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Rome and Human Sacrifices

This study examines how the Romans judged the custom of human sacrifices at the end of the Republic and during the Principate. The beginning of the study focuses on the period when Romans still practiced human sacrifices. Following this is an examination of Strabo's, Diodorus' and Caesar's descriptions concerning Celtic human sacrifices. At the end of the study, the question is posed whether these authors were independent or not. The theory of J. J. Tierney is also scrutinized. Regarding Caesar's account, it is also proposed that he may have been more independent of Posidonius' description than scholars believe, and thus his description seems less suitable for reconstructing Posidonius' work.

Keywords: Posidonius, Caesar, Diodorus, Strabo, Gauls, Druids, human sacrifice

Human sacrifice was not unheard of in Rome, as there are a number of examples from the period of the Republic when it is certain that the Romans performed human sacrifices, despite the fact that this was incompatible with the idea of Romanness and Roman religiosity.¹ However, it is well documented that there were several rituals in ancient Rome which required a human death: the drowning of hermaphroditic children, the duel between the *rex Nemorensis* and his successor, the live burial of Vestal Virgins and the live burial of Gauls and Greeks.² The Ro-

¹ HÄUSSLER (2014: 36).

² SCHULTZ (2010: 517). The live burials of the Gauls and Greeks were always extraordinary, and the sources used connected this custom with the fear of the enemies and with the upheavals of Vestal scandals, cf. VÁRHELYI (2007: 278). However, the sources indicate that not only the Romans performed sacrifices in dubious times; according to Plutarch (*Them.* 13), the Greeks also sacrificed humans before the battle of Salamis.

mans probably distinguished between these rituals and did not consider all of them to be human sacrifice, which is a special case of ritual murder.³ However, the differences between human sacrifice and ritual murder are suppressed by Roman authors when depicting other peoples,⁴ and thus they labeled every ritual murder performed by foreign peoples as human sacrifice. This phenomenon is quite significant, since the Romans clearly condemned human sacrifices and even banned the custom with a *senatus consultum* during the consulship of Cnaeus Cornelius Lentulus and Publius Licinius Crassus.⁵ At the same time, the ritual murder of individuals whose existence violated the natural order was customary and unexceptional for them, and was not even considered a sacrifice.⁶ Thus, several foreign customs were banned, while the Romans could continue to perform rituals which required a human death, as the aforementioned drowning of hermaphroditic children, the duel between the *rex Nemorensis* and his successor, and the live burial of Vestal Virgins were not to be considered human sacrifices in ancient Rome.⁷ These customs could be maintained. For example, in the case of the duel between the *rex Nemorensis* and his successor, there is evidence that such duels were still practiced during Caligula's reign,⁸ years after the Roman ban on human sacrifices. However, the *senatus consultum* which banned human sacrifices clearly shows that Roman attitudes changed in the 1st century BC, and even if the Romans performed human sacrifices before this

Similarly, based on Caesar (*Gal.* 6, 16), the Gauls might also have performed human sacrifices when someone's life was in danger.

³ SCHULTZ (2010: 516–518). The critical difference between ritual murder and human sacrifice is that 'ritual murder is not necessarily directed toward the divine' while a sacrifice "must be offered to, or directed to, someone'.

⁴ HÄUSSLER (2014: 36).

⁵ Plin. *Nat.* 30, 12. This event took place in 97 BC and banned the *immolatio* of human beings, which might not have included live burials, cf. VÁRHELYI (2007: 284); TÓTH (2013: 847). On the bans on the Druids, cf. KAPI (2019); TAKÁCS (2020: 17); ZECCHINI (1984: 73–108).

⁶ SCHULTZ (2010: 535).

⁷ SCHULTZ (2010: 535).

