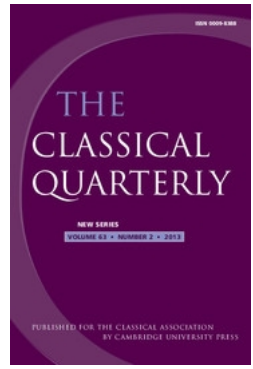

VENI VIDI VICI AND CAESAR'S TRIUMPH

Ida Östenberg

The Classical Quarterly / Volume 63 / Issue 02 / December 2013, pp 813 - 827
DOI: 10.1017/S0009838813000281, Published online: 08 November 2013

Classical Quarterly 63.2 813–827 © The Classical Association (2013)
doi:10.1017/S0009838813000281

VENI VIDI VICI AND CAESAR'S TRIUMPH*

Without doubt, *veni vidi vici* is one of the most famous quotations from Antiquity. It is well known that it was Julius Caesar who coined the renowned expression. Less frequently discussed is the fact that 'I came, I saw, I conquered' was announced as written text. According to Suetonius, Caesar paraded a placard displaying the words *veni vidi vici* in his triumph held over Pontus in 46 B.C. (Suet. *Iul*. 37.2):

> Pontico triumpho inter pompae fercula trium verborum praetulit titulum VENI VIDI VICI non acta belli significantem sicut ceteris, sed celeriter confecti notam.
>
> In his Pontic triumph he exhibited among the biers of the procession a placard (*titulus*) with three words VENI VIDI VICI, not to show the deeds performed in the war, as in the others, but to mark out how fast the war had been concluded.[1]

Famous though the statement is, *veni vidi vici* has not been analysed in context. Works on Roman history and Caesar mostly note the phrase only in passing,[2] as do discussions on the Roman triumph.[3] The words are taken as a reflection of Caesar's speed, which is certainly correct, but they are not scrutinized in further depth.[4]

This article proposes to analyse *veni vidi vici* as a political statement made in a Late Republican triumphal context. The discussion will focus on issues of the written text, self-presentation, elite competition, public display, ritual and *mos maiorum*, and the basic questions posed are: What was the message and meaning of *veni vidi vici*? Why was it shown in Caesar's triumph? What do its style, contents and context tell us about the intent and implication of the written words? How would people have reacted to its display? 'I came, I saw, I conquered' is a strong announcement of self,

* I am grateful to the editor and the anonymous referee of the *CQ* for their valuable comments and helpful suggestions. I am also indebted to Carsten Hjort Lange and Richard Westall for constructive recommendations, and to the higher seminar of Classical Studies at the University of Gothenburg, for useful feedback on an earlier version of this article.

[1] *Sicut ceteris* could mean both 'in the other triumphs' and 'on the other placards'. Both interpretations make a similar point: that *veni vidi vici* as a display was out of the ordinary.

[2] e.g. M. Gelzer, *Caesar: Politician and Statesman* (Cambridge, MA, 1968), 260; K. Christ, *Caesar: Annäherungen an einen Diktator* (Munich, 1994), 50; C. Meier, *Caesar* (London, 1995; first published in German 1982), 413; A. Goldsworthy, *Caesar: The Life of a Colossus* (New Haven, 2006), 469; R.A. Billows, *Julius Caesar: The Colossus of Rome* (London and New York, 2009), 228.

[3] e.g. M. Beard, *The Roman Triumph* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), 154; E. La Rocca, 'La processione trionfale come spettacolo per il popolo romano. Trionfi antichi, spettacoli moderni', in E. La Rocca and S. Tortorella (edd.), *Trionfi romani* (Rome, 2008), 34–55, at 45. The lack of any deeper analysis in triumphal contexts is probably due to the very particular nature of this placard.

[4] M.E. Deutsch briefly discusses the implications of the statement in 'Veni, vidi, vici', *PhQ* 4 (1925), 151–6, as does G. Sumi, *Ceremony and Power: Performing Politics in Rome between Republic and Empire* (Ann Arbor, 2005), 59–60.

proclaimed at a very critical point just after Caesar returned to Rome as victor in both external and internal conflicts. It will be argued that *veni vidi vici* was an extremely unconventional display that should be read as a strong provocation challenging traditional norms at a time that saw the final collapse of the long-praised Republican collegial system.

THE SOURCES

Suetonius is the only ancient author who writes that Caesar paraded *veni vidi vici* in his triumph in Rome. The phrase does, however, appear in two other writers. According to Plutarch and Appian, Caesar, having swiftly defeated Pharnaces of Pontus at Zela in 47 B.C., wrote 'I came, I saw, I conquered' in a letter to Rome.[5] Both give the phrase in Greek translation, but Plutarch praises the Latin wording for its persuasive composition and brevity.[6] Florus and Cassius Dio also describe the victory at Zela in words that testify to Caesar's speed and clearly refer to his statement.[7]

The Greek authors (and Florus) are relevant, as they attest to the efficiency and success of Caesar's words. However, for this paper, which proposes to discuss *veni vidi vici* in its Roman political context, the passage in Suetonius (quoted above) is the most important. Only Suetonius describes how the words were displayed in Rome, and he is, moreover, the one source to give the original Latin phrasing. In contrast to some of Caesar's other famed sayings, like 'You too, my child', 'Let the die be cast' and 'They wanted this' (at Pharsalus), reported by some authors to have been said or written in Greek,[8] it is significant that *veni vidi vici* was quite clearly first proclaimed in Latin. In terms of historical credibility, moreover, there are grounds for preferring Suetonius' account of a triumphal display to Plutarch and Appian, who claim that Caesar wrote the words in a letter to Rome. Certainly, there is no way to prove either tradition right or wrong. Caesar could have written the words in letters to Rome and then displayed

[5] Plut. *Caes*. 50.2, *Mor*. 206E; App. *B Civ*. 2.91. Plutarch (*Caes*. 50.2) claims that Caesar wrote the three words (ἔγραψε τρεῖς λέξεις· ἦλθον, εἶδον, ἐνίκησα) to a friend. In 1922, Cichorius restored the name of the addressee as C. Matius (*Römische Studien: Historisches, epigraphisches, literargeschichtliches aus vier Jahrhunderten Roms* [Leipzig, 1922], 245–50). In the *Moralia*, Plutarch instead writes that Caesar wrote to his friends. Appian states simply that Caesar wrote the words to Rome, ἐγὼ δὲ ἦλθον, εἶδον, ἐνίκησα.

[6] Plut. *Caes*. 50.2: Ῥωμαϊστὶ δὲ αἱ λέξεις, εἰς ὅμοιον ἀπολήγουσαι σχῆμα ῥήματος, οὐκ ἀπίθανον τὴν βραχυλογίαν ἔχουσιν ('In Latin, however, the words have the same ending of verbs, and a brevity which is most persuasive').

