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In the Shadow of the Empire: Greek Ethnography of the North in the Late Hellenistic Period and the Role of Comparisons[1]

ABSTRACT: Comparing is a base operation in the description of foreigners. Yet, its role in Hellenistic ethnography is still understudied. The paper looks at practices of comparing in the ethnographic texts of Polybius, Posidonius and Strabo in the 2nd and 1st century BC, which served to integrate the (newly discovered) peoples of western Europe into Greek views of the world. It shows both that the conquest of these areas by the Romans changed Greek perceptions of western 'barbarians' and that older ethnographic traditions were still retained.

KEYWORDS: Ancient Ethnography, Celts, Iberian Peninsula, Polybius, Strabo, Posidonius, Comparisons, Barbarians

[1] The paper is loosely based on my PhD thesis, which was recently published as Gieseke 2023. My thanks go to Prof. Raimund Schulz (Bielefeld), Prof. Uwe Walter (Bielefeld), Dr. Maurits den Hollander (Tillburg), Dr. Francesco Reali (Bologna), Malte Speich (Bielefeld) and Jordy D. Orellana Figueroa (Tübingen) for inspiring or proofreading parts or the whole of this paper, and for providing valuable feedback.

> Many times […], when two (Gallic) armies approach each other in battle with swords drawn and spears thrust forward, these men (the philosophers) step forth between them and cause them to cease, as though having cast a spell over certain kinds of wild beasts. In this way, even among the wildest barbarians, does passion give place before wisdom, and Ares stands in awe of the Muses.[2]

This ethnographic comment by Diodorus Siculus (1st century BC), often attributed to Posidonius of Apamea (*ca.* 135–51 BC), is full of comparisons: on the one hand, the Celts are being related to dangerous animals, on the other hand, their druids are equalled with Greek philosophers, who tame the beasts like Orpheus did with his music. All ethnographical thought was based on comparing.[3] Behind these comparisons were various, dynamic practices that went back all the way to Herodotus or even Homer.[4] A practice will here be understood following the definition of Andreas Reckwitz as 'a routinised type of behaviour […] (consisting of) forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge.'[5] Ethnography as such, however, is a modern concept, and thus there was no clearly defined set of ethnographical practices: instead, ethnographic descriptions in antiquity were spread over various *genera*, from philosophical, medical and geographic treatises to historiography, from lyrics and epics to inscriptions and visual depictions on monuments, helmets or coins.[6] This paper is mainly interested in historiographical writers in the tradition of Herodotus who held a strong, but by no means

[2] D.S. 5.31.5 = *FGrHist* 87 F 116 = F169 Theiler. Translation from Oldfather 1939. 'πολλάκις δ΄ ἐν ταῖς παρατάξεσι πλησιαζόντων ἀλλήλοις τῶν στρατοπέδων καὶ τοῖς ξίφεσιν ἀνατεταμένοις καὶ ταῖς λόγχαις προβεβλημέναις, εἰς τὸ μέσον οὗτοι προελθόντες παύουσιν αὐτούς, ὥσπερ τινὰ θηρία κατεπάσαντες. Οὕτω καὶ παρὰ τοῖς ἀγριωτάτοις βαρβάροις ὁ θυμὸς εἴκει τῇ σοφίᾳ καὶ ὁ Ἄρης αἰδεῖται τὰς Μούσας.' The author had no access to BNJ and thus used the FGrHist citations for all relevant fragments.

[3] Perl 1988: 25.

[4] Schulz 2020a portrays this development in detail.

[5] Reckwitz 2002: 7.

[6] Woolf 2011: 13–17, Schulz 2020b: 392.

exclusive and almost always secondary interest in ethnographical topics, for these men formed part of a community of writers: they were tied together by an explicit knowledge, as every author referred to and attempted to rival his predecessors. Scholars in situations as different as the Ptolemaic secretary Agatharchides of Cnidus, who never visited the regions he described, or Posidonius, who was friends with influential Romans and travelled the whole Mediterranean, continued the practices of Herodotus in their 'community of practice'.[7] They sought to explore the non-Greek world for their audiences, and to do so, they needed to compare.