⁸ Suet. *Cal.* 35, 3. Suetonius also reports that Emperor Domitian ordered the live burial of the chief Vestal, Cornelia, cf. Suet. *Dom.* 8, 4. About the trials of Cornelia cf. JONES (1996: 77–78).

ban, Roman authors clearly disassociated themselves from the ritual. As Livy's account testifies, it became an un-Roman custom:

In addition to such great disasters, the people were terrified both by other prodigies and because in this year⁹ two Vestals, Opimia and Floronia, were discovered to have had illicit affairs. One had been killed at the Colline Gate, under the earth as is the custom and the other took her own life [...]. Since this horrible event which occurred in the midst of so many terrible things, as is wont to happen, was turned into a prodigy, the decemviri were ordered to consult the Books. Q. Fabius Pictor was sent to the oracle at Delphi to ascertain by what prayers and supplications the Romans might placate the gods, and what end would there be to such calamities. Meanwhile from the Sibylline Books some unusual sacrifices were ordered, among which was one where a Gallic man and woman and a Greek man and woman were sent down alive into an underground room walled with rock, a place that had already been tainted before by human victims – hardly a Roman rite.¹⁰

After the gradual change in Roman attitudes, the subject of human sacrifices was associated with the barbarian enemies,¹¹ and human sacrifices were frequently used to depict the barbarism, inhumanity and the cruelty of certain peoples or groups.¹² This phenomenon became extremely typical in the 1st century BC when Roman and Greek authors wrote about the religion of the Gauls.¹³ Thus, it is not surprising that there are

⁹ 216 BC.

¹⁰ Liv. 22, 57, 2–6. *Territi etiam super tantas clades cum ceteris prodigiis, tum quod duae Vestales eo anno, Opimia atque Floronia, stupri compertae et altera sub terra, uti mos est, ad portam Collinam necata fuerat, altera sibimet ipsa mortem consciverat...Hoc nefas cum inter tot, ut fit, clades in prodigium versum esset, decemviri libros adire iussi sunt et Q. Fabius Pictor Delphos ad oraculum missus est sciscitatum quibus precibus supplicisque deos possent placare et quaenam futura finis tantis cladibus foret. Interim ex fatalibus libris sacrificia aliquot extraordinaria facta, inter quae Gallus et Galla, Graecus et Graeca in foro boario sub terram vivi demissi sunt in locum saxo consaepum, iam ante hostiis humanis, minime Romano sacro, imbutum.* Translated by SCHULTZ (2010: 533).

¹¹ VÁRHELYI (2007: 284).

¹² HÄUSSLER (2014: 36).

¹³ RIVES (1995: 68) suggests that stories about human sacrifice in Gaul probably began to spread during the 120s BC, so they can be connected to the Roman expansion in Transalpine Gaul. However, there were several conflicts between the Gauls and the

several problems in the literature regarding the interpretation of texts stating that human sacrifices took place in Gaul. The authors of such texts may have simply invented the claim that the Gauls performed such horrid rites even then, in order to depict them as cruel, uncivilized barbarians, even if this did not correspond to the reality of the author's own time. Therefore, the present study focuses on the three most detailed descriptions about the Gallic human sacrifices and investigates the problems concerning the texts. At the end of the study, an attempt is made to present a comprehensive picture of human sacrifice in Gaul and its representation in ancient accounts.

Before analyzing the texts, however, attention should be given to a few problems which make it difficult to answer any questions regarding this subject. The first major problem is that, in most cases, it is almost impossible to distinguish human sacrifice from other forms of violent death in the archeological data,¹⁴ for the sources indicate that the Gauls either stabbed their victims, impaled them, shot them with an arrow, burned them alive, or perhaps crucified them.¹⁵ Additionally, according to the authors, the victims were usually criminals, or perhaps captives, and since the method they used for sacrificing the victims seems quite common, it is almost impossible to distinguish human sacrifices from capital punishment or war injuries. The second major problem is that the originality of the data provided by the authors cannot be determined. Thus, it cannot be ruled out that their information originates from earlier times and that they present the reality of the past as a reality of their own time. Therefore, the mention of human sacrifices could be a manipulative

civilized world that led to the creation of a very negative *topos* about the Gauls and to the existence of a phenomenon called *tumultus Gallicus* or *metus Gallicus*, which could be used by politicians to mobilize citizens against their enemies, cf. BELLEN (1985); TWYMAN (1997); SZABÓ (2000: 1); ROSENBERGER (2003: 365). Roman propaganda against the Gauls was so strong that it still has an impact on the literature today, cf. SZABÓ (2000: 3).

¹⁴ HÄUSSLER (2014: 43).

