

Best wishes
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HILL-FORTS IN ACTION

By

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SUMMARY

A summary is given of all Caesar's accounts of attacks on hill-forts and Roman works during the Gallic Wars and an attempt is made to distinguish between normal Celtic methods of attack and defence and those which the Gauls learned from the Romans. It is suggested that what they learned may have affected the alterations made to British hill-forts in the period between Caesar and Claudius. Attention is also drawn to the inadequacy of some modern translations of Caesar for this purpose.

In my concluding address to the Conference, I mentioned two ways in which a study of the classical Greek and Roman authors can assist us in our understanding of Iron Age hill-forts, the one general and the other particular. In general, I suggested that what we are told of the behaviour of the Celtic nobility¹ might indicate that display as well as utility entered into their design and that elaborate gates, for example, might be regarded partly as 'boasting platforms'. More particularly, I suggested that closer attention should be given to accounts of hill-forts in action. It is the purpose of this paper to amplify this second point.

Our chief corpus of such actions is, of course, supplied by Caesar's *De Bello Gallico*, but this, no less than evidence from excavation, needs to be handled with due regard to stratigraphy. Caesar himself remarks on the readiness with which the Gauls learned and adopted Roman ways of fighting,² and his accounts of the greatest sieges, of Gergovia, Alesia and Uxellodunum, though important in themselves, come too late in the story to tell us very much about 'normal' Celtic methods. Fortunately he describes plenty of others, which took place earlier, and at the beginning of Book II (II:6) he makes a general statement, as follows:

'The Gauls and the Belgae use the same method of attack. They surround the whole circuit of the walls with a large number of men and shower it with stones from all sides, so that the defences are denuded of men. Then they form *testudo*, set fire to the gates and undermine the walls. They began to do this (he goes on) without difficulty on this occasion (i.e. at Bibrax).'

This passage, which is obviously of great importance to us, has suffered badly at the hands of the editors. A few have suggested, on stylistic grounds, that the whole of it is an interpolation³ – though it is difficult to see who could have inserted it, or why. More important, from a very early date they have jibbed at *portas succendunt* ('they set fire to the gates') and substituted *portas succedunt* ('they come up to the gates');⁴ but

¹ The relevant texts, with translations and comments, are conveniently collected in Tierney (1960).

² Caesar VII:22: *ut est summae genus sollertias atque ad omnia imitanda et efficienda quae ab quoque traduntur optissimum.*

³ E.g. Meusel, quoted by Rice Homes, followed by Kraner and Dittenberger (1960) and Seel (Teubner, 5th edn., 1961).

⁴ E.g. Aldus (1518); Oudendorp (1737); Delphin (1819); Rice Holmes (1914); Edwards (Loeb, 1917); Merguet (1961), s.v. *succedo* (where the fact that it is a conjecture is not mentioned).

having done this, they are confronted with the grammatical difficulty that the simple accusative *portas* will not do in Caesar, so that this too has been emended – by some to *portis*,⁵ by one to *propius*⁶ and by one by simple deletion.⁷ In actual fact the manuscripts are completely unanimous in giving the reading *portas succedunt*,⁸ and it is unfortunate that none of the English translations in common use follows it.⁹ The argument seems to depend mainly on the alleged impossibility of the action.¹⁰ Yet Caesar himself burnt the gates of Cenabum (No. 18 in list) and the Gauls used fire against the *hiberna* of Q. Cicero (No. 14) and against the Roman siegeworks at Avaricum (No. 22) and Uxellodunum (No. 30). There is no doubt that fire, in one form or another, was a normal weapon.

A rather more difficult problem, not discussed by the editors, is posed by the words *testudine facta*. This manoeuvre, whereby a number of men advanced with their shields locked together, in 'tortoise' formation, was a commonplace of Roman warfare, but its full success required both a high degree of training and the use of standard rectangular shields.¹¹ The Gauls are said to have used it at Alesia (No. 28), but it may be that Caesar only means that they were advancing with their shields held over their heads. This sort of *testudo* needs to be distinguished from the shed-like structures, also called *testudines*, which they built and used against the *hiberna* of Q. Cicero (No. 14) – something which they clearly borrowed from the Romans.

