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Breaching the Alps: the Roman Idea of the “Wall of Italy” from the Republic to the Augustan Era

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The Roman preoccupation with the Alps as the *tutamen* of Italy owed its epistemic immediacy to a much more recent event—the Cimbric Wars (113-101 BCE). This traumatic episode had reawakened imagery of the northern enemies penetrating the "Wall of Italy," which in some cases went all the way back to the Mid-Republican narrative traditions of the Gallic Invasions and the much more frequently debated shock of Hannibal's invasion. The significance of this imagery continued even beyond the Augustan era, so that remnants of the same Roman insecurity about the "Wall of Italy" being breached, especially by northerners, are preserved in narratives about later Julio-Claudians such as Caligula and Nero. This article first looks at the likely origins of the idea of the Alps as the "Wall of Italy" in Middle-Republican perceptions, projected back onto the past and presenting Rome as predestined to dominate Italy and the Gauls in particular as external intruders in the peninsula. Next, the Late Republican and Augustan stages of the motif is reviewed, and the impact of the Cimbric Wars on this imagery is debated. Finally, there will be brief discussion of anecdotes found in Tacitus and Suetonius about later Julio-Claudian episodes in which the fear of a northern invasion breaching the Alps seem to have gripped the Romans.

KEYWORDS:
Ancient history, Roman literature, Alps, mountain borders, Gauls, Cimbric Wars, symbolic borders, invasion narratives, barbarians, existential fear

Introductory notes

Natural formations, such as islands, rivers, and mountains, are generally good to think with, not only because they allow us to use them in structuring our image of the physical world, but also because they provide us with important metaphors.[1] In antiquity, rivers and mountains were frequently seen as borders or barriers, and mountains in particular often evoked notions of numinosity.[2] Although the connective dynamics of both rivers and mountains have most usefully been highlighted in modern scholarship, in this article I seek to explore the way in which one particular geographic feature—the Alps—was constructed as a "natural border" for Italy in antiquity.[3] I aim to explore the way in which the Late Republican and Early Imperial-era Romans perceived the Alps as both a border and a kind of wall for Italy along with the epistemic implications of the use of this metaphor. Behind this development is a slow process during the Mid-Republic which led the Roman elites to think about the Apennine Peninsula as a unitary region increasingly referred to as Italia, bordered not by the Apennines or the river Po, but by the Alps. I will first look at the textual evidence for the early stages of the Roman portrayal of Italy as a geographically unified area bounded by the Alps and the way this formed an epistemic basis for perceiving the Alps as Italy's border – retroactive though the sources are. Next, I will discuss several Late-Republican representations of the strategic and symbolic importance of the Alps and suggest a few likely reasons for this emphasis. I will also look at the propagandistic use of the "Alpine conquest" motif during the Augustan era and the vestiges of arguments that seem to have pushed back against such triumphalist rhetoric about this complex mountain borderland (though not always by emphasizing its complexity). Before offering some concluding observations, I will also take a quick look at some Early Imperial literary indications of the continued symbolic importance of the Alps and the unease still connected to the idea of an enemy breaching them.

1 Originally Lévi-Strauss spoke of animals as *bonnes à penser*; nowadays "good to think with" is often applied to categories or phenomena that we find symbolically or metaphorically useful cognitive tools. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, tr. by Rodney Needham (London: Merlin Press, 1963), 89.

2 Although the personification of rivers as divinities might mean that the same was true for rivers, too. On the mountains as a numinous landscape, cf. now the very insightful discussion by Ralph Häussler and Gian Franco Chiai, "Interpreting sacred landscapes: a cross-cultural approach," in *Sacred Landscapes in Antiquity. Creation, Manipulation, Transformation*, ed. Ralph Häussler and Gian Franco Chiai (Oxford and Philadelphia: Oxbow Books, 2020): 1-13, esp. 7-8.

3 Rivers as natural links: Colin Wells, "Celts and Germans in the Rhineland," in *The Celtic World*, ed. Miranda J. Green (London: Routledge, 1995), 609. On mountains as connective landforms: Dawn Hollis and Jason König, "Introduction," in *Mountain Dialogues from Antiquity to Modernity*, ed. Dawn Hollis and Jason König (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), 1-20: esp. 6-15; and as an example of mountains giving structure to the world in ancient thinking, see Jason König, "Strabo's Mountains," in *Valuing Landscape in Classical Antiquity. Natural Environment and Cultural Imagination*, ed. Jeremy McInerney and Ineke Sluiter (Leiden: Brill, 2016). On natural borders generally, see I. William Zartman, "Introduction. Identity, Movement, and Response," in *Understanding Life in the Borderlands. Boundaries in Depth and in Motion*, ed. I. William Zartman (Athens, GA & London: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 4-6; Paulina Ochoa Espejo, *On Borders: Territories, Legitimacy, and the Rights of Place* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 96-122.

Rome and the Apennine Peninsula

When the Romans looked back at the growth of their polity into a complex web of direct and indirect rule covering the whole Apennine Peninsula, the long process seemed in hindsight predetermined by both morally underpinned providential favour and the self-contained nature of what they had increasingly begun calling *Italia*.[4] To the Augustans, the much-lauded Italy seemed always destined to be "Roman," and this ideology coloured their view of all historical migrations and population movements into "their" peninsula. Livy inserts an emphasis on the "naturalness" of the Alpine border into the supposed response of the Senate to envoys from Gauls (*Galli*) who had crossed to Venetian lands in 189 BCE and built a town there:

> Introduced to the Senate by Gaius Valerius the praetor, they explained that since the population of Gaul was too great and, compelled by poverty and the unproductiveness of the soil, they had crossed the Alps in search of a home, and when they found a region that was uncultivated due to a sparse population, they established themselves there without harming anyone. . . [The Senate decreed that] the consul would, on condition that they would return to where they had come from, return all their property to them, and then immediately cross the Alps and warn the Gauls to contain their multitudes in their homeland: the Alps were a nigh-insuperable boundary between them and in any case, they would not fare better than those who had first opened a path across them.[5]

Essentially, what seems to have been a peaceful attempt to migrate to and settle in Cisalpina was rebuffed and reversed by the Romans because it had originated from the wrong side of the Alps.[6] The stories about the Gauls' "invasion" of the Po Valley, imagined to have taken place at some point before the semi-legendary Sack of Rome, formed an intensely politicized set of narratives that sought to cast the Gauls as wholly external and alien to Italy.[7] In this article, I view the Roman narratives of the Gauls crossing the Alps and

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4 On the slow process of settling where the symbolic northern border of *Italia* lay, see Jonathan H. C. Williams, *Beyond the Rubicon: Romans and Gauls in Republican Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 128-37; Filippo Carlà-Uhink, *The "Birth" of Italy. The Institutionalization of Italy as a Region, 3rd–1st Century BCE* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), esp. 42-58, but cf. 372; also Silvia Giorcelli Bersani, *L'impero in quota. I Romani e le Alpi* (Roma: Einaudi, 2019).

5 Livy 39.54.12: *introducti in senatum a C. Valerio praetore exposuerunt se superante in Gallia multitudine inopia coactos agri et egestate ad quaerendam sedem Alpes transgressos, quae inculta per solitudines uiderent, ibi sine ullius iniuria consedisse.* [...] *qui, si redeant, unde uenerint, omnia iis sua reddi iubeant, quique protinus eant trans Alpes, et denuntient Gallicis populis, multitudinem suam domi contineant: Alpes prope inexsuperabilem finem in medio esse: non utique iis melius fore <quam> qui eas primi peruias fecissent.*

6 Cf. Clifford Ando, "The Changing Face of Cisalpine Identity," in *A Companion to Roman Italy*, ed. Alison E. Cooley (Malden: Blackwell, 2016), 279-80, noting how the Romans remedied the Gallic argument of having found an unsettled land by founding the colony of Aquileia in the area.