¹⁵ Strabo 4, 4, 5; Diod. 5, 31, 3–4; 5, 32, 6. The word for crucifixion in Strabo's work is ἀνασταυρόω, which means either 'to impale' or 'to crucify'. Diodorus mentions that the Gauls impaled the victims, but he used another word in his description, cf. Diod. 5, 32, 6. So the Gauls may never have crucified their victims during the sacrifices.

element in the narratives that only serves to paint a negative picture of the Gauls. Because of this problem, scholars put forward different hypotheses concerning the originality of the descriptions, which influenced the interpretation of the accounts. This is especially true for the obscure and ambiguous parts of the texts.

Now that the main problems have been outlined, attention can be given to the analysis of the descriptions which provide important data about the Gallic customs. There are five authors who supposedly derived their information on this subject from Posidonius:¹⁶ Caesar, Diodorus, Strabo, Pomponius Mela and Athenaeus.¹⁷ The most relevant descriptions for the present study are those by Strabo, Diodorus, and Caesar. Strabo wrote the following about human sacrifices:

Again, in addition to their witlessness, there is also that custom, barbarous and exotic, which attends most of the northern tribes — mean the fact that when they depart from the battle they hang the heads of their enemies from the necks of their horses, and, when they have brought them home, nail the spectacle to the entrances of their homes. At any rate, Poseidonius says that he himself saw this spectacle in many places, and that, although at first he loathed it, afterwards, through his familiarity with it, he could bear it calmly. The heads of enemies of high repute, however, they used to embalm in cedar-oil and exhibit to strangers, and they would not deign to give them back even for a ransom of an equal weight of gold. But the Romans put a stop to these customs, as well as to all those connected with the sacrifices and divinations that are opposed to our usages. They used to strike a human being, whom they had devoted to death, in the back with a sabre, and then divine from his death-struggle. But they would not sacrifice without the Druids. We are told of still other kinds of human sacrifices; for example, they would shoot victims to death with arrows, or impale them in the temples, or, having devised a colossus of straw and wood,

¹⁶ This question will be addressed below.

¹⁷ TIERNEY (1960: 198); SILBERMAN (1988: xxxii).

throw into the colossus cattle and wild animals of all sorts and human beings, and then make a burnt-offering of the whole thing.¹⁸

As mentioned above, Strabo's information on the subject probably comes from Posidonius,¹⁹ and since Posidonius' name also appears in Strabo's text, this statement seems quite acceptable. However, if we compare this report with Diodorus' and Caesar's, a few unique elements stand out. Strabo mentions more methods of murdering than the other authors, and regarding the colossus – or wicker man – he shared more details than Caesar did, claiming that they also burned cattle and wild animals along with the human beings. However, he never explained who the victims were and what the Druids' role was during the sacrifices.

Diodorus is also said to have followed Posidonius,²⁰ but in this case it seems less obvious.²¹ Before exploring this question further, the differences between his and Strabo's description should be laid out. There are two relevant passages by him concerning human sacrifices:

3. They also observe a custom which is especially astonishing and incredible, in case they are taking thought with respect to matters of great concern; for in such cases they devote to death a human being

¹⁸ Strabo 4, 4, 5. Translated by H. L. JONES. The Greek text is as follows: πρόσεστι δὲ τῆ ἀνοίᾳ καὶ τὸ βάρβαρον καὶ τὸ ἔκφυλον, ὃ τοῖς προσβόροισι ἔθνεσι παρακολουθεῖ πλεῖστον, τὸ ἀπὸ τῆς μάχης ἀπίοντας τὰς κεφαλὰς τῶν πολεμίων ἐξάπτειν ἐκ τῶν αὐχένων τῶν ἵππων, κομίσαντας δὲ προσπατταλεύειν τοῖς προφυλαίοις. φησὶ γοῦν Ποσειδώνιος αὐτὸς ἰδεῖν ταύτην τὴν θεάν πολλαχοῦ, καὶ τὸ μὲν πρῶτον ἀθηρίζεσθαι, μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα φέρειν πρῶως διὰ τὴν συνήθειαν. τὰς δὲ τῶν ἐνδόξων κεφαλὰς κεδροῦντες ἐπεδεικνυον τοῖς ξένοις, καὶ οὐδὲ πρὸς ἰσοστάσιον χρυσὸν ἀπολυτροῦν ἠξίου. καὶ τούτων δ' ἔπαυσαν αὐτοὺς Ῥωμαῖοι καὶ τῶν κατὰ τὰς θυσίας καὶ μαντείας ὑπεναντίων τοῖς παρ' ἡμῖν νομίμοις. ἄνθρωπον γὰρ κατεσπεισμένον παίσαντες εἰς νῶτον μαχαίρα ἐμαντεύοντο ἐκ τοῦ σφαδασμοῦ. ἔθνον δὲ οὐκ ἄνευ δρυϊδῶν. καὶ ἄλλα δὲ ἀνθρωποθυσῶν εἶδη λέγεται: καὶ γὰρ κατετόξευόν τινας καὶ ἀνεσταύρουν ἐν τοῖς ἱεροῖς καὶ κατασκευάσαντες κολοσσὸν χόρτου καὶ ξύλων, ἐμβαλόντες εἰς τοῦτον βοσκήματα καὶ θηρία παντοῖα καὶ ἀνθρώπους, ὠλοκαύτου.