[7] Flor. *Epit*. 2.13.63: *Sed hunc Caesar adgressus uno et, ut sic dixerim, non toto proelio obtrivit, more fulminis, quod uno eodemque momento venit, percussit, abscessit. Nec vana de se praedicatio est Caesaris, ante hostem victum esse quam visum* ('Caesar attacked him, and in a single battle – or, if I may say so, in part of a battle – crushed him like a thunderbolt, which in one and the same moment came, struck and departed. Caesar's boast was not groundless, when he said that the enemy was defeated before he was seen'); Cass. Dio 42.48.1–2: καὶ ἦλθε πρὸς τὸν πολέμιον καὶ εἶδεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἐνίκησε ('on the same day and in the same hour he had come to the enemy, had seen him, and had conquered him'), 44.46.1–2: προσηγγέλθη τε ἅμα αὐτῷ προσιὼν καὶ ὤφθη παρὼν καὶ συνέβαλεν αὐθημερὸν καὶ ἐνίκησεν ('he was on one and the same day reported to the king as approaching him, was seen confronting him, engaged him in a conflict, and conquered him').

[8] For καὶ σύ, τέκνον, see Suet. *Iul*. 82.2–3; Cass. Dio 44.19.5. Plutarch claims that Caesar at Rubicon called out 'Let the die be cast' in Greek (*Pomp*. 60.2), while Suetonius (*Iul*. 32.4) tells of Caesar's utterance without indicating the language (cf. Plut. *Caes*. 32.6). According to Asinius Pollio (Plut. *Caes*. 46.1–2), Caesar stated 'They wanted this' in Latin but later wrote it in Greek; cf. Suet. *Iul*. 30.4–5, for the Latin words *Hoc voluerunt* …

them in his triumph.[9] Both versions could also have been preserved in the writings of Caesar's contemporaries, Oppius, Hirtius, Balbus and Asinius Pollio, sources extensively used by both Suetonius and Plutarch.[10] Still, we should note that Suetonius, as an imperial secretary, had access to records and archives, where triumphal contents could have been copied and preserved.[11] Moreover, Plutarch's account has a dramatic point and a contextual meaning that Suetonius' enumeration of triumphal displays lacks. One possibility therefore would be that the saying, stemming from one or more Latin texts that described the triumph in detail, was picked up by Plutarch, or his sources, and used as the perfect ending to Caesar's action at Zela, a narrative that Appian also follows. In fact, many modern historical treatments also place the saying at Zela, very likely because it makes an effective conclusion to the account of that battle.[12]

In the passage under discussion (*Iul*. 37), Suetonius reports on the display of the words as one of three very particular episodes that took place during all five of Caesar's triumphs, held in 46–45 B.C. for the victories in Gaul, Egypt, Pontus, Africa and Spain.[13] The other two incidents both occurred during the Gallic triumph. Suetonius writes that the axle of Caesar's chariot broke along the route and that he climbed the Capitol flanked by forty elephants bearing torches. Both these events were highly spectacular incidents, and the mention of *veni vidi vici* in this context suggests that this written announcement also made a significant impression at the time and in the records and that it was considered to be out of the ordinary. In fact, the concise alliterative message of *veni vidi vici* made up the perfect rhetorical catchphrase for a mass audience. As we saw above, Plutarch underlines its persuasive quality. Hence, whether or not Caesar had previously formulated the statement, *veni vidi vici* was most certainly intended for a large audience. The triumph provided an optimal setting, where the memorable phrasing would have been read, called out, repeated, debated and remembered by people gathered in this crowded ceremony that was filled with strong emotion and expectation.

[9] As suggested by C. Pelling in his new commentary, *Plutarch.* Caesar. *Translated with an Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford, 2011), 392.

[10] A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius: The Scholar and his Caesars* (London, 1983), 63–4; C. Pelling, 'Breaking the bounds: writing about Julius Caesar', in B. McGing and J. Mossman (edd.), *The Limits of Ancient Biography* (Swansea, 2006), 255–80, at 264–5, 272–3 n. 42; id., 'The first biographers: Plutarch and Suetonius', in M. Griffin (ed.), *A Companion to Julius Caesar* (Oxford, 2009), 252–66, at 252–3. On Oppius, see G.B. Townend, 'C. Oppius on Julius Caesar', *AJPh* 108 (1987), 325–42.

[11] Wallace-Hadrill (n. 10), 88–91. Cicero tells of how triumphal contents were documented by the *aerarium*, 2 *Verr*. 1.57. For archives and triumphal contents, see further I. Östenberg, *Staging the World: Spoils, Captives, and Representations in the Roman Triumphal Procession* (Oxford, 2009), 14–17.

[12] e.g. Gelzer (n. 2), 260; Meier (n. 2), 413; R.L. Jiménez, *Caesar against Rome: The Great Roman Civil War* (London, 1997), 192; Billows (n. 2), 228.

[13] Suet. *Iul*. 37.2: *Gallici triumphi die Velabrum praetervehens paene curru excussus est axe diffracto ascenditque Capitolium ad lumina, quadraginta elephantis dextra sinistraque lychnuchos gestantibus. Pontico triumpho inter pompae fercula trium verborum praetulit titulum VENI VIDI VICI non acta belli significantem sicut ceteris, sed celeriter confecti notam* ('As he passed the Velabrum on the day of his Gallic triumph, he was almost thrown out of his chariot as the axle broke, and he climbed the Capitol by lamplight, with forty elephants bearing torches on his right and his left. In his Pontic triumph he exhibited among the biers of the procession a placard (*titulus*) with three words *VENI VIDI VICI*, not to show the deeds performed in the war, as in the others, but to mark out how fast the war had been concluded').

THE *TITULUS*

According to Suetonius, the three words *veni vidi vici* were shown on a *titulus*. The term is revealing.[14] Several Latin authors tell of *tituli* that were carried in triumphal processions. Both Ovid (*Tr*. 4.2.20) and Propertius (3.4.16) depict the people of Rome reading names of captured towns on *tituli*. The Elder Pliny writes that Sulla in 81 B.C. paraded 14,000 pounds of gold under a placard (*sub titulo*) that specified the amount and reported that the younger Marius had earlier robbed the sum from the Capitoline temple.[15] Pliny also records that Balbus in 19 B.C. had a representation of *mons Gyri* preceded by a *titulus* that stated the name of the mountain and declared that it produced precious stones,[16] and that Claudius displayed *tituli* announcing the weight and the donors together with the golden crowns in his British triumph.[17] Suetonius writes that in the procession of A.D. 68, Nero displayed the crowns secured in the Greek games with *tituli* that provided information on how they had been won.[18] Centuries later, the biographer of the *Historia Augusta* (*Aurel*. 34.1–2) claims that the different groups of people in Aurelian's triumph had their names announced on *tituli*. There were, among others, women labelled as Amazons.