The practice of comparing is an everyday phenomenon.[8] Comparisons between Greeks and foreign peoples could serve various purposes: simple, explanatory comparisons were used to illustrate the characteristics of little-known regions and often accompanied the first contact.[9] On a second level, they were commonly followed by structuring comparisons, who assigned different literary *topoi*[10] to the ethnographical subjects.[11] Moral judgements could then be based on these classifications on a third level: on the one hand, by deploying legitimising comparisons, Greek writers distanced themselves from their ethnographic objects and assured themselves of their own cultural superiority. On the other hand, relativising comparisons could serve to break up the

[7] For Agatharchides cf. Lemser 2019.

[8] As such, it was an inevitable part of every ancient 'science', but especially in those concerned with foreign countries and peoples. Cf. Dueck 2005, Gieseke 2023: 27–28.

[9] The second *comparatum* in such comparisons had to belong to the knowledge the author shared with his readers and would therefore usually be taken from a Greek context; cf. Hartog 1988: 225–226.

[10] *Topoi* will here be understood as the information with which categories of ethnographic descriptions can be filled: for instance, the category 'appearance' could be filled with the *topos* 'all Germani are blond'. In this sense, *topoi* were first used by Norden 1920: 58. To be credible, the information had to be at least partially true: there were quite possibly more blond Germani than blond Greeks or Romans, but as a *topos* it was generalised to such a degree that an external spectator expected *every* German to be blonde. Lampinen 2021: 43 adequately speaks of "the written expressions of stereotypical thinking".

[11] Thus, Herodotus finds similarities between the inhabitants of coastal Scythia and the Greeks, while the Androphagi in the far North fit the descriptions of mythological monsters. Hdt. 4.17–18.

negative image of an ethnos. Finally, emphasising the singularity of a people and its *nomoi*[12] would acknowledge the distinct identity of the ethnographical subject in a similar way. These singularising statements were usually indirect comparisons, as the second *comparatum* was not named. Similar to incomplete syllogisms or enthymemes, a form of rational tool recommended by Aristotle, they assumed a shared knowledge between speaker/author and audience and left it to the latter to complete the argument in their own mind.[13] Usually, however, a comparison is a practice by which two objects (*comparata*), that share at least one similarity (assumption of homogeneity), are compared in a certain respect (*tertium comparationis*) for a given purpose (intention to compare). For instance, when Greek writers compared the Macedonians to the Celts (*comparata*), they first supposed that both of them were ethnic groups (homogeneity). The two objects were then compared in regard to e.g. their knowledge of Greek customs (*tertium*) to prove that the Macedonians were Greeks, while the Celts were not (intention).[14]

These ethnographical comparisons became especially prevalent during the Hellenistic age. The conquests of Alexander in Asia, followed by those of the Romans in the west, brought with them a wealth of new knowledge about the respective countries and peoples. Comparing the unknown with the known was the most popular way to make this wider world understandable.[15] Though this is equally true for earlier periods, the military and political changes of the late 4th century BC were accompanied by a revolution of the mind: Aristotle saw empirical research as the only way forward, and his Peripatos became one of four

[12] Here defined as customs, laws and traditions, after Schulz 2020a: 195–197, 233–234.

[13] Cf. Burnyeat 2012: 152–201 for this rhetorical device, its function and context. It could be aimed both at an elite audience, which was aware of such techniques, and at a broader public, like the citizen assemblies who would listen to political speeches. That these larger groups were also aware of geographic and ethnographic knowledge and *topoi* and had their own oral traditions is now shown by Dueck 2020 in some detail, but authors like Strabo (Strab. 2.5.1C109–110) did not intentionally write for them.

[14] Cf. Lloyd 2015: 30–33, Hartog 1988: 228–230.

