Homo Ferus, Terra Divisa:
Representations of space and custom north of the Res Publica
in the historical narratives of Polybius and Caesar

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April 2014
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1. Introduction

In the first quarter of the 4th century BCE, the Mediterranean world was engulfed in an intermittent series of conflicts with foreigners of a sort utterly unfamiliar to the Greeks and Romans. This menace originated in the North. The barbarians who participated in these great raids south were known by many names, but today they are identified by the broad linguistic designation “Celts.”

Over the course of the next five centuries, these peoples were gradually incorporated into Rome’s expanding sphere of influence. By the 2nd century CE the Celts had by and large ceased to present a significant threat to Rome. Descendants of the brash warriors who sacked Rome, butchered a legion at Faesulae, charged nude into the Roman formations at Telamon, resisted the campaigns of Julius Caesar, and participated in the great Gallic rebellion of Vercingetorix were, by the 1st century CE, sporting togas and in some cases even participating in the Roman Senate.

The five centuries that led to this point, however, were by no means a steady progression toward a more civil relationship.

We can examine this long period of interactions between the Celts and Romans through the sheer volume of information written by classical historians and ethnographers, who sought to

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1 The term “Celt” has been applied to a culturally diverse collection of peoples spanning centuries and continents. There was very little consistency in its application during antiquity other than as a means of identifying someone from Northern Europe. As classical writers became more familiar with this region, use of the term shifted to identify specific groups within the region, as Caesar does. However, even this more specific application of the term was non consistent. Diodorus Siculus and Strabo, for instance, use the term to denote different peoples and geographical areas. The rediscovery of a “Celtic” identity during the 18th-19th centuries applied this term to the inhabitants of Brittany, Cornwall, Ireland, the Isle of Man, Scotland, and Wales: those peoples who still spoke “Celtic” languages. While this makes sense linguistically, it gives the illusion that these modern peoples preserved some form of ancient Celtic culture in their national identity. Because of the associations that the term “Celt” has accumulated over time, I prefer to describe the peoples of northern Europe by the names given to them in each work which I have encountered in this study. So, for example, I will use Galli, Germani, and Britanni rather than Gauls, Germans, and Britons in the chapters on Caesar. This will, I hope, distance the tribes under discussion from any modern associations they have accumulated. Please consult Appendix C for a glossary of ethnic designations which I refer to in this study.

2 The Emperor Claudius famously advocated for the extension of citizenship to prominent men from Gallia Comata in 48 CE. His speech has been preserved on the Lyon Tablet (now in the Gallo-Roman Museum of Lyon) as well as in Tacitus’ Annales 11.24.
make sense of these puzzling foreigners and their persistent conflicts with the peoples of the Mediterranean. These sources orient our perception of Gallo-Roman interactions toward the Greco-Roman, rather than Celtic, perspective. Foreigners had fascinated ancient authors since Homeric times. Odysseus’ wanderings brought him to exotic locales inhabited by barbarians strange in custom and appearance. Descriptions of savage Cyclopes, hostile Laestrygonians, idle Lotus Eaters, and friendly Phaeacians all have at their core an archaic Greek concern for matters of hospitality and guest-friendship in a time when Greek civilization was expanding its horizons to the periphery of the known world through trade and colonization. Consider Odysseus’ landing on the island of the Cyclopes. The poet sings:

From there we sailed onward grieving in our hearts. We came to the land of the arrogant, lawless Cyclopes who entrust themselves to the immortal gods and neither cultivate with their hands nor plow the land, but everything grows unsown and unplowed; there is wheat and barley and vines, which produce...
wine of fine grapes, and the rain of Zeus nourishes them. 
And there are no assemblies, neither advisory or judiciary, 
and they inhabit the summits of lofty mountains 
in hollow caverns, and each governs 
his children and wives, though they do not respect one another. 
A wooded island extended beside the harbor 
neither near nor far from the land of the Cyclopes, 
on which were countless wild goats; 
for the path of humans does not keep them away, 
nor do hunters enter here, who beneath the woods 
suffer distress wandering the crests of the mountains. 
They are full of neither flocks nor plowed fields, 
but unsown and unplowed it has always 
lacked men, and it pastures bleating goats. 
For there are no red-cheeked ships among the Cyclopes, 
nor are any men born there who could produce 
well-decked ships, which could finish 
conveying them to all the towns of men, in such ways 
as men cross the sea to foreign lands in ships; 
who would have rendered the island habitable for themselves.

This passage makes several observations about the land of the Cyclopes. It is fertile and abounds 
in natural sources of food to such an extent that the inhabitants need not till the land or raise 
flocks. The environment (by the will of Zeus and the other immortals) permits the Cyclopes to 
live in this state of ease, untouched by human development (buildings, roads, fields, and ships). 
As a consequence of their isolation, the Cyclopes maintain their savage existence which would 
otherwise have been tamed by the effects of maritime commerce. The poet is essentially 
portraying the Cyclopes as a native population resistant to integration into the Mediterranean 
trade networks and colonial systems springing up in the 8th century BCE. This type of portrayal 
is paralleled in historical narratives by actual accounts of peoples hostile to contact with the 
Greeks and Romans. These Mediterranean peoples realized that trade was a powerful force in the 
taming of the wild interior of Europe. The close link between native character and the 
environment evident in the case of the Cyclopes is found centuries later in the account of Julius 
Caesar’s Gallic Wars. Indeed, the relationship between Celts and the peoples of the 
Mediterranean lent itself to this type of portrayal.
Writers of diverse backgrounds within the classical tradition, whether composing histories of the Roman Republic or treatises on geography, all had something to say about the Celts, and in particular the Gauls, a group of Celtic tribes that Rome dealt with frequently in the Republican period. Certain core elements in the representation of these peoples are traceable in authors as divergent in background, style, and agenda as Polybius of Megalopolis and Gaius Julius Caesar. A comparison of Polybius’ *Historiae* and Caesar’s *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* yields insights into the types of historical patterns and cultural observations which ancient writers relied upon to explain the connections between events in their narratives and in doing so engaged with the historiographical tradition. This comparison also highlights the way in which these two representations differed. Before exploring the works of Polybius and Caesar, however, a brief summary of Romano-Gallic relations from the fourth through the first centuries BCE is required in order to provide the historical context of these narratives.\(^3\)

1.1. The Gallic Wars: A Summary

Rome was almost constantly at war with one Celtic tribe or another from the period of the Middle Republic to the Principate.\(^4\) Peoples speaking a Celtic language and exhibiting material culture consistent with their northern, “Transalpine” cousins had crossed the Alps and settled in the Po Valley beginning at a very early date. There is archaeological evidence for their presence as early as the 8th century BCE.\(^5\) When the power of the Etruscan city-states began to wane in the

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3 *N.B.*: The following narrative relates a cursory account by drawing on a number of ancient sources (primarily Polybius, Caesar, Livy, and Plutarch) that were composed long after the events that they chronicle. We must consciously remind ourselves that the patterns identified by this study are first and foremost historiographical conventions adopted to make sense of historical fact. I will periodically refer to scholarship that contextualizes the accounts of Polybius and Caesar within the historical framework generated by archaeology in order to balance the ancient accounts with physical evidence of this period.

4 See Appendix A for a timeline of major events in the conflict between Rome and the Gauls.

5 Evidence for the origins of the Celts is entirely archaeological in nature. The archaeological culture that has been identified as an ancestor of later Celtic societies was located northeast of the Alps and termed the Urnfield Culture. It lasted from roughly the fall of the Bronze Age Mediterranean civilizations to 700 BCE, when a new culture
late 5th century, the Po Valley Celts took advantage of this vulnerability and began to raid the cities of Etruria and Latium, sweeping farther and farther into the Italian Peninsula as time went on. In 390 BCE a host of Celtic Senones penetrated as far as the Allia River barely 11 miles north of Rome, where they routed a Roman army and then marched south to sack Rome itself. This pattern of raiding continued through the fourth century until Rome managed to win a decisive victory in Etruria at Lake Vadimo in 283. From this point on, Rome succeeded in gradually extending its dominion northward through Etruria into Gallic territory. During the period from 283 to Hannibal’s invasion in 218, it was the Celts who were forced to go on the defensive. This stage in Romano-Gallic relations ended with Rome’s annexation of the Po Valley (Cisalpine Gaul) in 191, following their defeat of Hannibal.

The next major interactions between Romans and Celts took place west of the Alps in Transalpine Gaul. Rome became involved in the struggles of the Greek colony at Massalia against its neighboring Gallic tribes beginning in 125 BCE. Having extended its dominion over Iberia during the second century, Rome had become invested in protecting the overland route from the Iberian Peninsula to the Italian Peninsula through southern Gaul. This led to the

devolved in the northern foothills of the Alps along the Upper Danube as a result of contact with Greek colonies, the young Etruscan city-states, and nomadic steppe-peoples migrating westward into the Hungarian plain. All of these external influences had a profound effect on these “Hallstatt” peoples. The Hallstatt culture lasted until the end of the 5th century, by which time a new Celtic culture was rapidly developing to the west along the Marne and Upper Rhine: the La Tène culture. The Celts of the La Tène period are those who first burst into the Mediterranean World in the early 4th century BCE, occupying the Po Valley and launching raids deep into the “civilized” world. See B. Cunliffe, *The Ancient Celts*, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 39-67 for a more detailed account of these periods and the relevant archaeological assemblages.

Polybius is the primary ancient source used to reconstruct this chronology. I therefore follow his dates. However, it is believed that Polybius’ chronology is off by 3 years. See Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius Vol. 1*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957, p. 172-214 for his correction of Polybius’ chronology.

Μασσαλία (known to the Romans as Massilia and to the modern reader as Marseilles) was founded c. 600 BCE by Greek colonists from the Ionian city of Phocaea. Massiliote traders venturing north up the Rhone were responsible in part for the economic stimulus that jumpstarted the development of the La Tène civilization and the competitive network of Gallic oppida vying for control of this trade route. For a history of this city that explains its significance to the development of the Western Mediterranean, see A.T. Hodge, *Ancient Greek France*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998.

The Via Domitia, completed in 121 BCE, ran from the Rhone to Tarraco in Hispania.
creation of a region known colloquially by Caesar and others as Provincia, Rome’s first transalpine province, skirting the south coast. A Roman colony was founded at Narbo in the southwestern reaches of Provincia, which took its later designation, Gallia Narbonensis, from this city. Provincia then became embroiled in a whole new series of conflicts with the native Gallic tribes and threats from farther afield a generation later at the end of the 2nd century BCE. A massive coalition of tribes migrating from the far North threatened the security of Rome’s foothold in Gaul. The most prominent of these tribes were the Cimbri and Teutones, supposedly originating in Jutland (the modern Danish mainland). The ethnic identity of these tribes is a topic of debate, but they likely represent the first major group of Germanic-speakers to come into contact with Rome. To Roman eyes, these hairy foreigners were no different than the native Gauls. The Cimbri and Teutones encounter and defeat large Roman forces on three separate occasions: first in 113 BCE at Noreia in the eastern foothills of the Alps, then in 107 at Burdigala in Transalpine Gaul, and third in 105 at Arausio in Provincia, where they engulfed and annihilated a massive consular army, allegedly leaving 80,000 Romans and their commanders dead in its wake. Rome was saved by several more years of indecisive wandering that brought the peoples to northern Hispania and back to Gaul, but when once again they determined to cross the Alps, the legions of Gaius Marius were there to meet them, halting the tribes in their tracks in 102 and 101 at Aquae Sextiae in Provincia and Vercellae in Gallia Cisalpina. Clearly, the addition of Provincia had failed to dramatically alter the patterns of hostile incursion that had characterized Rome’s relations with the Gauls for centuries; it merely exposed Roman territory

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9 Provincia was later known as Gallia Narbonensis under the Julio-Claudians.
10 The identification of the Cimbri and Teutones with Jutland actually derives from later writers, chiefly Strabo and Ptolemy. It is entirely possible that these tribes originated elsewhere and shared similar Germanic ethnonyms as the inhabitants of Jutland whom the fleet of Augustus encountered in the early first century CE and who gave their name to Himmerland.
11 See the epitome of Livy, Ab Urbe Condita 67 for a summary of these three defeats.
12 See Plutarch, Marius for this general’s role in the defeat of the Cimbri and Teutones.
to a more diverse assortment of aggressive northern peoples. It comes as no surprise, then, that when Julius Caesar was given *imperium* over Gallia Cisalpina and Illyricum, Gallia Transalpina (Provincia) was tacked on as an additional responsibility. This extra region would prove to be far more of a burden on his attention than his original two appointments.

In 58 BCE, the year Caesar arrived in Gallia to take up his responsibilities, the region was about to undergo another devastating series of migrations, this time from the East: the Gallic Helvetii were readying themselves to erupt from the confines of the Alps and seize new lands for themselves. Another threat arose from a conflict between Rome’s allies: a coalition of Germanic tribes under the leadership of Ariovistus, an *amicus populi Romani*, had crossed the Rhine and had begun to settle in the fertile land to the west. This threatened the Gallic Aedui tribe, who had previously been named *fratres et consanguinei* of the Romans. When the Aedui appealed to Caesar for aid, he had to choose which ally he would support in this conflict: the settled Galli or the roving Germani. He realized that ripples of these violent population movements would doubtless be felt even in Provincia further south, so he used them as a pretext for invading non-Roman Gallia Comata. Once he had his foot in the door, Caesar lost no time in undertaking an ambitious series of campaigns during which he subjugated every Gallic tribe west of the Rhine and north of the Pyrenees between the years 58 and 52. He also undertook exploratory expeditions to Britannia and Germania during this time, leading his legions into territory that had not yet been explored by the Romans. After crushing the final great Gallic revolt in 52 and consolidating Roman control over the pacified tribes, Caesar had completed in seven years what
had taken Roman forces decades to accomplish in Gallia Cisalpina. The era of persistent Gallic raids was at an end.\textsuperscript{13}

1.2. Source Texts: Polybius and Caesar

Accounts of conflicts between Rome and the Celts were written by ancient authors of diverse backgrounds and compositional styles. A number of these accounts have been successfully transmitted to the present day through the manuscript tradition. Unfortunately, most Hellenistic and early Republican Roman historians who composed ethnographical treatises on the Celts and historical narratives of their initial conflicts with Rome are lost to us or survive only in a fragmentary form.\textsuperscript{14} This shifts the burden of historical transmission to later writers.

Polybius is the earliest historian whose substantial account of these early conflicts survives. Born in Megalopolis, Arcadia, in the year 200 BCE, Polybius was heavily involved in the affairs of the Achaean Confederacy during his early career. The trajectory of his career was dramatically altered in 167, when he and a thousand other Achaians were seized and held in Italy for the next seventeen years as guarantees of the Confederacy’s cooperation, which had been called into question by recent events in Greece. It was in Italy that Polybius began composing his forty-volume \textit{Historiae}, a historical account that documented events throughout the Mediterranean from 220 to 168. The work’s preface, or προκατασκευή, encompassed books 1 and 2. It provides summaries of earlier events and cultural information concerning the Romans. In book 2 Polybius treats the Gallic Wars of the Middle Republic. We will therefore explore this account in detail in order to identify themes in the representation of the barbarians.

\textsuperscript{13} The most detailed account of Caesar’s conquests may be found in his \textit{Commentarii de Bello Gallico}.

\textsuperscript{14} The Hellenistic writers Timaeus (b. 350 BCE) and Posidonius (b. 135 BCE), in addition to the first Roman historian Q. Fabius Pictor (b. \textit{circa} 250 BCE), composed works that dealt in part with Rome’s Gallic Wars of the Middle Republic and provided ethnographic information on these peoples. Although their works are now lost, their influence can be detected in the accounts of later writers such as Polybius, Livy, and Strabo.
Through his friendship with the Roman commander Publius Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus Africanus, Polybius was able to travel extensively throughout the Western Mediterranean, accompanying him to Hispania, southern Gaul, and Carthage. Polybius likely derived many of his cultural observations through autopsy as a consequence of these voyages. Polybius likely drew upon older accounts written by the Greek author Timaeus and the Roman historian Fabius Pictor in composing his summary of the Gallic Wars. Polybius’ own background, however, and the fact that he wrote for a Greek audience exerted influence over his account. Though he describes only Rome’s Gallic Wars, the Greek mainland and central Anatolia had undergone serious invasions by Gauls as well. In 279 a Gallic host had plundered its way through central Greece and assaulted Delphi, though according to legend they were repelled by the intervention of Apollo. The following year, the Gauls crossed the Hellespont and finally settled in central Anatolia, which was thereafter referred to as Galatia. Polybius’ audience will therefore have had a recent cultural memory of these terrifying northerners and could relate to the experiences of the Romans in the narrative. Polybius will be the first author I examine in my search for trends in the historical representation of the Gauls.  

Following observations on book 2 of Polybius, we shall turn to the *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* of Gaius Julius Caesar. Born in 100 BCE, Caesar spent his early political career as a partisan of Gaius Marius and later, after the forces of Sulla seized Rome in 82, he spent time abroad as a soldier in the wars against Mithridates in Anatolia and as provincial governor in Hispania Ulterior. He was known for his ability as an orator but chose to earn his fame in military pursuits. After uniting with Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus and Marcus Licinius Crassus to form the First Triumvirate in 60, he took a position as the governor of Gallia Cisalpina,

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Illyricum, and Transalpina. He spent the years from 58 to 52 conducting a series of conquests that resulted in the extension of Roman power to the English Channel and the Rhine. Over the course of his Gallic Wars he composed *commentarii*, one for each campaigning season, in which he laid out a justification for war with the natives and a detailed account of his strategy. These seven books provide modern scholars a look into the mind of the conqueror and reveal the methods with which he justified his campaigns. Written in Latin for a Roman audience, they are composed in a simple style that encourages the trust of the reader and complements his agenda of defending the rationality of his campaigns.

1.3. Mapping Our Route

I will attempt to show that Polybius and Caesar share common methods of explanation and exposition in their narratives on the Gallic Wars using the following observations on patterns of representation in the two authors. These trends will fall under three broad paradigms: geography, ethnography, and narrative. Both writers dedicate a substantial portion of their respective narratives contextualizing these conflicts geographically. A hallmark of these geographical observations is an emphasis on the connection between people and landscape. The identity of particular tribes corresponds with the region they inhabit. Clear distinctions between different peoples are made using physical landmarks such as mountains and rivers. In addition to these geographical divisions, the landscape functions as an outlet for characterization. Vast forests are inhabited by restless nomadic savages, battles are conducted in the thick shadows of fortified groves, and revolts spring up far and wide at gatherings conducted in secluded glens. The fertility of particular regions is given particular emphasis in order to explain the pattern of barbaric migrations from the European hinterland into the broad river-valleys and coastal plains.
of more settled groups. Both the human geography of a region and the landscape that shapes these peoples are prominent factors in the narrative schemes of both Polybius and Caesar.

Divisions are also made along ethnic lines; that is, both Polybius and Caesar distinguish between foreign peoples characterized by different ways of life and cultural features. While the ethnic divisions he makes often correspond to his geographical divisions, these distinctions are integrated into the narrative itself at several points in both works and serve an important purpose in explaining the varying approaches taken by different tribes in their interactions with Rome. The cultural distinctions manifest themselves both in ethnographic digressions and in accounts of significant events. The behavior of the barbari in these narratives allows both authors to demonstrate how foreign peoples fit the stereotypes applied to them in ethnographic passages.
2. Polybius and the North: Gauls through Greek Eyes

Polybius’ account of Rome’s Gallic Wars of the Early and Middle Republic presents an interesting opportunity for the student of ancient ethnography: a first glimpse at the methods with which writers described the intrusion of northern foreigners possessing a culture altogether alien to the Hellenistic world into the affairs of major Mediterranean superpowers, namely Rome and Carthage. Polybius’ account represents the earliest surviving description of the Κελτοί/Γαλάται in classical historiography. A striking feature of northern peoples in historical narratives of the larger conflicts between Mediterranean powers was the Gallic propensity to swiftly invade and ravage Roman territory before effective resistance could be marshalled in response. Gallic raids posed an obvious problem for Rome when the threat of conflicts to the south with Hellenistic Greek and Carthaginian armies required their undivided attention. The vulnerable northern frontier would prove to be Italy’s major weak point during these conflicts. Polybius therefore characterizes the Κελτοί in a manner which best suits them to their role in his narrative as aggressive northern neighbors. This characterization is achieved in several ways. Polybius begins his description of Romano-Gallic relations by orienting these two cultures to one another geographically.

In this chapter, we will first conduct an analysis of Polybius’ geographical overview. Next we will turn to his brief Gallic ethnography, in which he selects the most salient foreign aspects of Gallic culture as a means of distinguishing these peoples from the civilizations of the

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16 Herodotus’ Scythians take on a similar role as typical northern foreigners with customs altogether barbaric from a Greek perspective. However, they remain peripheral to the central conflict of the Histories, while the Κελτοί of Polybius directly influence the conflict between Carthage and Rome.

17 The Κελτοί are named by Herodotus in Hist. 2.33.3 and 4.49.3 purely as geographical references embedded within catalogues of rivers, associated in particular with the Ister/Danube. Polybius’ overview is the earliest surviving account that documents the history of these peoples in detail. However, scholars have proposed that Polybius derives the majority of his record from the lost work of Q. Fabius Pictor, a Roman historian who is believed to have participated directly in the third-century BCE campaigns against the Galli Cisalpini. See Walbank, Historical Commentary on Polybius Vol. 1, p.184.
Mediterranean. Observations on Polybius’ description of Gallic behavior in the narrative will follow. Finally, Polybius’ own diction will offer further insights into the function of the Κέλτοι within his narrative.

2.1. Context of the Gallic Wars in Polybius’ Historiae

Before proceeding to examine Polybius’ account of the Gallic Wars, it will be helpful to explain how these earlier wars relate to his central narrative of Rome’s war with Hannibal. Polybius begins his 40-book history with a προκατασκευή, or preface, which encompasses two entire books. Within these books he summarizes the major events that preceded the Second Punic War. Although this preface is structured chronologically, Polybius inserts a major interlude into the narrative of Book 2, which summarizes Rome’s relations with the Κέλτοι dating back to the early fourth century BCE. He is careful to explain the pertinence of these events to the conflict between Rome and Carthage. Polybius introduces the Κέλτοι for the first time in his narrative at the point when Hasdrubal extends Carthaginian hegemony over the Iberian Peninsula in the late 3rd century. Polybius relates:

αὐτόθεν μὲν οὖν ἐπιτάττειν ἢ πολεμεῖν οὐ κατετόλμων τοῖς Καρχηδονίοις διὰ τὸ τὸν ἀπὸ τῶν Κελτῶν φόβον ἐπικρέμασθαι τοῖς σφετέροις πράγμασιν καὶ μόνον οὐ καθ’ ἑκάστην ἡμέραν προσδοκᾶν τὴν ἔφοδον αὐτῶν (2.13.5).

At this point they (the Romans) undertook neither to deploy nor to make war upon the Carthaginians because a fear of the Κέλτοι hung over their affairs and they expected an invasion of these men every day.