¹⁹ TIERNEY (1960: 198; 207–211).

²⁰ TIERNEY (1960: 198; 203–207).

²¹ On the problems regarding Diodorus' sources cf. ILLÉS (2020: 99–100) and ILLÉS (2021: 8–10).

and plunge a dagger into him in the region above the diaphragm, and when the stricken victim has fallen they read the future from the manner of his fall and from the twitching of his limbs, as well as from the gushing of the blood, having learned to place confidence in an ancient and long-continued practice of observing such matters. 4 And it is a custom of theirs that no one should perform a sacrifice without a "philosopher"; for thank-offerings should be rendered to the gods, they say, by the hands of men who are experienced in the nature of the divine, and who speak, as it were, the language of the gods, and it is also through the mediation of such men, they think, that blessings likewise should be sought.²²

6. And in pursuance of their savage ways they manifest an outlandish impiety also with respect to their sacrifices; for their criminals they keep prisoner for five years and then impale in honour of the gods, dedicating them together with many other offerings of first-fruits and constructing pyres of great size. Captives also are used by them as victims for their sacrifices in honour of the gods. Certain of them likewise slay, together with the human beings, such animals as are taken in war, or burn them or do away with them in some other vengeful fashion.²³

²² Diod. 5, 31, 3–4. Translated by C. H. OLDFATHER. The Greek text is as follows: 3. μάλιστα δ' ὅταν περί τινων μεγάλων ἐπισκέπτονται, παράδοξον καὶ ἄπιστον ἔχουσι νόμιμον: ἄνθρωπον γὰρ κατασπείσαντες τύπτουσι μαχαίρᾳ κατὰ τὸν ὑπὲρ τὸ διάφραγμα τόπον, καὶ πεσόντος τοῦ πληγέντος ἐκ τῆς πτώσεως καὶ τοῦ σπαραγμοῦ τῶν μελῶν, ἔτι δὲ τῆς τοῦ αἵματος ῥύσεως τὸ μέλλον νοοῦσι, παλαιᾶ τι καὶ πολυχρονίῳ παρατηρήσει περὶ τούτων πεπιστευκότες. 4. ἔθος δ' αὐτοῖς ἐστὶ μηδένα θυσίαν ποιεῖν ἄνευ φιλοσόφου: διὰ γὰρ τῶν ἐμπείρων τῆς θείας φύσεως ὥσπερ εἰς τινων ὁμοφώνων τὰ χαριστήρια τοῖς θεοῖς φασὶ δεῖν προσφέρειν, καὶ διὰ τούτων οἴονται δεῖν τὰ γαθὰ αἰτεῖσθαι.

²³ Diod. 5, 32, 6. Translated by C. H. OLDFATHER. The Greek text is as follows: ἀκολουθῶν δὲ τῇ κατ' αὐτοὺς ἀγριότητι καὶ περὶ τὰς θυσίας ἐκτόπως ἀσεβοῦσι: τοὺς γὰρ κακούργους κατὰ πενταετηρίδα φυλάξαντες ἀνασκολοπίζουσι τοῖς θεοῖς καὶ μετ' ἄλλων πολλῶν ἀπαρχῶν καθαγίζουσι, πυρὰς παμμεγέθει κατασκευάζοντες. χρῶνται δὲ καὶ τοῖς αἰχμαλώτοις ὡς ἱερεῖοις πρὸς τὰς τῶν θεῶν τιμὰς. τινὲς δ' αὐτῶν καὶ τὰ κατὰ πόλεμον ληφθέντα ζῶα μετὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀποκτείνουσιν ἢ κατακάουσιν ἢ τισὶν ἄλλαις τιμωρίαις ἀφανίζουσι.