[15] And even alternative techniques such as genealogies included practices of (ethnographic) comparing: for instance, Timaeus must have compared the Celts with other peoples before deciding to claim that they must be the descendants of Polyphemus and Galatea: *EtMag s.v.* Γαλατία = BNJ 566 Timaios F 69.

hugely influential schools of philosophy; the other three being Plato's Academy, the Stoa and the Kepos of Epicurus.[16] Their ultimate aim was to provide a moral guideline for the quotidian life of their followers. In order to do so, the philosophers needed to compare their empirical information with competing interpretations, as to be able to organise the various views of their school on a diverse range of topics into categories and concepts. Likewise, comparing was central to their 'scientific' enterprises: newly discovered animals were associated with creatures from Greece that seemed to resemble them, plants were systematised according to similarities, geographical features equalled familiar ones in the Aegean and positions of stars and planets put in relation with each other.[17] In historiography, this was even true for non-Greeks: the Babylonian Berossus, the Egyptian Manetho and the Roman Fabius Pictor compared their own 'ethnic' pasts with Greek chronologies so that they could define their own position in Greek history and the Greek speaking-world. In short, the Hellenistic was an age of comparison.

Since the campaigns of Alexander and the diadochi had established this Hellenistic *oecumene*, Greek speaking elites compared the unknown with the known from the perspective of a people that seemingly ruled most of what they perceived as the 'civilised' world. This confident outlook was increasingly challenged by the advance of Rome: the conquests first of Magna Graecia and Sicily and then the victories over the Antigonids and Seleucids shattered the Greek worldview and many Hellenes soon found themselves under the rule of a foreign, worse, 'barbarian' people.[18] Ethnographic writing both about the Romans themselves and the non-Greek groups they had subjugated played a vital role in the mental processing of the new reality. It helped Hellenic thinkers to 1) understand and explain the character of their new masters, 2) draw conclusions from the conquest of other lands for their own situation and 3) increasingly identify themselves with the Romans who were fighting some of the same 'barbarians' that had threatened

[16] Buchheim 2016: 52–60.

[17] Ritti 1977: 113–117; 123; Leroi 2014.

[18] For a longer discussion of 'barbarians' in the Hellenistic imagination cf. Gieseke 2023: 34–39. 'Barbarians'/ βάρβαροι is a source term and is used as such here, hence the inverted commas.

the Greek world.[19] Centre stage among these took the Celts: ever since they had ravaged Macedon and central Greece and subsequently founded kingdoms in Thrace and Phrygia in the 270s BC, they had become the stereotypical (northern) 'barbarians' in Greek imagination.[20] Yet, even the wisest Greek scholars knew little about the homelands of the Celts: only the Roman conquest of these regions brought concrete knowledge to Hellas and allowed men of letters to explore the Keltiké themselves. Most Greeks had been even less aware of the peoples of the Iberian Peninsula, a land they saw as the end of the world. Roman expansion in the west made it necessary to learn more about this region, too, however. Therefore, I intend to focus on the depiction of the Celtic and (Celt-)Iberian peoples of western Europe in Greek writings of the last two centuries BC, when these groups became the subjects of intensive ethnographic speculation for the very first time.

These observations raise a number of questions: first of all, what role did practices of comparing play in late Hellenistic ethnography? Which comparisons were used in what context, and can the typology above be validated by the analysis of the ancient sources? Furthermore, which developments can be discerned in ethnographical writing from the time of Polybius to that of Strabo, and how far did these authors remain rooted in the tradition?

To draw a coherent and meaningful picture, the analysis will concentrate on Polybius, Posidonius and Strabo, whose texts have survived in a great enough quality to allow us to draw at least indicative conclusions. Since both Strabo and Diodorus preserved fragments of the Posidonian writings, Diodorus, too, will feature in the investigation. The comments of other, less well-preserved authors will be added to complete the results, but the limitations of a journal article mean that

[19] Murray 1972: 201 spoke of a new awareness of the world.