7 Williams, *Beyond the Rubicon*, 56, 61, and especially 77; Carlà-Uhink, *The "Birth" of Italy*, 39; cf. Ando, "The Changing Face of Cisalpine Identity", 273. As noted by Ralph Häussler, *Becoming Roman? Diverging Identities and Experiences in Ancient Northwest Italy* (London: University College London, 2016), 191, in the names of the Augustan *regiones* of Italy, the Gallic past was completely removed.

settling in what nowadays is northern Italy as a set of influential *exempla* that were imbued with more immediacy and symbolic value in certain Middle- and Late-Republican contexts. In his study *Beyond the Rubicon*, Jonathan Williams observes that:

> [t]he more apparently natural the boundaries, such as the Alps, or the Rhine and the Hellespont, the more contested they tend to be and, consequently, the more policing they require, both in the mind and on the ground.[8]

Williams devoted considerable attention to the few instances in Roman literature that seem to attest to there already being a perception of the Alps as a natural border for the Apennine Peninsula in the Middle Republican stage. The culturally and socially shared aspects of such perceptions have been most efficiently analyzed through the concept of "common sense geography" by Klaus Geus and Martin Thiering and by many of the contributors to their edited collection.[9] The height and topographical layout of the Alps would have made them a mentally salient feature in representations of the world among most Italian groups. Polybius furnishes important evidence for this early context in which Hannibal's hubristic violation of the Alps was a significant element and was clearly narrativized in ways that seemed methodologically suspect to Polybius:

> Some of those who have written about this passage of the Alps . . . while on the one hand introducing Hannibal as a commander of unequalled courage and foresight, yet representing him to us as entirely wanting in prudence, and again, being unable to bring their series of falsehoods to any closure, they introduce gods and the sons of gods [Herakles] into a sober investigation of events. They begin by saying that the Alps are so precipitous and inaccessible that not only horses and troops accompanied by elephants, but even active men on foot, would find it difficult to pass over them. At the same time, they tell us that the desolation of this district is so complete, that if some god or hero had not met Hannibal's forces and showed them the way, they would have been hopelessly lost and perished to a man.[10]

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> Similarly, what they say about the desolation of the district and its precipitousness and inaccessibility only serves to highlight their falsehoods. For they never learned about the Celts living along the river Rhodanus who had, not just once or twice before Hannibal but often, crossed the Alps with large armies and fought battles with the Romans in alliance with the Celts of the valley of the Padus, as I have already stated.

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8 Williams, *Beyond the Rubicon*, 55.

9 Klaus Geus and Martin Thiering, "Common Sense Geography and Mental Modelling: Setting the Stage," in *Features of Common Sense Geography*, ed. Klaus Geus and Martin Thiering (Zürich: LIT Verlag, 2014), 5-16.

10 Plb. 3.47.6-9: ἔνιοι δὲ τῶν γεγραφότων περὶ τῆς ὑπερβολῆς ταύτης [...] ἅμα μὲν γὰρ τὸν Ἀννίβαν ἀμίμητόν τινα παρεισάγοντες στρατηγὸν καὶ τόλμῃ καὶ προνοίᾳ τοῦτον ὁμολογουμένως ἀποδεικνύουσιν ἡμῖν ἀλογιστότατον, ἅμα δὲ καταστροφὴν οὐ δυνάμενοι λαμβάνειν οὐδ᾽ ἔξοδον τοῦ ψεύδους θεοὺς καὶ θεῶν παῖδας εἰς πραγματικὴν ἱστορίαν παρεισάγουσιν. ὑποθέμενοι γὰρ τὰς ἐρυμνότητας καὶ τραχύτητας τῶν Ἀλπεινῶν ὀρῶν τοιαύτας ὥστε μὴ οἷον ἵππους καὶ στρατόπεδα, σὺν δὲ τούτοις ἐλέφαντας, ἀλλὰ μηδὲ πεζοὺς εὐζώνους εὐχερῶς ἂν διελθεῖν, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ τὴν ἔρημον τοιαύτην τινὰ περὶ τοὺς τόπους ὑπογράψαντες ἡμῖν ὥστ᾽, εἰ μὴ θεὸς ἤ τις ἥρως ἀπαντήσας τοῖς περὶ τὸν Ἀννίβαν ὑπέδειξε τὰς ὁδούς, ἐξαπορήσαντας ἂν καταφθαρῆναι πάντας, ὁμολογουμένως ἐκ τούτων εἰς ἑκάτερον τῶν προειρημένων.

> Secondly, they ignore the fact that a great number of peoples live in the Alps.[11]

Polybius' criticism of these fanciful and incorrect descriptions of the Alps – and especially his emphasis on the region being inhabited and not a wasteland, as "some writers" have insisted – points to an early Mid-Republican tendency, though perhaps mostly among Greek writers, to portray the Alps as a desolate and forbidding mountain barrier hostile to life, so as to maximize Hannibal's glory in breaching it. Polybius even mentions the stories about "gods and the sons of gods," which, in addition to the implication of hubris on the part of Hannibal, surely must refer to the tradition encountered a bit later about Herakles having been the first to cross the Alps. The metaphor of the Alps as a conquered bulwark is strongly foregrounded just a bit later in the text when Hannibal calls his troops together to gaze down at the expanse of Italy, which made the "Alps seem like the citadel of the whole Italy."[12] The dramatic visuality of the scene conjured up by Polybius' words has been commented on by Katherine Clarke, while the literary topos of "looking from the mountain" or *oroskopia* has been recently studied by Irene de Jong, who notes the way in which Livy used the same scene when narrating Hannibal's crossing.[13]

The perception of the Alps being Italy's bulwark seems to have been articulated very literally even slightly earlier than Polybius' time, if we are to give credence to a reference that Servius' Late-Antique commentary on Vergil's *Aeneid* attributes to Cato the Elder and which would probably come from his *Origines*:

> The Alps, which according to Cato and Livy protect Italy in the manner of a wall.[14]

This statement has been read as evidence for Cato having "had a conception of the shape and the landscape of the north, and how it related both physically and symbolically to Italy."[15] It could perhaps be argued that the wall analogy cannot have been entirely accurate at Cato's time, since the areas between the Apennines and the Alps were then known as *Gallia*

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11 Plb. 3.48.5-7: ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ τὰ περὶ τῆς ἐρημίας, ἔτι δ᾽ ἐρυμνότητος καὶ δυσχωρίας τῶν τόπων ἔκδηλον ποιεῖ τὸ ψεῦδος αὐτῶν. οὐχ ἱστορήσαντες γὰρ ὅτι συμβαίνει τοὺς Κελτοὺς τοὺς παρὰ τὸν Ῥοδανὸν ποταμὸν οἰκοῦντας οὐχ ἅπαξ οὐδὲ δὶς πρὸ τῆς Ἀννίβου παρουσίας, οὐδὲ μὴν πάλαι προσφάτως δέ, μεγάλοις στρατοπέδοις ὑπερβάντας τὰς Ἄλπεις παρατετάχθαι μὲν Ῥωμαίοις, συνηγωνίσθαι δὲ Κελτοῖς τοῖς τὰ περὶ τὸν Πάδον πεδία κατοικοῦσι, καθάπερ ἡμεῖς ἐν τοῖς πρὸ τούτων ἐδηλώσαμεν, πρὸς δὲ τούτοις οὐκ εἰδότες ὅτι πλεῖστον ἀνθρώπων φῦλον κατ᾽ αὐτὰς οἰκεῖν συμβαίνει τὰς Ἄλπεις [...].

12 Plb. 3.54.2: ὥστε συνθεωρουμένων ἀμφοῖν ἀκροπόλεως φαίνεσθαι διάθεσιν ἔχειν τὰς Ἄλπεις τῆς ὅλης Ἰταλίας.

13 Katherine Clarke, *Between Geography and History: Hellenistic constructions of the Roman world* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), 101; cf. also Carlà-Uhink, *The "Birth" of Italy*, 40. On *oroskopia*, Irene de Jong, "The View from the Mountain (*Oroskopia*) in Greek and Latin Literature," *Cambridge Classical Journal* 64 (2018): 23-48, with 35 on Livy's Hannibal particularly.