Another device which the Gauls were using at an early stage was that of filling up ditches, presumably to create causeways over which the attackers could advance. They are first represented as doing this in the attack by the Alpine tribes on the *hiberna* of Ser. Galba at Martigny (No. 5), and it is mentioned in four other engagements (Nos. 7, 14, 15 and 28). Two variations appear: in one (No. 7) simple bundles of brushwood (*sarmenta virgultaque*) seem to have been used, but in the other (No. 28) wattles (*crates*) are referred to.¹² Whether this was a truly native form of attack we do not know, since it is only at Bibrax that we have details of a Gaulish assault on a Gaulish, as opposed to a Roman, work. But although P. Crassus used it in his attack on the pseudo-Roman camp of the Aquitani (No. 9), Caesar nowhere represents it as a borrowing. It could have been a contributory cause of the spread of multivallation.¹³

Of more limited application, but evidently a native as well as a Roman practice, is the use of tunnelling. In the Gallic Wars this was employed by the Sotiates (No. 8) and by the Bituriges (No. 22), and in each case Caesar attributes it to the fact that

⁵ E.g. Oudendorp (1737).

⁶ Klotz (1910), 243–4 and in Teubner (4th edn., 1952).

⁷ Kraner (1961).

⁸ So Dinter (Teubner, 1st edn., 1890); du Pontet (O.C.T., 1900); Constans (Budé, 1947); Rambaud (Presses Universitaires, 1965). The only slight indication to the contrary is that the late 13th century translator into Greek, cited by Oudendorp, evidently read *succedunt*; he renders it τῶν πυλῶν τῆς πόλεως ἐπιβάντας.

⁹ So Bohn (1873) has 'advance to the gates'; Loeb (Edwards, 1917), 'move up to the gates'; Penguin

(Handford, 1951), 'move close up'; Mentor (Warner, 1960), 'move up to the gates'.

¹⁰ So Meusel, quoted by Rice Holmes in his note on the passage: 'Succedunt is obviously impossible.'

¹¹ On the adoption of the rectangular shield by the Romans see Webster (1969), 22 n.

¹² This passage has attracted comment and (inevitably) emendation: see Rice Holmes (1914) on VII: 79:4.

¹³ As I suggested in a paper given to the Pre-historic Society Conference on European Hill-forts, 17th–19th April, 1959.

the Gauls involved were skilled miners. He himself used it at Avaricum (No. 22) and Uxellodunum (No. 30).

These, then, are some of the tactics which the Celts were using at the beginning of the campaigns but, as already indicated, they were quick to adopt Roman methods. At Noviodunum Suessionum (No. 2), in 57 B.C., they were amazed by the Roman mantlets and siegeworks, which they had never seen nor heard of before, and later in the same year they were astonished when they saw a Roman siege tower actually begin to move against the *oppidum* of the Atuatuci (No. 4). But already in 54 B.C. the Nervii were using circumvallation against the *hiberna* of Q. Cicero (No. 14), although they lacked the right tools for the job, and they also employed towers and ladders; and by the time of Avaricum (No. 22), in 52 B.C., the Gauls seem to have mastered the whole Roman armoury. To assist them in this they had the help not only of Roman prisoners (No. 14), but also of Spaniards who had fought against Pompey under Sertorius: in one case (No. 9) these men designed and constructed a camp on the Roman model, complete with a *porta decumana*.

All of this has interesting implications for us in Britain, and it would not be unreasonable to attribute some of the alterations which were made to British hill-forts in the last century of independence to the experience of the Gallic Wars. Commius, for example, had seen those wars from both sides of the hill, and there must have been many like him. In the meantime, of course, the Romans too had improved their methods, and it is interesting that, so far as we know, they never had to resort to circumvallation in the course of the Claudian wars of conquest. This may reflect the lower degree of urbanisation achieved in Britain, with a smaller concentration of population. There is little doubt that Caesar's figures for Gaul, like those of any other writer of war communiqués, are considerably inflated but, as Rice Holmes pointed out,¹⁴ the fact that Caesar could allocate one prisoner to each man in a force of some 50,000 does indicate that a very large number of people were involved at Alesia (No. 28) – many more than can have been the case anywhere in Britain. Caesar's contemptuous description of the so-called *oppidum* of Cassivellaunus (No. 12) is well known; but it is also worthy of note that the place which he attacked in Kent (? Bigbury, No. 11) is not given even this degree of recognition – it is simply a place (*locus*) in the woods which had fortifications (*munitiones*). By contrast, the towns of the Bituriges (No. 21) could be called not merely *oppida*, but actually *urbes*.