The statement above serves as a spatial and temporal pivot, catapulting the reader centuries into the past. The Romans were right to fear an invasion from the north, as they had experienced this particular breed of misfortune intermittently for the past century and a half since the sack of Rome in 390. This is why Polybius decides it is appropriate to take a break from the primary

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18 The “Gallic Wars” in question range from the Gallic sack of Rome in 390 BCE to the Roman conquest of Cisalpine Gaul in 222 BCE.
19 This is Polybius’ own terminology, used at 2.16.4.
narrative and give an account of the Gallic presence in Italy from their initial migration into the
Po Valley (5th c BCE) until the time he has reached in his primary narrative (221 BCE). Polybius
further justifies this abrupt shift in the following way:

Concerning these matters it seems to me both useful and significant on the one hand to give an
account, so that we might preserve the bounds of an introduction corresponding to our original
purpose, and on the other hand to return to those early times, in which the aforementioned people
(the Κελτοί) possessed this land; for I believe the inquiry concerning these matters is not only
worthy of contemplation and commemoration, but also necessary for the purpose of knowing what
men and what places Hannibal later trusted when he set out to overthrow the power of the
Romans.

This passage exposes Polybius’ compositional agenda. He seeks to address only matters that
directly influenced the course of events in his primary narrative, but he inserts lengthy
digressions on peripheral conflicts such as the Gallic Wars if he finds any connection at all to his
main topic, regardless of how long ago they occurred. This seemed especially important to him
considering the perspective of his audience. Even if a well-educated Greek of the 2nd century
BCE took the opportunity to tour the Po Valley or venture to Massalia, it would have been of
little help to them in comprehending the state of these regions only a century prior to their own
lifetimes. The Roman colonization of the Po Valley had begun rapidly following their final
conquest of the Cisalpine Gauls in 191, so that there was little to no trace of the original culture
left in the region by the time of Polybius’ composition. Additionally, he wished his narrative of
the Gallic Wars to foreshadow the greater conflict to come. The Second Punic War itself took the
form of a great raid southward from the Alps deep into the Italian peninsula, conducted by one of
the greatest military minds of the ancient world. Hannibal had at his disposal troops recruited
from Gallic tribes he had encountered on his march, so even the ethnic composition of the
invading army mirrored that of previous invasions. With this purpose in mind, Polybius undertakes his description of Rome’s early conflicts with the Γαλάται.

An account of these men and places aptly follows this preamble, conjoined in the context of human geography. Before detailing specific events, Polybius judges it proper to reveal all the pieces on the board, how they came to occupy their respective positions, and the merits and disadvantages of each position. The physical geography of northern Italy is his starting point.

2.2. Polybius’ Geography of Italy

Polybius schematizes the geography of northern Italy as a cluster of simple shapes broken into distinct regions by physical landmarks. This dramatic simplification lends itself to his correspondingly simple descriptions of the distribution, movement, and consequent interaction of various ancient populations. The Italian peninsula is envisioned as a vast triangle, bordered by seas on two sides and the Alps on the third. Within this area, a smaller triangle is drawn between the Alps and Apennines with its third side bounded by the Adriatic Sea. The River Po divides this smaller triangle still further. It is this small triangle—the Po Valley—that serves as the epicenter for the conflicts narrated in Polybius’ interlude on the Gallic Wars.

After sketching this approximate verbal map, Polybius details the particular merits of the Po Valley that serve as catalysts for population movements in the events which follow. He specifically stresses the abundance of food produced in this region. From a geographical perspective, therefore, the Po Valley is emphasized as the northern breadbasket of the rest of Italy in addition to its function as the sole overland route into the peninsula.

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20 This section extends from 2.14.4 to 2.14.12. Compare this schematization to that of Caesar at DBG 1.1.
21 See 2.15.
Having established the Po Valley as a region of considerable potential for cultivation, Polybius next charts patterns of human migration into and out of the region. Migration theory is a straightforward way of explaining how large groups of people came to inhabit various locations over a broad timeframe. Polybius’ particular brand of migration theory has been described by scholars as an “invasion hypothesis” in which population groups with distinct ethnic identities interact like billiard balls or dominoes: a specific group invades the territory of another and either completely annihilates the inhabitants or drives them to seek new territory for themselves.\(^{22}\) While this model of population movements poses a multitude of historical problems and has ultimately been abandoned as a viable explanation for migration, it suits Polybius’ own narrative quite well. The Κέλτοι are portrayed by Polybius as a race particularly prone to migration.\(^{23}\) He traces their origins to the Alps and the vast unknown regions lying beyond. After noting that in ancient times the Etruscans once inhabited the Po Valley, Polybius goes on to describe the motive behind a steady stream of Celtic migrations out of the Alps which forced the Etruscans further south. He states,

\[\text{oίς ἐπιμιγνύμενοι κατά τὴν παράθεσιν Κέλτοι καὶ περὶ τὸ κάλλος τῆς χώρας ὀφθαλμιάσαντες, ἐκ μικρᾶς προφάσεως μεγάλη στρατιὰ παραδόξως ἐπελθόντες ἐξέβαλον ἐκ τῆς παρὰ τὸν Πάδον χώρας Τυρρηνοὺς καὶ κατέσχον αὐτοὶ τὰ πεδία (2.17.3).}\]

The Κέλτοι mingled with them (the Etruscans) owing to their proximity and, having observed the beauty of their land, from this trivial cause they came unexpectedly in a great host and drove out the Etruscans from the land around the Po and occupied the plains themselves.

\(^{22}\) The long history of this model of migration and its successors is covered in P. Heather, *Empires and Barbarians*, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 16-35.

\(^{23}\) It is notable that Polybius shifts in his use of Κέλτοι almost exclusively from 2.13.5-2.18.6 to Γαλάται as the predominant ethnic designation for the remainder of this account. There are a few viable explanations for this dramatic shift in identification. One is that this is meant to indicate a temporal shift in usage from the earlier Κέλτοι to the more up-to-date Γαλάται. Another explanation stems from the possibility of Polybius using Q. Fabius Pictor as his primary source for these chapters, Γαλάται corresponding more closely with common Latin form Galli. A third explanation is that Polybius preferred to use the term Γαλάται in order to link these Italian populations with the contemporaneous grand migrations of other Γαλάται through Greece and into Anatolia. This reinforces the theory that Polybius wrote for a predominantly Greek audience, as it would represent the two migrations as parallel phenomena occurring in Italy, the setting of much of his work, and Greece, his audience’s homeland.
The sight of this bountiful territory attracted the newcomers. Note the curious manner in which Polybius relates this sentiment: the land possesses κάλλος (beauty). The Κέλτοι are envious of the Po Valley’s beauty, just as a man envious of another’s wife or material possessions. They want to take that which is physically appealing to them. Polybius tellingly glosses over any desire to cultivate the great expanses of fertile soil which later spurred on the Roman conquest of this region. Note that this envy is then described as a μικρὰ προφάσις, a small (petty?) motive, which attracts such a mighty force, a μεγάλη στρατία. This is the first time in his narrative that large Celtic forces appear suddenly with no warning in their single minded pursuit of τὸ καλλός. Migrations out of the Alps do not end with this initial invasion. Other Celtic tribes are lured by the same desires as the initial migrants, causing a great degree of turmoil in subsequent years. However, in order to properly describe events which occurred after this initial invasion, Polybius first had to distinguish between the many different tribes of Κέλτοι that make an appearance in his narrative.

2.3. Tribal Divisions

The primary basis for Polybius’ distinctions between the various tribes mentioned in the interlude is geographical. This is where the verbal map of 2.14.4-12 plays a significant role. Each nation is allocated a portion of this map. In particular Polybius distinguishes between the generalized Γαλάται Τρανσαλπῖνοι from more specific Celtic tribes that migrated into the Po Valley: the Λάοι, Λεβέκιοι, Ἰνσομβρεῖς, Γόνομάνοι, Ἄναρες, Βοῖοι, Λίγγονες, and Σήνωνες.24 Italy is conceived of as a large triangular shape, upon the northern edge of which lies the Po Valley, another triangle. The use of triangles as descriptors is adopted for the sake of simplifying the complex reality of northern Italy’s geography.

25 The Γαλάται Τρανσαλπῖνοι are first named at 2.15.8 and are initially contrasted with only two specific Po Valley tribes, the Ἀγωνεῖς and Ταυρίσκοι. The latter tribe is not named among the more extensive list of Po Valley tribes given at 2.17.4-8 after the expulsion of the Etruscans. There is debate over whether all of these tribes represented ethnically “Celtic” populations or whether instead there were non-Celts among them as well. Polybius appears to
These Celtic tribes are located in relation to the Po, the Adriatic, and the mountains surrounding the valley. It was important for Polybius to locate each of these tribes in relation to one another, as Rome will be tasked with defeating each in turn. The Βοῖοι and Σήνωνες cause much trouble early in the narrative while the Ἰνσομβρες become more significant later, resisting Rome’s annexation of the region north of the Po. These Celtic interlopers are in turn contrasted with the native Οὐενέτοι, Veneti, who inhabited the region around the mouths of the Po: τοὺς μὲν ἔθεσι καὶ τῷ κόσμῳ βραχεῖ διαφέροντες Κελτῶν, γλώττῃ δ’ ἀλλοίᾳ χρώμενοι (2.17.5), “they differ from the Κελτοί in customs and in humble adornment and they speak a different language.” This statement sets apart the Veneti and groups the aforementioned tribes under the term Κελτοί and implies a set of customs, dress, and language used by them. Having established an overarching Celtic “culture,” Polybius next undertakes a brief description of peculiar customs practiced by this ethnic group.

### 2.4. Celtic Custom

We turn now to Polybius’ direct exposition of ethnographic data on the Κελτοί. He writes,

> ἄκουν δὲ κατὰ κώμας ἀτειχίστους, τῆς λοιπῆς κατασκευῆς ἄμοιροι καθεστῶτες. διὰ γὰρ τὸ στηθαδοκοιτεῖν καὶ κρεαφαγεῖν, ἐτὶ δὲ μηδὲν ἄλλο πλὴν τὰ πολεμικὰ καὶ τὰ κατὰ γεωργίαν· ἀσκεῖν ἄπλοὺς εἶχον τοὺς βίους, οὔτ' ἐπιστήμης οὔτε τέχνης παρ' αὐτοῖς τὸ παράπαν γινωσκομένης. ὕπαρξις γε μὴν ἑκάστοι ἦν θρέμματα καὶ χρυσὸς διὰ τὸ μόνα ταῦτα κατὰ τὰς περιστάσεις ῥᾳδίως δύνασθαι πανταχῇ περιαγαγεῖν καὶ μεθιστάναι κατὰ τὰς αὑτῶν προαιρέσεις. περὶ δὲ τὰς ἑταιρείας μεγίστην σπουδὴν ἐποιοῦσαν διὰ τὸ καὶ φοβερώτατον εἶναι παρ' αὐτοῖς τοῦτον ὃς ἂν πλεῖστους ἔχειν δοκῇ τοὺς θεραπεύοντας καὶ συμπεριφερομένους αὐτῷ (2.17.9-12).

They inhabit unfortified settlements, possessing no share of extraneous furnishings. For through sleeping on pallets and eating meat, there being nothing else aside from war and agriculture, they fashion simple lives. Neither is any knowledge nor skill contemplated at all. The property of each was in livestock and gold, since these things alone were easy for them to transport far and wide depending upon the circumstances and to change at their own discretion. They are at great pains to treat all the tribes who descended from the Alps as Κελτοί, making sure to emphasize that the Οὐενέτοι, natives of the Po Valley, are of a different stock.
concerning their retinue, since the man who has the most attendants and followers is considered the most fearsome and powerful among them.

This passage contains several insights into Polybius’ choice of cultural attributes to relate. The unfortified village, or κώμα ἀτειχίστος, was a feature of Thucydides’ fifth-century hypothesis for the types of primitive settlements inhabited by the earliest Greek populations, during a period characterized by perpetual violence.26 According to Thucydides, the Greeks only began to construct walls around their settlements when they ceased the practice of perpetual migration. Note that a majority of peculiar cultural traits expressed here by Polybius hinge on the idea that the Κέλτοι live a semi-nomadic lifestyle. Some more notable features of this ethnography include subsistence on meat, a simple lifestyle of fighting and farming, and the idea that power is derived from the size of one’s retinue. These features are all quite significant to the identification of ethnographical conventions common to Polybius and Caesar, as the latter refers to these customs frequently when describing various barbaric populations in Northern Europe. However, as we shall observe next, Polybius prefers to let the deeds of these peoples serve as his primary mode of characterization.

2.5. Ethnic Character in Action

Apart from this brief passage, Polybius avoids lengthy ethnographic exposition, instead directing his audience to the narrative itself. He expresses his preference for revealing elements of national character through deeds: “It is easy to understand through the actions of these men their numbers, the size and beauty of their bodies, and especially their boldness in war” (τὸ γε μὴν πλῆθος τῶν ἄνδρῶν καὶ τὸ μέγεθος καὶ κάλλος τῶν σωμάτων, ἐτὶ δὲ τὴν ἐν τοῖς πολέμοις τόλμαν ἐξ αὐτῶν τῶν πράξεων σαρκὸς ἔσται καταμαθεῖν, 2.15.7). One must therefore turn to the

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26 See Thucydides 1.2.2.
depiction of the Κελτοί/Γαλάται as actors on Polybius’ stage when seeking to identify the core characteristics Polybius chooses to associate with this ancient ethnic division.

One facet of this ethnic character envisions the Γαλάται as untrustworthy allies and unpredictable enemies, a convention common to the rest of his narrative as well when describing the character of hostile populations. This portrayal of the Γαλάται is present even earlier in his narrative than the interlude on the Gallic War. During his account of the Illyrian Wars, Polybius describes the treachery of a band of Celtic mercenaries hired to guard the city of Phoinike in Epirus against the forces of Teuta, an Illyrian queen. These Γαλάται betray the city and hand it over to the piratical Illyrians for a share of the plunder. Polybius expresses consternation at the sheer foolishness of the Epirotes, who entrusted their city to a mercenary group with such a reputation for deceit. He asks: “First of all, who, having perceived the widespread infamy of the Γαλάται, would not be wary of entrusting to these people a prosperous city possessing many enticements to betrayal?” (πρῶτον γὰρ τίς οὐκ ἂν τὴν κοινὴν περὶ Γαλατῶν φήμην ὑπιδόμενος εὐλαβηθείη τούτοις ἐγχειρίσαι πόλιν εὐδαίμονα καὶ πολλὰς ἀφορμὰς ἔχουσαν εἰς παρασπόνδησιν; 2.7.5). The κοινὴ φήμη referenced in this passage is likely an allusion to the participation of Gallic troops in a previous mercenary revolt against their impoverished Carthaginian paymasters.\footnote{This event is described by Polybius at 1.67.} Note that this event does not involve Gallic mercenaries alone, but contingents from several different foreign nations. Indeed, a penchant for deceit is present in the portrayals of many barbaric peoples. However, Polybius’ fixation on this characteristic is particularly salient within his chronicle of the early Gallic Wars.

Returning to the narrative, after describing the geography of the Po Valley and the initial appearance of migrant Κελτοί on the scene, Polybius gives a cursory sketch of the next century
of Gallic conflict, from the sack of Rome in 390 BCE to the Roman victory at Lake Vadimo in 282 BCE. Following this decisive encounter the Γαλάται held their peace in fear of further Roman reprisals. However, in 236 BCE a new generation of Γαλάται encouraged their nation to break the truce with Rome. Polybius writes,

When those who had witnessed the terrible affairs passed away over the course of time, there came a new generation of men, full of irrational spirit, inexperienced and ignorant of every evil and every circumstance, who again endeavored to incite changes, having become aggravated against the Romans through these occurrences, and to entice Γαλάται from the Alps.

Note that the θυμὸς ἀλογίστος is presented as an inborn predisposition to such irrational behavior which the older generation had lost when they experienced the atrocities of war against the Romans. By contrast, the younger generation still possessed this flaming temper and was further irritated by an unfavorable truce with Rome. This portrayal corresponds with the idea that the character of a particular group is inherited rather than cultivated, continuing to dictate the disposition of various Celtic populations from one generation to the next.

The question of Gallic loyalty (or lack thereof) is again raised after the Romans conquer a great swath of the Po Valley following their victory at Telamon in 225 BCE. A number of Gallic tribes choose to ally with Rome rather than resist. This presented a problem to the Romans, who were intent on crossing the Po and extending their hegemony even farther northward. Polybius writes,
make an assault against men of the same race, they were wary of taking part in a matter of such importance with people of this sort.

In this instance, Rome foregoes the opportunity to utilize the vast manpower of their allied tribesmen because this reputation for treachery, Γαλατικὴ ἀθεσία, was so deeply associated with them.

Celtic treachery was not limited to interactions with other nations, however. Another facet of their portrayal in the narrative depicts them as particularly prone to internal disagreements and civil discord. Some of these disagreements manifest themselves as arguments between generals on the march. These disagreements generally lead to a disastrous end for the whole expedition. One of these internal conflicts of opinion takes place when a Roman army catches an invading Celtic force unawares. Polybius describes the situation: “But the Γαλάται, alarmed at the arrival of the Romans and quarreling against one another, made a retreat to their homeland comparable to a rout when night came” (οἱ δὲ Γαλάται καταπλαγέντες τὴν ἔφοδον αὐτῶν καὶ διαστασιάσαντες πρὸς σφᾶς νυκτὸς ἐπιγενομένης φυγῇ παραπλησίαν ἐποιήσαντο τὴν ἀποχώρησιν εἰς τὴν οἰκείαν, Polybius 2.18.8). The troops, thrown into confusion by the unexpected proximity of a large Roman force, completely abandon their campaign in favor of retreating to their homeland without a fight. Years later, a similar incident occurs, incited by a different motive. Having allied themselves with the Etruscans, a large Celtic force ravages the Roman ἐπαρχία, accumulating a large quantity of booty on their march. Polybius describes a conflict which occurs after their return journey:

εἰς δὲ τὴν οἰκείαν ἀφικόμενοι καὶ στασιάσαντες περὶ τὴν τῶν εἰλημμένων πλεονεξίαν τῆς τε λείας καὶ τῆς αὐτῶν δυνάμεως τὸ πλεῖστον μέρος διέφθειραν, τοῦτο δὲ σύνηθές ἐστι Γαλάταις πράττειν, ἐπειδὰν σφετερίσωνται τι τῶν πέλας, καὶ μάλιστα διὰ τὰς ἀλόγους οἰνοφλυγίας καὶ πλησιμονάς (2.19.3-4).

28 The word ἐπαρχία is roughly equivalent to Latin provincia. However, at this period it likely denotes a portion of Italy recently subjugated by Rome rather than a province as such.
Having arrived home and quarreling in greed over the spoils they had seized, they destroyed a significant portion of their own force. It is customary for the Галάται to do this, whenever they take anything from their neighbors, especially due to their irrational drunkenness and gluttony.

In this instance, the feud over the division of spoils erupts into a disastrous armed conflict resulting in the destruction of a large portion of the enemy host. Note the aspects of Gallic behavior that Polybius attributes this type of dispute to: οίνοφλυγία and πλησιμονά. This wanton behavior incited by excessive feasting and drunkenness serves as the antithesis to Greco-Roman standards of self-control and forms a persistent theme in representation of these peoples over the long chronological range of classical historiography.⁹

### 2.6. Celts at War: Shock and Awe

Within the context of battle narratives, the Κελτοί take on a different portrayal. Their impulsive audacity is contrasted with the calculated tactics of the Romans. This reckless courage, τόλμα, is a core element in representations of the Κελτοί. During their first encounter with the Romans in 390 BCE, discussed at 2.18.1, it is this characteristic that enables the Κελτοί to swiftly subjugate their neighbors and pierce ever farther south, eventually occupying all Rome apart from the Capitolium. In this initial stage of Celtic conflict with Romans, τόλμα is clearly an advantage. It appears again at Faesulae in 225 as one of the decisive factors that tipped the scales in favor of the Gallic army (2.25.9). However, as the Romans learn to adapt their strategy to anticipate violent invasions out of the North, this same τόλμα serves as the Achilles heel of the Κελτοί.

The boldness of the Κελτοί is turned to their disadvantage when it leads to strategically foolish decisions. No episode better illustrates this phenomenon than the Battle of Telamon, in which the Romans trapped and defeated the same Gallic force that had gained a victory earlier

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²⁹ See Plato, *Laws* 637 for Κελτοί listed among the various foreign peoples who drink excessively. Diodorus Siculus mentions their unquenchable thirst for wine at 5.26.3.
that same year at Faesulae.\textsuperscript{30} The Battle of Telamon is one of Polybius’ most extensive battle sequences in his interlude on the Gallic Wars. It also marks a major turning-point in the nature of the conflict between Γαλάται and Romans: it represents the last major Gallic invasion before Rome accomplishes the conquest of the Po Valley. In 225 BCE, a large coalition of Gallic nations invades Etruria and arrives at Clusium. A notable difference in motivation distinguishes this invasion from those of the past: this invasion was motivated by the fear of extermination at the hands of the Romans, fear encouraged by Gaius Flaminius’ seizure of Picenum. Polybius expresses the sentiment of the Βοῖοι:

\begin{quote}
πολλοὶ μὲν γὰρ τῶν Γαλατῶν ὑπεδύοντο τὴν πρᾶξιν, μάλιστα δ’ οἱ Βοῖοι διὰ τὸ συντερμονεῖν τῇ τῶν Ρωμαίων χώρᾳ, νομίζαντες οὐχ ὑπὲρ ἡγεμονίας ἢ καὶ δυναστείας Ρωμαίως τὸν πρὸς αὐτοὺς ποιήσασθαι πόλεμον, ἀλλ’ ὑπὲρ ὀλοσχεροῦ εξαναστάσεως καὶ καταφθορᾶς (2.21.9).
\end{quote}

While on the one hand many of the Γαλάται undertook this campaign, the Βοῖοι did so in particular because they bordered the land of the Romans and believed that the Romans waged war against them not over sovereignty or power, but for their wholesale expulsion and extermination.

The whole campaign was allegedly incited by fear of genocidal retribution. It is therefore no surprise that reckless courage features heavily in the deeds of a tribe faced with annihilation.

The rashness of the Γαλάται at Telamon was manifest in multiple forms. The first of these was the appearance of the Gallic host. One division, the Transalpine Γαισάται (Gaesatae), stripped themselves bare of all clothing but their golden torcs and arm-rings for this encounter. Polybius attributes this decision to their φιλοδοξία (thirst for glory) and θάρσος (boldness). Their startling appearance, augmented by the tremendous din raised by the whole Gallic host, has a twofold effect on the Romans advancing against them. Polybius relates,

\begin{quote}
ἐκπληκτικὴ δ’ ἦν καὶ τῶν γυμνῶν προεστῶτων ἄνδρων ἢ τ’ ἐπιφάνεια καὶ κίνησις, ὡς ἀν διαφερόντων τὰς ἄκμας καὶ τοῖς εἴδεσι. πάντες δ’ οἱ τὰς πρώτας κατέχοντες σπείρας χρυσοῖς μανιάκαις καὶ περιχείροις ἦσαν κατακεκοσμημένοι. πρὸς ὃ βλέποντες οἱ Ρωμαῖοι τὰ μὲν ἐξεπλήττοντο, τὰ δ’ ὑπὸ τῆς τοῦ λυσιτελοῦς ἐλπίδος ἀγόμενοι διπλασίως παρωξύνοντο πρὸς τὸν κίνδυνον (2.29.7-9).
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{30} This battle itself encompasses 2.28-30.
The appearance and movement of the men standing naked in front of the army was terrifying, as all were in their prime, and all those in the front ranks were arrayed in golden torcs and arm-rings. On the one hand the Romans seeing these things were terrified, but on the other hand, driven by the hope of profit, they were spurred into danger twice as much.