14 Cato F 150. The numbering of fragments is taken from Timothy J. Cornell, ed., *The Fragments of the Roman Historians. Volume I: Introduction; Volume II: Texts and Translations; Volume III: Commentary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. *Ap.* Serv. *Ad Aen.* 10.13: *Alpes quae secundum Catonem et Livium muri vice tuebantur Italiam*. Cf. Carlà-Uhink, *The "Birth" of Italy*, 35-42.

15 Williams, *Beyond the Rubicon*, 55-56; cf. also Ando, "The Changing Face of Cisalpine Identity," 284.

Cisalpina in accordance with the Romans' ethnonym for the Gauls, who were thought to make up a majority of the area's inhabitants. *Italia*, for its part, had the Apennines as its northern border. But although the northern border of Italy was officially pushed to the Alps very late in Republican history, this long process had many juridical stages and thus need not mean there was no recognition that the Romans ruled a peninsula almost entirely closed off in the north by a much more impressive mountain chain than the Apennines.[16] Besides, as a recent commentator on Cato's fragment has pointed out, a defensive bulwark "need not be contiguous with the space it defends."[17] In a way, the mountain range could have been thought of as a sort of defensive *propugnaculum* (a forward defence) in somewhat the same manner as Cicero used the term about Narbo, a colony that acted as a "watchtower" for the Romans in Southern Gaul.[18] Breaching it would have been an act of aggression. For all intents and purposes, the Alpine *murus* was being morphed into a natural border that was supremely good to think with.

Alps as the *murus* or *tutamen* of Italy in the Late Republic

The problem with the Servian reference to the Alps as the "Wall of Italy" is that, despite its ostensible Catonian origins, the formulation of the perception may depend more on Livy, the other author mentioned in the reference.[19] Livy's monumental *Ab urbe condita* represents a very Late Republican or Augustan distillation and narrativization of many layers of earlier Republican stories, but when taken together with Polybius' evidence discussed above, it is not implausible that the "Alpine Wall" had begun emerging as a "construction of the mind" by the Mid-Republic.[20] Although it uses the word *moenia* instead of *murus*, the Livian reference corresponding most closely to the expression which Servius attributes to both Livy and Cato is firmly connected with the Second Punic Wars, and it resembles the earlier evocation of the same scene of *oroskopia* in Polybius.[21] Yet the most

16 On the debate on the dates of Transalpina's incorporation, see Filippo Càssola, "La colonizzazione romana della Transpadana," in *Die Stadt in Oberitalien und in den nordwestlichen Provinzen des Römischen Reiches*, ed. Werner Eck and Hartmut Galsterer (Mainz: Von Zabern, 1991), 30-44; also Giambattista Cairo, "Gli strumenti giuridici della presenza romana in Cisalpina tra il I sec. a.C. e l'inizio del principato," *Historiká* 11 (2012): 33-54; as well as Ando, "The Changing Face of Cisalpine Identity", and very importantly Carlà-Uhink, *The "Birth" of Italy*, esp. 35-58. On the native communities and Roman institutions, see also Häussler, *Becoming Roman? Diverging Identities and Experiences*, esp. 75-144, and Gino Bandelli, "Le comunità della *Transpadana* dalla guerra gallica del 225-222 a.C. alla *Lex Pompeia* dell'89 a.C. Dati recenti e problemi aperti su alcuni aspetti di ordine istituzionale," *Gerión. Revista de Historia Antigua* 35, no. 2 (2017): 373-400.

17 Cornell, *The Fragments of the Roman Historians*, III: 158. Cf. Carlà-Uhink, *The "Birth" of Italy*, 40.

18 Cf. Cic. *Font.* 13: *est in eadem prouincia Narbo Martius, colonia nostrorum ciuium, specula populi Romani ac propugnaculum istis ipsis nationibus oppositum et obiectum*.

19 Cato F 150, cf. the problems of Cato F 11. Cornell, *The Fragments of the Roman Historians*, III: 71, 158.

20 Williams, *Beyond the Rubicon*, 56; Carlà-Uhink, *The "Birth" of Italy*, 40-42.

21 Livy 21.35.8-9 *moeniaque eos tum transcendere non Italiae modo sed etiam urbis Romanae; cetera plana, procliuia fore; uno aut summum altero proelio arcem et caput Italiae in manu ac potestate habituros*; on Polybius, see above; on *oroskopia* see de Jong, "The View from the Mountain (*Oroskopia*)."

economical assumption might be to assume a later date for the notion—something this section will explore.

It is indisputable that Hannibal's invasion generated an intense feeling of shock and vulnerability among the Middle-Republican Romans.[22] Yet in the much later context of Livy's contemporaries, a more recent existential threat was engendered by the wars against the Cimbri, Teutones, and other associated groups from 113 to 101 BCE. They were much more similar to the Gallic enemies of the past (and present) than Hannibal was, and as Clifford Ando notes, "[e]ven Hannibal had not wreaked such terrible and humiliating harm on the fabric of the city itself" than the Gauls of old, whose presence was still retained in Livian times through topographical names such as the *Busta Gallica*.[23] These new, rapacious invaders appeared to come out of nowhere and to represent the boundless northern expanse of peoples, and led to the realization of dangers that could breach the Alps and enter Italy from the northern barbarian lands. The traumatic defeats at Noreia and Arausio in particular seemed to open Italy up to imminent barbarian invasion, even if this threat did not actually materialize until 101 BCE when the Cimbri crossed the Alps before being decisively defeated by Marius at the battle of *Campi Raudii* at Vercellae.[24] The reawakened symbolic value of the Alps was subsequently salient enough to also be projected back onto narratives of earlier northern invasions.

Posidonius of Apamea, a Greek polymath who visited Rome and the western regions in the 90s BCE, seems to reflect his Roman sponsors' recent interest in the now more vulnerable Alpine frontier. This is particularly visible in the way he sought to tie the Alps to the Greek mythogeographical tradition by explaining that they were the real-life Rhipaean Mountains, the fabled natural barrier shutting the Hyperborean lands off from the rest of the world.[25] Similarly, he etymologized the Cimbri as the Cimmerians of Homer, thus situating both the new invaders and the mountain barrier they had penetrated within the time-honoured Greek mental map, even though he was simultaneously reflecting Roman considerations. The Cimmerians/Cimbri equivalence is preserved in Strabo's approving description written in hindsight during either the late Augustan or the Tiberian empire:

Posidonius is right to make these criticisms against the historians, and his own explanation is not a bad conjecture, that it was because the

22 E.g. Plb. 3.67. On the linkages between the *metus Gallicus* and the fear of Carthage see Heinz Bellen, *Metus Gallicus, metus Punicus: zum Furchtmotiv in der römischen Republik* (Mainz: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, 1985). The Gallic mercenaries in Hannibal's army not only influenced Roman tactics, but also suffered disproportionately heavy casualties: Ando, "The Changing Face of Cisalpine Identity," 278.

23 Ando, "The Changing Face of Cisalpine Identity," 275. On *Busta Gallica*, Livy 5.48.3; Varro *LL* 5.157.

24 On the events themselves see Émilienne Demougeot, "L'invasion des Cimbres-Teutons-Ambrons et les Romains," *Latomus* 37 (1978): 910-38. On the narratives, Dieter Timpe, "Kimberntradition und Kimbernmythos," in *Germani in Italia*, ed. Barbara Scardigli and Piergiuseppe Scardigli (Rome: Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, 1994), 23-60. A telling Late-Antique reuse of the Cimbric *exemplum* and the breach of the Alps can be found in Claudian's *De bello Gothico*, 640-47.

25 Ath. 6.233d. Posidonius F 240a in Ludwig Edelstein and Ian G. Kidd, *Posidonius*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972-1999).