The attached list includes all the attacks on hill-forts and Roman camps which are described by Caesar, arranged in chronological order. Although some of the identifications are doubtful,¹⁵ it nevertheless seems worth while to supply map references for them, to assist the interested reader to study them on the ground; for Britain National Grid References are given, for Gaul the reference is to the Michelin 1/200,000 map, in the form sheet/fold. In the summaries I have tried to bring out everything which bears on the actual methods of fighting used. It hardly needs to be stated that these summaries are no substitute for a reading of Caesar himself; but from what has been

¹⁴ See his note (1914) on VII:71:2.

¹⁵ I am grateful to Mr. A. H. A. Hogg for assistance with some of them. But neither he nor I have visited them all.

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said above it should also be clear that it is Caesar who needs to be read, not his editors or translators.¹⁶

No. 1

Date: 57 B.C.

Reference in Caesar: II:6-7

Place: Bibrax, an *oppidum* of the Remi

Probable identification: ?Vieux-Laon, St. Thomas (Aisne)
or ?Vieux-Reims, Guignicourt (Aisne)

Map reference: 56/5
or 56/6

Summary. Belgae began attack by the 'normal' method (see text). Caesar relieved Iccius and the Remi by sending in Numidian and Cretan archers and by diversionary attacks.

No. 2

Date: 57 B.C.

Reference in Caesar: II:12

Place: Noviodunum, an *oppidum* of the Suessiones

Probable identification: Pommiers (Aisne)

Map reference: 56/4

Summary. Roman direct assault repelled because of the width of the ditch and the height of the wall. Caesar built a camp, brought up mantlets, piled earth (?into the ditch or as a mound?) and built towers; whereupon the Suessiones, alarmed (*permoti*) by the scale of his preparations (for they had never seen nor heard of such things) surrendered.

No. 3

Date: 57 B.C.

Reference in Caesar: II:13

Place: Bratuspantium, an *oppidum* of the Bellovaci

Probable identification: Nr. Beauvais (Oise)

Map reference: 52/17

Summary. Surrendered without a fight.

No. 4

Date: 57 B.C.

Reference in Caesar: II:29-33

Place: *Oppidum Atuatuorum*

Probable identification: Hastédon, St. Servais (Namur), Belgium

Map reference: B.2/19

Summary. Promontory fort, protected by steep cliffs on all sides but one, where not more than 200 feet was defended by a high 'double wall' (*duplici muro*), on which the Atuatuaci had placed heavy rocks and sharpened stakes. They had abandoned all their other *oppida* and *castella* and concentrated here. At first they made sorties, but Caesar shut them in with a wall 12 feet high and 15 miles [*sic*] in circumference. He then brought up mantlets, constructed a

¹⁶ It is too easy to be misled. As a further example, the Penguin edition interprets the *concilium* at Alesia (no. 28) as an 'assembly'. This suggests an unlikely

degree of democracy and it seems fundamentally improbable that Critognatus would have dared to suggest cannibalism quite so publicly.

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siege-mound and built a tower some distance away. This provoked jeers from the Atuatuci, but when they saw it actually move, they were alarmed (*commoti*) and surrendered, throwing their arms into the ditch and opening their gates. However, they had treacherously kept some arms and at night they attacked the siegeworks. The Romans, whom Caesar had kept outside 'lest they should do injury to the inhabitants', were on the alert, killed 4,000 and drove the rest back inside. On the next day the gates, now undefended, were broken down and 53,000 people [*sic*] were sold into slavery.

No. 5

Date: 57 B.C.

Reference in Caesar: III:1-6

Place: Octodurus, *hiberna legionis XII* (Ser. Galba)

Probable identification: Martigny (Valais), Switzerland

Map reference: 74/9

Summary. Site in a valley overlooked by high ground. Seduni and Veragri attacked by hurling spears and stones, then by breaking down the palisade and filling up the ditch (*vallum scindere et fossas complere*). After a defensive rest, the Romans broke them with a charge, killing 10,000 out of 30,000. But Galba evacuated the position.

No. 6

Date: 56 B.C.