In all these examples, the triumphal *tituli* appear on parade together with captives, spoils and representations of places. They provide information on the specific displays by announcing names, numbers, weight and origins. Quite clearly, they are identical to the placards seen on reliefs depicting triumphal processions. For example, the famed relief in the passageway of the Arch of Titus in Rome provides three examples of placards carried by processional *ministri* (Fig. 1).[19] Each placard precedes a piece or group of booty from the temple in Jerusalem: the table of shewbread with vessels and trumpets, the golden seven-branched lampstand (*menorah*) and, probably following to the left of the third placard (where the relief breaks off), the Jewish Law.[20] Certainly, these placards once named and described the spoils on display; they were the *tituli* noted in the literary sources. Similarly, placards depicted in other representations of triumphal processions, for example on the Arch of Trajan in Benevento, appear just in front of captives and booty and were clearly *tituli* that gave brief information on those who followed.[21]

[14] For a discussion of *tituli* in triumphs (Caesar's *veni vidi vici* excluded) and other contexts, see I. Östenberg, '*Titulis oppida capta leget*. The role of the written placards in the Roman triumphal procession', *MEFRA* 121 (2009), 461–70.

[15] Plin. *HN* 33.16: *In eadem [Romae] post annos CCCVII, quod ex Capitolinae aedis incendio ceterisque omnibus delubris C. Marius filius Praeneste detulerat, XIIII pondo, quae sub eo titulo in triumpho transtulit Sulla et argenti VI*.

[16] Plin. *HN* 5.37: *mons Gyri in quo gemmas nasci titulus praecessit*. In the same passage, Pliny notes that Balbus displayed names and representations (*nomina ac simulacra*) of all peoples and cities taken. The *nomina* were certainly shown on *tituli*.

[17] Plin. *HN* 33.54: *Claudius, successor eius, cum de Brittannia triumpharet, inter coronas aureas VII pondo habere quam contulisset Hispania citerior, VIIII quam Gallia comata, titulis indicavit*.

[18] Suet. *Ner*. 25.1: *praeeunte pompa ceterarum [coronarum] cum titulis, ubi et quos quo cantionum quove fabularum argumento vicisset*. Cf. Cass. Dio 62.20.2.

[19] M. Pfanner, *Der Titusbogen* (Mainz am Rhein, 1983), 74, 82–90.

[20] According to Josephus (*BJ* 7.148–52), the three central spoils from Jerusalem displayed in the triumph were the golden table, the golden seven-branched lampstand and the Jewish Law. In my view, the third placard indicates the presence of the Law, Östenberg (n. 11), 111–19.

[21] For the frieze on the Arch of Trajan in Benevento, see I. Scott Ryberg, *Rites of the State Religion in Roman Art, MAAR* 22 (Rome, 1955), 150–4, figs. 82 a–e; Pfanner (n. 19), 86–7, Beil. 3. Other

FIG. 1: Procession of Romans with the booty from Jerusalem. 13 × 18 Rome, Arch of Titus. © 2012. Photo Scala, Florence – courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Att. Culturali.

Tituli seen on reliefs depicting triumphal processions almost exclusively have the form modern literature calls *tabula ansata*; that is a board with small handles, *ansae*, on the short sides. *Tabula ansata* is a modern and rather unfortunate term,[22] as Latin authors always call the placards *tituli* and never *tabulae*.[23] A general difference in the ancient terminology seems to be that *tabulae* were boards used for longer texts, such as legal decrees, edicts and treaties,[24] which were fastened on to any wall, whereas *tituli* were labels, 'titles', attached to a specific content for which they provided information. Hence, a *titulus* gave, for example, the title of a book, a speech or a wine, or the name and career of the person represented in portraiture and statue (*titulus*/*imago*).[25] The *tituli*

reliefs depicting triumphal processions and including *tituli* are: the small frieze running around the Arch of Titus, a relief from Cherchell and a Campana terracotta relief. See, for Titus, Scott Ryberg 147–8, figs. 80a–b; Pfanner (n. 19), 82–90, Abb. 46–8, Taf. 79–87; for Cherchell, M. Torelli, *Typology and Structure of Roman Historical Reliefs* (Ann Arbor, 1982), 124–5, pl. V.6; and for the Campana relief, S. Tortorella, 'Processione trionfale e circense sulle lastre Campana', in *Le perle e il filo: A Mario Torelli per i suoi settanta anni* (Venosa, 2008), 301–21. Except for the Campana relief, the *tituli* all have the *ansata* shape.

[22] Östenberg (n. 14).

[23] When the word *tabula* occurs in descriptions of triumphal processions, it always denotes a painting, taken and displayed as booty; see Östenberg (n. 11), 79–80, 194–9.

[24] See E.A. Meyer, *Legitimacy and Law in the Roman world: Tabulae in Roman Belief and Practice* (Cambridge, 2004, esp. 24–36.

[25] Books: Ov. *Tr*. 1.1.7, *Pont*. 1.1.17; Plin. *Ep*. 5.6.42; speeches: Frontin. *Aq*. 2.76; wine: Petron. *Sat*. 34.6; *titulus*/*imago*: e.g. Livy 10.7.11, 22.31.11, 36.40.9. For further references, see *OLD*, s.v. *titulus*. For knobbed *tituli* on Roman monuments, see G.G. Pani, 'Segno e immagine di scrittura; la *tabula ansata* e il suo significato simbolico', in *Decima miscellanea greca e romana. Studi pubblicati dall' Istituto italiano per la storia antica* 36 (1986), 429–41.

were intended to be read together with the item or person to which they belonged. Hence their knobs: clearly the handles were once used to fix or to nail the placards on these objects.

In the triumphal procession, *tituli* were not actually physically suspended on the spoils and captives on display. Nevertheless, through their shape, they transmitted the image of *tituli* to the spectators. Their knobbed ends signalled that they belonged to the objects or people shown behind them and that they should be read together with and as information about this display.

Hence, when Suetonius tells us that Caesar showed a *titulus* with *veni vidi vici* in his triumph, he reveals that the three words were not intended to be read in isolation. Instead, the placard formed a joint display with the person to whom it belonged: Caesar, the *triumphator*. According to Suetonius, Caesar exhibited (*praetulit*) the text among the biers of the procession (*inter pompae fercula*), a wording that does not specify its placing. *Inter fercula* might mean anywhere in the parade, while *prae* in *praetulit* could indicate that the placard was carried at the head of the parade, or that Caesar showed it just before (*prae*) his own appearance. The term *titulus* itself suggests that the placard appeared close to Caesar.[26] The intimate relation between *triumphator* and text is further underlined by the fact that the verbs were formulated in the first person singular – *I* came, *I* saw, *I* conquered. The *titulus* with its first person proclamation was a title 'fixed' to Caesar, encouraging the spectators to read it together with and as information about the *triumphator*.

