the south of Caesar. This does not ring true. The Helvetii must now have been extraordinarily weakened, and their relations with Arianovis had never been good. (b) Miltnier also recognises the importance of those Suebi, and suggests that Caesar had an interest in drawing Arianovis away from them to the south. This is more plausible; but it still hard to see why Arianovis should allow himself to be drawn. He would have done better to adopt the waiting game which had been successful at Magenoburgi, remaining in Upper Alsace and giving the Suebi a chance to join him. That would leave two options, either to wait for the Suebi, or to strike at Caesar's elbanged and exposed communations. (c) Finally, Morgan points to the advantages to Caesar of avoiding the plain of Alsace, since he feared the German cavalry; and he suggests that Caesar may have wished o keep the option of retreating southward to the Raurei or Helvetii, both of whom he had just subdued. But the Roman lines of communication led not to the Raurei or the Helvetii, but to the Eburii, the Sequani, and perhaps the Lenici and Lingones. Those would be the lines Caesar would wish to protect; those lands, not those of his recent enemies, would be his favoured directions of retreat. The Mulhouse-Basel location must leave these lines very vulnerable, especially if Caesar did not know the exact position of the Germans as he marched.

All these arguments are of course dangerous. Generals do not always read events correctly; and the preliminary manoeuvres may anyway have

(49) Résumé in REI. 49 (1971), 201.
(50) Bazoin places Caesar's camp in the reign of Ranstwiler and Magstadt, and Arianovis to the north of this first in the forest of Harth, then at the foot of the Signal d'Illfur. Miltnier places Caesar's first camp close to Habsheim, and Arianovis south of this, the first German camp is placed in the region of Basel, and their flank march on the heights west of Habsheim. Morgan puts the Roman castra maiorina on the Hitenberg, 1 km west of Hengoue, and the castra minora between Attenschwiler and Folgensbourg; the German camp is located at Attenschwiler. (Morgan's reconstruction is the most plausible and closest argued, with good criticisms of his two predecessors.)
(51) The Signal d'Illfur does not really 'dominate the area', as Bazoin claimed. Morgan places the castra sub monte at Sierentz, but here too there is no very plausible mons.

(52) Cf. 1. 1. 4. 1. 40. 7.
(53) Miltnier, art. cit. 186-7. This is hard to reconcile with his own thesis, placing Arianovis south of Caesar in an unexplained manner; but it might provide a strategic explanation of the reverse reconstructions of Bazoin and Morgan.
(54) Cf. 1. 40. 8-9. 1. 44. 3.
(55) Cf. 1. 48. 2. Eburii and Sequani, 1. 40. 11. Lenici and Lingones. By Sequani we should of course understand that part of their country which they had retained from the encroachments of Arianovis. Cf. Holmes 652, n. 1.
been more complex than Caesar's words would suggest, and there may have been other factors to draw the armies to the south-east. If this solution is correct, we should have to assume that the narrative was very bare and simplified, and that vital features of the campaign were unexplained; but, by now, that would be no surprise. The Mulhouse-Basel location remains improbable: credible topographical details are hard to find, and it is difficult even to conjecture a plausible strategic background. But, given the characteristics of Caesar's narrative technique, this solution is not quite impossible.

Still, the difficulties of this reconstruction strengthen the case for quinquaginta at L. 53. 1. That leads naturally to the solution of Schmittlein, a site in the neighbourhood of Belfort. That is the natural place for Ariovistus, coming from upper Alsace, and Caesar, coming from Vesontio, to meet; and the land to the north is far too mountainous to admit any alternative sites fifty miles from the Rhine. Schmittlein places Caesar's first camp near Montbéliard, and assumes that he moved nearer Ariovistus in the course of the negotiations. The first German camp will be near Rougemont-Lauw, the second close to Vescemont. For the final positions, see Figure 3: he places the main Roman camp on the heights of Cravanche, which have a commanding view northwards (the direction from which Ariovistus would approach); the final German camp is located on le Vallon and la Miotte; and he suggests Les Barres for Caesar's second camp, south-east of the first camp and south-west of Ariovistus.