Reference in Caesar: III:12-14

Place: *Oppida* of the Veneti

Probable identification: Various, but evidently *not* all cliff castles

Map reference: 58 and 63

Summary. 'The sites of the *oppida* of the Veneti were generally such that, being placed at the end of spits and promontories (*in extremis lingulis promunturiisque*), there was no approach to them on foot when the tide had rushed in from the open sea, which regularly happens twice every 12 hours, nor by ships, because when the tide ebbed they were caught on the shoals. Thus in either case the storming of the *oppida* was made difficult. And if ever the Veneti did happen to be overpowered by the scale of our works - when the sea had been shut out by huge dams (*aggere et molibus*) and these had been brought level with the walls of the *oppidum* - and began to despair of their chances, then they carried off all their property to the next *oppida* and there again defended themselves with the same advantages of position. For a large part of the summer they did this the more easily because our ships were held up by storms . . . (here follows the description of the Venetic ships) . . . When several (*compluribus*) of their *oppida* had been stormed, Caesar realised that his labour was in vain and that the enemy could not be prevented from escaping nor harmed by the capture of their *oppida*, so he decided to await the arrival of his fleet.'

No. 7

Date: 56 B.C.

Reference in Caesar: III:18-19

Place: *Castra* of Q. Titurius Sabinus

Probable identification: (In the territory of the Venelli - i.e. Cotentin peninsula)

Map reference: 54/?

Summary. Camp well sited at the top of a slope a mile long. Gauls under Viridovix collected fascines of brushwood and bushes (*sarmentis virgultisque collectis*) to fill up the Roman ditches, but their burdens put them at a disadvantage and a Roman sortie from two gates broke them.

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No. 8

Date: 56 B.C.

Reference in Caesar: III:21

Place: *Oppidum Sotiatium*

Probable identification: ?Sos (Lot-et-Garonne)

Map reference: 79/13

Summary. P. Crassus attacked with mantlets and towers. The Sotiates replied with sorties and by driving galleries (*cunicula*) under the Roman siege-mound and mantlets 'in which the Aquitanians are by far the most skilled, because there are copper mines (*aerariae secturaeque*) in many places in their territory.'

No. 9

Date: 56 B.C.

Reference in Caesar: III:23-26

Place: *Castra* of the Vocates and Tarusates

Probable identification: Unlocated

Map reference: 78, 79, 82

Summary. The leaders of the Aquitanians were men from Spain who had fought under Sertorius and were considered masters of military science: they chose their sites, fortified their *castra* and tried to cut off Crassus's supplies in the Roman manner (*consuetudine populi Romani*), hoping thereby to force him to withdraw. He began the attack by filling up the ditch and clearing the ramparts with missiles; but his cavalry reported that the rear of the camp, near the *porta decumana* [*sic*], was not so well fortified and his reserve cohorts broke in there. The total enemy strength is given as 50,000.

No. 10

Date: 55 B.C.

Reference in Caesar: IV:14

Place: *Castra* of the Germans (Usipetes and Tencteri)

Probable identification: Unlocated, but west of the lower Rhine

Map reference: ?

Summary. This camp contained baggage wagons (*carros impedimentaue*) and women and children. Caesar took it with a rush.

No. 11

Date: 54 B.C.

Reference in Caesar: V:9

Place: Fortification of the Britons

Probable identification: Bigbury, Harbledown, Kent

Map reference: N.G.R. TR117575

Summary. A place in woods 'excellently fortified naturally and artificially, which they had previously prepared, it seemed, for an internal war (*domestici belli causa*); for all the entrances had been blocked by felled trees laid close together' (it is not called *oppidum*, nor *castra*, nor *castellum*). The VII legion took it by forming *testudo* and throwing a mound against the fortifications.

No. 12**Date:** 54 B.C.**Reference in Caesar:** V:21**Place:** *Oppidum Cassivellauni***Probable identification:** Devil's Dyke, Wheathampstead, Herts.**Map reference:** N.G.R. TL186133

Summary. 'The Britons call it an *oppidum* when they have fortified with a rampart and ditch dense woods where they are accustomed to gather to avoid an enemy attack'; again it was 'excellently fortified naturally and artificially'. Caesar took it with an assault from two sides and the Britons withdrew on another side. Many cattle were found in it.

No. 13**Date:** 54 B.C.**Reference in Caesar:** V:26-37**Place:** *Hiberna* of Sabinus and Cotta at Atuatuca**Probable identification:** Tongres (Limbourg), Belgium**Map reference:** B.3/15

Summary. Attacked by Eburones under Ambiorix and Catuvolcus, but after a Roman cavalry sortie they withdrew to parley. Having persuaded the Romans to leave the camp (despite the misgivings of Cotta), they ambushed them. Such few Romans as could regain the camp committed suicide.