The boldness of the Γαίσάται cut both ways: the spectacle of seeing such men standing nude in contempt, lavishly adorned with golden jewelry, had the intended effect of frightening the Romans. However, the bold decision of wearing their wealth into battle also gave the Romans the hope of stripping these spoils from the corpses of their dead enemies. Likewise the nudity of the Γαίσάται produced unforeseen consequences for the outcome of the battle. Contrary to the expectations of the Γαίσάται, the lack of protective clothing proved to be utterly disastrous. The fate of this entire division was sealed by the javelins of Roman skirmishers. The φρόνημα (courage) of the Γαίσάται is utterly broken. By contrast, those Γαλάται who chose not to strip were protected by their war-gear and survived to engage in hand-to-hand combat with the Romans. Their prudence enabled them to maintain morale where the rash Γαίσάται were undone. Unfortunately, it would prove fruitless in the end, as a Roman cavalry charge won the day. The last great Gallic host was ultimately defeated by its own foolhardy overconfidence. This demonstrates the broad spectrum covered by this facet of Gallic national character, from victorious τόλμα to rash φιλοδοξία and θάρσος.

2.7. Polybian Diction

We can look to word choice as well in our search for patterns in Polybius’ portrayal of the Γαλάται. Consistent diction can be used to link disparate patterns together within a narrative. An example of this is the use of the phrase μεγάλη στρατία to denote both the concept of an entire population on the move and in the literal sense of “large army.” The phrase occurs when Polybius describes the first appearance of the Κέλτοι in the Po Valley, as they move in and drive
out the Etruscans. The migrating Gallic populations are endowed with a militant character entirely consistent with the “billiard-ball” approach to migration theory. This association can be applied in reverse as well, thanks to the consistency with which Polybius uses this term. Because μεγάλη στρατιά is at first used to denote a Gallic migration, later uses may in turn be associated with this migratory flavor as well, despite the absence of any real migrations occurring during this later period of invasions. Rather, it is the threat carried by the idea of a whole populace on the move, ready to displace anyone in its path, that bears real significance in the narrative. This illusory threat of barbarian migration lends additional weight to the Gallic invasions.

Another method with which Polybius conveys the urgency of the threat posed by the Gallic menace is through rendering it as a physically tangible phenomenon. This is achieved within the context of the verbal map of Italy presented at 2.14.4-12. On this map, the Γαλάται are situated in a wedge of territory sharing a border with the rest of Italy, which is vulnerable due to the proximity of these roving marauders. With this map in mind, and informed by the Gallic proclivity to sudden invasions, Polybius uses the verb ἐπικρεμάννυμι to conceptualize the intangible threat posed by the occupants of the Po Valley. It is this verb that Polybius uses when describing the role played by the Γαλάται in the struggles between Rome and Carthage. Intriguingly, Julius Caesar later appropriates a Latin equivalent of this verb, imminere, in his commentaries to describe an assault on the camp of Q. Cicero, a battle of desperate circumstances as the Roman garrison strove to fend off assaults from all sides by a large force of Germani bent on seizing the accumulated plunder of Caesars’ campaigns stored in Cicero’s

31 See 2.17.3.
32 See 2.13.5, quoted above.
This pendulous quality seems therefore to denote the necessity of the conflict in guaranteeing the safety of the *res publica* from the northern menace.

Another inspired choice of words colors Polybius’ approach to the broad phenomenon of northern invasions suffered by the Mediterranean world at this time. He likens the restlessness of the Γαλάται during these years to a great sickness which afflicted the entire population, driving them to wage war against their southern neighbors. Taking as his cue a reference to the Gallic assault on Delphi, Polybius writes: “For in these events it was as if fortune had set upon all the Γαλάται a pestilential inclination to war” (ἐν γὰρ τούτοις ἡ τύχη τοῖς καροῖς ὀσανεὶ λοιμικήν τινα πολέμου διάθεσιν ἐπέστησε πᾶσι Γαλάταις, Polybius 2.18.7). This epidemic of bellicose behavior enveloped not only the Γαλάται inhabiting the Po Valley, but all members of that race, including those who invaded Greece and were defeated in their attempt to sack the sanctuary of Apollo. This plague metaphor supplements Polybius’ original explanation for Gallic intervention in Italy, that is, the desire to settle more fertile lands and raid their vulnerable neighbors to the south. Just as the pendulous terminology used to describe the Γαλάται in the beginning, this metaphor does not so much explain the events of the narrative but color them through the association with other phenomena.

Polybius’ methods of representation, including schematization of geography to suit the nature of the conflict, observation of unusual Gallic customs underscoring their otherness, emphasis on deceitful and impetuous behavior, and diction giving the Γαλάται a looming and pestilential quality, all contribute to the portrayal of the Κελτοί as an imminent danger to the Roman state which necessitated a shift in Rome’s military focus away from the affairs of Hasdrubal in Iberia in order to deal with this northern crisis. Through these strategies, Polybius

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33 See DBG 6.36-41 for a full account of this assault and specifically 6.38.2 for Caesar’s use of *imminere*.
fashioned a cohesive presentation of multiple Gallic incursions of various natures, ranging from mass-migrations to sudden raids, which took place over a span of centuries. He chronicles these centuries of conflict within the space of twenty chapters. As we shall see, Caesar uses a similar set of representational methods to link together his own disparate campaigns over the course of seven books, forming the account of what we now call the Gallic War (58-52 BCE).


3. The Geography of Caesar’s Gaul

When Julius Caesar sat down each winter to compose a brief account of the year’s campaigns, he was faced with a significant obstacle. He needed to justify his aggressive policy of territorial expansion to a hostile senate. Doing so would require a frank narrative with a convincing argument for war with whichever Gallic tribes he had chosen to engage that year. Description of the northern landscape and the pattern of ethnic units mapped onto it afforded Caesar another outlet for characterizing his enemy. Human geography performs a significant function in any war narrative, as the conquest of a hostile entity – be it a roving tribe or a foreign nation with fixed boundaries – is described with constant references to the setting in which the events unfold. Polybius realized this when he set out to summarize the Gallic Wars of the 4th-3rd centuries BCE, carefully schematizing the geography of the Italian Peninsula in order to emphasize the region’s vulnerability to invasions originating beyond the οἰκουμένη (the civilized world). He portrayed these Gallic Wars as one piece in the puzzle of larger conflicts enveloping the Western Mediterranean. However, Polybius wrote about wars that had occurred centuries prior to his own time. By contrast, Caesar wrote his commentarii over the course of his own campaigns, waged in locations which were formerly the stuff of legend. His narrative demanded careful attention to geographical exposition because his audience back in Rome was likely quite ignorant of the interior of Northern Europe. Caesar uses the relative obscurity of Gallia to his advantage in crafting a coherent explanation of his campaigns. The core methods

34 The early Greek historians did not have an extensive knowledge of the interior of Northern Europe because Greek colonies and trading expeditions rarely penetrated that far into the barbaric hinterland. For instance, during his history of Darius’ campaigns in Thrace and Scythia, Herodotus attempts to describe the geography of Europe but is only able to do so in relation to the major river systems of this continent. The Greek biographer Plutarch, writing five centuries after Herodotus during the period of Rome’s greatest territorial expansion under Trajan, still likened his efforts at reconstructing the lives of heroes from the mythical past to the work of contemporary geographers, who crammed vast unknown regions into tiny corners of their maps. He writes, οἱ ἱστορικοὶ τὰ διαφεύγοντα τὴν γνώσιν αὐτῶν τοῖς ἐσχάτοις μέρεσι τῶν πινάκων πιεζοῦντες, αἰτίας παραγράφουσιν ὅτι τὰ δ’ ἐπέκεινα θίνες ἄνυδροι καὶ θηριώδεις’, ἢ ‘πηλὸς άιδνής’, ἢ ‘Σκυθικὸν κρύος’, ἢ ‘πέλαγος πεπηγός’ (Theseus 1.1).
with which he utilized geographical elements in his portrayal of these mysterious regions include a modular approach to delineating specific territories and relating them to one another (“Terra Divisa”) and his description of the physical landscape itself as a factor in his conquests (“Terra Silvestris”). The first of these strategies which we will look at is the act of dividing a foreign landscape in a way that synthesizes physical geography, ethnic identity, and political unity.

3.1. Terra Divisa

In order to lend some semblance of order to the vast expanse of territory he set out to conquer, Caesar divides the region into constituent parts. The process of dividing Gallia allows Caesar to describe patterns occurring across different sub-regions. The largest division Caesar makes is his delineation of Gallia itself, distinguishing it from other northern regions. What area does the term Gallia denote? Broadly speaking, Caesar’s Gallia represents the entire area bounded in the North by the English Channel, in the East by the Rhine, in the South by the Roman Province and the Pyrenees, and in the West by the Atlantic Ocean. The Rhine separates Gallia from Germania and the Pyrenees divide it from Hispania. This effectively defines the geographical limits of Caesar’s zone of influence (beyond his province) as imperator.  

However, as Caesar is quick to emphasize, Gallia is not inhabited by peoples of a uniform culture. He must therefore make a series of smaller divisions, describing three sub-regions of Gallia according to their respective ethnic identities: Celtae, Aquitani, and Belgae. He writes:

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35 Caesar was given proconsular imperium over Gallia Cisalpina, Transalpina (Province), and Illyricum beginning in 58 BCE immediately after his term as consul (this allowed him to maintain uninterrupted legal immunity in the transition from one office to the other). While he was not put in direct command over Gallia Comata, which Rome had not yet saw fit to annex, Caesar did have the responsibility of aiding allied Gallic tribes dwelling further north, such as the Aedui. His effective sphere of influence was therefore much larger than the territories explicitly listed under his command.
Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres, quarum unam incolunt Belgae, aliam Aquitani, tertiam qui ipsorum lingua Celtae, nostra Galli appellantur. Hi omnes lingua, institutis, legibus inter se differunt. Gallos ab Aquitanis Garumna flumen, a Belgis Matrona et Sequana dividit (DBG 1.1.1).

Gallia is entirely divided into three parts, one of which the Belgae inhabit, another the Aquitani, and a third those who are called Celtae in their own language and Galli in ours. These all differ from one another in language, institutions, and laws. The Garonne River divides the Galli from the Aquitani; the Marne and Seine divide the Galli from the Belgae.

Note that Caesar blends cultural and geographical criteria for this tripartite division. Each broad division of barbari occupy one-third of Gallia. They all differ from one another in language, institutions, and laws. These categories had been used to describe the character of various peoples as far back as Herodotus. In describing the peoples of Scythia, Herodotus distinguishes between various nomadic tribes using custom and language as measures of ethnic identity. Caesar also taps into the age-old convention of using the major river systems of Europe as landmarks around which he situates the various peoples of Gallia. His methods of geo-political exposition are firmly rooted in the historical tradition.

3.1.1. Celtic Galli

Caesar is careful to link his Galli with another term, Celtae, in describing the peoples that inhabited the region west of the Rhine and northeast of the Garonne. The latter term, written Κελτοί in Greek, is attested in Herodotus, who locates them at the headwaters of the Ister (Danube). Centuries later, Polybius preserves the term Κελτοί in his description of the Po Valley Celts who caused so much trouble for Rome in its adolescence, as discussed chapter 2. However, by Polybius’ time this broad ethnic designation is complicated by the addition of another term, Παλαται, to describe the peoples dwelling in and around the Alps during period of the Punic Wars. The true relationship between these two terms is poorly understood. Polybius

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36 See Herodotus’ description of the various tribes of Scythia at Hist. 4.17-21 for distinctions made between tribes according to language and custom.  
38 See Historiae 2.33.3 and 4.49.3 for Herodotus’ location of the Κελτοί.  
39 See Polybius Hist. 2.13-35 for an account of the Gallic Wars of the Early and Middle Republic.
seems to have used them interchangeably, preferring Κελτοί in the first portion of his short Gallic history and Γαλάται in the second. Perhaps this reflects a shift in the sources he used. Yet when a distinction had to be made between peoples from across the Alps and those inhabiting the Po Valley, Polybius calls the Transalpine peoples Γαλάται and the Cisalpine peoples Κελτοί.

Caesar, writing a century after Polybius, makes his own distinction between these terms.

Caesar prefers the term Galli over Celtae in his *commentarii*. He states the Galli call themselves Celtae in their own language. If this statement is true, it is curious that he confines the Celtae to such a narrow geographical range, when peoples speaking various forms of Celtic are known to have occupied a vast region from Hispania to Anatolia. It is my belief that Caesar did not fully understand the relationship between language, ethnicity, and geography in Northern Europe when he first set out to record his conquests. Indeed, even today there is much confusion surrounding the topic due to the modern rediscovery of a “Celtic” identity and the study of the Celtic language family. However, it is important for us to establish that in Caesar’s presentation of Northern Europe, the Celtae inhabited a very specific region of Gallia. Caesar did not link them ethnically with the surrounding peoples, despite what our own linguistic and archaeological evidence attests.

### 3.1.2. Aquitani

Caesar distinguishes the Celtic Galli from the Aquitani, a group of tribes dwelling south of the Garonne and extending into the Pyrenees. Caesar gives a short account of their conquest by Publius Crassus at *DBG* 3.20-27. He links them with the tribes of northern Hispania. This relationship is reflected in the formidable Hispano-Aquitanian resistance to the legions. Hispanic generals and troops who were trained to fight in the Roman manner by the rogue general Quintus

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40 Cunliffe gives an excellent summary of the modern rediscovery of the Celts and the effects this had on nationalism in Europe. See *The Ancient Celts* p. 10-19.
Sertorius were procured by the Aquitani for the defense of their homeland. Apart from their vigorous initial resistance to Crassus’ forces, the Aquitani do not play a great role in subsequent actions against the Romans. It is certainly significant that they are never referred to by the general term Galli, despite inhabiting one-third of Gallia.

3.1.3. Belgae

Caesar distinguishes the Celtic Galli from the Belgae, whom he locates between the Marne, Seine, and Rhine. As the Aquitani of the southwest are linked with Hispania, the Belgae of the northeast are alleged to have originated in Germania east of the Rhine, having displaced a native Gallic population and seized their lands at an unspecified time prior to the legendary 2nd century BCE migration of the Cimbri and Teutoni out of the North (2.4.1). However, these Belgae are distinguished from Germani proper. In the figures given for the fighting force of each enemy civitas that Caesar encountered in his first Belgic campaign, specific civitates communally designated as Germani are listed after the figures given for Belgic nations. These Germani are later named as vassals of the Nervii and Treveri, two powerful Belgic tribes. The Belgae therefore appear to have exerted political control over certain Germanic nations on the west bank of the Rhine. It is interesting to note, therefore, that Caesardevotes some space to distinguishing these ethnically divergent vassal tribes from the rest of the Belgae where he could simply have assimilated them with the Belgae. Both of these groups are given similar origins east of the Rhine. Just as the Aquitani are associated with, but not identified as, the peoples of Hispania, the Belgae are linked with the Germani in geographical origin while remaining

41 See DBG 3.23.3-6
42 A force of Aquitani was recruited by Teutomatus, king of the Gallic Nitiobriges tribe, to aid the cause of Vercingetorix at DBG 7.31.5.
43 Condrusos, Eburones, Caeroesos, Paemanos, qui uno nomine Germani appellantur, arbitrari ad XL milia. “The Condrusi, Eburones, Caeroesi, and Paemani, who are together termed Germani, were estimated at 40,000” (2.4.10).
ethnically distinct according to Caesar’s classification. Caesar’s initial tripartite division of Gallia serves as a skewed representation of the region’s ethnic composition, a rationalizing lens for the benefit of Caesar’s readers. Features of Northern Europe’s physical geography contribute to this schematic portrayal.

3.1.4. The Rhine

Caesar separates each third of Gallia using major river systems. Rivers are a suitable means of dividing large swathes of Europe due to their long, linear courses. It makes visual sense on a map to divide large land masses in this way. However, in using rivers to partition Gallia, Caesar was undoubtedly cutting through native populations which were linked rather than sundered by these river systems. Rivers were significant transportation and communication routes. Multiple large tribal coalitions held land on both sides of these rivers and demonstrated time and again that they were capable of crossing swiftly and in great numbers. Why, then, insist on using rivers as physical manifestations of ethnic divisions?

The Rhine presents an interesting case study in the function of rivers in Caesar’s description of northern geography. It serves as an ethnic partition between Galli to the West and Germani to the East. In fact, the term “Germani” seems to have been strongly associated by Caesar with this river, as this ethnic designation is frequently followed by a geographical

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44 For the importance of major river systems in the development of Celtic civilization, see B. Cunliffe, *The Ancient Celts* p.39-67, which links the development of the Celtic ethnic identity in the Hallstatt period with easy access to foreign traders along the Rhine, Rhone, and Danube. Another interesting study is that of S. McGrail, “Celtic Seafaring and Transport” in *The Celtic World*, New York: Routledge, 1995, which demonstrates the importance of navigable waterways to the in trade and war and contextualizes Caesar’s accounts within an archaeological framework.

45 The ability of barbarians to cross rough terrain and large bodies of water quickly is a familiar theme in Polybius, who links the swiftness of the Gallic raids with their early successes and attributes later defeats to lingering too long in Roman territory, where they could be trapped and defeated, as at Telamon. In Caesar’s account, Ariovistus’ Germani are a good example of this theme, representing a confederation of tribes that had extended their dominion across the Rhine into the land of the Gallic Sequani (1.31). The Belgic Menapii, living at the mouth of the Rhine, are another example of a tribe straddling this river (4.4). Nor did the English Channel prove to be a great natural barrier for the Belgae, who occupied territory on the mainland and in southern Britannia (5.12).
**Hi cum tantopere de potentatu inter se multos annos contenderent; factum esse uti ab Arvernis Sequanisque Germani mercede arcesserentur. Horum primo circiter milia XV Rhenum transisse; postea quam agros et cultum et copias Gallorum homines feri ac barbari adamassent, traductos plures; nunc esse in Gallia ad C et XX milium numerum... Sed peius victoribus Sequanis quam Haeduis victis accidisse, propter quaquod Ariovistus, rex Germanorum, in eorum finibus consedisset tertiamque partem agri Sequani, qui esset optimus totius Galliae, occupavisset et nunc de altera parte tertia Sequanos decedere iuberet, propter qua quod paucis mensibus ante Harudum milia hominum XXIII ad eum venissent, quibus locus ac sedes pararentur. Futurum esse paucis annis uti omnes ex Galliae finibus pellerentur atque omnes Germani Rhenum transirent; neque enim conferendum esse Gallicum cum Germanorum agro neque hanc consuetudinem victus cum illa comparandam (1.31.4-5, 10-11).**

Since these (the Aedui, Arverni, and Sequani) had contended with one another over sovereignty for many years, it happened that Germani were obtained for a price by the Arverni and Sequani. At first about 15,000 of these crossed the Rhine; subsequently these savage and barbarous people grew fond of the fields, culture, and resources of the Galli, and more men were drawn across (the Rhine). Now there are around 120,000 in Gallia...But this turned out worse for the victorious Sequani than for the conquered Aedui, because Ariovistus, king of the Germani, settled within their borders and seized one-third of Sequanian land, which was the best in all Gallia, and now he ordered the Sequani to cede another third, because a few months earlier 24,000 Harudes had come to him, for whom he needed to furnish land and homes. In a few years it would be the case that all (Gallic) men would be driven from the borders of Gallia and all the Germani would cross the Rhine; for neither could Gallic land be compared to that of the Germani, nor the Gallic way of life with the Germanic.

In this passage, Diviciacus expresses concern for the survival of Gallia in the face of Ariovistus and the roving Germani at his back. This threat is conceptualized as a wholesale migration of the Germanic race from the lands east of the Rhine westward into Gallia. The whole situation is described as a vast border-conflict, in which those who identify themselves as Galli claim an unjust occupation of their territory by outsiders, Germani. Purely within the context of Book 1, it

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46 For Transrhenaui/trans Rhenum see 2.35, 4.16, 5.2, and 6.5. For Cisrhanani/cis Rhenum, see 2.3 and 6.2.
is not apparent that any Germanic tribes other than those ruled by Ariovistus had settled west of the Rhine. By contrast, it appears in later books to be the case that tribes of Germani already held territory west of the Rhine independently of Ariovistus’ coalition. The supposed threat to Gallia posed by Ariovistus’ active promotion of Germanic settlement west of the Rhine would have been undercut had Caesar revealed the existence of Cisrhenane Germani who had been successfully assimilated among the Belgae previously. The Germani of Book 1 are newcomers to the Gallic theater and pose a similar threat to that of the Helvetii: a wholesale Germanic takeover of Celtic Gallia. The threat is immediate and pivots on the physical barrier posed by the Rhine.

If the Rhine served as such an efficient invasion route for tribes moving west, what sort of influence did it have on interactions aimed eastward? Caesar notes in his lengthy Gallo-Germanic ethnography that there was once a great Gallic folk movement to lands far east of the Rhine:

*Ac fuit antea tempus, cum Germanos Galli virtute superarent, ultro bella inferrent, propter hominum multitudinem agrique inopiam trans Rhenum colonias mitterent. Itaque ea quae fertilissima Germaniae sunt loca circum Hercyniam silvam, quam Eratostheni et quibusdam Graecis fama notam esse video, quam illi Orcyniam appellant, Volcae Tectosages occupaverunt atque ibi consederunt; quae gens ad hoc tempus his sedibus sese continet summamque habet justitiae et bellicae laudis opinionem. Nunc quod in eadem inopia, egestate, patientia qua Germani permanent, eodem victu et cultu corporis utuntur; Gallis autem provinciarum propinquitas et transmarinarum rerum notitia multa ad copiam atque usus largitur, paulatim adsuefacti superari multisque victi proelis ne se quidem ipsi cum illis virtute comparant (6.24).*

There once was a time when the Galli exceeded the Germani in manliness, carried their wars farther afield, and sent colonies across the Rhine on account of the surplus of men and scarcity of land. Thus the Volcae Tectosages seized and settled the most fertile parts of Germany around the Hercynian Forest, which appears to have been known to Eratosthenes and certain other Greeks, which they called Orcynia. At that time the Volcae Tectosages confined themselves to these settlements and held the highest reputation in justice and war. Now, because they persist in the same poverty, destitution, and endurance as the Germani, they make use of the same diet and bodily hygiene. However, the proximity of our provinces and the familiarity with overseas trade flourished for the Galli and they became slightly more accustomed to be overwhelmed and conquered in many battles such that none now compare themselves to these men in courage.

The Tectosages, who supposedly migrated eastward among the Germani at a time of great prosperity for the Galli no longer resemble the rest of their race in customs or appearance, not
only because they themselves have adopted Germanic customs, but also because the Galli have in the meantime accustomed themselves to foreign commerce and slipped into decline. The eastern wilderness swallowed up the Tectosages while Mediterranean culture softened the Galli left behind west of the Rhine. However, by Caesar’s time, rather than facilitating the transport of marauding hordes, the Rhine is said to have spread Gallic customs and statecraft to the westernmost Germanic civitas: the Ubii. The Galli themselves, having adopted a more refined lifestyle, were now civilizing their neighbors to the east. When describing the Ubii, Caesar notes:

\[ Ad \ alteram \ partem \ succedunt \ Ubii, \ quorum \ fuit \ civitas \ ampla \ atque \ florens, \ ut \ est \ captus \ Germanorum; \ ii \ paulo, \ quamquam \ sunt \ eiusdem \ generis, \ sunt \ ceteris \ humaniores, \ propterea \ quod \ Rhenum \ attingunt \ multum \ ad \ eas \ mercatores \ ventitant \ et \ ipsi \ propter \ propinquitatem \ Gallicis \ sunt \ moribus \ adsuefacti \ (4.3.3). \]

In another part come the Ubii, whose state is great and prosperous, according to the comprehension of the Germani; they are a little more refined than the rest, although they are of the same race, because they touch the Rhine, merchants do much business with them, and they practice Gallic customs owing to their proximity to them.