As evident in the description above, Diodorus stated that the presence of the ‘philosophers’ was essential for the sacrifices, and these ‘philosophers’ were almost certainly the Druids. Thus, for some unknown reason, he used a different term,²⁴ which seems strange if one assumes that Diodorus and Strabo used a common source. Furthermore, Diodorus did not mention the wicker man when he wrote about burnt-offerings, and more importantly, contrary to Strabo, he explained what the Druids’ role was during the sacrifices and identified the victims as prisoners and captives.

Caesar’s description contains a few pieces of information that are not mentioned by Strabo or by Diodorus. Concerning human sacrifices, Caesar writes in his ethnographic *excursus* in the 6th book of the *Commentaries on the Gallic War*:

The whole nation of the Gauls is greatly devoted to ritual observances, and for that reason those who are smitten with the more grievous maladies and are engaged in the perils of battle either sacrifice human victims or vow so to do, employing the Druids as ministers for such sacrifices. They believe, in effect, that, unless for a man’s life a man’s life be paid, the majesty of the immortal gods may not be appeased; and in public, as in private, life they observe an ordinance of sacrifices of the same kind. Others use figures of immense size, whose limbs, woven out of twigs, they fill with living men and set on fire, and the men perish in a sheet of flame. They believe that the execution of those who have been caught in the act of theft or robbery or some crime is more pleasing to the immortal gods; but when the supply of such fails they resort to the execution even of the innocent.²⁵

²⁴ TIERNEY (1960: 210–211) suggests concerning the diviners that Posidonius glossed the name οὐάταις (the word used by Strabo) with μάνταις (the word used by Diodorus) and perhaps even with εὐαγγεῖς (this word used by Ammian), but he states that the latter one is less probable. This might be so, but this hypothesis cannot be proved, since Posidonius’ text is lost, and there are clear problems with the terminology concerning the diviners.

²⁵ Caes. *BGall.* 6, 16. Translated by H. J. EDWARDS. The Latin text is as follows: *Natio est omnis Gallorum admodum dedita religionibus, atque ob eam causam, qui sunt adfecti gravioribus morbis quique in proeliis periculisque versantur, aut pro victimis homines immolant aut se immolaturos vovent administrisque ad ea sacrificia druidibus utuntur, quod pro vita hominis*

In Caesar's work, the aim of the sacrifices is completely different, as the statements in the first few sentences cannot be found either in Strabo's or in Diodorus' account. Caesar also did not mention that the Gauls performed human sacrifices to make divinations. He differs slightly from Diodorus regarding the victims too, since there is no mention of the captives of battle. According to him, the Gauls sacrificed thieves or other criminals and sometimes even innocent people, which is also a peculiarity.

These three descriptions supposedly based on the work of Posidonius thus show profound differences when the texts are compared. But does this mean that the authors wrote independent accounts? Unfortunately, this important question cannot be answered with absolute certainty, because even if there are profound differences between the accounts, the idea that Caesar, Strabo, and Diodorus used a common source cannot be completely dismissed. On this matter, J. J. Tierney has pointed out several similarities and parallels between the descriptions of Posidonius, Caesar, Strabo, Diodorus Siculus, and Athenaeus, which seems rather convincing,²⁶ and some of the authors do in fact mention Posidonius in their descriptions.²⁷ The weak points of Tierney's view are obviously the differences, which according to him are additions. However, this idea cannot be proved because Posidonius' work is lost, so there is no way to know exactly what the author wrote about the Gauls. The most problematic text in terms of Tierney's view is clearly Caesar's,²⁸ since he never referred to Posidonius and he was in Gaul for almost a

nisi hominis vita reddatur, non posse deorum immortalium numen placari arbitrantur, publiceque eiusdem generis habent instituta sacrificia. Alii immani magnitudine simulacra habent, quorum contexta viminibus membra vivis hominibus complent; quibus succensis circumventi flamma exanimantur homines. Supplicia eorum qui in furto aut in latrocinio aut aliqua noxia sint comprehensi gratiora dis immortalibus esse arbitrantur; sed, eum eius generis copia defecit, etiam ad innocentium supplicia descendunt.