Caesar's placard stands out as an unprecedented exception. All other triumphal *tituli* recorded in literature and art preceded, as we have seen, the captives, spoils or representations on parade and provided descriptive information about names, places, weight and provenance. By way of these short texts, the Roman victors defined the contents and extent of their conquests, now on display. *Veni vidi vici* is, as far as the sources tell, our only example of a *titulus* linked to a *triumphator* and it is exceptional in its first-person style. Moreover, Caesar's placard had not been attached to the *triumphator* by someone else. Instead it was Caesar himself who symbolically carried his own *titulus* ahead (*praetulit*). He thereby took advantage of a medium conventionally used to express Roman power and control over defeated enemies to show off his personal success. *Veni vidi vici* is an unorthodox and challenging self-advertisement, preceding Caesar and proclaiming the speed of his own deeds in his own words – I came, I saw, I conquered.

VENI VIDI VICI AS WRITTEN RESPONSE

Caesar certainly had cause for his boastful *veni vidi vici*. The Pontic campaign had been a quick affair. Caesar arrived in Pontus more or less directly from his cruise on the Nile with Cleopatra and defeated King Pharnaces at Zela within five days after his arrival and after only four hours of fighting.[27] Hence, the declaration of extreme speed had its rightful place in the Pontic triumph, and Suetonius also notes that the placard was brought

[26] If the placard was instead carried further ahead, its message would still have been the same.

[27] [Caes.] *BAlex.* 71–7; Suet. *Iul.* 35.2; App. *B Civ.* 2.91; Plut. *Caes.* 50; Cass. Dio 44.46.1–3. A.N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Foreign Policy in the East 168 BC to AD 1* (London, 1984), 300; R.D. Sullivan, *Near Eastern Royalty and Rome* (Toronto, 1990), 157–8.

forth to tell how fast the war had been concluded and not, as was usual practice, to show the deeds performed.

Caesar's swift victory in Pontus is generally given as the explanation for his *veni vidi vici*. This is certainly correct. However, as I aim to show, Caesar's message had further causes and wider implications, beyond the immediate reference to a quick Pontic success.

According to Appian (*B Civ*. 2.91), right after the victory at Zela, Caesar is said to have exclaimed: 'O fortunate Pompey, who was considered and named Great for fighting against such men as these in the time of Mithridates, the father of this man.' Thereafter, Appian says that Caesar wrote 'But I (ἐγὼ δὲ) came, saw, conquered' to Rome. Appian thus suggests that Caesar by *veni vidi vici* set his swift and effective success in contrast to Pompey's previous Pontic warfare. Suetonius also links the battle of Zela and the announcement of *veni vidi vici* with a comment by Caesar on Pompey's earlier campaigning in the area. Having just described the quick victory over Pharnaces, Suetonius (*Iul*. 35.2) writes that Caesar often reminded people of Pompey's luck in having gained his military reputation almost exclusively by defeating such powerless cowards.

Roman fighting against Pontus had been going on for periods since 89 B.C., including three so-called Mithridatic wars,[28] and when Pompey finally defeated Mithridates in 63 B.C., he did indeed win much repute for the success. Caesar's actions and comment at Zela, as reported in Appian and Suetonius, suggest that he announced *veni vidi vici* to take the shine off Pompey's deeds.[29] *Veni vidi vici* underlined the ease of his victory in contrast to earlier extended campaigns against Pontus. Caesar's words were aimed at previous Roman military leaders in the area, who had either been remarkably ineffective, or had won their fame far too easily (Pompey).[30] 'Came, saw, conquered' was an announcement of military quickness and resolute success against the kingdom that Caesar's predecessors – for very little reason, as it consisted of such easily defeated cowards – had been fighting for years.

Roman generals, with Sulla, Lucullus and Pompey as their prime champions, had been struggling to subdue Mithridates and Pontus for a very long time. Moreover, both Lucullus and Pompey (and probably Sulla)[31] made huge efforts to magnify their successes in the triumphal parades that ended their campaigns. In order to set *veni vidi vici* in context, it is necessary to discuss these earlier displays in some detail. In 63 B.C., Lucullus' triumph over Mithridates of Pontus and Tigranes of Armenia paraded a six-foot high golden statue of Mithridates, and sixty friends and generals of Mithridates also walked in the procession (Plut. *Luc.* 37.3–4). Two years later, Pompey held a massive two-day triumphal celebration over the eastern kingdoms and the pirates. In order to outdo Lucullus, he paraded a colossal statue of Mithridates of solid gold and eight cubits in height, plus large silver statues of both Mithridates and

[28] For the Mithridatic wars, see e.g. Sherwin-White (n. 27), 93–234; Sullivan (n. 27), 44–8; J.M. Madsen, 'Mitradates VI: Rome's perfect enemy', in E. Hallager and S. Riisager (edd.), *Proceedings of the Danish Institute at Athens* VI (Athens, 2009), 223–36.

[29] As noted by Deutsch (n. 4), 151–4 and Sumi (n. 4), 59–60.

[30] Caesar also erected a trophy on the site of Zela opposite a victory monument built by Mithridates in 67 B.C. after his victory against C. Valerius Triarius, who served under Lucullus, Cass. Dio 42.48.2.

[31] Sulla quite likely emphasized his victory over Mithridates in his triumph, but our limited sources tell very little of the display, Cic. *Leg. Man*. 3.8; Val. Max. 2.8.7; Plin. *HN* 33.16; Plut. *Sull*. 34.1–2; App. *B Civ*. 1.101; Eutr. 5.9.1. Murena also celebrated a triumph over Mithridates in 81 B.C., but nothing is known of its contents, Cic. *Leg. Man*. 3.8.

of Pharnaces I, the first king of Pontus.[32] There were moreover representations of Mithridates and Tigranes, shown fighting, conquered and fleeing, as well as an image of the death of Mithridates (App. *Mith.* 117). Sons and daughters of the king were put on show in the triumph, as were his throne and sceptre.[33]

Both Lucullus and Pompey also paraded a number of texts in their triumphs over Mithridates, and these too formed part of the competitive strife between the two. According to Plutarch, Lucullus exhibited tablets (δέλτοι) that recorded the sums of money that Lucullus had already paid to Pompey for the war against the pirates, to the Roman treasury and to each soldier (950 drachmas).[34] Both Appian (πίναξ) and Plutarch (γράμματα) also tell of lists brought forth in Pompey's triumph.[35] They gave names and numbers of nations, cities, forts, kings and ships conquered, cities founded and also stated that whereas the public revenues from taxes had been 50 million drachmas, Pompey now delivered twenty thousand talents in coined money and vessels of gold and silver to the treasury, in addition to the money that he gave to the soldiers.