The flourishing state of the Ubii is a product of their exposure to the civilizing forces of commerce and Gallic culture, facilitated by their access to the Rhine. This function of the river contrasts with its use as an invasion route. Each of these functions is limited to a specific cardinal direction within the context of purely Gallo-Germanic interactions. When Caesar arrives on the scene, he reverses the pattern of westward invasion in order to prove that the East (Germania) was just as vulnerable to Roman arms as the West (Gallia). He effectively establishes a demilitarized zone along the western bank, forbidding the local tribes from communicating with those inhabiting the eastern bank lest they draw more Germani into Gallic territory, throwing off Gallia’s delicate equilibrium. He alters this fundamental pattern in the Rhine’s role and in doing so forever alters the human geography of the Rhineland.

47 Cross-Rhine connections maintained by the Treveri irked Caesar to such an extent that he invaded their territory to prevent further interaction of this sort (5.2.4). According to P. Wells, the oppida east of the Rhine declined
3.1.5. *Civitates* and *Oppida*

Turning from the larger distinctions made between barbaric ethnic groups, we will now examine divisions at the tribal level. Lesser divisions are made between the individual barbaric *civitates* dotted across the landscape of Northern Europe. *Civitates* represent the most common form of population groupings Caesar encounters in Gallia. These small, localized tribes are reflected archaeologically in the distribution of *oppida*, or fortified proto-urban population centers, across the landscape of Northern Europe. These *oppida* functioned as trading posts, headquarters of local government, centers of manufacture, and refuges in times of war. When Caesar began his conquest of Gallia, the most common form of resistance he documented was the defense of a hill-top *oppidum* by the assembled forces of a specific *civitas*. Some of the more powerful tribes are noted by Caesar to possess several of these *oppida*, as many as 12 in the case of the Helvetii (1.5.2) and Suessiones (2.4.6-8). However, when narrating the conquest of each region, Caesar does not describe himself besieging each and every *oppidum* held by a single tribe. In fact, the aforementioned Suessiones are said to have surrendered to Caesar after only a single *oppidum* was besieged, such was their shock at the speed with which the Romans constructed their siege-works (2.12.5-2.13.1). The *oppidum* therefore appears to have been integrated by Caesar into his strategic framework by standing in for the *civitas* as a whole, regardless of the fact that the vast majority of the Gallic population likely lived quite far from these urban centers, dispersed in farmsteads throughout the countryside. However, an *oppidum* housed the local elite and would have been the rallying point for any large-scale military

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48 The clearest example of this form of resistance is found in Caesar’s conquest of the Belgae. He marches his forces from one fortified site to the next, besieging the local *oppidum* or receiving a peace delegation when he appeared before the walls (2.12-33).
ventures launched by the *civitas*, so assaults on this type of settlement would have accomplished Caesar’s goal of eliciting some form of response by the governing body of the *civitas*.\textsuperscript{49}

Map 7 in Appendix 2 charts the specific settlements which Caesar deems worthy of naming in his *commentarii*. It excludes towns which go unnamed but feature as battlefields which are later identified by the archaeological record. The specific *civitas* to which each *oppidum* belonged is noted in parentheses after the settlement’s name. I have excluded all unnamed *oppida* in order to emphasize the following patterns: named *oppida* are concentrated among the Celtic Galli and the Belgae as well as the Roman Province. There are no named settlements in Aquitania, Aremorica, Britannia, or Germania, despite the large numbers of *civitates* that Caesar observes inhabiting each of these regions. This could be attributed to a number of possible explanations. One is that Caesar simply did not learn the names of individual settlements in particular regions due to his absence, as is possible in the case of P. Crassus’ conquest of Aquitania and D. Brutus’ campaign against the tribes of Aremorica. Another likely reason is the lack of true *oppida* in these regions (excluding Britannia). The large hill-forts that characterized the La Tène culture’s proto-urban population did not extend far into western Gallia. A third reason could be to emphasize the peripheral nature of these campaigns. While *oppida* are mentioned in all of Caesar’s various campaigns, those located in the furthest reaches of *barbaricum* apparently do not merit a record in the *commentarii*. The seaside fortresses of the Veneti and the fortified groves of the Britanni are not central to the affairs of greater Gallia, and are therefore given only cursory mention. This is a clear example of Caesar’s tendency to blur geography on the fringes of his zone of command.

\textsuperscript{49} Caesar approaches the Treveri in order to prompt a diplomatic response from them in this way at 5.3.
The division of the Gallic countryside into a mosaic of *civitates* is coordinated with another feature of Caesar’s *commentarii*: the apparent lack of a neutral position in diplomatic relations with Rome. No *civitas* is permitted to remain aloof from the conflict after Caesar enters their territory. The entire population of the region is characterized as either complicit or resistant to the Roman presence.\(^{50}\) Caesar pursues even those *civitates* that persistently refuse to directly engage the legions in combat, justifying his reprisals with their refusal to send envoys. Such was the case with the Morini, Menapii, Germani Transrhenani, and Treveri.\(^1\) In other cases, a tribe is divided in its loyalty between the cause of the rebels and that of Caesar. Even if the majority of the population assents to cooperate with Rome, charismatic individuals frequently lead covert resistance movements that spread to surrounding tribes. This is especially true in the case of leaders who profess to have their race’s best interests at heart in resisting Rome, as even if they fail to gain support in their own *civitas*, they might still alter the sympathies of other tribes which identify with the same ethnicity. This tendency emphasizes the unitive force Caesar ascribes to ethnicity among the peoples of Gallia.

A specific *civitas* is not sundered from its ethnic identity in the narrative. At some points, an entire ethnic group bands together to resist the advancing legions. Such is the case initially when Belgae conspire to resist Rome. A huge coalition force is gathered from several Belgic *civitates* and from some neighboring Germani. However, this force fails to achieve victory over Caesar, and so each *civitas* decides to look to its own defenses separately. The region is subsequently conquered piecemeal. The Aquitani, too, swiftly unite to resist the advance of P. Crassus, spurred on by his quick defeat of the Sontiates. In this case, allied forces are even

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\(^{50}\) The most straightforward example comes from Caesar’s conquest of the Belgae, in which the Remi seek alliance with Rome while the remaining Belgic tribes conspire to resist Caesar (2.3.4-5).

\(^{51}\) Caesar justifies war with these tribes’ refusal to discuss terms: the Morini and Menapii (3.28.1), Germani (4.16.5: all but the Ubii had refused to send envoys), and Treveri (5.2.4: they had neglected to attend the pan-Gallic council Caesar had initiated).
marshalled from as far as Hispania. Another instance of this united resistance is found in Caesar’s second campaign against the Britanni, during which the various maritime tribes submit themselves to the authority of Cassivellaunus, the ruler of an inland tribe, so that the whole island might more effectively coordinate defensive actions. Perhaps the most extreme example of this united front, however, is presented by Vercingetorix’ efforts to free the entirety of Gallia from the Roman yoke.

Individual *civitates* are occasionally described by Caesar as taking on the responsibility of preserving their whole race upon the approach of the Romans. Such was the case initially when P. Crassus invaded Aquitania. He found a single tribe – the Sontiates – standing in his way. According to Caesar, this nation was spurred to make a desperate struggle for the sake of all Aquitania. This is paralleled by the role of the Veneti in Caesar’s war with the coastal states of Gallia and that of the Eburones during the second Belgic rising. The idea that individual tribes felt some degree of kinship with other tribes that shared a common ethnic identity is plausible, but it is also likely that Caesar greatly exaggerated the ability of various Gallic *civitates* to quickly forget old feuds and unite in common cause against the Roman threat. Presenting regions such as Aquitania as possessing a common identity which diverse tribes could all appeal to in times of need benefitted Caesar because it simplified the reasoning he could consequently simplify the reasoning he gives for campaigns waged against entire ethnic groups. His wholesale conquests of Aquitania, Aremorica, and the Belgae are clear examples of this. Instead of requiring justification for waging war against each of the dozens of tribes inhabiting Gallia, Caesar could hold the entire ethnic group responsible for the transgressions of a single *civitas*.

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52 See 3.23 for the forces marshalled by the Aquitani.
53 See 3.21 for an account of this battle with the Sontiates.
54 The Veneti revolt and draw others to their cause at 3.8. At 5.27, the Eburones explain their attacks on the winter camp of Titurius and Cotta by claiming it is not easy for Galli to deny fellow Galli. This is curious, as the Eburones are noted in Book 2 to be Germanic, not Gallic.
By projecting an exaggerated system of ethnic associations onto the confused jumble of Gallic *civitates* (which, we must remember, are in turn composed of various *oppida* and *pagi*), Caesar greatly simplifies the description of his conquests.

### 3.2. *Terra Silvestris*

In continuing our analysis of Caesar’s characterization of Gallia as a region, we will next evaluate the manner in which Caesar portrays the physical environment of Gallia. He puts particular emphasis on the rugged character of the landscape and the difficulties this posed for his campaigns. The hostile native population was not the only violent opposition Caesar faced. Quite often nature would conspire to foil his carefully-laid plans. The fact that Caesar devotes so much of his commentaries to intricate descriptions of engineering feats and logistical strategies designed to dominate the various natural obstacles placed in his way demonstrates that he saw the conquest of Gallia not just in terms of subjugated peoples, but also a subdued landscape.

Caesar describes Gallia as a vast wilderness, heavily-forested and dotted with fortified hilltops in which the natives were accustomed to find shelter. The wooded quality of the landscape is brought up time and again in the context of native resistance. Forests are portrayed as refuges for fleeing dissidents, nests of troublesome guerilla fighters, and even the staging grounds of full-scale rebellions. Natural boundaries such as the Rhine and the English Channel perform a similar function. The lands beyond these natural barriers – Germania and Britannia – themselves serve as refuges for resistance leaders and supply rebellious Galli with supplies and occasionally military aid. These hotbeds of resistance are a constant concern for Caesar, who adapts his strategy to suit the various problems posed by fighting an enemy accustomed to entrust themselves to natural defenses.
We first encounter this emphasis in the narrative of Caesar’s initial campaign among the Belgae in Book 2. After subduing the Suessiones, Bellovaci, and Ambiani without a fight, Caesar encounters a large coalition force of Nervii, Atrebates, and Viromandui, who put up a stubborn resistance to the advancing legions. Unlike their recently-subdued countrymen, this force chose to march out directly against Caesar rather than await his coming in their oppida. They send all individuals unsuitable for fighting to a place rendered inaccessible by swamps and await Caesar’s coming on high ground. Then, having been informed of the positioning of the various approaching legions by Gallic deserters from Caesar’s force, the Nervii prepare the surrounding countryside for the Roman advance. Caesar describes their peculiar tactics:

Adiuvabat etiam eorum consilium qui rem deferebant quod Nervii antiquitus, cum equitatu nihil possent (neque enim ad hoc tempus ei rei student, sed quicquid possunt, pedestribus valent copiis), quo facilius finitimorum equitatum, si praedandae causa ad eos venissent, impedirent, teneris arboribus incisis atque inflexis crebrisque in latitudinem ramis enatis [et] rubis sentibusque interiectis effecerant ut instar muri hae saepes munimentum praeberent, quo non modo non intrari sed ne perspici quidem posset. His rebus cum iter agminis nostri impediretur, non omittendum sibi consilium Nervii existimaverunt (2.17.4-5).

A custom upon which the Nervii had of old relied actually supported the plan which they had proposed: since they made no use of cavalry (nor do they practice that skill even now, but instead they rely entirely on prevailing with infantry forces), if their neighbors ever ventured among them for the sake of plundering, using slender severed trees interwoven lengthwise with branches they produced these hedges in the likeness of a wall in order to serve as a fortification which could neither be penetrated nor even seen through. The route of our marching-column was interrupted by these things, nor did the Nervii believe that this plan should be neglected.

Using these impromptu barricades, the Nervii impeded the Roman troops, allowing them time to gather their allied forces on the hilltop. Meanwhile they select a position favorable to their own tactics which mirrored the effect of these artificial barricades:

Ab eo flumine pari acclivitate collis nascebatur adversus huic et contrarius, passus circiter CC infimus apertus, ab superiore parte silvestris, ut non facile introrsus perspici posset. Intra eas silvas hostes in occulto sese continebant; in aperto loco secundum flumen paucae stationes equitum videbantur. Fluminis erat altitudo pedum circiter trium (2.18.2-3).

A hill of equal height (to that occupied by the Romans) rose opposite the river, its base open for around 200 paces, and wooded on its upper part, so that it was not easy to see within. Within these woods the enemy held themselves under cover; on the open ground scattered guards of horsemen were seen beside the river. The depth of this river was around three feet.
The Nervii choose a heavily-wooded hilltop for the natural advantages it would afford. Their numbers and positions are cloaked by the dense forest, affording them the element of surprise. This gave them a distinct advantage in the early stages of the battle. Drawing up their troops into formation within the woods, they rapidly repulse the Roman cavalry, swiftly advancing across the stream toward the Roman position. The two forces join battle on a field thick with the artificial hedges constructed by the Nervii, with the result that it was impossible for the Roman officers to observe how the battle progressed at another point in the line. After a desperate struggle, Caesar manages to gain the upper hand and the Roman forces prevail. However, this would prove to be one of the hardest-won battles of the entire campaign, owing to the enemy’s skillful choice and manipulation of the battlefield’s terrain: mastery of the local topography nearly wins the day for the Nervii.

The next people whom Caesar observes to have made efficient use of their environment for defensive measures are the Veneti of the Atlantic coast. Caesar lists the Veneti among a subset of Celtic Galli known as the civitates Aremoricae, a large division clustered on the peninsulas of Brittany and Normandy. The Veneti are characterized as skillful sailors who inhabit a rugged landscape of lofty promontories broken by inlets that shelter substantial naval forces. When this coastal tribe hears of the approaching legions, they throw the Roman peace delegation in chains and marshal their forces, trusting in the ruggedness of their homeland for defense. Caesar comments:

Pedestria esse itinera concisa aestuariis, navigationem impeditam propter inscientiam locorum paucitatemque portuum sciebant, neque nostros exercitus propter inopiam frumenti diutius apud se morari posse confidebant; ac iam ut omnia contra opinionem acciderent, tamen se plurimum

55 This Gallic civitas is apparently entirely unrelated to the homonymous Veneti of the northern Adriatic which we encountered in Polybius.
56 The origin of the term Aremorica appears to have been Gaulish, meaning “beside the sea” (compare with Welsh ar y môr).
They (the Veneti) knew that the land-routes were cut by estuaries and that a naval expedition would be impeded by ignorance of the region and the scarcity of harbors, and they trusted that our armies would not be able to delay for long among them due to the scarcity of grain; and they considered that, even if all things should occur contrary to their judgment, nevertheless they held the most ships, while the Romans had none available, nor did they know of the shallows, harbors, or islands where they would wage war; additionally they perceived that a naval expedition on an inland sea was very different from one on the most vast and open Ocean.

Every conceivable invasion route from which the legions might be expected to penetrate the land of the Veneti is impeded by natural defenses. Moreover, they possess ships designed to endure the rough Atlantic currents, which initially prove disastrous to the Roman navy assembled by D. Brutus. However, the Romans manage to overcome these difficulties in the end thanks to a cunning devise used to cripple the rigging of the Venetic ships. Victory goes to the Romans despite the multiplicity of disadvantages posed by Aremorica’s rugged terrain. Roman ingenuity triumphs over environmental hazards and a sea-savvy enemy.

The Morini and Menapii, two coastal tribes inhabiting the region between the mouths of the Seine and Rhine, use their own physical geography to hold out longer than any other Belgic tribes against the Romans. The landscape inhabited by these peoples is described as a vast expanse of swamplands and forests. Whenever the legions enter their territory, these tribes withdraw into the impenetrable fastness of their swamps. Caesar relates,
hostem conlocabat et pro vallo ad utrumque latus extruebat. Incredibili celeritate magno spatio paucis diebus confecto, cum iam pecus atque extrema impedimenta a nostris tenerentur, ipsi densiores silvas peterent, eius modi sunt tempestates consecutae uti opus necessario intermitteretur et continuacione imbrum diutius sub pellibus milities contineri non posse. Itaque vastatis omnibus eorum agris, vicis aedificisique incensis, Caesar exercitum reduxit et in Aulercis Lexovisiisque, reliquis item civitatibus quae proxime bellum fecerant, in hibernis conlocavit (3.28-29).

At this time, although summer was nearly over, nevertheless, because the Morini and Menapii persisted, who were still under arms and had never sent peace envoys to him, while the rest of Gallia had been pacified, Caesar, believing that he could swiftly complete this war, led the army there. They wage war in a manner quite different from the rest of the Galli. For they perceived that the greatest nations, those which had contended with him in battle, were repulsed and overwhelmed, and so they held themselves within their woods and swamps, where they gathered together all of their goods. When Caesar arrived at the edge of the woods and began to fortify a camp the enemy was not spotted, but while our men were dispersed in their work they (the Belgae) suddenly rushed from the forest and made an assault upon our men. Our men quickly took up arms and drove them back into the woods and, once many (Galli) had been slaughtered, they killed a few of our men deep in inaccessible places.

Then for the remaining days Caesar gave the command to cut down the woods, and lest an attempt be made on the flank of the unarmed and foolish soldiers, he gathered all the wood that had been cut facing the enemy and arranged them on either side as a wall. Since a great expanse was cleared with great speed in a few days, now their herds and baggage were reached by us, while they themselves sought denser woods, but the time had come so that it was necessary to cease the operation and it was no longer possible to restrain the soldiers under tents due to continuous rainfall. And so once all their fields were plundered and their villages and homesteads burned, Caesar led the army back into the territory of the Aulerci and Lexovii, and likewise sent them to winter quarters among the remaining nations that had recently waged war.

The Morini and Menapii refuse to engage the legions in a pitched confrontation, learning from the mistakes of their neighbors who had been defeated in the field the previous year. They turn to guerilla tactics and trust the woods to conceal their possessions. Caesar counters this strategy by cutting a deep gash in the forest to get at the enemy, but to no avail. The devastation of the countryside and the destruction of their settlements had to suffice. It should still be said that Caesar’s concentrated assault on the wood is another example of his attempts at overcoming the natural advantages upon which the Galli relied. His persistence pays off later after his return from Britannia, catching the Morini high and dry when their swamps fail to offer them refuge. The Menapii, on the other hand, manage to flee into their woods, leaving Caesar to his
accustomed retaliatory pillaging. Indutiomarus, leader of the anti-Roman faction among the Treveri, initiates plan to hide away the nation’s young in the Silva Arduenna (the Ardennes). Caesar only manages to lure this rebellious chieftain from the deep forest by supporting his rival Cingetorix. The Germani too are observed to prefer sheltering deep in their woods when Caesar makes his astonishing expedition across the Rhine.

Mingled with Caesar’s campaigns against the Morini and Menapii are his two expeditions to Britannia. It is interesting to note that the idea of a woodland refuge is taken to a new extreme in Caesar’s description of the hill-forts of the Britanni. While these would have closely resembled the oppida of Celtic Gallia, Caesar decides to give the fortifications of Britannia a more rustic spin to correspond with the air of mystery shrouding the island. Caesar’s troops find themselves pursuing a group of Britanni into a wood which had apparently been relied upon in civil warfare among the Britanni as a fortified refuge, complete with a timber rampart. Caesar describes the action that occurred at this site:

Repulsi ab equitatu se in silvas abdiderunt, locum nacti egregie et natura et opere munitum, quem domestici belli, ut videbantur, causa iam ante praeparaverant: nam crebris arboribus succisis omnes introitus erant praecussi. Ipsi ex silvis rari propugnabant nostrosque intra munitiones ingredi prohibebant. At milites legionis septimae, testudine facta et aggere ad munitiones adiecto, locum ceperunt eosque ex silvis expulerunt paucis vulneribus acceptis. Sed eos fugientes longius Caesar prosequi vetuit, et quod loci naturam ignorabat, et quod magna parte diei consumpta munitioni castrorum tempus relinquit volebat (5.9.4-7).

Repelled by the cavalry they (the Britanni) withdrew into the woods, to a place excellently fortified by nature and skill, which they had prepared beforehand for use in civil conflicts: for all entrances were blocked by thick trees which had been felled. They themselves in loose formation attacked and prevented our men from penetrating the fortifications. But the soldiers of the seventh legion, once a testudo was produced and a ramp thrown up along the ramparts, captured the place and drove the enemy from the wood, having received few wounds. But Caesar forbade them from

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57 See 4.37 for this second campaign against the Morini and Menapii, incited by their assault on a pair of beached Roman transport ships returning from Britannia.
58 This initial schism among the Treveri occurs at 5.4.
59 The Sugambri flee to the woods to avoid Roman reprisals for sheltering fugitives from Caesar previous war with the Usipetes and Tencteri (4.18). The Suebi demonstrate a more organized strategy, hiding those unable to fight deep in the woods while the warriors gathered in a central location to await Caesar’s coming. Caesar prudently declines pursuing them into uncharted territory (4.19).
pursuing those who fled, both because he was ignorant of the nature of the place, and because, once a great portion of the day was exhausted, he wished to leave time for fortifying a camp.

The Romans are forced to resort to tactics typically reserved for assaulting city walls, such as the *agger* and *testudo*, in order to capture this fortified grove.\(^6^0\) This would have seemed highly unusual to a Mediterranean audience accustomed to fortifications which crowned bare hilltops or defended large cities. Why fortify a grove – uncultivated land – for use in war when the towns in which people lived merited this far more? It could be a slight exaggeration on Caesar’s part in order to emphasize the wild character of Britannia. It could reflect the familiar idea that *barbari* are used to worshipping in sacred groves. Either way, it lends this type of defensive strategy a foreign quality in addition to emphasizing the skill with which the Britanni had adapted their landscape to suit their situation, similar to the measures taken by the Nervii discussed above.

Note that Caesar preferred not to pursue the natives into unknown territory: a wise decision on his part. An entire legion had been caught at unawares in Caesar’s previous invasion attempt when the enemy had occupied the nearby wood under cover of night (4.32.4-5). Later in this second expedition, Caesar’s forces suffer heavily from lighting raids performed by Cassivellaunus’ chariots bursting from the hills and forests (5.15,19). If Caesar had learned anything from these campaigns, it was to beware of wooded terrain.