²⁶ TIERNEY (1960: 198–224).

²⁷ TIERNEY's view is followed *inter alia* by CHADWICK (1966: 7); LINCOLN (1988: 382) and FREEMAN (2006). However, the idea that Caesar derived his information from Posidonius appeared in the literature even before TIERNEY's work, cf. for example DEWITT (1938: 324).

²⁸ Cf. CUNLIFFE (2010: 67–75).

decade and certainly had some first-hand experience. Thus, one might rightly ask why he would use Posidonius' work to create his own ethnographic *excursus*. However, Tierney proved that Caesar at least in part and without acknowledgement drew on Posidonius' work at several points in the Gallic Wars. Yet the most problematic part – where Caesar differs the most from Posidonius – is clearly his ethnographic *excursus* in the 6th book, which, according to Tierney, contains highly debatable additions and omissions compared to Posidonius' work.²⁹ Is this really the case, or did Caesar present his own observations? Sadly, this is another question that cannot be answered. After all, Caesar's testimony cannot be verified with the help of archaeology, since there is no trace of human sacrifices in the Gallic archeological data from the 1st century BC. Therefore, Tierney's view can be accepted as a possible alternative that should be taken with a grain of salt because of the problems mentioned above. But what is there to gain from accepting this approach? The most positive result of Tierney's view is that it provides a more or less consistent picture of Gallic religious customs. If one assumes that the authors obtained their data from a common source, then the various descriptions³⁰ can be used quite boldly to interpret and explain the more obscure parts of the texts. Thus, the various data can be used as puzzle pieces to create a more complete picture of the subject. Based on this approach, we can say that, apart from some obvious additions, the authors – including Caesar – mostly recorded an older custom or *topos* with some modifications.³¹ In the previously cited text, Caesar gave less information about the role of Druids during the sacrifices than Diodorus. More precisely, he did not mention that the Druids had to oversee the rites and that they also acted as mediators between the humans and the gods during these rituals.³² He also did not tell us everything about the purpose of the human sacrifices, as he does not mention that the Gauls sometimes per-

²⁹ TIERNEY (1960: 198).

³⁰ Caes. *B Gall.* 6, 16; Strabo 4, 4, 5; Diod. 5, 31, 3; 5, 32, 6 and perhaps Athenaeus 4. 154 A–C.

³¹ In Caesar's case, it can be hypothesized that he wanted to manipulate his audience and depicted the Gauls as more cruel in order to gain more supporters for his campaign.

³² TIERNEY (1960: 215–216).

formed these rites to make divinations.³³ The victims were mostly criminals or prisoners of war, but sometimes even innocent people were sacrificed as well.³⁴ The method of the sacrifices could vary greatly, as the victims could be stabbed, impaled, shot with an arrow, or burned alive in an enormous wicker man with cattle and wild animals.³⁵

In addition to Tierney's approach, there is another important view that focuses primarily on Caesar's sources and challenges the accuracy of Tierney's approach. Miranda Aldhouse-Green, for example, emphasizes that Caesar spent several years in Gaul during his campaign, enabling him to observe everything he wrote about; moreover, his Aeduan friend, Divitiacus – who, according to Cicero, was a Druid³⁶ – could also serve as a source of information about the Druids and their rituals.³⁷ This critique was also mentioned above with respect to Tierney's view, though not in its entirety, as Aldhouse-Green also argues that Caesar's comments on the Druids 'could not have been fraudulent in essence' because other educated officers who served with him, such as Quintus Tullius Cicero, would likely have refuted his false statements in Rome.³⁸ Therefore this approach implicitly suggests that Caesar had to present the reality of his time and had no need at all to use Posidonius' account to create his own ethnographic *excursus* on the Gauls. This line of thought also leads to the conclusion that Caesar's reports should be considered relatively reliable, since his political enemies likely checked the accuracy of his account.

³³ Caes. *BGall.* 16; Diod. 5, 32, 6.

³⁴ Based on Diodorus' account, TIERNEY (1960: 216) suggests that Caesar's 'innocents' were prisoners of war, but there doesn't seem to be enough evidence to prove this.

³⁵ Caes. *BGall.* 6, 16; Diod. 5, 31, 3–4; 5, 32, 6; Strabo 4, 4, 5.