[20] Aristotle had already characterised the Gauls as aggressive, irrational creatures of the cold north and after 280 BC, they appear as a threat to civilisation in the works of Callimachus, while the Aetolian League and the Attalid Kingdom in particular used victories over the attackers to legitimate their rule. Cf. Arist. *Pol.* 1324b; 1327b 24–34; *Probl.* 14.8.909b9–10; 15, 910a26–27; 16, 910a38–39; *Eth. Nic.* 1336a; Callimach. *Galat.* (Asper 2004) 356. For Aetolia: Champion (1996) 317–318; Paus. 10.19.4–23,13; *E.M.* 7400 = *IG* II/*IG* III², 680 = *Syll.*³ 408/*Delph. Inv.* 2275 = *IG* IX, I², 194b = *FD* III, 3, 215= *Syll.*³ 402. For the Attalids: Zanker 2000: 412–413; Fless 2002 passim.

the undertaking cannot be exhaustive.[21] In two ways, then, will the paper divert from older research: while Posidonius' discussions of the Gauls particularly have been the object of exhaustive examination, his technique of comparing has rarely been analysed before, even though it is central to ethnographic thinking.[22] And though many aspects of the works of Polybius and Strabo have been thoroughly scrutinised, their contributions to the ethnographical tradition have largely been overlooked.[23] In fact, they have only been taken seriously as authors that made use of ethnographic practices during roughly the last two decades, as key publications by Clarke, Woolf and Almagor & Skinner show.[24] This paper plans to follow up on these efforts and to offer a fresh view on ancient ethnography.[25]

[21] Among the other authors are Artemidorus, Asclepiades of Myrlea and Timagenes, who all wrote extensively either about Iberia or the Celtic lands. Earlier authors on the north and west, like Timaeus, will be considered as influential predecessors. Authors that said little about the western and northern parts of the *oecumene* such as Agatharchides or Nicolaus of Damascus cannot be treated here.

[22] The same is true for Polybius and Strabo. Ethnographic comparisons have long been seen as crucial for the works of the two most obvious ancient authors of ethnography, however; cf. Hartog 1988: 225–320 on Herodotus and Perl 1988 and Perl 1990 on Tacitus. Murray 1972: 200–201 emphasised that comparisons were equally important for Hellenistic ethnography, but did not systematically analyse the technique as such and claimed (id.: 210), that the influence of Herodotus and other classical authors on ethnographic writing ended with Posidonius.

[23] Frank W. Walbank never tackled the topic in any of his various works on Polybius, nor have eminent scholars of Strabo like Daniela Dueck or Johannes Engels specifically looked at ethnographical aspects of the *Geographika*. Lowe 2017 gives a good overview of Strabo's views on Iberia; more detailed is Griffiths 2013, who, however, does not specifically analyse the *Geographika* as a work with ethnographical interests.

[24] Clarke 1999; Woolf 2011; Almagor, Skinner 2013; especially the introduction on 1–12.

[25] Thereby also attempting not to fall back into the trap of trying to look 'past' the ancient *topoi* and ethnographic descriptions in general, which is less fruitful, as Lampinen 2021 passim has recently pointed out.

Polybius as an Ethnographic Writer

The *Histories* of Polybius of Megalopolis (*ca.* 200–118 BC) have been the subject of extensive analysis ever since the Renaissance.[26] Little attention, however, has been paid to Polybius' ethnographic descriptions of the 'barbarians'. Only a handful of studies have looked into his depiction of the Celts, while his passages about the Iberian Peninsula have mainly been investigated by Spanish scholars as a source for the history of ancient Hispania.[27] The obvious reason for this disinterest is the nature of Polybius' work: as an experienced officer, he primarily wrote a political-military history for Greek statesmen.[28] Yet, as he was convinced that the coming of Rome could only be told as part of a universal history, he was interested in 'the doings of nations, cities, and monarchs'[29] in the whole *oecumene*.[30] Polybius thought that the history of all peoples around the Mediterranean had been connected ever since the 140th Olympiad (220–216 BC): what happened in Greece had consequences for the Carthaginians, events in Babylon could influence the daily politics in Rome: this concept he called συμπλοκή.[31] He applied these ideas to the writing of history and found a role model in Ephorus, who had penned the first universal history.[32] And despite never mentioning him by name, Polybius was also influenced by Herodotus: like

[26] With Walbank the most prominent contributor: e.g., Walbank 1957–1979; Walbank 1972; Walbank 2002b.

