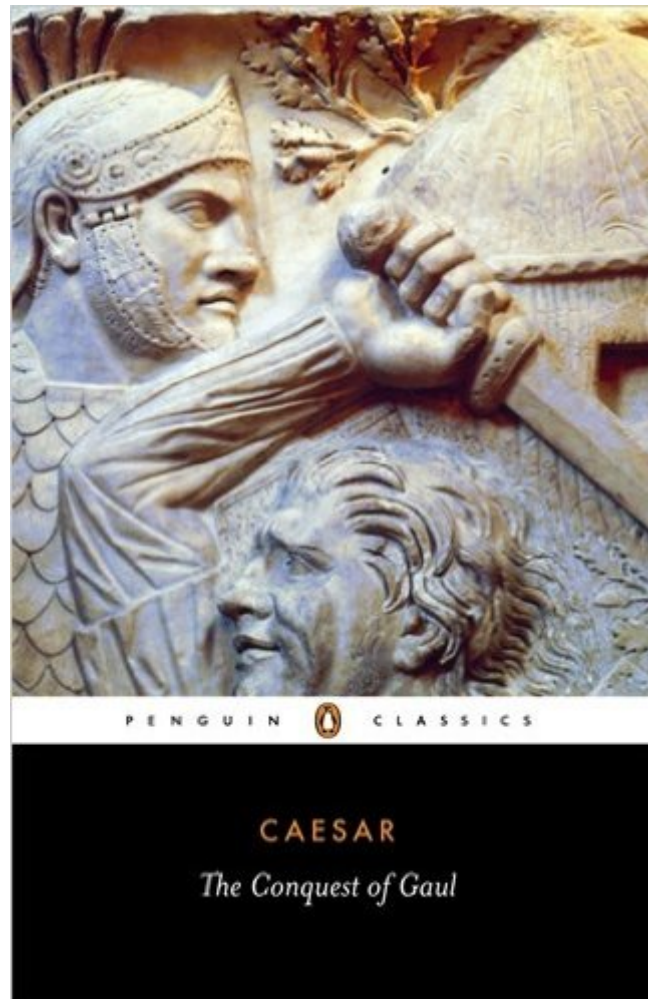


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The Conquest Of Gaul (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Between 58 and 50 BC Caesar conquered most of the area now covered by France, Belgium and Switzerland, and twice invaded Britain. This is the record of his campaigns. Caesar's narrative offers insights into his military strategy & paints a fascinating picture of his encounters with the inhabitants of Gaul and Britain, as well as offering lively portraits of a number of key characters such as the rebel leaders and Gallic chieftains. This can also be read as a piece of political propaganda, as Caesar sets down his version of events for the Roman public, knowing that he faces civil war on his return to Rome. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

This is a genuine historical treasure. Rarely are we fortunate enough to have historical accounts written by eyewitnesses. Caesar was not only an eyewitness, but the lead player. It's as though we had accounts of Alexander's campaigns written by Alexander, himself. Or Charlemagne's life in his own words. And, not only is it a firsthand account, but it is brilliantly written. Caesar's commentaries, whether of the Gallic campaigns or of the Civil War that followed, are considered masterpieces of

Latin prose. The writing is concise and straightforward. Caesar's writings are still used today to teach Latin. All the brilliance aside, however, this is also lively and interesting to read. "The Conquest of Gaul" covers the ten-year period of Caesar's proconsulship of Gaul. During those ten years he carried out a series of military campaigns that subdued all of Gaul (Europe west of the Rhine and south to the Pyrenees and Mediterranean), bringing it under Roman rule, while also leading expeditions across the Channel into southeastern Britain. Caesar writes not only of his battles, but also of the tribes he encountered and details of how his own men lived. We see Caesar as the consummate leader, sharing the hardships of his men. He fights in the front lines with them, he marches with them, he eats the same food they eat, and they will follow him anywhere. Caesar's success as a general is a product of several factors. His speed of movement, his effective use of terrain, the absolute loyalty and confidence of his troops, and the relatively advanced engineering skills of the Romans are all used effectively by Caesar. Written to publicize Caesar's Gallic successes among the people back in Rome, these accounts remain as readable today as they were intended to be 2,000 years ago.

Julius Caesar was one of the truly pivotal people in recorded history. Most non-historians know him as the one who was stabbed by Brutus on the Ides of March. It is almost as if Caesar sprang full-grown to grab the reigns of power from the Senate in Rome. Yet Caesar had a fairly long life before he became First Citizen of Rome. He was a successful general and a talented historian who saw world events with the dispassionate eye of one who felt supremely confident that his tenure as an army general was but the last stop before his ascension to ultimate power. In his CONQUEST OF GAUL, Caesar uses the third person point of view to punctuate his tacit assumption that unfolding events ought to be divorced as far as possible from the one witnessing them. This writing technique also served to symbolize his stated goal: to conquer Gaul. To him, Gaul was a land of barbarian tribes, with each possessing formidable numbers and fierce fighters. These tribes and their leaders were enormously emotional, wildly unpredictable, and more dangerous as individuals than as organized units. Caesar knew that to beat them, he could not be as them. They were emotional, he coldly calculating. They were not efficient in massed groups, his legions had to be. Caesar was the ultimate practitioner of the divide and conquer school. He picked off his enemies one at a time, like bobbing heads on a shooting gallery. The Atuaticii, the Nervii, the Helvetians all fought ferociously, sometimes winning minor victories, but it was Caesar who won the ones that counted. He transformed his legions into extensions of his personality. They fought well as masses against overwhelming odds, not for their pay, or hope of plunder, or even for glory, but for their

commander.

Amazingly well written and easily readable personal account of the war in Gaul by Caesar himself. Caesar would write these memoirs each year at the end of the Campaign season when in his Winter camp and they have an enormous level of detail. For example, during his first campaign season there is a very detailed account of how the Celts/Gauls built their city walls that made me feel like running out and building a miniature reproduction with Lincoln Logs, stones and dirt in the back yard (my wife would have loved that). Clearly, Caesar is recording this for future Roman armies so they know how the Gallic walls are built and how they can be destroyed. At one of the first cities in Gaul that Caesar lays siege to, the defenders gather on the walls and call the Romans names and throw things down at them, reminiscent of a scene from a Monty Python movie where a Gallic defender hurls epithets and other objects down at soldiers in front of a castle. However, when Caesar's troops begin to slowly wheel a massive, multi-story siege engine out of the woods and up to the walls, the occupants throw open their gates, run out, and surrender without a fight. The Romans usually faced lopsided odds in their battles and were frequently outnumbered 3:1. They overcame these odds by the incredible discipline and physical conditioning of the Roman troops who would march up to 50 miles per day with armor and weapons. The battles would usually be lost by the first side whose men panicked and fled the field. Caesar's accounts of battle give you an idea of how critically important discipline and physical strength and conditioning were to the military success of Rome.

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