The texts described by Appian and Plutarch were no *tituli*, but lists that would have worked independently of the displays on parade. Such texts are otherwise unattested in the sources. Appian and Plutarch suggest that Lucullus' and Pompey's texts were designed to eclipse the achievements of each man's rival. In Plutarch's version, Lucullus even has a placard boasting that he has paid a lot of money for Pompey's continued campaign. Hence, Lucullus' text could be said to project itself into Pompey's parade held two years later, in that it told future spectators to remember his role in the making of Pompey's victory and triumph. Pompey's processional lists, in their turn, could be read as a textual response to Lucullus' claim, announcing clearly that the money now taken into Rome superseded all previous victories over Mithridates and Tigranes.

The triumphal displays of Lucullus and Pompey form part of the intense rivalry between the two. In 74 B.C. the Senate appointed Lucullus for the prestigious command against Mithridates. When his troops mutinied in 68/7 B.C. (Plut. *Luc*. 34), Rome deprived him of his command and sent Pompey instead to take up arms against Mithridates.[36] From that point on, the two fought bitterly to be given the highest honours and recognition for their Pontic commands. When Lucullus returned to Rome in 66 B.C., he was forced to stay outside the city for three years before he could enter in triumph.[37] Pompey came off better, and on his return in 61 B.C. walked almost immediately into the city in a procession lasting two days.[38] In his triumph were also a majority of the soldiers who had once fought for Lucullus in the East.[39] Lucullus reacted by calling Pompey a vulture, who in his unlimited lust for military power and glory profited from other people's success.[40] Pompey, for his part, made fun of Lucullus' failure

[32] Plin. *HN* 33.151–2; App. *Mith*. 116.
[33] Plut. *Pomp*. 45.4; App. *Mith.* 116–17.
[34] Plut. *Luc*. 37.4.
[35] Plut. *Pomp*. 45.3; App. *Mith*. 117.
[36] On the *lex Gabinia*, *lex Manilia* and the *inimicitia* between Lucullus and Pompey, see Vell. Pat. 2.33; Plut. *Luc*. 34–6, *Pomp*. 30. D.F. Epstein, *Personal Enmity in Roman Politics 218–43 BC* (London and New York, 1987), 77, 83–4; A. Keaveney, *Lucullus: A Life* (London, 1992), 120–8.
[37] Cic. *Acad. Pr.* 2.3; Plut. *Luc.* 35.7, 36.4, 37; cf. Keaveney (n. 36), 129–36.
[38] Livy, *Per.* 103; Vell. Pat. 2.40.3; Diod. Sic. 40.4; Plin. *HN* 7.98, 33.151–2, 37.12–18; Asc. *Mil*. 41–2; Plut. *Pomp*. 43, 45; App. *Mithr*. 116–17; Cass. Dio 37.21; Eutr. 6.16.
[39] Plut. *Luc*. 36.4, *Pomp*. 31.5–6.
[40] Vell. Pat. 2.33, 2.40.4; Plut. *Pomp*. 30.3, 31.5–7; Cass. Dio 36.46. Later on, Lucullus contested

and his greed for money.[41] The texts paraded in their triumphs formed part of this verbal dispute.

In Caesar's triumphs, sources again note the display of a particular text in a triumph: *veni vidi vici*. Once more, the enemy was a king of Pontus, Pharnaces, son of Mithridates, the long-time bitter enemy of Rome. Caesar's placard can be interpreted as mocking earlier lengthy campaigns against Pontus. When carried through the streets of Rome, the words might also be read as a written response to Lucullus' and Pompey's longstanding rival claims for having won a decisive victory over Pontus, and their use of triumphal processions to announce that mastery. In its message as well as in verbal quickness, *veni vidi vici* put an effective end to that dispute. Not only had Sulla first, and Lucullus and Pompey later on, needed twenty years to subdue Pontus. They also spent years in arguing about it, and in their triumphs they paraded Pontic spoils and images with list after list with words, numbers and names to publicize their deeds. For Caesar, four hours on the battlefield and one placard with three words in the triumphal parade sufficed.

Hence, just as Pompey's triumph might be read as a response to Lucullus' parade, Caesar's performance was a reply to his predecessors' celebrations. In particular, *veni vidi vici* countered Pompey's Pontic pomp. In the larger context, all five of Caesar's triumphs were designed to outdo his former father-in-law's three separate triumphs (around 80, in 71 and in 61 B.C.). Pompey had shown himself master of the world, staging triumphal processions over Africa, Spain (Europe) and Asia, all culminating in the two-day long celebration held in 61 B.C. that paraded the inhabited world as his trophy.[42] Caesar went one step further, and stacked up four of his triumphs in just one month. These marked his victories in Europe (Gaul), Africa (Egypt and Thapsus) and Asia (Pontus), later to be complemented by a military victory in Europe (Spain). Caesar's celebrations could be read as a response to Pompey's claim of world conquest, by emphatically announcing worldwide mastery in the space of just one month, whereas the same achievement had taken Pompey a period of twenty years.[43] Thus, *veni vidi vici* tells a story similar to that of Caesar's triumphs taken as a whole. While Pompey had performed great deeds and paraded grand displays, Caesar had equalled or even surpassed his success, and at a much swifter pace.

VENI VIDI VICI AS PROVOCATION

Veni vidi vici was an utterly effective text that announced Caesar's speedy victory in contrast to earlier never-ending campaigns in Pontus. We have also seen that it could be read as a textual response to the bitter quarrel and triumphal displays of Lucullus and Pompey. Furthermore, I will argue that *veni vidi vici* was a manifest challenge to centuries of normative acting and writing in Republican Rome. The *titulus* in Caesar's Pontic triumph is unparalleled, and was, I believe, deliberately provocative in several senses: in proclaiming Caesar's extreme speed at the expense of his fellow

the ratification of Pompey's eastern *acta*: Vell. Pat. 2.40.5; Plut. *Cat. Min*. 31.1–2, *Luc*. 42.5–6, *Pomp.* 46.3; App. *B Civ*. 2.9; Cass. Dio 37.49–50.

[41] Vell. Pat. 2.33; Plin. *HN* 9.170; Plut. *Pomp*. 31.5–7.

[42] Cass. Dio 37.21.2; cf. Vell. Pat. 2.40.4; Plut. *Pomp*. 45.4.

[43] See further Östenberg (n. 11), 284–7.

Romans, in boasting the *triumphator*'s personal achievements in the first person singular, and in expressing the success of one man in such a condensed form.