Perhaps the most striking description of the European wilderness is found in book 6 in the form of a lengthy digression on the Hercynian Forest, a trackless expanse of woodland

\(^{60}\) Caesar states that the Britanni were accustomed to call these fortified groves *oppida*, yet he himself refrains from calling them by this term, which he reserves for fortified sites on the mainland (5.21.3).
stretching from central Germania all the way to the lands of the Daci hundreds of miles to the east.\textsuperscript{61} Caesar relates the following account:

\begin{quote}
Huius Hercyniae silvae, quae supra demonstrata est, latitudo novem dierum iter expedito patet: non enim aliter finiri potest, neque mensuras itinerum noverunt. Oritur ab Helvetiorum et Nemetum et Rauracorum finibus rectaque fluminis Danubi regione pertinet ad fines Dacorum et Anartium; hinc se flectit sinistrorsus diversis ab flumine regionibus multarumque gentium fines propter magnitudinem adtingit; neque quisquam est huius Germaniae, qui se aut adisse ad initium eius silvae dicat, cum dierum iter LX processerit, aut, quo ex loco oriatur, acceperit: multaque in ea genera ferarum nasci constat, quae reliquis in locis visa non sint; ex quibus quae maxime different ab ceteris et memoriae proponenda videantur haec sunt.
\end{quote}

Est bos cervi figura, cuius a media fronte inter aures unum cornu existit excelsius magisque directum his, quae nobis nota sunt, cornibus: ab eius summo sicut palmae ramique late diffunduntur. Eadem est feminae marisque natura, eadem forma magnitudoque cornuum.

Sunt item, quae appellantur alces. Harum est consimilis capris figura et varietas pellium, sed magnitudine paulo antecedunt mutilaque sunt cornibus et crura sine nodis articulisque habent neque quietis causa procumbunt neque, si quo adflictae casu conciderunt, erigere sese aut sublevare possunt. His sunt arbores pro cubilibus: ad eas se applicant atque paulum modo reclinatae quietem capiunt. Quarum ex vestigiis cum est animadversum a venatoribus, quo se recipere consuerint, omnes eo loco aut ab radicibus subruunt aut accidunt arbores, tantum ut summa species earum stantium relinquatur. Huc cum se consuetudine reclinaverunt, infimas arbores pondere adfligunt atque una ipsae concidunt.


The breadth of this Hercynian Forest, which was mentioned above, is a nine-day journey for one who is travelling lightly; it cannot be fathomed otherwise, nor do they know ways of measuring the route. It rises from the borders of the Helvetii, Nemetes, and Rauraci and extends along the River Danube to the borders of the Daci and Anartes; here it bends to the left in regions separate from the river and touches the borders of many tribes because of its size; nor is there any man of Germania who could say he has come to the edge of this forest having advanced for 60 days, nor could he say that he has heard of where it originates: it is known that many types of wild beasts are born there which are cannot be seen in other places; those of them that seem to differ the most from the rest and whose memory should be preserved are the following.

\textsuperscript{61} The Hercynian Forest was located in various regions by various ancient writers. Initially it appears to have been a general term used to describe the uncharted, heavily-wooded interior of Northern Europe. Caesar uses it to describe the wilderness that once occupied the modern regions of Thuringia and Bohemia. For more accounts of this legendary forest, see Seneca, Medea 705-719; Diodorus Siculus, Bib. Hist. 5.32; Tacitus, Germania 30; and Plutarch Marius 11.6.
There is an ox in the shape of a deer, whose single horn projects from its forehead between its ears taller and straighter than the horns of those known to us: branches pour forth from its peak just as palms. The nature of the females is the same as the males, as is the size of their horns.

There are those which are termed elks. Their shape and the pattern of their hides is similar to that of deer, but they exceed these a little in size, are deformed by their horns, and have legs without joints; they neither lay down for rest nor can they raise or support themselves if they fall. Trees serve as beds for them: they lean on these and thus rest a bit. When the place where they are accustomed to rest is discovered by hunters from their tracks, they either dig under the trees with branches or cut them to the extent that they appear to remain standing. When they (the elks) lean upon them according to custom, they cast down the weakened trees with their weight and fall together with them.

There is a third kind of these called aurochs. These are slightly lesser in size than elephants and have the appearance, color, and shape of a bull. Their speed and strength is great, not do they spare any man or beast which they set eyes on. They (the Germani) eagerly kill those that they capture in pits. The young men toughen themselves by this undertaking and train themselves in this kind of hunt, and those who slay many of these (aurochs) win great fame, bearing their horns back publicly (these serve as proof). But they are not able to become accustomed to humans even when they are taken young. The size, shape, and appearance of their horns differ much from those of our cattle. They bind in silver those they have zealously acquired and use them as drinking-cups in lavish feats.

In this case, the forest in question is characterized by three main features: its vast size, ferocious beasts, and the feats of valor performed by its inhabitants in their hunts. The idea that no one had yet managed to quantify the size of the Hercynian Forest, despite its proximity to the borders of numerous tribes and presence in the classical mind as an archetypal wilderness, emphasizes to Caesar’s audience the fact that this region was as far from Mediterranean as one could get. Not even the names of the tribes inhabiting its inner reaches are able to be named. Instead, we are provided with a series of observations on the local fauna. Each of the three beasts Caesar describes is linked with counterparts common to the Mediterranean, but they are distinguished from these familiar species by curiosities: the reindeer for its massive set of antlers, the elk for its strange sleeping habits, and the aurochs for its size and ferocious temperament. The reindeer’s single horn and the elk’s lack of joints are both Caesarian embellishments, likely resulting from errors in translation from whatever textual or oral source he used for this section. By contrast, the

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62 Tacitus is able to record the names of specific tribes inhabiting this region in his *Germania* because the Julio-Claudian emperors of the 1st century CE had spent a great deal of time and resources trading blows with the growing Germanic coalitions forming in the western reaches of the Hercynian Forest. Sustained military action in any area results in the accumulation of information on the region’s geography and peoples regardless of whether conquest is actually achieved.
description of the aurochs is remarkably consistent with fossil evidence of these wild oxen. Lavishly decorated drinking horns taken from these animals are a hallmark of Iron Age graves. In addition to serving as embellishments in Caesar’s portrayal of wild Germania, these observations also illustrate the Germani themselves as hunters whose status in society is augmented by the number of fantastical beasts they have slain. Beast-hunting as a rite of passage for young men in Germanic society directly contrasts with the pursuits which Roman youths traditionally engaged in: the acquisition of martial discipline, mental acuity, and rhetorical skill.

The farther Caesar marched from the zone of Mediterranean influence in his campaigns, the more he relied upon these illustrations of the untamed countryside to embellish his account. Germania and Belgium both undergo this type of description frequently. Britannia does so as well, but to a lesser extent. It is interesting to note that Caesar described this island as thick with the native habitations mirroring the settlement pattern of Gallia (hominum est infinita multitudo creberrimaque aedificia fere Gallicis consimilia, DBG 5.12.3), but proceeds to describe much of the action occurring on the fringe of dense woodland. Caesar gives Gallia itself a wooded quality only infrequently, usually in describing clandestine meetings held by troublemakers in the countryside. An exception is the territory of the Belgae, characterized as a perilous backwater that swallowed whole garrisons in the winter of 54 BCE. In central Gallia, the reader envisions a cultivated Gallic countryside established by frequent references to Gallic consternation at the plundering of their fields by roving bands of marauders.

Caesar’s integration of a simplified assemblage of ethnic groups into a landscape naturally divided along major mountain ranges and river systems is an ingenious means of

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63 See Wells, Peter S. The Barbarians Speak, p.39-42 for an overview of Iron Age grave finds from the period preceding the Roman conquest.
skewing the nature of the relationships between various barbaric communities in Northern
Europe in a manner advantageous to his own agenda. The atmospheric characterization that
Caesar lends to the diverse landscapes within his narrative shrouds the entire account in a vast
wilderness of fortified groves and inaccessible promontories, particularly in peripheral areas such
as Britannia and Belgium, where the inhabitants have adapted their strategy to suit the
environment in addition to adapting the environment to suit their strategy. As we shall see in the
following chapter on foreign ethnicity, ethnic character and the environment are closely linked in
Caesar’s ethnographic digressions included in the narrative.
4. Ethnography in Caesar’s *De Bello Gallico*

Within the *Commentarii de Bello Gallico*, Caesar’s most straightforward mode of characterizing foreign peoples is the ethnographic excursus. For the purposes of this study, ethnography shall be defined as information presented for the purpose of illustrating the cultural features and value system of a nation. These digressions vary in length: some appear as brief interjections, while others extend to fill significant portions of their respective books. Their relationship with the narrative in which they are embedded varies as well. An examination of these passages reveals patterns in Caesar’s fixation on particular elements of society and how this corresponds to the relevance of the ethnographies to the narrative itself. In order to appreciate the role of ethnography both in individual books of the *Commentarii* as well as in the work as a whole, the ethnographic passages of individual books will be considered first and a discussion of sub-textual implications will follow.

4.1. Ethnicity in Caesar’s Tripartite Gallia

The opening passage of Book 1 of the DBG is one of the most frequently quoted pieces of Latin in existence and rightly so, for it establishes a simple system for understanding the complex historical processes that shape the subsequent narrative. Caesar begins:

> Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres, quarum unam incolunt Belgae, aliam Aquitani, tertiam qui ipsorum lingua Celtae, nostra Galli appellantur. Hi omnes lingua, institutis, legibus inter se different. Gallos ab Aquitanis Garumna flumen, a Belgis Matrona et Sequana dividit. Horum omnium fortissimi sunt Belgae, propter quod a cultu atque humanitate provinciae longissime absunt, minimeque ad eos mercatores saepe commeant atque ea quae ad effeminandos animos pertinent important, proximique sunt Germanis, qui trans Rhenum incolunt, quibuscum continenter bellum gerunt. Qua de causa Helvetii quoque reliquis Gallos virtute praecedunt, quod

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64 Therefore a battle narrative might portray actions that characterize a nation, but it does not qualitify as ethnography unless an action is explicitly stated to represent a specific custom. Likewise a major event of the distant past alluded to by the narrator qualifies as ethnography if it is mentioned for the purpose of explaining a particular cultural phenomenon occurring at the time of the narrative.
65 The most extensive of these encompasses eighteen sections of book six: 6.11-28.
66 Ethnographic passages are found at 1.1, 4.1-3, 5.12-14, and 6.11-28.
fere cotidianis proeliis cum Germanis contendunt, cum aut suis finibus eos prohibent aut ipsi in eorum finibus bellum gerunt. Eorum una, pars, quam Gallos obtinere dictum est, initium capta a flumine Rhodano, continetur Garumna flumine, Oceano, finibus Belgarum, attingit etiam ab Sequanis et Helvetiiis flumen Rhenum, vergit ad septentriones. Belgae ab extremis Galliae finibus oriantur, pertinent ad inferiorem partem fluminis Rheni, spectant in septentrionem et orientem solem. Aquitania a Garumna flumine ad Pyrenaeos montes et eam partem Oceani quae est ad Hispaniam pertinet; spectat inter occasum solis et septentriones (DBG 1.1).

Gallia is entirely divided into three parts, one of which the Belgae inhabit, another the Aquitani, and a third those who are called Celtae in their own language and Galli in ours. These all differ from one another in language, institutions, and laws. The Garonne River divides the Galli from the Aquitani; the Marne and Seine divide the Galli from the Belgae. Of these the Belgae are the strongest, since they are the furthest removed from the refinement and civilization of the Province, they infrequently deal with traders and import those things which tend toward the weakening of their courage, and they are closest to the Germani, who dwell across the Rhine, with whom they engage in perpetual warfare. For this reason the Helvetii outstrip the other Galli in courage, since they engage in daily battles with the Germani, when they either defend their own borders against them or make war in the territory of their enemies. One part of these [regions], which the Galli are said to occupy, takes its beginning from the River Rhone and is contained by the Garonne, the Ocean, and the borders of the Belgae and even touches the Rhine through the Helvetii and Sequani; it faces north. The Belgae rise from the farthest limits of Gallia, they extend to the lower stretches of the Rhine, and they face northeast. Aquitania extends from the Garonne to the Pyrenees and that portion of the Ocean which stretches toward Spain; it faces northwest.

Within the range of Caesar’s ethnographic passages this one in particular focuses on explaining the relationship between space and culture and therefore subordinates observations of native customs to geography. This is accomplished through the construction of a verbal map of Gallia with particular emphasis on division and orientation. The nature of Caesar’s initial division of Gallia is significant. While these regions differ in language, laws, and institutions, their borders are also well defined along major river systems, illustrating a mosaic of culturally distinct zones delineated along precise geographical partitions. Elements of the ethnographic passages hinge on this relationship between geography and ethnicity, particularly those which describe interactions between neighboring nations. Already in 1.1.3-4, geographical proximity dictates national character: The Belgae are strongest (fortissimi) because of their distance from the civilizing elements of Provincia (the Roman province officially termed Gallia Narbonensis, corresponding...

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67 This instance of Gallia encompasses Gallia Transalpina excluding the Provincia. Here Caesar notably foregoes the use of Gallia Comata, which describes this territory more precisely.
roughly with modern Provence and Languedoc) as well as their proximity to the Germani across the Rhine, with whom they engage in perpetual warfare. The cultural exchange between one nation and another, be it trade, war, or migration, is presented as the actual factor that accounts for ethnic character, yet this is explained in a geographical framework.

Just as the Belgae are singled out from the inhabitants of Gallia in the broad sense, so too the Helvetii are emphasized among Celtic Galli. In this way Caesar directs attention to the primary antagonists of the first portion of Book 1. This seems to explain Caesar’s use of *fortitudo* as the qualifying factor in his choice of specific *civitates* to identify in the introductory section. A war with the Helvetii should be introduced by an explanation for their bellicosity in relation to the rest of Gallia. Caesar’s geographical vocabulary also prepares the reader for his depiction of migration and its causes, which plays an integral part in the subsequent narrative of Book 1. The Helvetii and Ariovistus’ Germani are both portrayed as migrant populations in search of greener pastures that Caesar is loath to cooperate with, explaining his initial intervention in Gallia. The ethnographic introduction to Book 1, and to the *DBG* as a whole, seeks to introduce a schematic diagram of Gallia and upon this framework impose a relationship between geography and local culture which supports the subsequent narrative of the Bellum Helveticum’s causes.

### 4.2. Germanic Ethnography

The next major ethnographic section is found in Book 4 and treats the Transrhenane Germani. Just as the first section of Book 1 introduced the geographical setting for the

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68 The *Bellum Helveticum* occupies *DBG* 1.1-30.
69 While the accepted designation for Caesar’s commentaries on his Gallic campaigns is the *Commentarii de Bello Gallico*, the narrative is in fact comprised of several independent *bella*, each designated upon its completion by a formulaic use of the ablative absolute construction as a means of transitioning from one war to the next.
70 See *DBG* 4.1-3.
migration of the Helvetii, this passage introduces the relationship between nations across the Rhine and what caused two Germanic peoples, the Usipetes and Tencteri, to migrate west into Belgium. Caesar writes, “The cause of their crossing was that, having been harassed by the Suebi for many years, they were oppressed by war and prevented from cultivating their fields (causa transeundi fuit quod ab Suebis complures annos exagitati bello premebantur et agri cultura prohibebantur, DBG 4.1.2).” This conflict between the Suebi and other Germani permeates the short ethnography which follows. Once again division is an important theme, but is less bound to geography than at 1.1. In this instance, national custom is the root cause of the migration, specifically the Suebic custom of devastating the countryside adjacent to their own territory for miles around. Before arriving at this point, however, Caesar takes the opportunity to describe other customs of the Germani. The Suebi receive significantly more attention than other tribes in this digression. Caesar states:

Sueborum gens est longe maxima et bellicosissima Germanorum omnium. Hi centum pagos habere dicuntur, ex quibus quattuordecim singula milia armatorum bellandi causa ex finibus educunt. Reliqui qui domi manserunt, se atque illos alunt; hi rursus in vicem anno post in armis sunt, illi domi remanent. Sic neque agri cultura nec ratio atque usus belli intermittitur. Sed privati ac separati agri apud eos nihil est, neque longius anno remanere uno in loco colendi causa licet. Neque multum frumento, sed maximam partem lacte atque usus bellandi causa ab usu atque usus bellandi causa ab usu.

The Suebic tribe is by far the greatest and most warlike of all the Germani. They are said to have one hundred cantons, from which every year they draw one thousand armed men each in order to wage war. The rest, who stay at home, support the others; they in turn take up arms the following year, while the others stay home. Thus neither agriculture nor war is interrupted. But there are no private or partitioned plots of land among them, nor is it permitted for them to remain in one place for more than a year for the sake of cultivation. Nor is there much grain, but they live for the most part on milk and livestock. They hunt frequently. Owing to the type of food, daily exercise, and freedom of life, since from boyhood they are accustomed to no duty or discipline and do nothing against their will, all this aids their strength and produces men of massive bodies. Additionally, they have led themselves to bear no clothing but skins in the coldest regions, and owing to the scarcity of these most of the body is bare, and they bathe in rivers.

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71 This appears to have been Caesar’s preferred designation for the land occupied by the Belgae as opposed to Gallia Belgica, the name of the later Romanized province. See DBG 5.12.2, 5.25.4.
Initial observations are comparable to those made in Book 1. The Suebi are singled out as the most bellicose of the Germani. Additionally, note that the Suebi are described not as a *civitas* but as a *gens*, emphasizing a tribal nature and genealogical rather than political unity.\(^{72}\) This contrasts with the term *civitas*, denoting an organized political entity, which Caesar uses most frequently when referring to the Galli. So focused is the Suebic *gens* on war that they have established a yearly rotation so that some men will always be available to procure food while the rest make war upon their neighbors. This statement is followed by several observations on daily life in Germania. Allegedly, the human body grew to massive proportions in the frigid northern climate, impervious to cold weather despite being clothed only partially in skins. According to Caesar, no land is privately owned among the Germani. This idea ran in direct contrast to the very heart of the traditional Roman lifestyle: the rugged smallholder making his way in the world by the fruits of his fertile holdings. Additionally, the Suebi are said to practice a semi-nomadic lifestyle. This is not the constant wandering Herodotus observes among the Scythian steppe-peoples, but rather a primitive form of cultivation. The slash-and-burn agricultural strategy of the Germani presumably necessitated periodic migrations because it drained nutrients from the soil so quickly. Pastoralism and the poor-quality soil ensured that meat dominated the Germanic diet rather than grain. However, it must be noted that Germania as Caesar defines it – the lands east of the Rhine – appears from the archaeological record to have been just as agriculturally productive as Gallia, otherwise it could not have supported the numerous *oppida* dotting the countryside north of the Danube in the Rhineland, Bavaria, and Bohemia.\(^{73}\) Did Caesar intentionally ignore the advanced societies inhabiting Germania during his conquest of Gallia or

\(^{72}\) This is not to say that the Suebi were not politically organized enough to be termed a *civitas*. Caesar merely chooses *gens* in this instance to lend his description a different flavor.

was he simply unaware of them? The latter is a distinct possibility. The locations of Caesar’s two Rhine crossings are unknown, but if they occurred on the Lower Rhine, the likelihood of an encounter with the eastern *oppida* decreased dramatically. The coastal plain of Northern Germany has very poor soil and could support only small communities of a few hundred inhabitants. The peoples inhabiting this region, extending from the lower Rhine to the coast of the Baltic Sea, were culturally quite distinct from their neighbors to the south – even fellow “Germani.” They exhibited a common material culture and spoke the earliest form of Germanic languages, unlike their contemporaries in the Rhineland, Bavaria, and Bohemia, who displayed the La Tène material culture and spoke Celtic languages.74 Although they were not conquered by Caesar, these eastern *oppida* rapidly declined during the period of Roman intervention west of the Rhine. This was likely due to Caesar’s embargo on communication and commerce across the Rhine, severing the trade links that had formerly united the peoples of La Tène Europe. In the next century, nearly all of these communities were replaced by Germanic migrants out of the North.

This rapid succession of observations on the Suebic lifestyle is notable in that it describes this warlike nation from multiple angles. Moreover, although these customs were in stark contrast to those of the contemporary Mediterranean world, no explicit value judgment was assigned to this lifestyle, nor indeed to any nation described in an ethnographic passage of this type. Instead, Caesar allows the negative associations inherent in this type of primitive representation to do the work of belittling these peoples for him. The political organization of the Galli is implicitly emphasized by their contrast with this primitive Germanic society, stressing the significance of Caesar’s Gallic conquests even more.

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74 See P. Wells, *The Barbarians Speak*, p. 99-121 for a discussion of the contrasting textual and archaeological evidence for the Celt/German divide.
Following observations on the Suebic lifestyle, Caesar discusses the practices of the Germani more broadly. Caesar notes:

Mercatoribus est aditus magis eo ut quae bello ceperint quibus vendant habeant, quam quo ullam rem ad se importari desiderent. Quin etiam iumentis, quibus maxime Galli delectantur quaque impenso parant pretio, Germani importatis non utuntur, sed quae sunt apud eos nata, parva atque deformia, haec cotidiana exercitacione summi ut sint laboris efficiunt. Equestribus proelis saepe ex equis desiliunt ac pedibus proeliantur, equos eodem remanere vestigio adsuefecerunt, ad quos se celeriter, cum usus est, recipiunt: neque eorum moribus turpius quicquam aut inertius habetur quam ephippiis uti. Itaque ad quemvis numerum ephippiatorum equitum quamvis pauci adire audent. Vinum omnino ad se importari non patiuntur, quod ea re ad laborem ferendum remollescere homines atque effeminari arbitrantur (DBG 4.2).

They welcome traders more in for the sake of selling what they have taken in war than they desire for anything to be imported. The Germani do not use imported beasts of burden, in which the Galli delight greatly and pay a high price, but those which are born among them, small and deformed, through daily exercise they train them to be capable of highest toil. In cavalry skirmishes they often leap from their horses and fight on foot, having trained the horses to remain in the same spot, to which they retreat if there is need, nor is anything considered more shameful or lazy than to use a saddle. Therefore a few dare to approach any number of saddled horsemen. They do not permit wine to be imported, since they judge that it softens men for bearing toil and emasculates them.

Interactions with other peoples serve as the main theme of this section. The Germani trade only what they capture in war. With a net flow of goods out of Germania and scarcely anything sought from traders, Caesar implies that there is no market for Mediterranean goods in the Germanic wilderness. Unlike the Galli, the Germani never import foreign-bred horses or use saddles. Superior pedigrees that were commonly traded across the Roman world were spurned in favor of those bred locally. Caesar sneers at these beasts as parva atque deformia (small and ugly). He does, however, emphasize the Germanic proclivity for equestrianism by commenting on their disdain for saddles and those who use them. Moreover, he notes that they are capable of fighting both mounted and on foot in the same battle, leaping on and off their horses with remarkable ease in the midst of the fray. Caesar’s observations heighten the contrast between the Germani and other peoples, particularly the Galli, regarding horses and wine. This Gallo-
Germanic contrast demonstrated here and is discussed in more detail later in the narrative. The final segment of this ethnography deals with territory.

Publice maximam putant esse laudem quam latissime a suis finibus vacare agros: hac re significari magnum numerum civitatum suam vim sustinere non posse. Itaque una ex parte a Suebis circiter milia passuum C agri vacare dicuntur. Ad alteram partem succedunt Ubii, quorum fuit civitas ampla atque florens, ut est captus Germanorum; ii paulo, quamquam sunt eiusdem generis, sunt ceteris humaniores, propter eam quod Rhenum attingunt multum ad eos mercatores ventiant et ipsi propter propinquitatem [quod] Gallicis sunt moribus adsuefacti. Hos cum Suebi multis saepe bellis experti propter amplitudinem gravitatem civitatis finibus expellere non potuissent, tamen vectigales sibi fecerunt ac multo humiliores infirmiores redegerunt (DBG 4.3).