No. 14**Date:** 54 B.C.**Reference in Caesar:** V:38-49**Place:** *Hiberna* of Q. Cicero in country of the Nervii**Probable identification:** Nr. Bavai (Nord)**Map reference:** 53/5

Summary. Having cut off a timber-collecting party, the Eburones, Atuatuca and Nervii, with their clients, tried an immediate assault, but were beaten off. During the night Cicero completed his defences and built 120 wooden towers. Next day the Gauls attacked again and filled in the Roman ditch. Similar attacks followed for some days, while the Romans used the nights to prepare stakes with fire-hardened points (*praeustaes sudes*) and palisade stakes (*pila muralia*) and to improve the towers. Having failed to persuade Cicero to withdraw, the Gauls surrounded the *hiberna* with a rampart 10 feet high and a ditch 15 feet wide. 'They had learnt this method from our practice in previous years and were instructed by some prisoners from our army; but having no supply of iron tools (*ferramenta*) suited to the task, they had to cut the turfs with their swords and remove the earth with their hands and cloaks. Their large numbers (later given as 60,000) could be gauged by the fact that in less than three hours they completed a fortification 3(?) miles long; and in the next few days, instructed by the same prisoners, they began to build towers equal in height to the rampart and to make grappling-hooks (*falces*) and sappers' huts (*testudines*).¹ On the 7th day, in a high wind, they began throwing hot sling-bullets of softened clay and fire darts (*ferventis fusili ex argilla glandis fundis et fervefacta iacula*). These set fire to the thatched buildings inside the *hiberna* and the Gauls began to move up their towers and *testudines* and to climb the rampart with ladders. The Romans did not waver and killed many Gauls 'because they crowded close to the foot

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of the rampart and those behind prevented those in front from retreating'; and when the Gauls brought a tower up close, they cleared it with stones and set it on fire. Eventually Cicero got a message through to Caesar, who assembled a relief force, and the Gauls raised the siege.

No. 15

Date: 54 B.C.

Reference in Caesar: V: 49-51

Place: Caesar's small *castra*

Probable identification: Nr. Bavai (Nord)

Map reference: 53/5

Summary. Caesar deliberately made the camp small (though it held 7,000 men, without baggage) and blocked the gates to simulate panic, thereby luring the Gauls into an unfavourable position. They threw weapons (*tela*) into the camp and called on his men to surrender. Then, not realising how lightly the gates were blocked, some began to cut at the rampart by hand while others filled up the ditches. Caesar then routed them with sallies from all the gates.

No. 16

Date: 53 B.C.

Reference in Caesar: VI: 36-41

Place: Reused *hiberna* of Sabinus and Cotta at Atuatuca

Probable identification: Tongres (Limbourg), Belgium

Map reference: B.3/15

Summary. Camp manned by untried troops under Q. Cicero. While 5 cohorts and 300 convalescents were out foraging, German cavalry made an attack on the *porta decumana* so suddenly that the merchants who had gathered under the rampart had no chance of escape. Seeing that the Roman force was small, they then attacked from all sides and routed some of the forage party, but when the Roman defences were properly manned they withdrew.

No. 17

Date: 52 B.C.

Reference in Caesar: VII: 11

Place: Vellaunodunum, an *oppidum* of the Senones

Probable identification: ?Le Donjon, Triguères (Loiret)

Map reference: 65/3

Summary. Caesar built a circumvallation round it in two days, and on the third it surrendered.

No. 18

Date: 52 B.C.

Reference in Caesar: VII: 11

Place: Cenabum, an *oppidum* of the Carnutes

Probable identification: Orléans (Loiret)

Map reference: 65/16

Summary. Caesar arrived too late in the day to attack it. During the night the inhabitants began to leave it by a bridge over the Loire, but Caesar burnt the gates and sent in the troops he had held ready. Very few of the Carnutes escaped because of the narrowness of the bridge and the streets.