First, *veni vidi vici* was provocative in its contents: the announcement of Caesar's exceptional and victorious speed. Spectators of the triumph could hardly have missed the blunt announcement of superiority in a message that, carried in front of the *triumphator*, ridiculed and scorned Caesar's predecessors. 'I came, I saw, I conquered' both showed off Caesar's achievements and diminished the value of other Roman generals' accomplishments.

Besides boasting of Caesar's pre-eminence over other Roman commanders, *veni vidi vici* could be read as a proclamation of victory against these very generals, not least Pompey. We should not forget that the four processions that Caesar staged in one and the same month in 46 B.C. were also his first ritual entry into Rome after more than three years of civil wars that had started off with the crossing of the Rubicon.[44] The four triumphs celebrated his victories in Gaul, Alexandria, Pontus and Africa. However, although the triumphs officially celebrated only Caesar's *bella externa*,[45] they in practice signified the ceremonial end to battles fought against enemy Romans.[46] Not only were Caesar's successes at Alexandria and Zela marked as festive days in the calendar afterwards, but so were his victories at Pharsalus and Thapsus, and later Munda.[47]

Late Republican triumphs did not altogether cover up civil wars.[48] In his processions of 46 B.C., Caesar was careful not to exhibit the names of defeated fellow Romans, but he could not resist parading images of them in their death.[49] Thus, the suicides of Cato and Scipio were both shown, a display much disliked by the Roman spectators.[50] There could have been little doubt for the people watching that Caesar was now master of both the outside world and of Rome. To further his message of power, as many as seventy-two lictors accompanied the victor, a massive display, which was not taken favourably by the people (Cass. Dio 43.14.3, 43.19.2). Hence, Caesar's famed declaration of *clementia* on his return after Thapsus was proclaimed with a parallel statement of supreme power.[51] The triumph showed the Romans who had refused Caesar's *clementia* crushed, while those who had chosen to accept his pardon were forced to watch their comrades and the defeat of their cause. The triumphs in themselves were also a victory for Caesar. The last time he tried for a *triumphus*, in 60 B.C., Cato and the Senate

[44] Caesar had been in Rome between Rubicon and the triumphs, but none of the visits had included a ritual entry: Plut. *Caes*. 35, 37.1–2, 51; App. *B Civ*. 2.41, 48, 92. Gelzer (n. 2), 208–10, 220–3, 261.

[45] Cic. *Phil*. 14.23: *Pharsaliae vero pugnae ne triumphum quidem egit.*

[46] Florus suggests that although (images of) Pharsalus, Thapsus and Munda were not on display in the triumphs of 46 and 45 B.C., these were in fact Caesar's major victories (*Epit.* 2.13.89): *Pharsalia et Thapsos et Munda nusquam. Et quanto maiora erant, de quibus non triumphabat!*

[47] Munda: *Inscr. It.* 13:2, 426 (*Fasti Caeretani*, *Fasti Farnesiani*); Thapsus: *Inscr. It.* 13:2, 437 (*Fasti Praenestini*); Pharsalus: *Inscr. It.* 13:2, 493 (*Fasti Allifani*, *Fasti Amiternini*, *Fasti Antiates Ministrorum*); App. *B Civ*. 2.106.

[48] Sumi (n. 4), 31–2, 58–60, 216–17; C.H. Lange, 'Triumph and civil war in the Late Republic', *PBSR* 81 (2013), 1–24. When Sulla held his triumph over Mithridates in 81 B.C., he exhibited gold from Praeneste, and Marius the Younger's name was on display on the accompanying *titulus*, clearly denoting Marius as an enemy and referring to his victory in the ongoing *bella interna*: see Plin. *HN* 33.16, cited in n. 15 above.

[49] App. *B Civ.* 2.101; Cass. Dio 43.19.2–3. Suetonius mentions both Scipio and the sons of Pompey in his description of Caesar's triumphs (*Iul*. 37); cf. Östenberg (n. 11), 246–8, 251–61, 264.

[50] According to Appian (*B Civ*. 2.101), Caesar refrained only from showing the misfortunes of Pompey, since he was much missed by the people.

[51] Declaration of *clementia*: Vell. Pat. 2.56.1; Cass. Dio 43.15–18.

managed to hinder it.[52] This time, any such resistance had effectively been wiped out, and Cato's death scene was even on public display as part of the triumph.

In this triumphal context, where victories over Romans were suggested and even paraded alongside those over foreign enemies, the message *veni vidi vici* had double significance. Beyond the obvious reading of a swift Pontic campaign, 'Came, saw, conquered' was, I would argue, also a statement of Caesar's determined and speedy takeover of the Italian peninsula and his victories over Roman adversaries. Caesar was renowned for using surprise and rapid, bold movements as a strategic weapon, both in his foreign wars and in the civil struggles. Hence, Suetonius, Plutarch, Appian and others repeatedly describe Caesar's audacious speed as a winning factor in the internal conflicts.[53] Contemporary sources tell the same story. Cicero, in his letters from 49 B.C., time after time comes back to Caesar's almost unimaginable swiftness, strongly contrasted with Pompey's irresolute undertakings. Thus, according to Cicero, Caesar, unlike Pompey, used an unbelievable speed (*O celeritatem incredibilem!*), rushed along and would soon be in Rome (*at illum ruere nuntiant et iam iamque adesse*), and then hastened through Apulia to catch Pompey at Brundisium (*Caesaris hic per Apuliam ad Brundisium cursus quid efficiat, exspecto*).[54] On display in Rome in 46 B.C., *veni vidi vici* told the Roman spectators that Caesar's speed, force, boldness, strategic superiority and leadership had struck down Pontus with a single blow, and also that he rapidly and with little resistance had taken control of Rome. The four triumphs were Caesar's entry as first man in Rome,[55] and *veni vidi vici* a declaration of his swiftness and his unquestionable new position of authority and power.

The second aspect of provocation in *veni vidi vici* concerns its pronounced I-form. As far as we know, no other text displayed in a Roman triumph expressed the specific acts of the triumphing general in the first person. As demonstrated above, texts shown in triumphal processions were almost exclusively short notes of names and numbers that preceded spoils and prisoners, providing the spectators with effective and easily read labels on the objects and peoples that passed by. Also, lists of kings captured, cities founded and money brought into Rome appear in the description by Appian and Plutarch of Lucullus' and Pompey's eastern triumphs.