Cimbri were brigands and nomads that they made an expedition even as far as the country round Lake Maeotis, and the Cimmerian Bosporus was named after them in the sense of the "Cimbrian" Bosporus, for Greeks called the Cimbrians Cimmerians. . . . But when the Helvetii saw that the gold from Cimbrian plunder exceeded their own local gold, they were roused to join in with the Cimbrian invasions, especially the Tigurini and the Toygeni among them. They were all destroyed by the Romans, both the Cimbri themselves and those who had joined their expedition, some after crossing the Alps into Italy, the rest on the other side of the Alps.[26]

Posidonius' emphasis on how even the originally peaceful and already wealthy Helvetii were induced to join in with the "Cimmerian" depredations is a moralizing one. According to a cryptic reference in the *Scholia to the Argonautica of Apollonius Rhodius*, Posidonius had also claimed that the Hyperboreans, the legendary and blessed inhabitants of the farthest reaches of the world according to early Greek mythographers, led a real-life existence on the Alps.[27] I have argued elsewhere that the scholiast's reference is probably connected to Posidonius' Helvetii, especially when taken together with the connection Posidonius drew between the Alps and the Rhipaean mountains, which had long been thought of as a mountain barrier and the home of Boreas, the Greek god of the north wind, behind which the Hyperboreans lived.[28] This is a thoroughly learned interweaving of Greek mythical geographies and contemporary Roman concerns about the northern *Barbaricum*, with the focal point being the Alps, a new and desperately urgent borderland of ethnic knowledge-ordering and meaning-making.

The Cimbric shock also formed the crucial mental background for Cicero's and Livy's perceptions of the northern threat and Rome's blessed position on a peninsula walled in by the Alps. Cicero conveys this in his *De provinciis consularibus*. In seeking to secure Caesar an extension for his command along the northern border, Cicero presents him as being even greater than Marius, who had merely defended Italy from "enormous multitudes of Gauls" who had "poured in"—thereby portraying the Alps as a periodically ineffective flood barrier.[29] Such similes connecting forces of nature with northern barbarians were extremely common in this era.

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26 Str. 7.2.2: ταῦτά τε δὴ δικαίως ἐπιτιμᾷ τοῖς συγγραφεῦσι Ποσειδώνιος καὶ οὐ κακῶς εἰκάζει, διότι λῃστρικοὶ ὄντες καὶ πλάνητες οἱ Κίμβροι καὶ μέχρι τῶν περὶ τὴν Μαιῶτιν ποιήσαιντο στρατείαν, ἀπ᾽ ἐκείνων δὲ καὶ ὁ Κιμμέριος κληθείη Βόσπορος, οἷον Κιμβρικός, Κιμμερίους τοὺς Κίμβρους ὀνομασάντων τῶν Ἑλλήνων. [...] ὁρῶντας δὲ τὸν ἐκ τῶν λῃστηρίων πλοῦτον ὑπερβάλλοντα τοῦ παρ᾽ ἑαυτοῖς τοὺς Ἑλουηττίους ἐπαρθῆναι, μάλιστα δ᾽ αὐτῶν Τιγυρίνους τε καὶ Τωυγένους, ὥστε καὶ συνεξορμῆσαι. πάντες μέντοι κατελύθησαν ὑπὸ τῶν Ῥωμαίων αὐτοί τε οἱ Κίμβροι καὶ οἱ συναράμενοι τούτοις, οἱ μὲν ὑπερβαλόντες τὰς Ἄλπεις εἰς τὴν Ἰταλίαν οἱ δ᾽ ἔξω τῶν Ἄλπεων. F 272b, Edelstein and Kidd, *Posidonius*, 1: 236-358.

27 *Schol. in Apoll. Rhod.* 2.675. F 270, Edelstein and Kidd, *Posidonius*, 1: 235.

28 See Antti Lampinen, "Fragments from the "Middle Ground' – Posidonius' Northern Ethnography," *Arctos* 48 (2014): 237-40; also cf. Carlà-Uhink, *The "Birth" of Italy*, 36.

29 Cic. *Prov. cons.* 32: *influentis in Italiam*. It should be said at this stage that the Cimbri were commonly regarded as yet another type of Celts or Gauls until well into the Augustan era: see fn. 47 below. Flood imagery was common in conceptualising northern peoples' migrations and movements: Str. 2.3.6, 7.2.1; Nic. Dam. *BNJ* 90 F 109 *ap.* Stob. *Flor.* 7.40; Ael. *VH* 12.23; Flor. 1.38.1; [Quint.] *Decl. Maior.* 3.4.5; Amm. 15.9.4.

> . . . nature had fortified Italy with the Alps, and not without a certain divine forethought, for if the entrance had been left open to the immense multitudes of Gauls, this city would have never become the seat of the empire. Now there is nothing that Italy would need to fear beyond those mountain peaks until the Oceanus.[30]

Caesar, Cicero argues, is instead taking the fight to the other side of the mountain wall, which Italy had been fortified (*munierat*) with by nature itself. The existence of such a barrier, Cicero argues, was proof of a certain kind of divine providence (*divino numine*): If the road to Italy had not been protected, Rome could never have become the seat of an empire. The analogy with a Roman colony planted in hostile surroundings seems intentional. Even through Cicero's affect one can see how palpable the return of Roman confidence was in venturing outside their peninsula, as if from a city relieved after a long siege, with its defenders professing to have known all along that their fortifications were strong enough. As for now, the orator concludes, Caesar has instead essentially pushed the natural border of Roman power all the way to the Ocean. The roles are reversed. These sentiments had an influence on actual strategic concerns. Caesar's first operations against the Helvetii at the outset of his Gallic campaigns were probably motivated by recent Roman sensitivities regarding Italy's vulnerability in the face of threats from beyond the Alps.[31] Even though Filippo Carlà-Uhink very sensibly warns against the unquestioned use of the concept of "natural" borders or boundaries in an ancient context, Cicero's terminology – while obviously based on a vastly different understanding of what *natura* was than the eighteenth-century articulations of "natural boundaries" – is nonetheless very telling in terms of Roman ideas about the providentiality of landforms.[32]

By the time Cicero gave his speech on the division of consular provinces, the role of the Alps had been even further reinforced by the alarms raised by the Sertorian War. This gifted renegade had proved hard to dislodge from Hispania, and though the hostilities constituted first and foremost a civil war joined with a local uprising, Sertorius' use of local traditions and tactics made it easy for him to be represented as an enemy who had become barbarized.[33] Pompey, who finally defeated the Sertorians, particularly toyed with the triumphalist imagery of having (re)conquered both the Alps and the Pyrenees in the course of his campaigns.[34] According to the fragments of Sallust's *Histories*, in his letter to the Senate, Pompey drummed up the

30 Cic. *Prov. cons.* 34: *Alpibus Italiam munierat antea natura non sine aliquo diuino numine; nam si ille aditus Gallorum immanitati multitudinique patuisset, numquam haec urbs summo imperio domicilium ac sedem praebuisset. quae iam licet considant! nihil est enim ultra illam altitudinem montium usque ad Oceanum quod sit Italiae pertimescendum.*

31 Cf. Caes. *BGall.* 1.2.31. This numerical scaremongering about the barbarian manpower was certainly intentional: cf. Christine Trzaska-Richter, *Furor Teutonicus. Das Römische Germanenbild in Politik und Propaganda von den Anfängen bis zum 2. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 1991), 110-18.

32 Carlà-Uhink, *The "Birth" of Italy*, 37; also going on to note (38) that the "naturalness" of a border and the admission for its necessity often go hand in hand.