No. 19**Date:** 52 B.C.**Reference in Caesar:** VII:9-12**Place:** Gorgobina, an *oppidum* of the Boii**Probable identification:** ?Dun-les-Places (Nièvre)**Map reference:** 65/16**Summary.** Attacked by Vercingetorix, who abandoned the siege to relieve Noviodunum. No details.**No. 20****Date:** 52 B.C.**Reference in Caesar:** VII:12-13**Place:** Noviodunum, an *oppidum* of the Bituriges**Probable identification:** Nr. Neuvy-sur-Barangeon (Cher)**Map reference:** 64/20**Summary.** When Caesar began the attack, the Bituriges offered surrender, but when they saw the advance guard of Vercingetorix's forces they began to take up arms again, shut the gates and man the walls. The centurions who were in the *oppidum* seized the gates and evacuated their men safely. After Caesar had defeated the relief column, the Bituriges again surrendered.**No. 21****Date:** 52 B.C.**Reference in Caesar:** VII:14-15**Place:** More than 20 towns of the Bituriges**Probable identification:** Various**Map reference:** 64, 65, 68, 69**Summary.** The advice of Vercingetorix was to deny supplies to the Romans by burning all villages and farms (*vicos atque aedificia*) within range of foragers and to burn 'all *oppida* which were not made completely impregnable by their fortifications and situation . . . More than 20 *urbes* of the Bituriges were burnt in one day. The same thing happened in the other *civitates* and fires could be seen in all directions.'**No. 22****Date:** 52 B.C.**Reference in Caesar:** VII:15-28**Place:** Avaricum, an *oppidum* of the Bituriges**Probable identification:** Bourges (Cher)**Map reference:** 69/1**Summary.** Avaricum was not burnt because, the Bituriges argued, it was strong and 'it was about the fairest city of all Gaul, the defence and pride of their nation.' Its wall was a *murus Gallicus* (fully described in VII:23). Because it was largely surrounded by river and marsh (and the Gauls had broken down the causeways over the marsh) Caesar could not circumvallate it, but he built a siege mound and two towers and brought up mantlets. His operations were hindered by the success of Vercingetorix in denying him supplies and by the tactics of the defenders, largely imitating those of the Romans: they lassoed the Roman hooks and pulled them in with windlasses; they undermined the Roman mound with galleries 'the more cleverly because they have great iron mines and are thoroughly familiar with all kinds of underground working'; they built towers all along the wall and raised them to keep pace with the Roman works; they set fire to the Roman works; they countermined the Roman saps

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and prevented their extension with fire-hardened stakes, hot pitch and large stones; and when, after 25 days, the Roman mound had grown to 330 feet wide and 80 feet high, they fired it from a tunnel and at the same time threw torches, dry wood and pitch on the top of it. Nevertheless they were driven to consider evacuation and were only dissuaded by the women. Finally, in a rainstorm, the Romans succeeded in occupying the whole wall. The Gauls reformed in the market place (*in foro*) but then scattered to all parts of the *oppidum*; some were killed crammed into the narrow gateways, others were cut down in flight by the cavalry. Only 800 out of 40,000 survived.

No. 23

Date: 52 B.C.

Reference in Caesar: VII: 36, 41

Place: Roman *castra*

Probable identification: Nr. Gergovie (Puy-de-Dome)

Map reference: 73/14

Summary. Caesar had left C. Fabius with only two legions in the large camp while he dealt with the Aedui. Constant attacks, in which the Gauls used arrows and all kinds of missiles, put great pressure on them, but artillery (*tormenta*) was of great use to the defenders. Fabius was blocking up all but two of the gates and adding breastworks (*pluteos*) to the rampart when Caesar relieved him.

No. 24

Date: 52 B.C.

Reference in Caesar: VII: 36-53

Place: Gergovia, an *oppidum* of the Arverni

Probable identification: Gergovie (Puy-de-Dome)

Map reference: 73/14

Summary. The home town of Vercingetorix (VII:4). As it was situated on a high mountain and difficult of access, Caesar decided not to begin a siege until he had secured his supplies, but in a preliminary action, in which the Gauls used archers and cavalry, he occupied a neighbouring hill to restrict their water supply and their foraging. Here he built his 'small camp' and linked it to his 'large camp' with a double ditch 12 feet wide. The Gauls had taken in an additional area on the slope below the *oppidum* with a 6-foot wall of large stones and were fortifying a narrow wooded ridge which adjoined the *oppidum* itself. Caesar made a feint on the left towards this ridge, thus drawing off the defenders of the *oppidum*, sent some Aedui up on the right, and launched a surprise attack from his small camp. The Romans easily crossed the 6-foot wall and captured three of the Gaulish *castra* which it protected, including that of the Nitiobriges whose king, Teutomatus, barely escaped naked to the waist on a wounded horse. Then Caesar, 'having achieved his purpose' (*consecutus id quod animo proposuerat*), sounded the recall. Only the 10th legion heard it and the rest pressed on to the *oppidum*. Here the women, remembering the treatment of Avaricum, made as if to surrender, and L. Fabius, a centurion of the 8th legion, actually mounted the wall. But the Gauls, with their cavalry leading, rushed back from the ridge and Caesar had to commit his reserves to cover the Roman retreat. Fabius and those who had followed him were killed and so was M. Petronius, another centurion, trying to break down the gates. Additional confusion was caused by the arrival of the Aedui, because their arms were similar to those of the enemy and although their right shoulders were (as agreed) bared, the Romans thought it was a ruse. The legions reformed at the foot of the hill and Vercingetorix withdrew his men within his fortifications (*intra munitiones*).