[27] Urban 1991 and Berger 1992 gathered Polybius' comments on the Celts and put them into their respective historical context, while Williams 2001 drew a detailed picture of Greco-Roman ideas about and politics toward the cisalpine Celts. Alonso-Núñez 1985 was the first since Schulten 1911 to illustrate Polybius' opinion on the peoples of the Iberian Peninsula. The most important publications since then was the volume Santos Yanguas, Torregaray Pagola 2003. Yet, none of these authors attempted to analyse Polybius' descriptions as a contribution to the tradition of ancient ethnographical thinking and writing.

[28] Pol. 2.61.11; 3.7.5; 9.15; 31.30.1.

[29] Pol. 9.1.5. Translation from Paton/Walbank/Habicht 2011. 'τὰς πράξεις τῶν ἐθνῶν καὶ πόλεων καὶ δυναστῶν.'

[30] For his (intended) audience cf. Walbank 2002c.

[31] Quinn 2013; Vollmer 1990: 1–2; Eckstein 2013: 82. In such models, Polybius processed contemporary philosophical theories, especially those of the Stoics, in a syncretistic way: Strasburger 1965: 45–46; Ries 1975: 30. Baldry 1965: 177.

[32] Pol. 5.33.2.

the 'father of history' before him, he treated a world empire he knew from personal experience, he called his main work Ἱστορίαι, and he seems to have modelled several passages on Herodotean examples.[33] Both historians underlined the importance of autopsy and, accordingly, Polybius travelled widely in the *oecumene*: in the retinue of Scipio Aemilianus, he likely visited Iberia, North Africa, southern Gaul and the Alps, and, presumably after the destruction of Carthage, he led a naval expedition down the Atlantic coast of Africa.[34]

Even though generations of historians have been aware of Polybius' travels, few have engaged with his descriptions of foreign peoples. Due to the political-military orientation of the *Histories*, there are almost no excursions dedicated to lands or ethnic groups in the style of Herodotus. Instead, most of Polybius' comments on the character and lifestyle of the different inhabitants of the *oecumene* are dispersed throughout his forty books. Since he mainly presented a history of military and political events to his readers, and since by doing so he meant to explain why and how the Romans had been able to conquer large parts of the known world 'in less than fifty-three years',[35] it made more sense to him to add passing remarks on foreign peoples when they appeared in the narrative of his work rather than to dedicate whole books or chapters to them. There is, however, one exception, and that is book six about the Romans. Older research has not considered what survives of the book as a contribution to Greek ethnography, both since it focuses on the theory of the Roman constitution and due to our familiarity with

[33] For the last point, see McGing 2012. Murray 1972 convincingly shows every Hellenistic historian will have read at least part of Herodotus' *Histories* and Walbank 1972: 2–3 already points out the biographical similarities.

[34] Pol. 10.11.4; Walbank 1972: 24 (Iberia); Pol. 36.16.1; Walbank 1972: 11; Pol. 38.21.1–22.3 (North Africa); Strab. 4.2.1C190 = Pol. 34.10.6–7; Ath. *epit.* 8.332A = Pol. 34.10.1–4 (Gaul); Pol. 3.48.12 (Alps); Plin. *NH* 5.9 = Pol. 34.15.7; Schulz 2016: 308; Eichel,Todd 1976. Probably during the 130s, he accompanied Scipio on a diplomatic mission to Ptolemaic Egypt; Strab. 17.1.12C797–798 = Pol. 34.14.1–6.

[35] Pol. 1.1.5, translation from Paton/Walbank/Habicht 2010. 'οὐχ ὅλοις πεντήκοντα καὶ τρισὶν ἔτεσιν.'

the conception of a Greco-Roman world.[36] Yet, for most Greeks in Polybius' day, the Romans were no less 'barbaric' than Celts.[37] He sought to correct this image, not primarily out of sympathy for the Romans, but because he was convinced that they could not be overcome: accordingly, the Greeks would have to stop the fighting and accept the rule of their new overlords, which would also bring increased safety overall.[38] The ethnographical descriptions of the north-western 'barbarians' can only be understood within the context of such Greek views on the Romans, who were violently imposing their rule on both Greeks and the peoples of the West in the Late Hellenistic period.