They consider it the greatest praise as a community for their fields to be unoccupied for as great an extent from their borders as possible: the great number of nations unable to resist their might is indicated by this. Thus the fields are said to be empty for about one hundred miles from the land of the Suebi. In another part come the Ubii, whose state is great and prosperous, according to the comprehension of the Germani; they are a little more refined than the rest, although they are of the same race, because they touch the Rhine, merchants do much business with them, and they practice Gallic customs owing to their proximity to them. When the Suebi attempted in many wars to drive them from their territory they were unable to do so due to the extent and weight of their state; nevertheless, they made them their vassals and reduced them to a more humble, inferior status.

It is in this section that a division is made within Germania between the gens Sueborum and civitas Ubiorum (4.3). The nomenclature used to describe these nations is already a hint that the Ubii are considered humaniores than the other Germani. Here Caesar relies upon the same account he used to explain the fortitudo of the Belgae in Book 1: the Ubii live on the Rhine, trade with merchants, and have adopted many Gallic customs. Proximity to neighbors yields frequency of interaction, but in this case the outcome is commerce rather than warfare, yielding a strong, civilized state prepared to withstand constant trouble from the Suebi. So ampla et florens was the civitas Ubiorum that the Suebi were unable to dislodge them during the annual border conflicts between these peoples. By contrast, the Usipetes and Tencteri were considerably weakened by these conflicts and fled across the Rhine, disrupting the fragile peace established by Caesar in his earlier conquest of the Belgae. At this point Caesar returns to the narrative, so we shall move on to the next ethnographic passage.

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75 See DBG 6.11-28.
4.3. Ethnography of Britannia

The next people to undergo scrutiny by Caesar are the Britanni at 5.12-14, just after his forces establish a garrison on the island during his second invasion attempt. The passage is preceded by a petition of the maritime nations to Cassivellaunus, eponymous chieftain of an inland tribe, to lead the resistance against Caesar’s invasion. As with other passages we have examines, this ethnography begins with a division. Caesar claims that the interior of the island is inhabited by those who consider themselves natives, while the coast is inhabited by nations who migrated from Gaul and kept their original tribal names. He writes:

Britanniae pars interior ab eis incolitur quos natos in insula ipsi memoria proditum dicunt, maritima ab eis, qui praedae ac belli inferendi causa ex Belgio transierunt (qui omnes fere eis nominibus civitatum appellantur, quibus orti ex civitatibus eo pervenerunt) et bello illato ibi permanerunt atque agros colere coeperunt. Hominum est infinita multitudo creberrimaque aedificia fere Gallicis consimilia, pecorum magnus numerus. Utuntur aut aere aut nummo aureo aut taleis ferreis ad certum pondus examinatis pro nummo. Nascitur ibi plumbum album in mediterraneis regionibus, in maritimis ferrum, sed eius exigua est copia; aere utuntur importato. Materia cuiusque generis ut in Gallia est, praeter fagum atque abietem. Leporem et gallinam et anserem gustare fas non putant; haec tamen alunt animi voluptatisque causa. Loca sunt temperatiora quam in Gallia, remissioribus frigoribus (DBG 5.12).

The inner portion of Britannia is inhabited by those who say that they were born on the island, while the coast is inhabited by those who crossed from Belgium for the sake of booty or war (they are all called by the names of their tribes from which they ventured there) and once war was carried out stayed there and began to cultivate the fields. There is a boundless multitude of men and thickly-crowded buildings like those of the Galli, and a great number of herds. They use either bronze or gold coins or iron ingots set at a standard weight instead of coins. In the inland regions tin (white lead) emerges, and in the coastal regions iron, but the amount of this is scarce; they use imported bronze. The trees are of the same type as in Gallia, apart from the beech and fir. They do not judge it right to eat rabbit, hen, or goose; in fact they nurture these for the sake of amusement. These regions are milder than Gallia and there is less frost.

This type of bipartite division between a more settled, civilized population and a semi-nomadic, uncivilized population is typical of Caesarian ethnography. However, the section immediately following this diverges from Caesar’s typical description of peoples and customs to discuss the resources of the land, praising its mineral wealth, quantity of livestock, and mild climate. The natural wealth and mild climate of the island as presented in this passage perhaps function as a

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76 Recall that of the Suebi and Ubii at 4.3.
justification of his two invasions. However, it contrasts with the atmosphere he creates in his
narrative of these invasions, which are plagued by tremendous storms and scarcity of supplies.

After expounding on the merits of the island, and situating it geographically in relation to
other lands known to the Romans, Caesar returns to the division between interiores and maritimi
he established at the beginning of the digression.\textsuperscript{77}

\textit{Ex his omnibus longe sunt humanissimi qui Cantium incolunt, quae regio est maritima omnis,
neque multum a Gallica differunt consuetudine. Interiores plerique frumenta non serunt, sed lacte
et carne vivunt pellibusque sunt vestiti. Omnes vero se Britanni vitro inficiunt, quod caeruleum
efficit colorum, atque hoc horridiores sunt in pugna aspectu; capilloque sunt promisso atque omni
parte corporis rasa praeter caput et labrum superius. Uxores habent deni duodenique inter se
communes et maxime fratres cum fratribus parentesque cum liberis; sed qui sunt ex his nati,
eorum habentur liberi, quo primum virgo quaeque deducta est (DBG 5.14).}

Of these the most civilized by far are those who inhabit Cantium (Kent), an entirely coastal region.
They do not differ much in custom from the Galli. Most of the inland peoples do not sow grain,
but live on milk and flesh and are clothed in skins. In fact, all the Britanni paint themselves with
woad, which produces a blue color, and through this they are more startling to encounter in battle.
Their hair is worn loose and every part of their body is shaved apart from their head and upper lip.
Ten or twelve men keep wives in common among themselves, especially brothers with brothers
and fathers with sons. However, those who are born by these are considered the sons of the man
by whom the maiden was first brought home as a bride.

The people of Cantium are described as the \textit{humanissimi} of the Britanni, inhabiting the coast (by
implication engaging in trade) and practicing Gallic customs, much as the Ubii do as a
consequence of their proximity to the Rhine. By contrast, the \textit{interiores} plant no crops, live off of
meat, and dress in skins. Their characterization is comparable to that of the Suebi of Book 4. The
ethnography is rounded off with a number of customs particular to the Britanni (5.14.3-5). First
is their startling appearance: blue war-paint, wild hair, shaven bodies, and long moustaches.
These highly visible features served as ethnic markers in standard depictions of northern \textit{barbari}
such as the Dying Gaul and the Ludovisi Gaul, both Roman copies of bronze originals from a
victory monument of the Attalid dynasty at Pergamum. Perhaps the most striking Britannic

\textsuperscript{77} DBG 5.13: This is a particularly important contribution to our understanding of how Romans attempted to
conceptualize a region that had long been though to mark the edge of the world, far beyond the \textit{οἰκουμένη} described
by Greek geographers.
custom described by Caesar is the sharing of wives between groups of men, particularly members of the same family. Following this ethnographic digression, the narrative picks up abruptly with a cavalry skirmish, demonstrating a dramatic lack of transition between modes of discourse otherwise present in other ethnographic sections, perhaps indicating that this passage was composed separately from the main narrative and included at a later date.\textsuperscript{78} We are left without the sense that the information conveyed has any bearing on the events unfolding in the main narrative. Instead, this digression seems to have been included to emphasize the “otherness” of the Britanni while simultaneously justifying Caesar’s two high-cost, low-yield campaigns.

4.4. The Comprehensive Gallo-Germanic Ethnography of Book 6

The final, lengthiest ethnographic digression extends from 6.11-28 and has an ambitious aim: “to divulge the customs of Gallia and Germania and how these nations differ from one another (\textit{de Galliae Germaniaeque moribus et quo differant hae nationes inter se proponere}, \textit{DBG 6.11.1}).” This account will therefore deal with peoples whom Caesar has already discussed in shorter ethnographic passages. It stands out from the rest in both its length and organized structure. It is divided into two major parts, one describing the customs of the Galli and one on the Germani. Contrasts between the two which were established early in the narrative persist in this more extensive passage. This bipartite structure suits the purpose of \textit{separating} and \textit{defining} these two races quite well, as it offers an all-encompassing description of each race separately. However, the organization and content of sections within the respective Gallic and Germanic sections is not parallel.

\textsuperscript{78} As noted above, 1.1 and 4.1-3 transition smoothly into their respective narratives.
The Gallic portion is organized into sections on social hierarchy and functions of different classes (6.13-15), religious beliefs (6.16-18), and civic administration (6.13). Thematically this portion is much more focused on the structure of Gallic society and the function of various classes within this society. A primary element of Gallic society which Caesar emphasized right at the outset is their extreme factionalism. According to Caesar,

In Gallia non solum in omnibus civitatibus atque in omnibus pagis partibusque, sed paene etiam in singulis domibus factiones sunt, earumque factionum principes sunt qui summam auctoritatem eorum iudicio habere existimantur, quorum ad arbitrium iudiciumque summa omnium rerum consiliorumque redeat (6.11.2-3).

In Gallia there are factions not only within every tribe, canton, and division, but also even within individual households. There are chieftains of these factions who are deemed to hold highest authority in their judgments. The most important of all affairs and plans are reported to their discretion and judgment.

It is striking that Caesar portrays a society so riven by feuds, but it is plain to see in the narrative at several points. During the initial preparations of the Helvetii for their migration in Book 1, Orgetorix is said to have sought the aid Dumnorix, brother of the powerful Aeduan chieftain Diviciacus. Dumnorix was to wrest authority over the Aedui from his brother and guarantee a safe route through their lands for the migrating tribes. He failed in this endeavor (due in large part to the death of Orgetorix), but proved a thorn in Caesar’s side for several years afterward. Similarly, the young firebrand Vercingetorix is exiled from the Arvernian oppidum of Gergovia by his uncle Gobannitio for exhibiting rebellious behavior in Book 7. Vercingetorix succeeds in marshalling likeminded individuals to his cause and ousts the pacifist faction from Gergovia. He is in turn proclaimed rex and attracts numerous other tribes to join his rebellion. The first sparks of the great Gallic rebellion of 52 BCE were therefore kindled by this internecine Gallic factionalism observed by Caesar.

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79 See DBG 1.3.5.
80 See DBG 7.4.2-5.
Caesar notes that, on a broader scale, all Gallia is divided into two factions. This fact had come into play years earlier during the war with Ariovistus in Book 1. The Sequani, leaders of one faction, had invited Ariovistus and his Germani into their lands as aid against the rival faction led by the neighboring Aedui.\textsuperscript{81} Caesar recounts this event, the subsequent defeat of the Germani by his legions, and rise of the Remi as leaders of the second faction in summary within the context of his ethnographic digression.\textsuperscript{82} After making these observations on Gallic factionalism, Caesar proceeds to describe the social classes present in Gallic society.

Caesar’s primary concern in commenting on the Gallic class system is with the nobility, as the vast majority of movers and shakers on both sides of his campaigns were members of the local ruling class. After noting that the Gallic \textit{plebes} held a wretched status little better than slaves (6.13.1), Caesar moves on to the two primary types of Gallic nobles: \textit{druides} (druids, literally “people of the oak”) and \textit{equites} (knights). These \textit{equites} are given only the most cursory description despite their importance to the narrative. By contrast, Caesar has a great deal to say about the druids, a group that is poorly represented in the narrative itself due to their characteristic abstention from military matters.\textsuperscript{83} According to Caesar,

\begin{quote}
\textit{Ille rebus divinis intersunt, sacrificia publica ac privata procurant, religiones interpretantur: ad hos magnus adulescentium numerus disciplinae causa concurrit, magnoque hi sunt apud eos honore. Nam fere de omnibus controversiis publicis privatisque constituant, et, si quod est admissum facinus, si caedes facta, si de hereditate, de finibus controversia est, idem decernunt, praemia poenasque constituant; si qui aut privatus aut populus eorum decreto non stetit, sacrificiis interdicunt. Haec poena est gravissima. Quibus ita est interdictum, hi numero impiorum ac sceleratorum habentur, his omnes decessit, aditum sermonemque defugit, ne quid ex contagione incommodi accipiant, neque his petentibus ius redditur, neque honos ullus communicatur. His autem omnibus druidibus praeest unus, qui summam inter eos habet.}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{81} See \textit{DBG} 1.31.4.
\textsuperscript{82} See \textit{DBG} 6.12.
\textsuperscript{83} The only druid who plays a major role in our narrative is Diviciacus of the Aedui, who is not even described as a druid by Caesar. Instead, this information is transmitted to us through Cicero, who allegedly hosted the man during his embassy to Rome seeking aid against Ariovistus. Cicero relates the following: \textit{Eaque divinationum ratio ne in barbaris quidem gentibus neglecta est, siquidem et in Gallia Druidae sunt, e quibus ipse Divitiacum Haeduim hospitem tuum laudatoruemque cognovi, qui et naturae rationem, quam fisiologian Graeci appellant, notam esse sibi profitebatur, et partim auguriis, partim coniectura, quae essent futura dicerat (de Divinatione 1.41).}
\end{footnotesize}
auctoritatem. Hoc mortuo aut si qui ex reliquis excellit dignitate succedit, aut, si sunt plures pares, suffragio druidum, nonnumquam etiam armis de principatu contendunt. Hi certo anni tempore in finibus Carnutum, quae regio totius Galliae media habetur, considint in loco consecrato. Huc omnes undique, qui controversias habent, conveniunt eorumque decrets judicisque parent. Disciplina in Britannia reperta atque inde in Galliam translatas esse existimatur, et nunc, qui diligentius eam rem cognoscere volunt, plerumque illo discendi causa proficiscuntur.

Druides a bello abesse consuerunt neque tributa una cum reliquis pendunt; militiae vacationem omniumque rerum habent immunitatem. Tantis excitati praemiis et sua sponte multi in disciplinam conveniunt et a parentibus propinquisque mittuntur. Magnum ibi numerum versuum ediscere dicuntur. Iaque annos nonnulli vicenos in disciplina permanent. Neque fas esse existimant ea litteris mandare, cum in reliquis fere rebus, publicis privatisque rationibus Graecis litteris utantur. Id mihi duabus de causis instituisse videntur, quod neque in vulgum disciplinam efferri velint neque eos, qui discunt, litteris confisos minus memoriae studere: quod fere plerisque accedit, ut praesidio litterarum diligentiam in perdiscendo et memoriam remittant. In primis hoc volunt persuadere, non interire animas, sed ab aliis post mortem transire ad alios, atque hoc maxime ad virtutem excitari putant metu mortis neglecto. Multa praeterea de sideribus atque eorum motu, de mundi ac terrarum magnitudine, de rerum natura, de deorum immortalium vi ac potestate disputant et iuventuti tradunt (DBG 6.13.4-6.14.6).

They are involved in divine matters, oversee public and private sacrifices, and interpret matters of religion: a great multitude of young men rushes to them for the sake of their teachings, and among them (the Galli) they are great in honor. For they pass judgments on all public and private disagreements and, if any crime is committed, if murder is done, or if there is a quarrel over parentage or property, these same men pass judgment and set fines and punishments. If anyone privately or publicly does not abide by their decree, they ban them from sacrifices. This is the greatest punishment among them. For those who are banned in this way, they are held in the number of impious and wicked men whom all men avoid and flee from their approach and conversation, lest they receive anything from contact with the unclean. Neither is law given to these men when they seek it nor is any honor communicated to them. Moreover, one man presides over the other druids and holds highest authority among them. When this one dies, either the man who surpasses all others in dignity succeeds him, or, if there are many equals, by a vote of the druids. They never contend for rule under arms. At a predetermined time of year they gather on sacred ground in the territory of the Carnutes, which is considered the centermost region of all Gallia. To this place come those who have disagreements and procure their decrees and judgments. The teaching is considered to have originated in Britannia and was transported to Gallia, and now those who wish to diligently comprehend it travel there in order to learn.

The druids are accustomed to abstain from war and they do not pay taxes together with the others; they hold an exemption from the military and immunity from all affairs. Many are incited by these rewards and willingly come for training or are sent by their parents and kin. They are said to learn a great number of verses. Many remain in training for twenty years. They do not think it right to commit things to writing, while in other circumstances they use Greek letters for public and private matters. They seem to me to have instituted this for two reasons: because they do not wish for their teaching to be exposed to the common folk nor for those who have studied to trust more to writing than to their memory: since it actually happens that with the help of writing they lose attentiveness and memory. They primarily wish to teach this: that souls do not perish, but cross from these (bodies) to others after death, and they believe this to drive men to great courage since the fear of death is disregarded. Aside from this they discuss many things about the stars and their movements, the size of the earth and the continents, the nature of things, and the force and power of the immortal gods, and transmit these things to the young men.

The druids are portrayed by Caesar as autocrats who maintain their authority through the religious beliefs of their subjects. This type of system would not have been unfamiliar to the
Romans. In Rome, the highest priestly offices such as that of the *pontifex maximus* and the augurs were traditionally limited to the nobility. These priests conducted the most important sacrifices and read omens just as the druids are observed to do. However, the druids are said to practice a mysterious *disciplina* and discourage the dissemination of their mysteries through the uninitiated commoners. Their way of life has obscure origins in Britannia but has managed to exert influence over the entirety of continental Gallia.\textsuperscript{84} This pervasive belief system, with its secretive theocrats functioning as the ultimate authority in Gallic society, is represented by Caesar as a strong centralizing force that binds the Galli together. If this priesthood was a pan-Celtic institution, it would certainly have provided unparalleled advantages in orchestrating mass revolts. The fact that the Gallic rebellion of 52 BCE was spearheaded by the Carnutes (modern Orléans), hosts of the annual pan-druidic gathering, was very likely due to the influence of the druids.

Caesar rounds off his discussion of this priestly class by summarizing their primary beliefs and philosophical debates, emphasizing the tremendous influence of the principle of transmigration on the courage of the Galli. The fact that they occasionally use Greek letters in writing is archaeologically attested, though it appears that Latin letters were also used later on.\textsuperscript{85}

It seems that the primary argument against the use of writing by the druids was that it would

\textsuperscript{84} A. Ross argues in “Ritual and the Druids” in *The Celtic World* that druidism was not unique to the Celts of Britain and Gaul but was likely a pan-Celtic institution integral to the function of local rituals and that, despite the destruction of the druidic center on Anglesey by Suetonius Paullinus in 61 CE, the order appears to have survived, for it features in several Irish and Welsh poems of the Early Middle Ages. The function of the druid (*druides*), the prophet (*vates*), and the bard (*bardos*) likely merged in Britain and Gaul during the Roman period after druidism was banned by Tiberius. It was the responsibility of the druid to communicate with the gods and the bard to praise men in song. Diodorus Siculus is the first ancient source we have that distinguishes between these three classes of Celtic priests (*Bibliotheca Historica* 5.31). The bards are strangely absent from Caesar’s account of Gallia, despite their appearance in several other classical writers, notably Diodorus, Athenaeus, Lucian, and Ammianus Marcellinus.

\textsuperscript{85} The subject of early Celtic writing is fascinating because there is such early evidence for it. The earliest Celtic settlers in the Po Valley, the so-called Lepontic culture, wrote in Greek letters. It was still being used for dedications to Celtic deities in Gaul during Caesar’s time, as evidenced by a stone slab from Vaison-la-Romaine written in “Graeco-Gallic” letters. See B. Cunliffe, *The Ancient Celts* p.21-23.
make their role as the cultural and intellectual archives of their civilization obsolete. Interestingly, their refusal to commit anything culturally significant to writing served to hasten the death of Celtic culture in Gallia. After the Roman conquest and annihilation of the druidic hearth on Anglesey in 61 CE, practically the entire cultural heritage of the continental Celts was lost because there were no new druids to transmit their doctrine.

Clearly Caesar saw the druids as a significant force in Gallic society, a force whose unconventional belief system and powerful grip on the Gallic population would prove to contribute greatly to the cause of Gallic nationalism. Caesar’s brief description of the Gallic equites (military leaders who relied upon their vast retinues to maintain authority) appears strangely incomplete in comparison, considering the significant role these leaders played in the marshalling of Gallic hosts in aid or opposition to Caesar’s legions. If the testimony of Cicero concerning the druidic status of the Aeduan chieftain Diviciacus is trustworthy, it is likely that many other Gallic principes who play an important role in Caesar’s narrative also held this position. The question still remains, however, of why Caesar chose not to mention the druids until his comprehensive ethnography of Galli and Germani in book 6.

Following these observations on the Gallic aristocracy, Caesar notes some features of Gallic religion. Bringing to the fore a subject that would have caused great consternation among his readers back in Rome, Caesar describes the Gallic habit of human sacrifice with the following:

Natio est omnis Gallorum admodum dedita religionibus, atque ob eam causam, qui sunt affecti gravioribus morbis quique in proelis periculosisque versantur, aut pro victimis homines immolant aut se immolatus vovent administrisque ad ea sacrificia druidibus utuntur, quod, pro vita hominis 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

86 See DBG 6.15.
The entire Gallic nation is devoted to rituals, and for this reason, those who are affected by severe
diseases or are routed in battles and ambushes burn human beings for sacrificial victims or vow to
burn themselves and employ the druids as ministers for these sacrifices; they believe that it is not
possible for the power of the immortal gods to be appeased unless a man’s life is returned for that
of another, and they conduct the sacred rites of this type publicly. Some have statues of massive
proportions whose limbs, woven from vines, they fill with living men; when these are set on fire
the men are killed by the surrounding flames. The punishment of those who are apprehended for
treachery or theft or any other crime is thought to be more pleasing to the immortal gods; but,
when they lack supplies of this type, they even descend to execution of innocents.

Human sacrifice was a universal taboo for the peoples of the Mediterranean by the time of
Caesar’s campaigns in Gallia, though it had been used by the Romans in the most dire of
circumstances in the past, including the Gallic raids of the 3rd century BCE. The fact that it was
still commonly practiced by the Galli would have greatly disturbed the readers of these
commentarii, the more so because in all likelihood Roman prisoners of war were immolated in
Gallic wicker-men at some point over the course of these campaigns. The sheer magnitude of
the spectacle would have greatly amplified the shock-value of this type of sacrifice. Apart from
this highly unusual custom, however, the remainder of Gallic religious practices are described in
a manner which likens them to those practiced by the Romans themselves. Gallic deities are
assigned the corresponding Roman names and share similar traits to the Olympian pantheon, and

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87 See Plutarch, *Marcellus* 3.4 for the burial of two Greeks and two Gauls in obedience to the Sibylline Books.
88 The topic of human sacrifice among the Celts remains obscure. While there are certainly examples of slaughtered
prisoners at many sites, including those deposited in bogs (a common location for votive deposition) and given a
ritualistic “triple death” (garroting, throat-cutting, and dismemberment by axes), the exact ritual context is unclear.
One area in which multiple Gallic sanctuaries have turned up ossuaries full of human ashes and decorative use of
human and horse bones is Picardy in the territory once occupied by the Belgic Bellovaci and Ambiani. The remains
date to the period of Caesar’s conquests, but it is still unclear whether this is evidence of the Gallic wicker-men. See
J. Webster, “Sanctuaries and Sacred Places” in *The Celtic World* for an overview of the evidence for human and
animal sacrifice in Gaul. See Livy 23.24 for the use of Roman remains in Gallic ritual, specifically the gilded skull
of the Roman general Postumius, who fell in battle against the Boii in 216 BCE.
89 The execution of prisoners in giant wooden effigies is an observation unique to Caesar. Other writers tell of Gallic
human sacrifices that take various other forms. Athenaeus mentions the Celtic practice of sacrificing prisoners of
war as well as ritually decapitating a willing volunteer at their feasts (*Deipnosophistae* 4.151, 160). Diodorus
mentions a particular type of druidic sacrifice involving divination based on observing the patterns of blood-spatters
spewing from a victim. He also mentions the use of impalement and other means of torture applied to sacrificial
victims before they are burned on a pyre along with other offerings (*Bibliotheca Historica* 5.31-32). Pliny the Elder
adds the charge of cannibalism to the traditional charge of human sacrifice among the offenses perpetrated by the
druids that were ended by a decree of Tiberius in the 1st century CE (*Naturalis Historia* 30.13).
Caesar neglects to record the Gaulish names, though hundreds of deities have been identified archaeologically in votive inscriptions. In addition to this, the habit of accumulating vast amounts of treasure in the sanctuaries of the gods corresponds directly with Mediterranean practices. Caesar’s observations on Gallic religious customs is a strange medley of entirely alien conventions such as human sacrifice mingled with customs closely linked with those of the Romans themselves.