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Roman losses were 700, including 46 centurions. The next day Caesar failed to lure Vercingetorix out to battle on the plain. The day after he left for the country of the Aedui.

No. 25

Date: 52 B.C.

Reference in Caesar: VII:55

Place: Noviodunum, an *oppidum* of the Aedui

Probable identification: Nevers (Nièvre)

Map reference: 69/3

Summary. Used by Caesar as a supply base, where he had concentrated his hostages from all the Gaulish tribes. Eporedorix and Viridomarus massacred the garrison, sent the hostages to Bibracte, carried off all the supplies they could, and burnt the rest.

No. 26

Date: 52 B.C.

Reference in Caesar: VII:57-58

Place: Lutetia, an *oppidum* of the Parisii

Probable identification: Paris

Map reference: 56/11

Summary. Situated on an island in the Seine (Ile de la Cité). Large forces from neighbouring tribes assembled under Camulogenus, an aged but skilful Aulercan. He opposed Labienus some distance away, where a marshy stream (Essonne) drained into the Seine. Labienus tried, under cover of mantlets, to build a causeway with wattles and other material, then withdrew to cross the river higher up, at Melun. When Melun fell, the Gauls sent orders to burn Lutetia.

No. 27

Date: 52 B.C.

Reference in Caesar: VII:58

Place: Metiosedum, an *oppidum* of the Senones

Probable identification: Melun (Seine-et-Marne)

Map reference: 61/2

Summary. Also situated on an island. Labienus built a pontoon bridge with about 50 boats. Such inhabitants as remained (those who had not been called away to war) were terrified by this unusual operation (*rei novitate perterritis*) and the town fell without a struggle. Labienus then rebuilt a bridge which the Gauls had destroyed, crossed to the right bank, and marched on Lutetia.

No. 28

Date: 52 B.C.

Reference in Caesar: VII:68-90

Place: Alesia, an *oppidum* of the Mandubii

Probable identification: Mont Auxois, Alise-Ste-Reine (Côte-d'Or)

Map reference: 65/18

Summary. Situated on a high hill washed by streams on north and south, and surrounded by hills of similar height except on west, where there was a plain. The east slope below the walls was occupied by Gauls, protected by a ditch and a 6-foot wall (*maceria*). Caesar began to construct a circumvallation 11 Roman miles long, complete with camps and 23 redoubts. In a preliminary battle the Roman cavalry, with legionary support, defeated the Gaulish

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cavalry and pursued them right up to the outer wall. Here, jammed in the narrow entrances, they suffered heavy casualties, and Vercingetorix had to shut the gates of the *oppidum* to prevent their abandoning the outer lines. After this he sent out all his cavalry to raise support elsewhere, leaving 80,000 people in the *oppidum*, and evacuated the outer position. Caesar then strengthened his circumvallation with towers, *lilia* and other devices, adding a ditch 20 feet wide 400 paces in front of it, and also constructed an outer line, 14 Roman miles long, against any relieving force. In Alesia a council (*concilium*) met. Critognatus recommended cannibalism 'as in the war with the Cimbri and the Teutones', but it was decided to send the old and infirm and the Mandubian women and children out of the *oppidum*; but Caesar refused them passage. When the besieged saw the arrival of the relief army (8,000 cavalry and 240,000 infantry), they made a sortie and covered the first Roman ditch with wattles and filled it with earth (*cratibus integunt atque aggere implent*). Caesar engaged the relief cavalry, who were interspersed with archers, and narrowly defeated them, after which the besieged retired into the *oppidum*. The relief force, having spent a day preparing wattles, ladders and grappling hooks (*harpagones*), attacked the Romans with arrows, stones and other weapons at midnight, shouting to inform the besieged. After some initial success, they came up against the Roman works and were trapped in the *lilia*, and at dawn, having failed to penetrate the defences, they withdrew.