33 Cf. Plut. *Sert.* 11, 16-20.

34 On Pompey's *tropaeum* of the Pyrenees, see Str. 3.4.1, 7; Plin. *NH* 3.18; Dio Cass. 41.24; Sall. *ap.* Serv. *Ad Aen.* 11.6.

immediate threat the army of Perperna, Sertorius' second-in-command, posed to the Alps and thus to Italy:

> . . . within forty days of receiving from you the nominal position of command, I had raised and equipped an army and driven the enemy, already at the throat of Italy, from the Alps into Spain; and over those mountains I opened for you another and more convenient route than what Hannibal had taken. I recovered Gaul, the Pyrenees, Lacetania, and the Indicetes; I withstood the first onslaught of the victorious Sertorius despite the rawness of my troops and the enemy's superiority in numbers. I spent the winter neither in the towns nor boosting my own popularity, but in a camp surrounded by the most savage of foes.[35]

In Pompey's rendering, the lands beyond the Alps are both metaphorically and concretely beyond urban amenities. Yet he has also played the role of an explorer, finding an alternative route to Hannibal's. He complains to the senators that he has essentially been banished to overwinter in the wilderness, which has led to famine among his troops and did not even allow him to engage in politics. Pompey goes on to warn that if the Senate should fail in its duty to support him, he would be forced to "cross to Italy" with his army and "bring with it the whole Spanish war."[36] The threat is vivid and certainly connected to the contemporary imagery of siege warfare: If Pompey's army is forced to retreat from beyond the border to the Italian side of the Alps, the enemy will follow at its heels and will no doubt attempt to penetrate the natural defences. The implication of an *urbs capta* fate possibly in store for Italy is obvious, and it relies on the degree to which Sertorius has been represented as a barbarian enemy instead of a Roman renegade. There are further examples from the time of the later civil wars of such "barbarization" among Roman enemies with bases beyond the Alps.[37] This fearful imagery, which Pompey only toyed with, would become a reality a few decades later in a somewhat altered form when Caesar crossed the Alps and returned to the Italian side of the mountains – although it was only the crossing of the Rubicon, which was then the official border, that marked the formal opening of hostilities.

Livy, a writer who in many ways is both the last Republican historian and the first Imperial one, put an Augustan spin on earlier Mid-Republican stories, as was previously mentioned. But it is perhaps relevant for his emphasis on the Alps at several instances in his monumental work of history that Livy himself hailed from Patavium, modern Padua, and thus from an area that within the likely lifetime of his parents had seen the depredations

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35 Sall. *Hist*. F 2.82.4-5 *ap.* Cod. Vat. Lat. 3864 / Fleury MS cols. 13-16: [...] *quippe qui nomine modo imperi a uobis accepto diebus quadraginta exercitum paraui hostisque in ceruicibus iam Italiae agentis ab Alpibus in Hispaniam submoui. per eas iter aliud atque Hannibal, nobis opportunius, patefeci. recepi Galliam, Pyrenaeum, Lacetaniam, Indigetis et primum impetum Sertori uictoris nouis militibus et multo paucioribus sustinui hiememque castris inter saeuissumos hostis, non per oppida neque ex ambitione mea egi*. Patrick McGushin, ed. *Sallust: The Histories, vol. 2* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 59.

36 Sall. *Hist*. F 2.82.10: *reliqui uos estis: qui nisi subuenitis, inuito et praedicente me exercitus hinc et cum eo omne bellum Hispaniae in Italiam transgredientur*. McGushin, *Sallust*, 59.

37 Cic. *Ep. ad Att*. 7.13.3, with Caesar's march towards Rome called *barbarorum adventus*.

wreaked by the Cimbri and Teutones.[38] Based on the *Periochae* of his work, there was no doubt in Livy's mind that, by crossing the Alps, the Cimbri had invaded Italy.[39] In Book 5 of his *History*, which deals with the first Gallic catastrophe for Rome – the fabled invasion of Brennus and the consequent Sack of Rome, clearly at this late stage modelled after the Hellenistic stories about the Galatian attack on Delphi—Livy presents the Alps much like Cicero had done: as an obstacle to Gallic plans to migrate into Italy, and one that indeed encircled and hedged *them* in rather than Italy. In this instance, Livy also strikes a clearly sceptical note regarding Hercules' supposed crossing of the Alps.[40] Other instances, such as one in Book 39 mentioned earlier, are perhaps more faithful testimonies to Mid-Republican considerations, but they should also be understood as having been created and interwoven according a Livian programme in which the "First Gallic Invasion" serves as an *exemplum*. Even when he calls the Alps the *moenia* of Italy in Book 21, Livy is already reflecting the perceptions of his later, Augustan context, which saw *Italia* and *Roma* destined to form a close unity. This is clear from the way in which the Alps are both the walls of Italy and those of *urbs Roma*.[41]

Augustan and Early Imperial Reflections

It follows from the previous section's discussion that the emphasis here must be on reading Livy's back-projections together with—and against—other cases of Late Republican and Augustan historians. Some of Livy's close contemporaries ended up emphasizing the Gallic crossing of the Alps in a much more positive light, even seeking to apply the *exemplum* of Hercules to non-Roman, barbarian peoples. These influential and much-emulated historians were probably significant for the further reception of the theme of the "Wall of Italy" in Early Imperial literature, which will also be briefly referred to at the end of this section. Yet at the same time, the role of Augustus as the final conqueror of the Alps was clearly emphasized in the political propaganda of the era.[42]

Livy's contemporaries show that the Alps were an intensely debated and narrativized feature of Italy's spatial conception of the time. All the works of Timagenes of Alexandria, an important Late Republican and Augustan historian, who was based in Rome but wrote in Greek, have unfortunately been lost. There are, however, enough fragments and echoes of it in extant authors to at least suggest that Timagenes took a very different take than Livy's scepticism towards Heracles' mythical crossing of the Alps. Other contemporaries, such as Diodorus Siculus and Parthenius of Nicaea, two Greek authors who wrote in the last decades of the first century BCE, featured

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38 Cf. Bernhard Kremer, *Das Bild der Kelten bis in Augusteische Zeit. Studien zur Instrumentalisierung eines antiken Feindbildes bei griechischen und römischen Autoren* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1994), 76-80; also Williams, *Beyond the Rubicon*, 120, 123.

39 Livy *Per.* 67.1, 68.6, though, as Carlà-Uhink, *The "Birth" of Italy*, 41 notes, the Cimbri did not cross the Po.

40 Livy 5.34.5-7: *Alpes inde oppositae erant; quas inexsuperabiles uisas haud equidem miror nulladum uia, quod quidem continens memoria sit, nisi de Hercule fabulis credere libet, superatas. ibi cum uelut saeptos montium altitudo teneret Gallos.*

41 Livy 21.35.9. Possibly Livian is also Flor. *Epit.* 1.38 *per Alpes, id est claustra Italiae*.

42 E.g. *RG* 26-27, 30-33; cf. Suet. *Aug.* 48.

several genealogies connected to Heracles in addition to his conquest of the Alps.[43] A piece of evidence confirming this comes from Ammianus Marcellinus in the late-third century CE, who explicitly quotes Timagenes on the role of Hercules as the progenitor of Gaul and, more crucially, the one who first constructed a road across the Alps:

> The Theban Hercules, while on his leisurely journey to destroy Geryon and Tauriscus, constructed the first of these roads near the Maritime Alps and named them the Graian Alps.[44]

Timagenes has been characterised by Marta Sordi and others as a "philobarbarian" or "anti-Roman" historian, and not without justification.[45] Thus, even if the emphasis on the Alps might otherwise be understood as reflecting the Augustan triumphalist celebration of the region's pacification (and in so doing repeating Hercules' old feat and adding another layer to the Roman universalism), Timagenes may also have implied that the later Gallic crossings of Alps were a demonstration of Herculean heroism that was quite separate from any Roman claims.[46] It is not so much the Romans as it is the *Galli* who are put forward as the heirs of Hercules' *exemplum*. From what we know about his works, Timagenes clearly seems to have emphasized Gallic accomplishments, which ended up foregrounding the similarity between his take on the Alps and that of his younger contemporary Pompeius Trogus—although even Timagenes' direct influence on Trogus should not be discounted.

Trogus' own origins lay in the Romanized aristocracy of Southern Gaul. As with Timagenes, his work has been lost in its original form, but an Imperial-era writer called Justin produced an *Epitome* of Trogus' work that preserves large sections of the original.