In contrast with the Gallic portion of this ethnography, which deals primarily with social institutions and religious beliefs, the Germanic portion is less focused, covering a wider range of barbaric customs. This contrast achieves the effect of depicting the Galli as a relatively refined culture, at least in comparison to the Germani. According to Caesar:

Germani multum ab hac consuetudine differunt. Nam neque druides habent, qui rebus divinis praeestint, neque sacrificis student. Deorum numero eos solos ducent, quos cernunt et quorum aperte opibus iuvantur, Solem et Vulcanum et Lunam, reliquos ne fama quidem acceperunt. Vita omnis in venationibus atque in studiis rei militaris consistit: ab parvulis labori ac duritiae student. Qui diutissime impuberes permanserunt, maximam inter suos ferunt laudem: hoc ali stataram, ali vires nervosque confirmari putant. Intra annum vero vicesimum feminae notitiam habuisse in turpiissimis habent rebus; cuis rei nulla est occultatio, quod et promiscue in fluminibus perturuntur et pellibus aut parvis renonum tegimentis utuntur magna corporis parte nuda (DBG 6.21).

The Germani differ much from these (Gallic) customs. For they have no druids to preside over matters of religion, nor do they perform sacrifices. They consider as gods only those whom they can perceive and by whose works they are aided: the Sun and Fire and the Moon, and accept no others. Their entire life consists of hunts and the pursuit of military matters: from a young age they are zealous for work and hardship. Those who remain boys for longest have the greatest praise among them: they believe that this increases their physique and strengthens their strength and muscles. In fact, they consider intimate knowledge of a woman before the twentieth year to be most shameful. There is no modesty in this matter, since they bathe together in rivers and wear scant clothing of reindeer hide while a great portion of their body is left naked.

These Germani allegedly demonstrate no complex system of belief and rituals, worshipping only the elements and celestial bodies. Like Gallic human sacrifice, this would have seemed quite strange to the inhabitants of the Mediterranean, who had inherited a pantheon of deities dating

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back to prehistoric times. The idea that there was no reciprocal relationship represented by
sacrifice would have appeared brash, perhaps even hubristic, to those who communed with their
deities almost exclusively in this manner. Religion quickly transitions into other curious
characteristics of the Germani such as the hyper-modest spurning of women before a man’s
twentieth birthday and the strangely indiscreet prevalence of public nudity evident in the customs
of swimming and going about partially clothed. The Germani are “other-ized” in a manner
altogether different from the Galli in this passage. They are made to seem ignorant and immature
where the Galli are depicted as culturally complicated but in ways entirely foreign by
Mediterranean standards.

The portrayal of the Suebi eclipses that of the other Germanic civitates when Caesar
embarks on his great Gallo-Germanic ethnography of 6.12-28. The sedentary, civilized Ubii are
ignored and the customs of the semi-nomadic Suebi are applied to the Germani as a whole. The
following passages in particular show the appropriation and extrapolation of Suebic customs to
represent those of all Germani.

Agriculturae non student, maiorque pars eorum victus in lacte, caseo, carne consistit. Neque
quisquam agri modum certum aut fines habet proprios; sed magistratus ac principes in annos
singulos gentibus cognitionibusque hominum, qui una coierunt, quantum et quo loco visum est
agri attribuunt atque anno post alio transire cogunt. Eius rei multas adferunt causas: ne adsidua
consuetudine capti studium belli gerendi agricultura commutent; ne latos fines parare studeant,
potentioresque humiliores possessionibus expellant; ne accuratius ad frigora atque aestus
vitandos aedificant; ne qua oriatur pecuniae cupiditas, qua ex re factiones dissensionesque
nascantur; ut animi aequitate plebem contineant, cum suas quisque opes cum potentissimis
aequari videat.

Civitatibus maxima laus est quam latissime circum se vastatis finibus solitudines habere. Hoc
proprium virtutis existimant, expulsos agris finitimos cedere, neque quemquam prope audere
consistere; simul hoc se fore tutiores arbitrantur repentinae incursionis timore sublato (DBG
6.22-23).

They do not practice agriculture, and the greater part of their sustenance consists of milk, cheese,
and meat. Neither is any parcel of farmland measured nor does it have set boundaries; but

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91 This is justified when they are first described. Since they practice largely “Gallic” customs, it would not avail
Caesar to pervert his clear-cut cultural divisions between Galli and Germani by mentioning those tribes who seem to
fall somewhere in between on this spectrum.
magistrates and chieftains annually allot to the tribes and kin-groups of the assembled people as much land as seems best and after one year they force them to migrate. They offer many reasons for this state of affairs: lest seized by a sedentary lifestyle they should exchange the pursuit of warfare for agriculture; lest they strive to protect wide boundaries, and stronger men drive the weak from their fields; lest they build more strategically for warding off frost and heat; lest any desire for money should arise, from which factions and disagreements are born; and so that they might hold their plebs equal in spirit, since each man sees that their own property equals that of the most powerful among them.

The greatest praise for these states is to dwell alone in deserted territory for as far as possible around them. They consider this a characteristic of courage: that their neighbors are driven from their fields and withdraw, and that none dare to dwell nearby; likewise they consider themselves to be safer when fear of swift invasion is removed.

The most notable difference between this passage and the specifically Suebic ethnography discussed above is the further cultural detail concerning Germanic views on property ownership; namely, that land is not owned privately but instead annually distributed by magistratus and principes (Caesar’s two preferred appellations for denoting civic roles among barbari). A rationalization of this custom is then given: it makes them invulnerable to the raids of neighbors. This emphasizes the prominence of powerful chieftains in Germanic society and demonstrates the great philosophical rift between property-conscious Romans and the Germani.

The Germanic ethnography continues by touching back upon topics covered in the previous ethnographic passage of Book 4 before moving on to a description of the vast Hercynian Forest.\(^{92}\) Having covered each of Caesar’s primary ethnographic passages independently, we will now seek to identify common trends running through them.

4.5. Patterns in Caesar’s Ethnographic Observations

A myriad of patterns can be identified through comparison of the passages identified above. These patterns are useful in identifying what type of cultural information Caesar felt was worth mentioning and the manner in which he chose to present this information. Specific

\(^{92}\) See DBG 6.22-24 for recycled material from Book 4.
observations on national character and customs noted by Caesar can be grouped into several categories. One is the characterization of a tribe according to the nature of its state.

4.5.1. Unity of a Civitas

This type of observation manifests as either a comment on a state’s quality or as a more technical description of the functioning of governing bodies. The civitas forms the basic unit of political authority in Caesar’s account of Gallia.\(^{93}\) The conquest of individual civitates and later the suppression of larger unions of rebellious barbarian conspirators form the central conflicts of the commentaries. Oftentimes the quality of a civitas is divulged during the introduction to a particular campaign. In the very first passage of his commentarii, Caesar introduces the Belgae and the Helvetii as the most courageous and warlike inhabitants of Gallia, foreshadowing his conflicts with these peoples in books 1 and 2. In another instance, Caesar questions a conquered Belgic tribe in order to learn information concerning the Nervii before he sets out against them, providing him the opportunity to describe this nation’s ferocity in the words of their fellow Belgae.\(^{94}\) The fact that these informants, themselves among the fortissimi of Gallia, were in awe of the Nervii compounds the effective “hype” preceding Caesar’s march into Nervian territory and makes his victory all the more dramatic when it is finally achieved. Civitates do not all need to be savage to play a prominent role in Caesar’s narrative. Some are noted for displaying remarkable civility in negotiations with Rome. Among these are the Aedui, the Remi, the Ubii, and the Trinobantes. Each of these tribes is observed to have developed a particularly strong

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\(^{93}\) Caesar’s account might exaggerate the degree to which the population of Gallia was consolidated into distinct nations. In a largely agricultural society, the vast majority of the population would live dispersed throughout the countryside in small farming communities. The oppida were Iron Age Europe’s densest population clusters, and these are likely the populations which are represented by Caesar’s civitates. The primary agents of interaction with Rome remain the civitates, both because this was the easiest way of portraying the response of Gallic population groups to Roman incursions, and because the civitates themselves very likely grew in significance during this period as the rural population sought the defense of their more concentrated counterparts dwelling in the oppida.

\(^{94}\) DBG 2.15
state, have access to trade, and welcome Caesar’s arrival. It is these tribes that Caesar places in charge of those he defeats and from whom he levies auxiliary forces over the course of his campaigns.

4.5.2. Food

Patterns can be discerned in Caesar’s fixation on specific customs in addition to his more general observations on the character of foreign tribes. One prominent example is the type of food eaten by different peoples. This is linked to their manner of dress, particularly in populations dependent upon hunting for sustenance. The eating habits of the Suebi in particular are described in conjunction with their proclivity for constant warfare. They do not rely much on grain but instead subsist on meat and milk. Allegedly meat is acquired most often through hunting rather than the tending of domestic species. The nature of Suebic sustenance therefore supports their characterization as a highly mobile nation. By contrast, the Usipetes, Tencteri, and Ubii are noted in this same introductory section to till the land, contributing to the contrast between the violently unstable Suebi and the more sedentary nations of Germani. Agriculture itself is also described as one of the major factors behind Germanic incursions into Gallia forming Book 5’s primary conflict. Because the Usipetes and Tencteri are prevented by the Suebi from cultivating their fields east of the Rhine, they are driven to cross this river to acquire new land on which to sustain themselves. The Ubii too are pressured by Suebic raids, but manage to remain firmly rooted thanks to the strength of their civitas. By contrast, the Suebi are not bound by the constraints of agricultural needs and prefer to dwell within a vast desolation.

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95 DBG 4.1
created by their prowess in battle. Several times they manage to evade Caesar by withdrawing into the trackless forests deep in Germania, in which they conduct hunts for great beasts.96

The peoples of Britannia are treated in a similar manner to those of Germania regarding dietary staples.97 Just as there is a divide between the quasi-Gallic Ubii and the Suebi, a cultural divide is established in Britannia between the allegedly autochthonous inland peoples and those of the coastal regions. While the maritime civitates are said to have migrated from Gallia (evidenced by matched pairs of Britannic and Gallic civitas names) and preserve Gallic customs, the interiores are described in the following manner: frumenta non serunt, sed lacte et carne vivunt pellibusque sunt vestiti.98 The parallel is obvious in Caesar’s diction here, transplanted nearly unaltered from Book 4. Interestingly, it is an inland tribe that gives Caesar the most trouble during his attempted conquest while the coastal nations are quickly subdued, directly corresponding to the respective responses of the Suebi and Ubii.

4.5.3. Physical Appearance

This fixation on foreign clothing (and lack thereof) was a common feature in ancient ethnographic texts. Classical writers frequently commented on the apparel of the Galli in particular. Their bristling blonde hair, pale, muscular bodies, brightly-patterned plaid cloaks and trousers, and conspicuous gold jewelry were the physical features that the ancient writers emphasized most, stressing their alien appearance. Diodorus Siculus writes,

tούτῳ δὲ τῷ τρόπῳ σωφρίσων τόν χρυσοῦ πλῆθος καταχρῶνται πρὸς κόσμον οὐ μόνον αἱ γυναῖκες, ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ ἄνδρες. περὶ μὲν γὰρ τοὺς καρποὺς καὶ τοὺς βραχίονας ψέλλει, περὶ δὲ τοὺς αὐχένας κρίκους παχεῖς ὁλοχρύσους καὶ δακτυλίους ἄξιολόγους, ἔτι δὲ χρυσοῦς θώρακας.

Οἱ δὲ Γαλάται τοῖς μὲν σώμασίν εἰσὶν εὐμήκεις, ταῖς δὲ σαρκὶς κάθυγροι καὶ λευκοί, ταῖς δὲ κόμαις οὐ μόνον ἐκ φύσεως ξανθοὶ, ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ τῆς κατασκευῆς ἐπιτηδεύουσιν αὕξειν τὴν φυσικὴν τῆς

96 DBG 1.54, 4.19, 6.25-28
97 DBG 5.12,14
98 DBG 5.14
χρόας ἰδιότητα. τιτάνου γὰρ ἀποπλύματι σμῶντες τὰς τρίχας συνεχῶς [καὶ] ἀπὸ τῶν μετώπων χαίτης ἀποπλύματι σμῶντες τὰς τρίχας συνεχῶς [καὶ] τὰ δὲ γένεια τινὲς μὲν ξυρῶνται, τινὲς δὲ μετρίως ὑποτρέφουσι· οἱ δὲ εὐγενεῖς τὰς μὲν παρειὰς ἀπολειαίνουσι, τὰς δὲ ὑπήνας ἀνειμένας ἐῶσι, ὥστε τὰ στόματα αὐτῶν ἐπικαλύπτεσθαι. διόπερ ἐσθιόντων μὲν αὐτῶν ἐμπλέκονται ταῖς τροφαῖς, πινόντων δὲ καθαπερεὶ διὰ τὸν ἰθμὸν φέρεται τὸ πόμα ἐσθῆσι δὲ χρῶνται καταπληκτικαῖς, χιτῶσι μὲν βαπτοῖς χρώμασι παντοδαποῖς διηνθισμένοις καὶ ἀναξυρίσιν, ἃς ἐκεῖνοι βράκας προσαγορεύουσιν· ἐπιπορποῦνται δὲ σάγους ῥαβδωτοὺς ἐν μὲν τοῖς χειμῶσι δασεῖς, κατὰ δὲ τὸ θέρος ψιλούς, πλινθίοις πυκνοῖς καὶ πολυανθέσι διειλημμένους.

Having amassed an abundance of gold in this way (collecting it from rivers), not only the women but the men as well use it to adorn themselves. They wear arm-rings around their wrists and upper-arms, solid gold torcs around their necks, remarkable signet-rings, and even golden corselets.

The Γαλάται are tall and white, with rippling muscles. They have fair hair not only by nature, but also through preparation, customarily augmenting their peculiar appearance. For they habitually wash their hair in lime-water and draw it up from the brow to the crown of the head and back to the neck-sinews, so that their faces resemble Satyrs and Pans. Their hair thickens from this practice, such that it does not differ from a horse’s mane. Some shave their beards, while others let it grow a little, but the well-born shave their cheeks and grow moustaches to such an extent that their mouths are covered. Thus these become entangled in their food when eating and serve as a sieve when drinking.

They wear woven clothing, tunics and trousers dyed in many colors, which they call bracae (a Latinized Gallic word). They wear striped cloaks, thick in the winter and light in the summer, densely checkered with squares of many colors.

This passage integrates all of the various observations we have seen so far on the appearance of northern barbarians in both Polybius and Caesar, from their disheveled hair to their flowing moustaches and gleaming exposed skin. Diodorus, in the tradition of Polybius, makes these observations of the Γαλάται, the people whom Caesar and his fellow Romans called Galli. Yet Caesar seems to prefer assigning these physical characteristics to the more remote groups he encounters on the fringes of the known world. Caesar’s Germani have massive bodies and pale skin while his Britanni paint themselves with woad and cultivate the type of Gallic facial hair described by Diodorus. Why does Caesar transfer these characteristic Gallic physical features to peoples further afield? The most likely explanation for this is that his audience was intimately familiar with the Gallic stereotype drilled into their heads in any reference to the conflicts of the
past three centuries. Because of this familiarity, Caesar avoided a tangent on Gallic characteristics and devoted this space to illustrations of his more remote foes, who had not yet earned stereotypes for themselves. Caesar therefore appropriated elements of the traditional representation of the Galli for his observations on the Britanni and Germani.
5. Conclusions

The historical accounts of both Polybius and Julius Caesar appeal to a common framework of observation and interpretation that characterized ancient ethnographic thought. Despite the disparity between the perspectives of Polybius the Greek politician and Caesar the Roman imperialist, both presented the northern barbarians in relation to the culture of the Mediterranean rather than on their own terms. Implicit in both descriptions is a spectrum upon which people of every race and lifestyle fall. On one end lies the high civilization of the Greeks (or Romans). Both of our authors write from this side of the spectrum, considering there to be no greater culture than their own. On the other side is the lifestyle of utter savagery practiced by the monsters of classical myths such as Polyphemus, tending his sheep in a state of bestial ignorance. Between these two poles lie the barbari.

The position of various foreign peoples on this spectrum is dictated by their function in the narrative. We have observed that a comparison between two or more groups of barbari is a common occurrence in these narratives. Rarely do the groups under comparison fall on the same point on our spectrum. The purpose of these comparisons is to establish the civility or barbarity of one group over another. Moreover, the barbarity of a particular group might be emphasized in one instance, pushing it toward the savage end of the spectrum, while in another instance it is drawn back to the civilized end by comparison with another group. So, for example, Polybius stresses the primitive lifestyle of the Po Valley Celts when he introduces his tangent on the Gallic Wars, yet in his account of Telamon he stresses the alien savagery of the Transalpine Gaesatae in contrast to the more conventional tactics of the Po Valley Celts. Likewise, Caesar emphasizes the strange customs and indomitable spirit of the Gauls, but contrasts them with the
even stranger Germani. A group’s place on the spectrum is only set in relation to other groups, dictated by the roles they play in the events of the narrative.

Polybius and Caesar share common methods of illustrating the character of various ethnicities. Division and comparison are two strategies that allow classical writers to assign (or even generate) identities and relate them to one another. The character of the people (branded with these identities) is illustrated in the narrative through their appearance, their customs, their environment, and their interactions. Our writers stress the physical appearance of the various peoples we encounter in their narratives. Their large frames, pale skin, bristly hair, and long moustaches are common observations. Their apparel was also striking: trousers, furs, plaid patterns, and copious amounts of jewelry.

Certain customs and cultural institutions are common in these ethnographies. The practice of human sacrifice was a common feature used in the narrative to emphasize the savagery of the Galli. War among the barbari is presented as a type of cultural institution among these foreigners. Their bellicosity is augmented by a tendency toward factionalism. Agricultural practices are also noted, emphasizing the settled nature of populations inhabiting fertile land and the pastoral lifestyle of peoples inhabiting rougher terrain.

The landscape itself is integral to both writers’ representations of the barbari. The wild quality of the Gallic countryside is emphasized during battle narratives and descriptions of more distant regions, while its fertility is stressed elsewhere. The Roman conquest involves the resisting peoples as well as the native countryside. Caesar must cut down forests, bridge rivers, and burn fields in order to achieve victory. The fertility of the Po Valley is emphasized in
Polybius in contrast to the frigid valleys of the Alps in order to simplify the Celtic motivation to migrate. This same strategy is used by Caesar to explain the migration of the Helvetii.

Interactions with barbari are the most common opportunities for characterization in these narratives. Treachery is portrayed as a persistent problem among the Galli. They initially fight for plunder and glory, but eventually they are driven to the point of fighting for survival. Commerce is the most effective way of civilizing the barbari. Therefore the more isolated tribes are less likely to come to terms with the Roman conquest.

Polybius and Caesar do differ in the use of certain representational strategies that suit their own perspectives and that of their audience. Polybius explicitly acknowledges his debt to the accounts of previous authors and notes where he diverges in his interpretation of events. Polybius constantly mentions the purpose of his Historiae and justifies lengthy tangents within it. Polybius actively tried to fit his account into the evolving tradition of Greek historiography, going so far as to draw parallels between the Gallic Wars and the Persian Wars, the topic of Greece’s first historical enquiry. His compositional style is much more transparent than that of Caesar, who never explicitly states that he derives any information in his account from other sources. Caesar’s account therefore appears at face value to represent purely his own observations. In part this reflects his active participation in the events which the DBG describes. Nevertheless, Caesar relies much more on direct ethnographic observations than Polybius, who had largely abandoned this representational strategy in direct contrast to his predecessor Timaeus (whom Polybius frequently criticizes). In this respect, Polybius diverged more from historiographical convention than Caesar, whose ethnographic passages serve as the primary source material for later ethnographers writing on the Galli such as Diodorus Siculus.
6. Appendices

6.1. Appendix A: Timeline of Romano-Gallic Interactions

All Dates BCE

**Period covered by Polybius**

c. 400: The Po Valley is invaded and occupied by a series of Celtic tribes from the Alps and beyond, expelling the Etruscans. The Senones tribe founds Sena (Senigallia) on the coast of the Adriatic.

396: The Insubres found Mediolanum (Milan).

391: The Senones assault the Etruscan city of Clusium. Rome sends aid and a Gallic chieftain is treacherously slain during negotiations. The Gauls withdraw.

390: The Senones sack Rome following their victory over the Romans at the Allia River. For the next 30 years the Cisalpine Celts are plagued by raids conducted by their Transalpine kinsmen.

360: The Gauls besiege the ancient city Alba in Latium. The Romans are unable to oppose them.

348: The Gauls once again march south but retreat in the face of stiff Roman resistance. They establish a truce with Rome.

334: A large force of Transalpine Gauls crosses the Alps and throws the Po Valley Celts into turmoil.

299: A coalition force of Transalpine Gauls, Po Valley Celts, and Etruscans successfully raids Roman territory but implodes in a dispute over spoils.

295: A coalition of Gauls and Samnites defeats the Romans at Camerinum. The Romans exact vengeance in their victory at Sentinum.

283: A band of Gauls besieges Arretium. A Roman relief force is soundly defeated, but a second Roman force manages to drive them off and inflict a crushing victory on the Senones at Lake Vadimo. The Romans occupy the territory of the Senones, expel the native population, and plant a colony at Sena.

282: A coalition force of Celtic Boii and Etruscans is soundly defeated by the Romans in two battles. The Gauls are temporarily pacified, allowing Rome to deal with the invasion of Pyrrhus and the First Punic War.
279: A large force of Gauls penetrates the Greek mainland and plunders Delphi but is (according to legend) turned away from the Sanctuary of Apollo by the intervention of the god. Some turn east, cross the Hellespont, and enter Anatolia, where they settle and are later known as Galatians.

236: A young generation of Po Valley Celts conspires with the Transalpine Gauls to rise against Rome. The Boii oppose this force and in the subsequent conflict the two Celtic forces destroy one another.

232: The Romans partition Picenum (the old territory of the Senones).

231: The Boii and Insubres conspire with the Transalpine Gauls named Gaesatae and prepare to launch one last desperate assault into Roman territory. The Romans, meanwhile, secure a peace with Hasdrubal and the Carthaginians, who expand their holdings in Hispania.