To hold a triumph was the greatest honour that a Roman general could achieve. The procession provided him with a public space and opportunity to exhibit his glorious deeds of conquest. Nevertheless, from what the sources suggest, the parade was acknowledged primarily as a place and time to bring the fruits of victory, spoils and prisoners, into the Roman realm and to present the conquests to the people and gods of Rome. Personal success, though profoundly present in the performance *per se*, was not visually emphasized by specific displays. Hence, while vivid representations showed the actions and deaths of Roman enemies, no images are attested that picture the martial

[52] Suet. *Iul*. 18.2; Plut. *Caes*. 13.1, *Cat. Min*. 31.2–4; App. *B Civ*. 2.8; Cass. Dio 37.54.

[53] e.g. Vell. Pat. 2.51.2; Suet. *Iul*. 34; Plut. *Caes*. 32.1–2, 35.2, 37, 52.1–2, 53.1–2; App. *B Civ*. 2.34–6, 2.41, 2.47–9, 2.52–3; Cass. Dio 41.44, 42.56.1.

[54] Cic. *Att*. 7.20.1, 7.22.1, 8.11.7, all from February 49. Cf. *Att*. 8.9, 8.9a.2, 8.13.1, 8.14.1–2, 9.18.2, 16.10.1, *Fam.* 8.15, *Marcell*. 5.

[55] Similarly, though with less boasting of domestic victories, Octavian entered the city as new leader of Rome in 29 B.C., and in A.D. 71, the triumphal entry of Vespasian and Titus marked the new Flavian dynasty's kick-off as emperors; for the latter, see M. Beard, 'The triumph of Flavius Josephus', in A.J. Boyle and W.J. Dominik (edd.), *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text* (Leiden, 2003), 543–58, at 552–8.

acts performed by the general.[56] In fact, except for *veni vidi vici*, our sources lack references to displays that focussed on the person of the *triumphator*, but for one example – Pompey's portrait made of pearls paraded in 61 B.C., a distasteful exhibit according to Pliny the Elder (*HN* 37.14). Pompey and Caesar are exceptions that prove the general rule; that in this ritual context, the *triumphator* played a role, a god-like, kingly performance, in which the phallus under the car, the songs of the soldiers and the slave standing behind the successful general worked to hinder any personal hubris from going too far.[57] To use this ritual moment reserved for thanking the gods to produce a first-person boast, 'I came, I saw, I conquered', was unprecedented and, without doubt, very provocative.

Quite clearly, Caesar's *veni vidi vici*, like Pompey's portrait, belongs to a Late Republican context, in which the great generals, equipped with unprecedented power, authority and self-confidence tested the limits of traditional behaviour to the extreme.[58] In their quest to outdo each other,[59] Pompey and Caesar staged triumphs that went far beyond the conventional. Both marked themselves as world conquerors, and both employed elephants to escort them;[60] Caesar also had white horses.[61] Elephants and white horses were potent symbols that signalled royal and semi-divine status and thus marked the ambition of Pompey and Caesar, unrestricted by the limits of Republican codes of behaviour. Caesar's use of massed lictors to escort him in the triumphs, his display of conquered fellow Romans, and the presence of elephants and white horses were together with *veni vidi vici* prime components in his use of 'provocation and transgression as political habitus', to use the words of Tonio Hölscher.[62]

Caesar's use of the first person singular also stands out in contrast to his use of the third person in the *Bellum Gallicum* and *Bellum Civile*.[63] The *commentarii* were well known in Rome at the time of the triumphs in 46 B.C.,[64] and one would suspect that at least spectators within the leading political circles would have reacted to this drastic shift in expression. Now, as has been discussed by Batstone and Damon, Caesar by using the third person in his *commentarii* paradoxically manages to shape an intimate feeling of shared values that transmits a sense of 'us' to his readers.[65] The recurrent character Caesar appears as an impersonal and distanced actor in the field, who fights for the good of Rome, and whose deeds appear as objective facts.[66] This is an image

[56] Östenberg (n. 11), 245–61.
[57] Östenberg (n. 11), 280–2.
[58] T. Hölscher, 'Provocation und Transgression als politischer Habitus in der späten römischen Republik', *MDAI(R)* 111 (2005), 83–104.
[59] For Pompey's and Caesar's triumphs as competitive displays, see Östenberg (n. 11), 280–2, 284–7. For Caesar's building programme as a reply to Pompey's manubial edifices, see R. Westall, 'The Forum Iulium as representation of imperator Caesar', *MDAI(R)* 103 (1996), 83–118, esp. 88–98.
[60] For Pompey's elephants: Plut. *Pomp*. 14.4–5; Gran. Lic. 36, p. 31 F (34 C). Pompey also rode in a chariot decorated with gems and wore what was said to be the cloak of Alexander (App. *Mith.* 117). For Caesar's triumphal use of elephants, there are two different versions in Suetonius (*Iul*. 37.2) and Cassius Dio (43.22.1–2).
[61] Cass. Dio 43.14.3. S. Weinstock, *Divus Iulius* (Oxford, 1972), 68–75.
[62] Hölscher (n. 58).
[63] For the third person, see e.g. J. Marincola, *Authority and Tradition in Ancient Historiography* (Cambridge, 1997), 175–216, esp. 196–205; A.M. Riggsby, *Caesar in Gaul and Rome: War in Words* (Austin, 2006), 150–5; W.W. Batstone and C. Damon, *Caesar's Civil War* (Oxford, 2006), 144–6; C.S. Kraus, 'Bellum Gallicum', in Griffin (n. 10), 159–74, at 159–65, with further references.
[64] The *Bellum Gallicum* was clearly known by this date: Kraus (n. 63), 160. The date of the publication of the *Bellum Civile* is debated; see K. Raaflaub, 'Bellum Civile', in Griffin (n. 10), 180–2.
[65] Batstone and Damon (n. 63), 117–22.
[66] Ibid. 144–6.

of Caesar, omnipresent and highly successful, but still in the midst of equals. Interestingly, as Batstone and Damon also show, Caesar in the *Bellum Civile* gradually refers more frequently back to his own accounts and he also uses the first person plural more often, to refer to Caesar the author.[67] In one passage near the end, he even slips in an 'I' (3.70.1: *credo*). Hence, as his wars proceed towards their conclusion, Caesar, again according to Batstone and Damon, transforms his voice from that of the participating general to that of the analysing observer.[68]

One might argue that *veni vidi vici* takes the narrative voice one step further. Caesar's use of first person could be interpreted as a playful and self-confident textual reference to his own earlier third-person writings. More importantly, in *veni vidi vici*, Caesar is certainly no more a Roman general who aims at including his readers, or even an observant commentator of a war that is coming to its end. 'I came, I saw, I conquered' allows for no feelings of a collective Roman identity and the words do not even pretend to present a factual war report. They are the blunt and raw words of a winner who has by his own superior actions mastered all resistance and taken full command of both external enemies and former friends.