> For when the land that had given rise to the Gauls was unable to contain them due to their vast numbers, they sent out three hundred thousand men, as in the rite of "sacred spring," to seek new settlements. . . . They were a fierce, bold, and warlike people: the first after Hercules (to whom that undertaking procured great admiration for his valour and a belief in his

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43 Diod. Sic. 5.24.2-3; Parth. *Narr.* 30.

44 Timag. *BNJ* 88 F 14 *ap*. Amm. 15.10.9: *et primam Thebaeus Hercules ad Geryonem exstinguendum, ut relatum est, et Tauriscum lenius gradiens prope maritimas composuit Alpes hisque harum indidit nomen*. Hercules as an ancestor to Gauls, Timag. *BNJ* 88 F 2 *ap.* Amm. 15.9.3, 6.

45 Marta Sordi, "Timagene di Alessandria: uno storico ellenocentrico e filobarbaro," *ANRW* II 30.1 (1982): 775-97; cf. Livia Capponi, "A Disillusioned Intellectual: Timagenes of Alexandria," in *Intellectual and Empire in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, ed. Philip R. Bosman (London: Routledge, 2018), 50.

46 On Augustus, king Cottius, and the Alpine passes, see Luisa Brecciaroli Taborelli, "Un passo di Ammiano Marcellino e il probabile heroon di Cozio," in *Romanità valsusina* [n.e.] (Susa: Società di Ricerche e Studi Valsusini, 2004), 75-83; Hannah Cornwell, "The King Who Would Be Prefect: Authority and Identity in the Cottian Alps," *Journal of Roman Studies* 105 (2015): 41-72; also Erich S. Gruen, "The expansion of the empire under Augustus," in *Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 10, ed. Alan K. Bowman, Edward Champlin and Andrew Lintott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 169-71. Augustus' *tropaeum* of the Alps at La Turbie (Plin. *NH* 3.136-37; *CIL* V.7817) and his arch at Segusio (mod. Susa) were no doubt partly erected to outdo Pompey's *tropaeum* of the Pyrenees (see above); cf. Dario Vota, "L'occupazione romana delle Alpi Cozie. Ipotesi sul processo d'intervento," in *Romanitá valsusina* [n.e.] (Susa: Società di Ricerche e Studi Valsusini, 2004), 15-50.

> immortality) to pass the Alps, with their unconquered heights and places desolate due to the excessive cold.[47]

Trogus' unequivocally positive assessment of the Gauls' Alpine crossing presents them as reproducing the *exemplum* of Hercules with all of its implications of admiration and even apotheosis. In the empire of *Divi filius* Augustus, who tended to emphasize his own conquest of the Alps, this was a brave implication indeed. Another important point is that, in order to emphasize the achievement, Trogus clearly turned his back on Polybius' admonitions, as seen above, about not making the Alpine barrier seem like an uninhabited wasteland. Trogus, with his Narbonese connections, would certainly have known better, so his choice is particularly significant.

Indeed, it could be said that the emphasis on the environment and forces of nature is a notable theme associated with the movements of northern population groups in this era. In a later book, Justin is probably echoing Trogus' description of the Cimbri as "untold thousands from fierce and implacable peoples" who, in a somewhat extended metaphor of natural imagery, penetrated the Alps *more procellae* (like a wave).[48] Here, the old idea of northern migrations being set in motion by oceanic inundations is being morphed into a threatening image of the Cimbri and the Teutons (whom the Gallic Trogus, in stark contrast to many of his contemporaries, never seems to have called Gauls) crashing into the Alpine breakwater and spilling over it. A water metaphor also appears in Justin's Latin about the Gauls through the expression *abundante multitudine* (24.4.1), with a root verb meaning to overflow, surge, or swell.[49]

Both Timagenes and Trogus emphasized the role of Heracles/Hercules as the first to have crossed the Alpine wall in the mythical past. As mentioned in the first section, this idea predated the Late Republican era, and had become well-enough established during the Middle Republic for Polybius to expressly criticize accounts that presented Heracles' help as crucial to Hannibal successfully crossing the mountain chain. No doubt such criticism was partly motivated by Roman recalcitrance to the idea that the same demigod to whom certain Roman *gentes* (such as the Fabii) traced their origins would have assisted Hannibal by indicating a safe crossing over the Alps.[50] The natural wall of Italy could surely not have been endangered by a hero whose descendant Fabius Cunctator had done so much to safeguard the republic from the Punic invader. In Livy, the rejection of the *exemplum*

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47 Just. 24.4.1, 3: *Namque Galli abundante multitudine, cum eos non caperent terrae, quae genuerant, CCC milia hominum ad sedes nouas quaerendas uelut uer sacrum miserunt.* [...] *gens aspera, audax, bellicosa, quae prima post Herculem, cui ea res uirtutis admirationem et inmortalitatis fidem dedit, Alpium inuicta iuga et frigore intractabilia loca transcendit.*

48 Just. 38.4.15: *simul et a Germania Cimbros, immensa milia ferorum atque inmitium populorum, more procellae inundasse Italiam.* Water metaphors are frequently found in contexts where Greeks and Romans spoke about population movements, although to my knowledge they have not been much studied, except by Evan Jewell, "(Re)moving the Masses: Colonisation as Domestic Displacement in the Roman Republic," *Humanities* 8, no. 2 (2019): 66. The analogies with the contemporary coverage of refugees and immigrants are remarkable.

49 *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, *s.v.* "abundō". See fn. 28 above on the flood explanations and analogies.

50 On the Fabian origin story, see Plut. *Fab.* 1.2; Fest. 77L; Ov. *Fast.* 2.235-42; Sil. *Pun.* 2.3, 7.34, 44; Juv. 8.14.

of Hercules seems motivated by similar propagandistic considerations; the emphasis on the (relative) impermeability of the Alps helped Livy to emphasize the illegitimacy of Hannibal's and the Gauls' crossings. In Diodorus Siculus, on the other hand—for whom Heracles was a clear precursor not only to Roman universalism but more specifically to Julius Caesar—Heracles' crossing of the Alps is emphatically a great feat and is presented as a genuine opening of a very Roman-sounding road.[51]

By the Late Republican and Augustan Eras, Hannibal's *exemplum* had lost a significant part of its urgency and contemporary relevance, whereas the threat of the northerners was still conceivable. The movement of Cimbri, Teutones, and associated groups made sure of this: These barbarians, often still subsumed into the broader commonality of "Gauls" or "Celts" seemed to cross the mountain wall at will.[52] Added to the concrete threat was a symbolically ominous detail: the *Galli* were widely considered to be descendants of Hercules.[53] Yet this was an *exemplum* that could be manipulated at will: For the Narbonese-born Trogus, the Gauls had crossed the Alps in a heroic re-enactment of the very first crossing by their ancestor Hercules, but Trogus also reverts to outcasting and natural imagery in a much more negative way when referring to the Cimbri crossing the Alps.[54] Strong reactions during the Augustan era to defeats north of the Alps, such as the *clades Lolliana* (16 BCE) and *clades Variana* (9 CE), are partially a reflection of Roman insecurities stemming from the historical *exempla*.[55] Later, the exemplary narratives were also made use of in a dispute between Claudius and the senators about admitting Gallic aristocrats into the Senate. Senatorial resistance to the legislation was partly expressed through fearmongering about the Gauls trying to insinuate themselves into the heart of the empire by guile after they had repeatedly failed to do so by force.[56] Some Gallic groups had been putting forward claims of Trojan ancestry for several generations, but in the senatorial counterargument, they seemed more like a Trojan horse attempting to take the *urbs* by stealth.[57]

The northerners' perceived hubris in breaching the Alpine barrier stemmed partly from the feelings of numinosity such a clearly providentially placed natural form elicited from the Romans: For them, the Alps were not a complex landscape of communities but primarily a wall and a border. As

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51 Diod. Sic. 4.19.3-4.

52 Cimbri as "Gauls" or "Celts", e.g. Sall. *Iug.* 114.1; App. *Ill.* 4.

53 Hercules as Gallic ancestor: Parth. *Narr.* 30; Timagenes *BNJ* 88 F 2 *ap*. Amm. 15.9.6; Diod. 5.24.2-3; Just. 24.4.4.