It is not hard to find difficulties in this account. Belfort is not even fifty miles from the Rhine; the distance is about thirty-five miles. We should have to assume that the Germans took an indirect route, some perhaps fleeing north-east rather than east; or that Caesar allowed himself a generous rounding; or that he simply guessed too high. None of these assumptions is impossible, but the distance is still uncomfortably near to the lower limit which we earlier allowed. Again, some critics have thought the distance from Vesontio intolerably small - about fifty-four miles by the direct route from Vesontio to Montbéliard, where Schmittlein puts Caesar's first camp (56). But here Schmittlein can be defended. Our

(56) The criticism is made by Colini, art. cit., 304-5, and esp. by Ramraud (reviews cited in n. 361); so also Morgan, in his paper to appear. Schmittlein's own defence, assuming that the Romans marched a total of fifty miles, is not satisfactory: above, p. 757-758.
estimate for Caesar’s march gave sixty to eighty miles during the first six days, then an unknown amount on the seventh. We cannot know what route Caesar took: but it certainly involved the long circuitus, and might well be considerably longer than the direct road. Our estimate fits the Montbéliard identification well enough.

Graver difficulties are presented by Schmittlein’s detailed suggestions. The final German camp should be the castrum of the two sides. If Caesar had occupied the same place, it is quite likely that Ariovistus would occupy Cravanche, and such a camp would now genuinely hinder Caesar’s communications. The landscape may be the castra minora, and this answer quite well to the senex passus at I. 49. 1. The battle would now be fought a short distance south-west of Schmittlein’s proposed position.

(2) Even so, the battlefield remains cramped, and it is hard to believe that both sides could operate as they did. The Valud de la Savoureuse did not exist. Both Cravanche and (especially) la Mothe are higher and steeper than the Castrum Minus usually followed in such circumstances, though this is compensated by the impressive northern view which both hills command. But it is more likely that the whole battle should be transferred some way south-east, to the rather larger plain south-east and east of Danjoutin. A suitable location for Caesar’s first camp would be offered by the hill on which the Port de Vézelois now stands, some four kilometres south-east of Belfort. Its gently rising slope corresponds to the type of camp which Caesar usually preferred, and the hill has commanding views north and east-south-east. From it a strong army might easily control the Savoureuse valley. Ariovistus’ second camp, six miles away and sub monte, causes no difficulty: a precise identification is impossible, but there are a number of possible sites below the Forêt de Roche, between Valdoie and Rougemont-le-Château. Ariovistus’ final camp should be two miles from Port de Vézelois, and able to control Caesar’s communications. The most likely possibility is the hillock overlooking Andelans, some 1.5 kilometres west of Meroux, just east of the modern Belfort-Montbeillard road. The Roman castum Minus might be placed on the hill a little to the south, close to Sevenans.

No special importance need be attached to these detailed proposals: they merely illustrate that there are locations near Belfort which are not vulnerable to the objections which face Schmittlein. His general thesis remains quite plausible, and it does seem that the environs of Belfort have more to recommend them than any other proposed site. The Belfort region is the most plausible point for the two armies to meet, and the hills

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(57) Above, p. 754.

(58) Schmittlein’s conjectural route (La première campagne, 145-8) is based on his misunderstanding of circuitus, and is not plausible.


(60) Cf. Jullian, iii. 179, n. 3.
surrounding Belfort a natural position for Caesar to choose to occupy. The Belfort-Chaux airport presents a plausible planitia. The precise route of Ariovistus' flank march cannot be recovered — but, in this land of hills, ridges, and forests, it would be odd if he could not find a route which was naturally protected against a Roman attack.

The status of this conclusion must again be stressed. We are not dealing with certainties: Caesar's narrative technique does not permit it. The strategy of the campaign, the course of the fighting, the nature of the terrain may all have been more complex than Caesar's language would suggest: and these complications may have led both generals to act, or to allow their enemy to act, in ways which we find hard to understand. It may still be that the Mulhouse-Basel solution is correct, however difficult it is to explain how the armies reached that region. Even on the Belfort identification, the figure of fifty miles is not wholly satisfactory, though it can be explained. And, on any account, the narrative remains bare and terse: note, for instance, the extreme economy of Caesar's description of the German flank march (48.2). Given these qualifications, Belfort presents the fewest difficulties. Plutarch's ἐπαχώσιας and Orosius' quinquaginta are vindicated, and quinquaginta should be read at B.G., 1. 53. 1.

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