The third aspect of provocation signalled by *veni vidi vici* also concerns form, more specifically its brevity. Traditionally, Roman aristocrats told and inscribed their martial deeds by way of lengthy enumerations of names and numbers of places, peoples and wealth obtained. From the conclusion of the victorious battle onwards, the general gave detailed accounts at several occasions, the purpose being first to secure a triumph and second to commemorate the victory and triumph. He sent a laurelled letter from the battlefield to tell of the victory and on his return to Rome he met with the Senate in order to present a thorough war report.[69] Success could be quantified and numbers were important. Hence the reports included the number of battles won, cities, forts and ships conquered and enemies captured and killed (preferably balanced by a low number of Roman losses).[70] The lists that Lucullus and Pompey presented in their triumphs according to Appian and Plutarch form part of this tradition.[71]

After the celebration, successful generals had their deeds announced and represented in inscriptions, monuments and art. Here, we find the same insistence on recording the particulars of the performed victorious deeds. Examples include the *tabulae* noted in the literary sources as describing the deeds of C. Duilius (*Inscr. It.* 13.3, 44–9), L. Aemilius Regillus (Livy 40.52), Tiberius Gracchus (Livy 41.28.8–10) and Pompey (Plin. *HN* 7.97–8). They were written in the third person singular and in the past tense (e.g. *praeda domum reportavit; triumphans in urbem rediit; eius rei aedem vovit*), giving name and title (*Cn Pompeius Magnus imperator, Ti. Semproni Gracchi consulis*), and recording the fruits of victory in names (e.g. peoples and kings conquered) and numbers (of captured ships, people etc.). Indeed, this would be the normative Roman written laudatory text, whether set up by the person praised or dedicated by somebody else: inscriptions

[67] Ibid. 129–31.
[68] Ibid. 129–30.
[69] The general's goal was twofold: first and foremost to gain a triumph, and second to mark his position within the aristocratic circle by presenting his deeds well; see M.R. Pelikan Pittenger, *Contested Triumphs: Politics, Pageantry, and Performance in Livy's Republican Rome* (Berkeley, 2008), esp. 299–302 for triumphal debates in Livy.
[70] The triumph itself could be read as an exhaustive visual list of Roman success. Livy's detailed accounts of such displays (e.g. 34.52, 37.59) reflect the Roman concern for documenting, quantifying and itemizing the gains of the victories to the Senate, people and gods.
[71] Plut. *Luc.* 37.4, *Pomp.* 45.3; App. *Mith.* 117.

written in past tense in the third person singular, and listing military and civic accomplishments in detail. This epigraphic habit formed part of the Republican competitive culture, in which martial deeds together with the *cursus honorum* were essential markers of the symbolic capital by which individuals and families struggled for power and status.[72] By listing in detail conquests, triumphs and offices, the public texts made Roman achievements and merits visible and comparable. In this culture of competition, the written records made it evident to the Roman public who had succeeded and who had not.

As with any written advertisement of victory, *veni vidi vici* gave evidence of the deeds performed by a victorious Roman general. It was written in the perfect tense, and thus told of a war fully completed. In all other aspects of form and content, however, *veni vidi vici* was unconventional in the extreme. In contrast to the traditional announcement of success, it presented no account of financial gains, or of battles won and enemies conquered.[73] It gave no numbers and no names. The message was clear: Caesar did not need to humble himself into reporting the details of his campaign to the Senate and the people. His achievements were too great to be compared to those of others. As victor over the outside world and over Rome herself, he stood above both the approval of others and the traditional system of public record-keeping.

In other ways too, Caesar's *veni vidi vici* marks his independence from the Roman tradition. As noted above, the Roman victory texts customarily presented the general in the third person singular, naming his role as *consul* or *imperator* as a way of marking that victory had been accomplished in the name of Rome. Duilius, Gracchus, Pompey and others had been successful not as private citizens but in their capacity as Roman representatives. In contrast, in Caesar's compressed *veni vidi vici*, there is no mention of Rome, any magistracy or title, and his first-person style suggests that his victory was simply won by himself and for himself.

Compared to the traditional listings of Roman achievements, the compact *veni vidi vici* was extremely effective. It reflected Caesar's speed at the battlefield and also his swiftness in writing. It told of a general who was not obliged to report his every action and who was too busy winning battles and taking control of Rome to give a detailed account. *Veni vidi vici* also exposed Caesar's character,[74] revealing at the same time his resolute actions (*acta*) and talent for witty and laconic self-expression (*dicta*).[75] In fact, Caesar was famed not only for his speed as general but also for his quick intellect and fast writing.[76] He was known as the second best orator in Rome,[77] and his charismatic personality was reflected in his sayings. *Veni vidi vici* became one of his catchphrases, and it was included in collections of Caesar's *dicta*.[78] Its stylistic elegance, as attested by Plutarch, revealed a leader who was just as quick on the battlefield as he was with words.

[72] See e.g. K.-J. Hölkeskamp, *Reconstructing the Roman Republic: An Ancient Political Culture and Modern Research* (Princeton, 2010), 107–24.

[73] Other *tituli* in Caesar's triumphs very probably gave names and numbers, but that does not diminish the power of expression presented in the *veni vidi vici*.

[74] For Caesar's character, see J. Paterson, 'Caesar the man', in Griffin (n. 10), 126–40.

[75] For *dicta* as mirrors of personality, see Quint. *Inst*. 6.3.35; Plut. *Mor*. 172E; Macrob. *Sat*. 2.1.44. Ancient collections of *dicta*: Cic. *Off*. 1.104, *De or*. 2.271, *Fam*. 9.16.4; Quint. *Inst*. 6.3.5; Suet. *Iul*. 56.7. Caesar himself collected Roman sayings: Cic. *Fam*. 9.16.4; Suet. *Iul*. 56.7. See also R. Laurence and J. Paterson, 'Power and laughter: imperial *dicta*', *PBSR* 67 (1999), 183–97.

[76] Hirtius, *BGall*. 8, praef.; Plin. *HN* 7.912; Plut. *Caes*. 17.3–4.

[77] Cic. *Brut*. 261–2; Plut. *Caes*. 3.2–4.

[78] Plutarch includes *veni vidi vici* in his *Apopthegmata Caesaris* (*Mor*. 205F–206F).

When *veni vidi vici* first appeared in Caesar's triumph, its context, contents and form was without precedent. To the people of Rome, the words probably made an immediate impact. To Caesar's equals, the announcement very likely appeared as humiliating. Caesar had not just shown himself undefeatable on the battlefield. With *veni vidi vici*, he also proclaimed that he was quicker, smarter and wittier than everybody else, and moreover was unbound by tradition and expected behaviour. *Veni vidi vici* was written provocation and a laugh in the face of the Roman *mos maiorum*.

University of Gothenburg IDA ÖSTENBERG
ida.ostenberg@class.gu.se