54 Hercules is also an *exemplum* for Trogus' brave attempt at writing universal history, at least according to the epitomator Justin's metaphor: Just. *praef.*2.

55 See Trzaska-Richter, *Furor Teutonicus*, 239; Alain Chauvot, *Opinions romaines face aux barbares* (Paris: De Boccard, 1998), 43; John F. Drinkwater, *Roman Gaul: the Three Provinces, 58 B.C. – A.D. 260* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), 122; Vota, "L'occupazione romana delle Alpi Cozie," 28.

56 Claudius' introduction of the Comatan Gauls into the Senate: Tac. *Ann.* 11.25.1-2; the Lyon Tablet in *CIL* XIII 1668 (*ILS* 212). Already Miriam Griffin, "The Lyons Tablet and Tacitean Hindsight," *Classical Quarterly* 32 (1982): 404-18, here: 406 noted Claudius' emphasis on Gallic loyalty and avoidance of any mention of the Gallic Sack.

57 On the questions of Trojan ancestry in the Claudian era, see David C. Braund, "The Aedui, Troy, and the *Apocolocyntosis*," *Classical Quarterly* 30 (1980): 420-25.

Filippo Carlà-Uhink observes, the Alps came to have an "eerie" quality in the Roman imagination as a place of myth and otherness.[58] Several examples of this have been discussed above. This feeling of numinosity may even have emphasized the existential nature of Roman fears whenever an enemy breached the Alps. This is especially true if one agrees with what Berndt Kerremans points out about *tumultus*, the Roman juridical state of emergency, which is that *tumultus* primarily indicates a situation like this.[59] Such a symbolically powerful barrier also had to be treated with respectful language. There is a Late Republican exemplar of poetry in which the majesty of the Alps was perceived to have been insulted: Furius Bibaculus' reference to Jupiter "spitting the snows" onto the Alps was thought to be an insult to both the king of gods and the Alps. Catullus' surprisingly respectful reference would have perhaps been considered much more appropriate.[60]

For the Augustan Romans, the Alps had been placed thanks to some sort of divine forethought. That they protected Rome, the "natural *caput*" of both a favourably placed Italy and the entire world, from the northern peoples seems to have been a widely shared sentiment in the Late Republic. As was previously mentioned, Cicero and Livy both expressed this explicitly, and similar sentiments could also be found in the *laudes Italiae* of the Augustan literature.[61] Virgil's celebration of the providentially blessed *Saturnia tellus* of Italy offers typical exemplars in the poetic register, while Vitruvius' similarly Augustan take presented in the genre of technical writing borrows from the language of ancient climatological theories focused on explaining the excellence of the Romans—or more broadly, the Italians—through their ideal positioning in the system of climatic zones between the extremes of north and south.[62] In these conceptualizations of Italian exceptionalism, the traditional idea of areas surrounded by mountains being inaccessible is transformed into an idea of a strongly fortified central region of the earth specifically set apart for great things by some numinous design.[63] The Alps

58 Carlà-Uhink, *The "Birth" of Italy*, 36.

59 Bernt Kerremans, "*Metus Gallicus, tumultus Cimbricus*? The Possible Promulgation of a *tumultus* in the Cimbrian War (105-101 BCE)," *Mnemosyne* 69 (2016): 822-41.

60 Furius Bibaculus: *Iuppiter hibernas cana niue conspuit Alpes* (Hor. *Sat*. 2.5.40f.; Quint. *Inst*. 8.6.17; Ps.-Acro *Ad Hor. Sat*. 2.5.41 on which see Peter Kruschwitz, "Gallic War Songs: Furius Bibaculus' Annales Belli Gallici," *Philologus* 154 (2010): 285-305; also Catullus 11.9-10 *siue trans altas gradietur Alpes Caesaris uisens monumenta magni*. Catullus, it may be noted, is another Northern-Italian native like Livy.

61 See very usefully Laura Passavanti, *Laudes Italiae. L'idealizzazione dell'Italia nella letteratura latina di età augustea* (Trento: UNI Service, 2009); also Filippo Carlà-Uhink, "*Caput mundi:* Rome as Center in Roman Representation and Construction of Space," *Ancient Society* 47 (2017): 119-57.

62 Verg. *Georg*. 2.136-76; Vitr. *Arch*. 6.1.11; cf. Varro *Rust*. 1.2.4-7; Dion. Hal. *AR* 1.36.2-37.5. On the theoretical basis, see James Romm, "Continents, Climates, and Cultures: Greek Theories of Global Structure," in *Geography and Ethnography,* ed. Kurt A. Raaflaub and Richard J. A. Talbert (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 215-35; Georgia Irby, "Climate and courage," in *The Routledge Handbook of Identity and the Environment in the Classical and Medieval Worlds*, ed. Rebecca Futo Kennedy and Molly Jones-Lewis (London: Routledge, 2016), 247-65.

63 On the traditional associations between mountains and isolation, Hollis and König, "Introduction", 1-8. Spatially, the centrality of Italy was an extension of the centrality of Rome, on which Carlà-Uhink, "*Caput mundi*", 132-37. Climatological and other explanation models simply sought to reify and justify this exceptionalism.

were permeable mostly from Italy outwards, which reflected ideas of Rome's universality, but movement back across them was a concept that came under intensely moralizing scrutiny, as demonstrated by the Augustan disputes about the peoples for whom the *exemplum* of Hercules was relevant.

Finally, there are a few later sources from the Early Imperial period. The earliest of these is about the emperor Caligula and comes from the early second century imperial biographer Suetonius. When commenting on the mentally unstable emperor's frequent blustering about the northern barbarians, Suetonius describes how he was thrown into a panic by a rebellion in Germania when he had to contemplate the possibility of "the victorious enemy taking possession of the summits of the Alps, as the Cimbri had done, or even the city itself, as the Senones had once done."[64] The two narratives of the past northern breaches could still be meaningful enough, though the textual context clearly uses these in order to highlight Caligula's cravenness and irrationality. Yet the Alpine symbolism may not have been useful only for describing Caligula's mental disturbance. Its role in the dispute about the acceptance of Gallic senators during Claudius' rule was already mentioned above. Moreover, Tacitus writes that during the chaos after Nero's fall, the cataclysmic fire of the Capitoline temples led to widespread anxiety among the Romans. Rumours of a northern coalition of barbarians were rife, and a particular emotional charge was affixed to the imagery of Gallic Druids viewing the moment as presaging the fall of Rome and the "Transalpine peoples'" rise to prominence.[65] Naturally, the term *Transalpinis* itself indicates the purely Italo-centric angle of this panic.

Concluding thoughts: geographical determinism and collective trauma

The Alps were both a symbolic and a numinous border for Italy in the worldview of the Late Republican Romans, while the perception of them as Italy's natural "wall" may go back even further to the Hannibalic wars. The mountain chain had been placed by whatever *numen* guided the order of nature, and in terms of transgression their demarcating symbolic function could perhaps be compared with that of the ritual *sulcus primigenius*, the original furrow that enclosed a properly founded Roman city, delineated the site of the walls, and was to be crossed only from the inside out, never from the outside in.[66] These perceptions endured to a degree even as late as the first century of the Empire.