225: The Gauls invade and lay waste to Etruria, scoring an early victory over the Romans at Faesulae. The Gauls, loaded down with plunder, are trapped between two Roman armies and defeated in a savage engagement at Telamon. The Romans launch a punitive campaign against the Boii and then return to Rome in triumph.

224: The Romans launch another campaign northward, completely subduing the Boii.

223: Yet another campaign is undertaken by the Romans, this time against the Insubres. They soundly defeat this tribe in a pitched battle.

222: The Insubres recruit the Transalpine Gaisatai once again. The Romans rout them at Clastidium and seize the town of Acerrae. The Gauls fall back to Mediolanum, which is taken by siege.

End of period covered by Polybius

218: Hannibal crosses the Alps and invades Italy, inciting the Cisalpine Gauls to rebel and join his cause.

191: After the long war with Hannibal, the Romans subdue the rebellious Boii, ending the revolt. In the years following this victory, the Po Valley is colonized and integrated into the road network, undergoing thorough Romanization.

125: Rome extends its influence across the Alps, aiding the Greek city Massalia against the Salluvii, a hostile local tribe.

121: The Aedui, a tribe of central Gaul, appeal to Rome and win the status of “brothers and kin” (*Fratres at Consanguinei*) of the Romans. The Romans offer them
assistance by defeating their rivals, the powerful Arverni of central Gaul and Allobroges of the Rhone Valley.

118: Rome plants a colony at Narbo, which serves as the center of the newly formed province of Transalpine Gaul (the coastal region extending from Massalia to the Pyrenees).

113: A massive migration erupts from the far north, possibly originating in Jutland (mainland Denmark).

112: After a long march south, the migrating Cimbri, Teutones, and Ambrones defeat a Roman force in Noricum. They turn northwest, skirting the northern slopes of the Alps.

109: Having entered the Rhone Valley, the migrating tribes meet and destroy another Roman army under the command of Marcus Junius Silanus.

107: The Tigurini, an Alpine Gallic tribe that joined the Cimbri and Teutones on their march west, defeat a Roman army at Burdigala (Bordeaux) and kill its commander, the consul Gaius Cassius Longinus, inciting a rebellion among the tribes of Provincia.

105: Quintus Servilius Caepio puts down the Gallic rebellion and captures Tolosa along with a fabled hoard of gold taken by the Gauls in previous raids (including the assault on Delphi in 279).

105: The migrants again attempt a march south through the Roman province and win a great victory at Arausio, then cross the Pyrenees into Hispania but are repelled by the native Celtiberians. They turn east and head toward Italy.

102: The Roman general G. Marius defeats the Ambrones and Teutones at Aquae Sexiae in Transalpine Gaul.

101: Marius finishes of the Cimbri at Vercellae in Cisalpine Gaul.

71: Ariovistus, king of a Germanic mercenary group, invades Gaul at the behest of the Gallic Sequani. He defeats the Aedui and their allies in battle and draws more forces across the Rhine, carving out a kingdom in eastern Gaul. The Romans name him a friend of the Roman people.

61: The Allobroges, a provincial tribe of Transalpine Gaul, revolt and are defeated.

Beginning of Caesar’s Conquests and Commentarii
58: Caesar launches a campaign against the Helvetii, who were attempting to migrate from the land north of Lake Geneva into central Gaul. After defeating them and re-settling them in their former territory, Caesar decides to intervene in the Gallic conflict with Ariovistus. After defeating the Germani, Caesar winters his troops in Gaul.

57: The Belgae of northeastern Gaul rise to resist Caesar’s advance. Caesar breaks their united front in battle and then conquers them piecemeal.

56: Caesar moves west to conquer the coastal Gauls of Aremorica. His legate Crassus subdues the Aquitani in the south.

55: Caesar defeats two roving Germanic tribes who had crossed the Rhine. Then he performs his first invasion of Britain.

54: Caesar launches a second invasion of Britain. The Belgae rise in revolt against the Winter Camps.

53: Caesar puts down the last vestiges of rebellion among the Belgae.

52: The pan-Gallic rebellion headed by Vercingetorix is destroyed at Alesia. The Roman conquest of Gaul is complete.

End of period covered in Caesar’s Commentarii
6.2. Appendix B: Maps

Map 1. Celtic language families

Map 2. Celtic expansion: 6th – 3rd centuries BCE
Map 3. Peoples of Northern Italy: 4th – 3rd centuries BCE

Map 4. Gallic Wars: 400-283 BCE
Map 5. Gallic Wars: 283-222 BCE

Map 6. Caesar’s Tripartite Gaul
Map 7. Oppida named by Caesar in the DBG

Map 8. Caesar and the Rhine
6.3. Appendix C: Tribal Glossary

Greek

Ἅναρες (Anares): A Celtic or Ligurian tribe dwelling between the Po and Trebia Rivers.

Βοῖοι (Boii): A major Gallic tribe that migrated south of the Po and seized the Etruscan city of Felsina, which they renamed Bononia. The Romans annexed their territory in 196 BCE. The nature of their relationship with the Boii of Bohemia is uncertain.

Γασάται (Gaesatae): A tribe of Transalpine Gauls who frequently sent mercenary forces across the Alps to aid their Celtic kin in the Po Valley. Polybius gives a false etymology for their name, implying that it meant “those who serve for pay (mercenaries)” in Gaulish. However, the name appears to derive from the Gaulish word *gaesum*, or spear, thus meaning something like “spearmen.” They served in Gallic armies at Telamon in 225 BCE and at Clastidium in 222, but were soundly defeated on both occasions.

Γαλάτα (Galatia): Greek term for the entire region inhabited by the Γαλάται, or Gauls. This term was later restricted to the interior of Asia Minor, which was invaded and settled by the Volcae Tectosages c. 280 BCE. Polybius, however, uses it in its original, broader sense.

Γονομάνοι (Cenomani): An important Gallic tribe with settlements at Brixia, Verona, Cremona, Bergamum, Mantua, and Tridentum. They allied themselves with Rome during the Gallic Wars of the later 3rd century BCE and their cities prospered after the Roman conquest.

Ἴνσομβρες (Insubres): A major Gallic tribe whose chief settlement was Mediolanum. They were conquered by Rome in 222 BCE, revolted, and were once again subdued in 194.

Καμέρινον (Camerinum): Modern Camerino, Italy. Site of a Roman defeat by a coalition force of Gauls and Samnites in 295 BCE.

Κέλτοι (Celts): Greek term for the peoples of Western Europe, originally those around the headwaters of the Danube in the 5th century BCE.

Κλαστίδιον (Clastidium): Modern Casteggio, Italy. A town in the Po Valley located at a river-crossing where the Romans defeated a force of Insubres in 222 BCE during the Roman conquest of Cisalpine Gaul.

Κλούσιον (Clusium): Modern Chiusi, Italy. A major Etruscan city in the foothills of the Apennines. In 391 BCE, Clusium appealed to Rome to send aid against a large force of Senones that had besieged the city. The Roman force successfully repelled the Gauls through treachery during a truce, but was defeated by them the

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99 The sources used to construct this glossary include Grant’s *Guide to the Ancient World* and Walbank’s *Historical Commentary on Polybius*. 
following year (390) at the Allia River, and Rome was sacked as a consequence of this defeat.

Λάοι (Laevi): A tribe of mixed Celtic and Ligurian stock who inhabited the valley of the River Ticinus.

Λεβέκιοι (Libicii): A Gallic tribe inhabiting the valley of the River Sesites. Their chief settlement was Vercellae.

Λίγγονες (Lingones): A Gallic tribe that occupied the territory between the Po and the cities of Ariminum and Ravenna.

Μασσαλία (Massalia): Modern Marseilles, France. Founded c. 600 BCE by Phocaean colonists, it was located at a cultural crossroads between the peoples of the Western Mediterranean: Etruscans, Ligurians, Carthaginians, Romans, and Gauls. Massalia was the gateway to the interior of Europe via the Rhone Valley. Its exports to the northern tribes catalized the cultural movement known as La Tène. However, it also came into conflict with the surrounding tribes, soliciting the protection of Rome c. 125 and the subsequent creation of Roman Provincia. The history of independent Greek Massalia ended in 49 when Julius Caesar sacked the city during his civil war with Pompey.

Οὐενέτοι (Veneti): Inhabitants of the Po Valley at the head of the Adriatic. Their occupation of this territory pre-dated that of the Celts by several centuries.

Πικηνόν (Picenum): Corresponds roughly with the modern region of Marche, Italy. Picenum was occupied initially by Italic Picentines until the early 4th century BCE, when the Gallic Senones occupied the region. The Romans defeated the Senones of Picenum in 283 and formally redistributed the land to Roman colonists in 232.

Σεντῖνο (Sentinum): Modern Sassoferrato, Italy. Location of a major Roman victory over a coalition force of Gauls and Samnites in 295 BCE.

Σενόνες (Senones): A Gallic tribe that crossed the Alps c. 400 BCE and settled on the coast of the Adriatic at Sena, modern Senigallia. In 390 they defeated the Romans at the River Allia and sacked Rome. In 283 they were defeated at Lake Vadimo and driven from their territory, the Ager Gallicus in Picenum, which was resettled by Roman colonists. The Senones of the early Gallic Wars were probably related to the Transalpine Senones dwelling between the Loire and Seine at the time of Caesar’s conquests.

Τελαμῶν (Telamon): Modern Talamone, Italy. A small Etruscan port on the coast of the Tyrrhenian Sea. In 225 BCE, a large force of Gauls from both sides of the Alps was trapped here between two Roman forces and soundly defeated on a steep hill overlooking the sea.

Φαισόλα (Faesulae): Modern Fiesole, Italy. An Etruscan city located at a pass through the Apennines. In 225 BCE, a large force of Gauls from both sides of the Alps
defeated a Roman legion guarding the pass. The Gauls were defeated later that year at Telamon.

**Latin**

Aedui: A large Gallic tribe inhabiting the territory between the Loire and Saone Rivers. They represented one of the two major Gallic factions in the early 1st century BCE. They were named *fratres et consanguinei* of the Romans for representing Roman interests in Gallia Comata. Their rivals, the Gallic Arverni and Sequani tribes, utilized Germanic mercenary forces to defeat the Aedui and exiled their elites. In 58, Caesar succeeded in driving the Germani from their territory and reestablished their former supremacy in the region. The principal *oppidum* of the Aedui was Bibracte (Mont Beuvray, France).

Ambiani: A Belgic tribe inhabiting the region around modern Amiens. They were conquered in 57 BCE along with the other major Belgic tribes. Their principal *oppidum* was Samarobriva (Amiens).

Aquae Sextiae: Modern Aix-en-Provence, France. A Roman colony founded in 122 BCE among the Saluvii tribe during the creation of Roman Provincia. It served as a defense of the western stretches of the Via Domitia. It was the site of Gaius Marius’ victory over the Teutones in 102.

Aquitani: Inhabitants of the region of Aquitania. They were culturally distinct from the Gauls to their north and more closely resembled the Cantabri of northern Hispania. The Aquitani were defeated by P. Crassus in 56 BCE during Caesar’s conquest of Gaul. Caesar noted that the Aquitani were skilled at siege warfare because of their familiarity with mining owing to the great mineral wealth of the region.

Aquitania: Modern Aquitaine, France. The region of Gaul south of the Garonne River and north of the Pyrenees, inhabited by tribes of Aquitani. Augustus later extended this region north to the Loire and fixed its capital at Burdigala (Bordeaux) on the Garonne River. Aquitania was noted by Caesar to contain great mineral wealth.

Arausio: Modern Orange, France. A settlement in Roman Provincia. Site of the defeat of a large Roman army by the Cimbri and Teutones in 105 BCE.

Aremorica: A region of western Gaul encompassing the peninsulas of Brittany and Normandy. The tribes of this region resisted Caesar at sea using a navy consisting of large, seaworthy ships. Their fortresses were located on high promontories, making them difficult to assault by land. They were conquered by the Romans in 57 BCE.

Arverni: A large Gallic tribe inhabiting the region of modern Auvergne, France. They, along with the Sequani to the east, represented one of the two main Gallic factions. A young chieftain of the Arverni, Vercingetorix, usurped power from his uncle
Gobannito in 53 BCE and led the Gallic revolt against Caesar. The principal oppidum of the Arverni was Gergovia (La Roche-Blanche, France).

Atrebates: A large Belgic tribe with holdings on both sides of the English Channel. They were initially conquered in 57 BCE along with the other major Belgic tribes. Caesar placed a client king, Commius, in command of the Atrebates (on both sides of the channel) and the Morini.

Belgae: Inhabitants of the region of Belgium. These Gallic tribes were noted by Caesar to have been more belligerent than their neighbors to the south. They also exhibited a mix of Gallic and Germanic cultural features. By the time of Caesar’s conquests in the 1st century BCE, the Belgae had extended their control across the English Channel into southern Britannia.

Belgium: Parts of modern Belgium, France, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. The region of Gaul north of the rivers Marne and Seine and west of the Rhine. Caesar conquered this region in 57 BCE, but frequent revolts and Germanic incursions over subsequent years constantly plagued the area. The region later became the province of Gallia Belgica, the eastern parts of which were further divided into Germania Inferior and Superior on the Rhine frontier.

Bellovaci: A large Belgic tribe inhabiting the territory around modern Beauvais, France. They were conquered by the Romans along with the other major Belgic tribes in 57 BCE.

Burdigala: Modern Bordeaux, France. A settlement of the Gallic Bituriges Vivisci on the Garonne River. It served as an important port throughout its history. It was conquered during the campaigns of Julius Caesar in 56 BCE and later made the capital of Gallia Aquitania under Augustus.

Cantium: Modern Kent, England. This region of Britain was observed by Caesar to be the most civilized part of the island because of its proximity to Gaul. During Caesar’s second invasion of the island, the four kings of Cantium assaulted and were defeated by Caesar.

Carnutes: A major Gallic tribe located in the territory around modern Orléans, France. This tribe hosted an annual gathering of the druids from across Gaul. The Carnutes were one of the first tribes to join the Gallic Rebellion of 53-52 BCE. Their principal oppidum was Cenabum (Orléans).

Celtae (Celts): The Latin term for the Greek word Κέλτοι. Caesar uses this term to denote the inhabitants of the region between the Garonne and Seine Rivers.

Cimbri: A Germanic tribe thought to originate in Jutland (Himmerland). The Cimbri, along with the Teutones and Ambrones, migrated south in the late 2nd century BCE, accumulating several more tribes on their march, and came into conflict with Rome at Noreia east of the Alps in 113, when they defeated a Roman army. They moved west into Transalpine Gaul and defeated two more Roman armies at the
Rhone and at Arausio. They were finally defeated by the forces of Gaius Marius at Vercellae in 101.

Cisrhenani (Germani): Germanic tribes living west of the Rhine during Caesar’s conquest of Gaul.

Eburones: A tribe of Belgic Gaul located north of the Ardennes. They are termed both Galli and Germani by Caesar. They were defeated in 57 BCE along with the other major Belgic tribes. In 54 they ambushed and massacred an entire garrison of Roman troops wintering in their territory. In response, Caesar and his legate Labienus initiated a punitive campaign the following year in which the Romans systematically exterminated the inhabitants of this territory, inviting Germani from across the Rhine to participate.

Galli: (Gauls): A diverse group of peoples who shared a common Celtic language and material culture who inhabited much of Western Europe in the latter half of the first millennium BCE.

Gallia (Gaul): The region inhabited by the peoples named Galli in Latin sources. It extended from the Apennines north to the English Channel, east to the Rhine, and west to the Bay of Biscay and the Pyrenees. By 52 BCE the entirety of this region had fallen into Roman hands.

Gallia Cisalpina (Cisalpine Gaul): The region of Gaul bounded by the Alps, Apennines, and Adriatic Sea. According to the ancient historians, it was settled by the Gauls c. 400 BCE. The Romans gradually annexed it between 295 and 191. According to Polybius, there was scant trace of any Celtic culture remaining in the region when he visited in the mid-2nd century.

Gallia Comata (Hairy Gaul): The region of Transalpine Gaul north of Provincia not yet under Roman rule in the 1st century BCE. It was conquered in the campaigns of Julius Caesar between 58 and 52.

Gallia Transalpina (Transalpine Gaul): Gaul beyond the Alps. This was further divided between Provincia and Gallia Comata.

Germani (Germans): A term applied by Caesar to the peoples living east of the Rhine in the first century BCE, including peoples speaking both Celtic and Germanic languages.

Germania (Germany): A vast region east of the Rhine, extending east to the steppe, north to the Baltic Sea, and south to the Danube. It was inhabited by numerous tribes of diverse ethnic identities. Sites in the foothills of the Alps as well as Bavaria and Bohemia exhibit a material culture almost identical to that of eastern Gaul: the Celtic La Tène culture. On the coasts of the Baltic, a distinct material culture is predominant: the Germanic Jasdorff culture. After the 1st century BCE, the prosperity of the southern region declined while the north flourished.

Helvetii: A Gallic tribe settled east of Lake Geneva in modern Switzerland. In 58 BCE they attempted to migrate from the Alps into lowland Gaul through Roman Provincia.
but were prevented from doing so by Julius Caesar, who defeated them and compelled them to return to their former homes, which they had burned before migrating.

Massilia: See “Μασσαλία.”

Menapii: A Belgic tribe located around the mouth of the Rhine. Along with the Morini, the Menapii resisted Roman conquest using guerilla warfare. Caesar responded using scorched earth tactics on their territory, forcing their eventual submission in 54 BCE.

Morini: A Belgic tribe located around modern modern Boulogne, France. Along with the Menapii, the Morini resisted Roman conquest using guerilla warfare. Caesar responded using scorched earth tactics on their territory, forcing their eventual submission in 54 BCE.

Narbo Martius: Modern Narbonne, France. Rome’s chief colony in Provincia, founded on the remains of a Gallic settlement in 118 BCE in the territory of the Volcae Tectosages. It protected the western stretches of the Via Domitia. Caesar settled the veterans of the Tenth Legion here in 45.

Nervii: A Belgic tribe occupying the area of what is now central Belgium. They were considered less civilized and more aggressive than other Belgic tribes, though the whole region was known for its hostility toward Rome. Caesar defeated the Nervii and their subjects (the Atrebates and Viromandui) in 57 BCE at the River Sabis (possibly the modern River Sambre). They also rose up in 53 BCE and assaulted the winter camp of Q. Cicero.

Noreia: Modern Magdalensberg, Austria. A settlement of the Celtic Norici tribe, possibly identified by Hecataeus as Nyrax in the late 6th century BCE. Site of a Roman defeat by the migrating Cimbri and Teutones in 113. The Gallic Boii tribe allegedly besieged Noreia before moving west and joining the migration of the Helvetii in 58.

Provincia (The Province): The region of southern Gaul conquered by Rome in the late 2nd century BCE. It was bounded in the west by the Pyrenees, in the north by the Massif Central, and in the east by the Alps. Provincia was later termed Gallia Narbonensis in Augustus’ new division of the Gallic provinces. Genava, Narbo, Tolosa, and Vienna were major settlements in Provincia. Massalia, though it was located within this region, remained autonomous until Caesar conquered it in 49.

Remi: A major Belgic tribe located around modern Reims, France. Unlike the rest of their fellow Belgae, the Remi sided with the Romans during Caesar’s conquest of Belgium in 57 BCE. He rewarded them by making them the dominant political power in the region, comparable with the Aedui in Celtic Gaul. The principal oppidum of the Remi was at Durocortum (Reims).

Sequani: A Gallic tribe inhabiting the area between the modern river Saone and the Jura Mountains. They, together with the Arverni to the southwest, represented one of
the two major Gallic factions in the early 1st century BCE. They used Germanic mercenary forces from east of the Rhine to overwhelm their rivals, the Aedui. However, these Germani under Ariovistus quickly took overwhelmed their former employers and occupied their territory. They appealed to Caesar, who expelled Ariovistus’ Germani in 58. Thereupon they became vassals of the Aedui. The principal oppidum of the Sequani was Vesontio (modern Besançon, France).

Sontiates: A tribe of Aquitani inhabiting the region around modern Sos, France. Their defeat by the forces of P. Crassus in 56 BCE caused the remaining Aquitani to reevaluate the Roman threat and seek the aid of allied forces from the Cantabri of northern Hispania.

Suebi: A major Germanic tribe inhabiting an extensive territory east of the Rhine on the borders of the Hercynian Forest. The Germanic king Ariovistus was possibly of Suebi origins. Caesar observes that the Suebi were the most warlike of the Germani and attributes Germanic migrations westward to pressure from the Suebi.

Suessiones: A major Belgic tribe inhabiting the area around modern Soissons, France. Caesar notes that theirs was the most extensive of the Belgic tribes. They were conquered by Caesar in 57 BCE.

Tencteri: A Germanic tribe that crossed the Rhine with the Usipetes in 55 BCE. The initial catalyst for their migration appears to have been their aggressive neighbors to the east, the Suebi. The Usipetes and Tencteri were defeated by Caesar and forced back across the Rhine, where they were sheltered by the Germanic Sugambri.

Teutones/Teutoni: See “Cimbri.”

Transrhenani (Germani): The Germanic tribes living east of the Rhine at the time of Caesar’s conquest of Gaul.

Treveri: A Belgic tribe located just west of the Rhine around in the valley of the Moselle River around modern Trier, Germany. They were famed for their cavalry, whom Caesar often made use of in his campaigns against the Gauls. In 54 BCE they participated in a revolt that was crushed by Caesar’s legate, Labienus. They appear to have had strong ties with Germanic tribes across the Rhine which harbored Treveran fugitives after the unsuccessful revolt.

Trinobantes: A tribe of southern Britain located at the mouth of the Thames. They cooperated with Caesar during his second invasion attempt, in 54 BCE. Caesar reinstated their king Mandubracius, who had been exiled to Gaul by Cassivellaunus, king of a powerful inland tribe (possibly the Catuvellauni). The principal oppidum of the Trinobantes was Camulodunum (modern Colchester, England).

Ubii: A Germanic tribe living east of the Rhine during Caesar’s conquest of Gaul. Of all the Germanic tribes which Caesar encountered, the Ubii were the most cooperative. Caesar observed that their material culture was more Gallic than Germanic. In the reign of Augustus, the Romans allowed the Ubii to settle west of the Rhine in the territory surrounding modern Cologne, Germany.
Usipetes: A Germanic tribe that crossed the Rhine with the Tencteri in 55 BCE. The initial catalyst for their migration appears to have been their aggressive neighbors to the east, the Suebi. The Usipetes and Tencteri were defeated by Caesar and forced back across the Rhine, where they were sheltered by the Germanic Sugambri.

Veneti: A Gallic tribe of Aremorica on the west coast of modern Brittany around modern Vannes, France. They were the primary tribe in the region to resist Roman conquest, amassing a navy from the surrounding tribes and withdrawing into inaccessible seaside fortresses. They were defeated by the Romans in 57 BCE.

Vercellae: Modern Vercelli, Italy. A settlement in Cisalpine Gaul. It was the site of Gaius Marius’ victory over the Cimbri in 101 BCE.

Viromandui: A Belgic tribe conquered by Caesar in 57 BCE along with the Atrebates and Nervii at the Sabis River.

Volcae Tectosages: A Gallic tribe originally located around Tolosa (modern Toulouse, France). In the third century, they migrated east to Bohemia and raided south into Greece and Asia Minor. Some settled in central Asia Minor around modern Ankara, giving it the name Galatia.
7. References


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