Meanwhile the besieged had lost much time in bringing out the things they had prepared for a sortie and in filling up ditches, and had not reached the main Roman works when the retreat began, and they had to retire into the *oppidum*. The relief force then decided that Vercassivellaunus should take out a force of 60,000 in the evening, to attack one of the Roman camps which was badly sited on the slope of a hill to the north. This he did at noon next day, while the main relief force made a diversionary attack on the main Roman works. Observing this, Vercingetorix sallied out with poles, sappers' huts (*musculi*), hooks (*falces*) and other implements, and fighting became general. The greatest threat to the Romans was at the badly-sited camp, where some Gauls attacked with missiles while others advanced with locked shields (*testudine facta*); all threw earth on the fortifications, which enabled them to mount the rampart and covered the traps which the Romans had hidden in the ground. Caesar sent Labienus with six cohorts to relieve the camp. Meanwhile the besieged, despairing of penetrating the major Roman works, tried to attack another camp on a steep hill. They dislodged the defenders with missiles, filled the ditches with earth and wattles, and tore down the rampart and breastwork (*vallum et loriam*) with hooks (*falcibus*); but Caesar sent reinforcements, and finally went there himself, and they were repulsed. He then moved over to help Labienus. Here hand-to-hand fighting ensued, with the Romans using their swords. Finally, when the Gauls saw cavalry in their rear and fresh cohorts coming up in front, they broke and fled. When the besieged saw this, they too withdrew, and the rout was complete. The next day Vercingetorix was handed over, the Gauls laid down their arms and Alesia surrendered. Apart from the Aedui and the Arverni, whom he thought might be useful politically, Caesar distributed the prisoners as booty among his men, one to each man.

No. 29

Date: 51 B.C.

Reference in Caesar: VIII:26-27

Place: Lemonum, an *oppidum* of the Pictones

Probable identification: Poitiers (Vienne)

Map reference: 68/13

Summary. Held by Duratius, a pro-Roman Picto, against 'many thousands' of Gauls under Dumnacus. On the approach of C. Caninius, Dumnacus temporarily drew off his forces to

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attack the Roman camp. This (no details) was a failure, and on the approach of a second Roman force under C. Fabius he finally raised the siege and made for the Loire.

No. 30

Date: 51 B.C.

Reference in Caesar: VIII: 32-44

Place: Uxellodunum, an *oppidum* of the Cadurci

Probable identification: Puy d'Issolu, Vayrac (Lot)

Map reference: 75/19

Summary. Drappes (a Senonian) and Lucterius (a Cadurcan), with a force of not more than 2,000, were intending to raid the Roman Province, but as Caninius with two legions was close behind them, they occupied Uxellodunum. This was very strong, protected on all sides by precipitous rocks, and so difficult to attack – but equally difficult for the Gauls to evacuate without being noticed. Caninius built three camps and began to construct a circumvallation as fast as his limited forces allowed. Remembering the shortages at Alesia, Drappes and Lucterius left 2,000 armed men in the *oppidum*, while they took the remainder out to forage. In the event they were both defeated some way from the *oppidum*, Drappes being captured, and Caninius, soon joined by Fabius, could concentrate on the siege. When the circumvallation was complete, Caesar himself arrived and took charge. He decided to concentrate on the water supply. First, he denied the besieged access to the river which ran round the foot of the hill by stationing archers, slingers and artillery to command the slopes. This left one spring which gushed out just below the wall of the *oppidum*. Here, under cover of mantlets which only partly protected the men from the missiles thrown down on them, he built a mound 60 feet high and on top of it a tower of 10 storeys in which he mounted artillery, not to reach the wall but to dominate the spring. Tormented by thirst, the besieged filled casks (*cupae*) with tallow, pitch and pieces of wood (*scandulis* – lit. 'shingles') set them on fire and rolled them down on the Roman works. These were easily set alight, and seeing that heavy losses were being suffered Caesar ordered his men to scale the rocks around the *oppidum* wherever they could, to give the impression of a general attack and divert the Gauls from the Roman works; this succeeded and the fires were extinguished. But though many died of thirst, the besieged still held out. In the meantime, however, Caesar's sappers had been tunnelling towards the source of the spring and finally they diverted it. At its sudden drying up the Gauls surrendered. Caesar cut off the hands of all the survivors who had borne arms. Drappes had starved himself to death in captivity; Lucterius had escaped, but was eventually betrayed by Epasnactus, a pro-Roman Arvernian.

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