There are few points that could be used to sum up how the Alps were represented as Italy's wall or bulwark during the Late Republican and Early Imperial periods. The first one is to note what was an ongoing debate,

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64 Suet. *Calig.* 51.3: *mox etiam audita rebellione Germaniae fugam et subsidia fugae classes apparabat, uno solacio adquiescens transmarinas certe sibi superfuturas prouincias, si uictores Alpium iuga, ut Cimbri, uel etiam urbem, ut Senones quondam, occuparent.*

65 *Hist.* 4.54: *fatali nunc igne signum caelestis irae datum et possessionem rerum humanarum Transalpinis gentibus portendi superstitione uana Druidae canebant.*

66 The microcosmic-macrocosmic parallelism is briefly touched by Carlà-Uhink, *"Caput mundi,"* 138 and Carlà-Uhink, *The "Birth" of Italy*, 158-59; cf. also. 193-4 on the connection of *pomerium* and Italy.

drawing largely on mythical and historical *exempla*, about who got to cross the Alps. The precedent set by Herakles/Hercules was perhaps the most significant one, and it was against this that later breaches of the Alps were measured. Political inflections were thus unavoidable. Hannibal himself became a figure in literature with implicit and explicit Herculean allusions.[67] Because the role of Hercules as a model to the Romans was a positive one in Livy's history, in Book 5 the historian needed to try and obscure the traditions about him crossing the Alps. In this context Hercules would have been too obvious an *exemplum* for the "invading" Gauls, who in turn were presented in Livy's work as wholly extraneous to Italy. The Roman ingroup's own legitimacy in crossing the Alps, perhaps unsurprisingly, goes unchallenged. It is obvious in Cicero, for instance, that Caesar could cross the Alps to Gaul without it being hubristic, while the barbarians crossing the Alps to Italy was deemed against the natural order of things. Yet there was a pushback to this argument clearly advanced by such writers as Timagenes or Trogus, who both had their own reasons for promoting the Gauls as the rightful emulators of Hercules' first Alpine crossing. Diodorus Siculus, on the other hand, saw in the hero a suitable precursor for Roman conquerors.

In antiquity, mountains generally tended to be viewed by city-dwellers as both unproductive no-man's-land and as locales with a numinous presence, like many out-of-the-way areas—even if overly schematic dichotomies between premodern "mountain gloom" and modern "mountain glory" have recently become rightly questioned.[68] They were certainly seen as barriers to movement, even if this in fact obscured the myriad ways in which upland societies made use of mountain environments. Yet another aspect—perhaps particularly important in the case of the Alps—was that ancient climatological theories may have fostered a symbolic assimilation between the harsh climates of the mountains and the harsh climate of the north, which became the principal model used to explain the perceived hostility of northern peoples towards Romans and Greeks.[69] Domination of the mountains may have been seen as something that had to be constantly reaffirmed from the point of view of the Romans, while the narrativization of the movement of hardened northerners could present the hostile "otherspace" of the mountain climes as more easily passable for the barbarians. Mountains were frequently associated with the past in antiquity, as Dawn Hollis and Jason König have noted, and the less culturally and materially sophisticated northerners—who themselves represented the past—were a natural "match" with the Alpine climate and landscape.[70]

The perceived numinosity of the Alps, on the other hand, brought with it another association that had deep roots in Greco-Roman thinking: the

67 See Claire Stocks, *The Roman Hannibal. Remembering the Enemy in Silius Italicus' Punica* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), 218-21.

68 See Hollis and König, "Introduction," 2-4, 6.

69 See e.g. Just. 24.4.3; Flor. *Epit.* 1.37.2: *atrox caelum, perinde ingenia*.

70 Hollis and König, "Introduction," 8-9; cf. also their points on mountain landscapes as resisting "anthropocentric certainties" (15). On barbarians as representing the past: Thuc. 1.6.6; Diod. Sic. 5.21.1-6. Cf. Wilfried Nippel, "Ethnic images in classical antiquity," in *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters*, ed. Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 33-44: 38.

way in which crossing natural barriers was used to indicate hubris. Xerxes' crossing of the Hellespont is the *locus classicus* here, but also relevant are the narratives of the Galatian attack on Greece in the 270s BCE and their divine punishment for this affront. As in Livy, the way Romans posed as the defenders of an Italy that was "naturally" delineated by the Alps set them up not just as a pious and moderate ingroup, but also as the protectors for all Italian groups against the "invading" northerners.[71] In the Greek sphere, there may be an interesting indication of the trauma of barbarian invaders penetrating a formerly safe barrier of mountains, since Plutarch mentions that the mountains of Acrourion in Central Greece were later known as "Galates," possibly reflecting the famous Galatian invasion of the third century BCE.[72]

As was already noted, the Romans perceived the permeability of the Alps in strictly unidirectional moral terms: while they themselves were allowed to cross the "uncrossable" mountains at will, this was denied to peoples regarded as barbarians, and thus external to Italy. The mythological exemplars—especially those projected back onto Hercules—affirmed the ingroup's right to emulate the Alpine crossing of this culture-bringing hero, even though it was agreed that Hercules had crossed the Alps from Gaul to Italy, and not the other way round. While the Romans on the whole saw themselves as the worthy inheritors of the *exemplum* of Hercules, I have discussed evidence of Late-Republican writers who sought to break with this tradition and even assimilate the Gallic Alpine crossings with the exemplar of Hercules. The Gauls were a good epistemic fit both in terms of the relevant geography and because of Hercules' perceived genealogical links to northerners. For Livy, this sort of application of the *exemplum* was unacceptable, and he thus needed to tone down the tradition about Hercules crossing the Alps, which Polybius had already rejected based on his philosophy of history.

Historical exemplars were brought into starker relief and epistemic salience by any recurring episode of danger perceived to originate from beyond the Alps. Particularly significant was the shock of the Cimbric Wars just before the year 100 BCE, which reawakened the symbolic and concrete role of the Alpine border and coloured most Late-Republican texts on the nature and intrinsic hostility of European barbarians. A new attack like Hannibal's seemed unlikely (unless perhaps by a renegade like Sertorius), but who knew what the northern *Barbaricum* could throw at Italy? Cicero's arguments about the benefits of Caesar's genocidal campaign in Gaul were influenced by these historical insecurities. It could also be suggested that Livy's dramatic narrative of the much-earlier Gallic Sack in Book 5 taps into the more recent horizon of Cimbri having breached the Alps and threatened the Italian heartland of the empire.

The literary reverberations of these events were still being felt in the Early Empire, and some parallel developments can even be detected in

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71 See Hdt. 7.33-36; on the Galatian attack into Greece see Diod. 22.3-5, 22.9; Paus. 1.4, 10.19-23; Just. 24.3.10-8.16; on defending Italy as a measuring stick: Just. 28.2.1-3.

72 Plut. *Phoc.* 33.7.

Late Antiquity. One very elucidating example from this stage could have been the attention Orosius devoted to the Caucasus mountains. A. H. Merrills has argued that Orosius' unprecedented interest in the Caucasian region may reflect the way in which around 390 or 391, within his own memory, the Huns had crossed the Caucasus mountains, a natural barrier for which no such *exempla* were widely known at the time.[73] This sort of epistemic heightening of a supposedly impenetrable geographical border after a traumatic breach could perhaps be dubbed a "Wellsian shock" through an analogy with the existential trauma conjured up by H. G. Wells in *The War of the Worlds* (1897), but perhaps most succinctly expressed in the refrain of Jeff Wayne's musical version of Wells' book:

> The chances of anything coming from Mars
> are a million to one, he said.
> The chances of anything coming from Mars
> are a million to one, but still, they come.[74]

Along the same lines, a potential Cimbric and Teutonic penetration of the supposedly "natural" barrier of the Alps was an equally portentous and confidence-shattering horizon for the Romans that fully awakened the *exemplum* of Hannibal's invasion, albeit with more savage and primal enemies. As I have shown, Late Republican reflections of this shock can be detected not only in historiographical texts but also mythical narratives, rhetorical speeches, and even etymologies. The natural barriers of mountains, rivers and seas are, in some ways, far *too* "good to think with," which lends implausible degrees of entitativity to regions and their populations. As such, the crossings of the Alps and the Caucasus, just like the crossing of the Danube and Rhine by many population groups in antiquity, are all too similar to the way in which contemporary crossings of the Aegean and other parts of the Mediterranean are narrativized, thus making the movement of people seem invasive, penetrative, or a breach of supposedly "natural" borders.

73 Andy H. Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 78, 87-92.

74 Jeff Wayne, "The Eve of War," *Highlights from Jeff Wayne's Musical Version of the War of the Worlds*. Columbia Records, 1981.

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