³⁶ Cic. *Div.* 1, 41, 90. If we compare Cicero's statement with the accounts of Strabo (4, 4, 4) and Diodorus (5, 31, 2), who divided the Gallic intellectual and religious elite into three different groups, it appears that Divitiacus may have been a diviner and not a Druid.

³⁷ ALDHOUSE-GREEN (2021: 27) is the most recent proponent of this approach. KENDRICK (1994: 76–77) suggested a similar approach, but KENDRICK's work was first published in 1927, so his approach is much older than TIERNEY's. Caesar's own experiences are also emphasized by CUNLIFFE (2010: 5), who thought that even if Caesar augmented his knowledge with some data from Posidonius, he did not simply copy from him, cf. CUNLIFFE (2010: 6; 75).

³⁸ ALDHOUSE-GREEN (2021: 27).

This later element of the approach might not be true, however, since the power of the Druids seems extremely exaggerated, and it cannot be determined with certainty if his political enemies had as much interest in the accuracy of his ethnographic *excursus* as they had about Caesar's personal actions during the campaign. In Caesar's case, this approach is less problematic than Tierney's view, but it too could only be tested against the archaeological data, which unfortunately are not at all helpful in this matter. Therefore, it seems reasonable to accept this approach as a possible alternative as well, although it also provides a slightly different interpretation from Tierney's view. If Caesar did not use Posidonius' description at all for his own account, the other accounts should be viewed with greater caution to explain and interpret the obscure points of Caesar's ethnographic description, since he may have observed differently and therefore the differences may not be simple omissions or additions.³⁹ Nevertheless, it also seems certain that Caesar intentionally held back information he deemed unimportant at times. This seems evident in the case of divination by human sacrifice. On this matter, it can be noted that certain classes, such as the diviners and the bards, are absent from his sociopolitical *excursus*, since he clearly states that he wants to focus exclusively on the most influential classes of Gaul.⁴⁰ The absence of the diviners also indicates that he had no need to mention anything of their activities.

³⁹ Concerning this matter, the most critical point in Caesar's *excursus* is the 14th paragraph, in which Caesar states the following: *In primis hoc volunt persuadere, non interire animas, sed ab aliis post mortem transire ad alios* [...]. Following the view of TIERNEY (1960: 215), at this point Caesar should refer to Pythagorean beliefs, and so he speaks about reincarnation. However, if one does not accept this hypothesis *a priori*, and does not connect Caesar's words to the idea of reincarnation, a completely different picture can be obtained, since the passage *ab aliis post mortem transire ad alios* could mean that the spirits from these people (*ab aliis*) went to those (*ad alios*), so from the living ones to the ones in the underworld or in the otherworld. This view can be supported by a parallel from Lucan (1, 450–458) in which, regarding Druidic teaching, he wrote that they think *regit idem spiritus artus orbe alio*. At this point the *orbe alio* can also refer to the otherworld. Regarding this question, cf. MACCULLOCH (1911: 333–347).

⁴⁰ Caes. *BGall.* 6, 13. FREEMAN (2006: 150) suggests that, when Caesar speaks about the Druids, he might also be speaking about the bards and diviners. This also seems plausible.

In conclusion, there are two plausible alternatives on the basis of which one can create different narratives about the human sacrifices in Gaul. If one accepts Tierney's approach, the sources – including Caesar's account – probably represent, at least in part, an earlier state of affairs,⁴¹ and any differences between the texts could be seen as omissions or additions. In this case, Caesar could have used an old *topos* to manipulate his readers, and he depicted the Gauls as more barbarous than they actually were in his time. The other approach suggests that Caesar wrote about his own time and that his description provides a nearly realistic picture. This would mean that the Gauls were indeed so cruel that they still performed human sacrifices in his time, even building enormous wicker frameworks in which to burn people alive. However, if Caesar were more independent, then his account is less suitable for reconstructing Posidonius' work. In this case, the parallels in his description should be treated with more caution, since it is not known precisely which information was derived from Posidonius.⁴²

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⁴¹ This can be true in both cases.

⁴² This problem is also present in the rest of the descriptions. For example, LINCOLN (1988: 382) connects Mela's account to Posidonius, but his description is very similar to Caesar's, so he might have derived his information from Caesar.

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