

The paper examines the style and language of the *Bellum Hispaniense* and reassesses its place in the evolution of Latin prose. The *Bellum Hispaniense* is today commonly interpreted as an example of extremely poor writing (thus e.g. Madvig, Norden, Klotz, Holmes, Way, Pascucci, Diouron). According to the *communis opinio*, the author tries to write in a highly literary and archaizing style but completely fails and permanently reveals his lack of culture and education. For several reasons this image is flawed. First of all, the text is obviously badly damaged (at least 20 lacunae, many erroneous repetitions, transpositions, glosses). In the past, scholars have arbitrarily corrected some of the obvious faults while blaming others on the author's 'illiteracy'. Evidently, this is methodologically unsound and must lead to a distorted picture. Secondly, the quotations of Ennius' *Annals* in 23.3, 31.7 and the rhetorical style of the speeches in 17.1–2 and 42.4–7 contradict the image of an almost illiterate writer. Sihler's, Pötter's, and Richter's attempts to resolve this contradiction by assuming that the speeches were written by a different author is unconvincing because the speeches contain many features that are typical of the remaining work (e.g. extensive use of *intensiva* and compounds with *de-* and *com-*). Hence, we must reckon with a single author who is at least sensitive enough to adjust his use of rhetorical devices to the respective context. Thirdly, in analyzing the language of the work, we should not so much compare it with much later texts reflecting 'colloquial Latin', but we should *a priori* take as our point of departure those texts which the author himself considered canonical and exemplary (Ennius' *Annals*) and those which are thematically and generically the nearest parallels (Caesar, the fragments of the Roman annalists, Sallust, and Livy). Most of the alleged colloquialisms and ineptitudes have close parallels in early Roman poetry, the late annalists, Sallust, and Livy, and this strongly suggests that the author of the *Bellum Hispaniense* deliberately distances himself from the stylistic conventions of Roman military reports and from the model of Caesar's *Commentarii* and places his own work in the generic framework of Roman historiography. Once regarded in this generic context, the work appears far less heterogeneous, and while some readers of the first century BC may have disliked its artificiality, few (if any) would have considered the work a piece of colloquial Latin or its author illiterate or uneducated. The *Bellum Hispaniense* challenges the traditional dichotomy of classical Ciceronian/Caesarian Latin on the one hand and colloquial/sub-standard Latin on the other hand because it exemplifies the stylistic diversity of the time (a point recently stressed also by e.g. Adams). Moreover, it is an important piece of evidence for our picture of the stylistic development of Roman historiography from the late annalists to Sallust and Livy.