In order to persuade his readers that they had to come to terms with the Roman dominion, Polybius illustrates the various strengths of their military, emphasising their tactical superiority when compared with the Macedonian phalanx.[39] The two *comparata* are compared in regard to their tactical adaptability: while the phalangites were only really effective (εὔχρηστος) on wide, level ground, the Roman soldier were effective (εὔχρηστος) in every situation, thanks to their armament and

[36] It is telling how Walbank in his influential monograph simply passes up the opportunity to look at any of what Polybius says in book 6 as ethnography; Walbank 1972: 153–154. Equally representative is the following statement of Elias Bickerman (1952: 81, n. 105): 'Polybius was not interested in these questions.' In the last 30 years, however, these notions have been challenged, and his understanding of Roman culture has been shown as complex and ambivalent, including elements of the characterisations of both 'barbarians' and Greeks. Especially useful are Martínez Lacy 1991, Champion 2004, Thornton 2010, Woolf 2011, Erskine 2012, Erskine 2013b, Champion 2018.

[37] Cf. Thornton 2010: 45, 76. In 6.3.1–4 Polybius explicitly claims to be the first Greek to describe the public and private institutions of the Romans in detail. Pro--Carthaginian Greek historians condemned Roman behaviour during the Punic Wars; D.S. 23.12.1; 15.2; 24. 3 with Baronowski 2011: 47–48.

[38] This is demonstrated by his discussion of the destruction of Carthage and its reception in the Greek world: The Carthaginians had given themselves over to the Romans in a *deditio*, hence Scipio Aemilianus could do with the city as he pleased: Pol. 36.9.3–17; Walbank 1972: 174–176; Baronowski 2011: 101–106. The moral questions had become irrelevant: since the Romans were invincible, there was simply no point in military resistance anymore. Thus, Polybius puts the blame of the wars of the 140s on those who decided to fight Rome, including his very own Achaean League, whose brutal destruction will have strongly shaped his views. Walbank 1972: 176–179; Erskine 2005: 241–243. At the same time, they were protectors against 'barbarians', as he emphasises in Pol. 2.35.

[39] Pol. 18.28–32.

training.[40] This allows him to conclude that the Roman way of fighting was clearly superior.[41] Elsewhere, Polybius cites the *topos* that the Romans always adopted the best *nomoi* of their enemies to defeat them.[42] With these relativising comparisons, Polybius directly attacked the conceptions of his Greek readers and showed them why they had lost against the Romans and why they should not fight them anymore. In this, he was once more a successor of Herodotus, who had emphasised the advantages of Persian *nomoi* and challenged the derogatory stereotypes of his readers, which were at odds with the historical successes of the Persian kings.[43] It was not, therefore, Polybius' aim to idealise the Roman military, rather, he emphasised its strengths to demonstrate that it could not be overcome.[44] With a force that was better organised, better supplied and more flexible than the Macedonian armies who had conquered half of the known world, the Romans were invincible and unique, and the same was true for other parts of their society and culture. A crucial element was their perfectly balanced, mixed constitution – singular in the known world for escaping the law of constant

[40] Pol. 18.32.9–10. The *tertium* is how εὔχρηστος, literally "how good to use", they were, a common word that Polybius also uses in a military function elsewhere: E.g., in Pol. 3.73.5 for Carthaginian soldiers. The term εὔχρηστο is often used as referring to humans or a group of humans; cf. Plat. Leg. 6, 777b (applied to ἄνθρωπος); IPriene 102.5 (δῆμος).

[41] Pol. 18.32.12–13.

[42] E.g., Pol. 6.25.3–11 with the example of Roman cavalry arming themselves after the Greek model, and a general conclusion in 11.

[43] Herodotus (1.135) had also ascribed the ability to adopt the best *nomoi* of their foes to the Persians. For his repeated critique of Greek *nomoi* cf. Schulz 2020a: 221–326.

[44] After all, he exposes shocking *nomoi* such as the beheading of prisoners on the forum (Pol. 1.7.10–12), which corresponded to the sacred *agora* of a *polis*, and mentions that Roman officials could even condemn their own sons to death; VI, 54, 5 with Erskine 2013b: 121–122. This was the παρανομία of 'barbarians', a transgression of everything that the Greeks considered right: παρὰ πᾶν ἔθος ἢ νόμον (6.54.5). Cf. Erskine 2013a: 241–244.

political degeneration – which even allowed them to survive the catastrophe of Cannae.[45]

Finally, Polybius analysed Roman religion as a social practice, which served to bind the common people and their political leaders together. In his 'ethnographic' view,[46] he realised that, in stark difference to the Greeks, the Roman elites were able to control the *demos* because they instilled a strong fear of the gods in their subject's minds.[47] What other Hellenic authors had dismissed as 'barbarian' superstition, Polybius identified as one of the sources of Roman power:

> But the quality in which the Roman commonwealth is most distinctly superior is in my opinion the nature of their religious convictions. I believe that it is the very thing which among other peoples (ἄλλοις ἀνθρώποις) is an object of reproach, I mean superstition, which maintains the cohesion of the Roman State.[48]

[45] Over the course of its history, it had naturally acquired features of all three 'good' forms of government (monarchy, aristocracy and democracy): Pol. 6.2.4–6. For a recent discussion: Moore 2017: 138. For him, history was guided by *tychē*, the power of fortune, and with Hannibal it had sent the Romans the greatest possible challenge. Pol. 6.2.7; 18.28.6–8; Deininger 2013: 83. The basic idea of the development of constitutions can be found in Pol. 6.4.7–10 and is then discussed in detail over the following chapters. There is no space here to explain the model, its sources or Polybius' lost 'archaeology' of Rome's early history (all that remains is 6.11.1–2), so it must suffice to point to 6.4.13 where Polybius claims that the natural development of Rome's constitution fits the ἀνακύκλωσις, which also follows the natural cycle of birth, growth and eventual death very well. It is important to note that Polybius consciously described an idealised form of reality that enabled him to compare the advantages of the Roman constitution to the disadvantages of other constitutions; Pol. 6.12.10. Cf. von Fritz 1954, Nicolet 1974, Blösel 1998, Lintott 1999: 16–26; Walbank 2002a The same idealisation can be found in his depiction of Italic landscapes, cf. Gieseke 2023: 148–150 for northern Italy and Athen. 1.31d = Pol. 34.11.1, Strab. 5.4.3C242 = Pol. 34.11.5–7 for the south.

[46] As a historian, he rejected religious explanations: Pol. 4.40.1–3, 15.12.3–11, Hau 2016: 67–68.

[47] Pol. 6.56.11–12. He follows an idea first proposed by the sophist Critias: S. Em, *adv. math*. IX, 54 with Müller 1997: 152–154.

[48] Pol. 6.56.6–7. Translation from Habicht/Paton/Walbank 2011. μεγίστην δέ μοι δοκεῖ διαφορὰν ἔχειν τὸ Ῥωμαίων πολίτευμα πρὸς βέλτιον ἐν τῇ περὶ θεῶν διαλήψει. [7] καί μοι δοκεῖ τὸ παρὰ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἀνθρώποις ὀνειδιζόμενον, τοῦτο συνέχειν τὰ Ῥωμαίων πράγματα, λέγω δὲ τὴν δεισιδαιμονίαν.

With ἄλλοις ἀνθρώποις, Polybius primarily refers to his Greek countrymen and the Carthaginians, who are unfavourably compared with the Romans. Again, he relativises the supposed primitivity of the Romans and turns the arguments of his predecessors against them: far from being a grave mistake, the retention of superstition was the main strength of the Roman system, making it much more robust than Greek states who educated the masses. The Romans had consciously maintained these old beliefs:[49] they are therefore rational actors who actively decided to retain some of the *nomoi* from their more 'barbarian' past that still served a purpose. In this, we can see another (indirect) singularising comparison: the Romans combined the best customs of Greeks and 'barbarians'.[50] His investigation of the Romans was meant not only to answer the question how the Romans had achieved their rule over the *oecumene*, but also to underline Polybius' personal authority as an ethnographic writer. His own practice of 'research' in Rome and among the Scipiones stands behind it. Once the sixth book of the *Histories* is seen as an ethnographical *logos*, it becomes apparent that he largely uses singularising comparisons to underline the unique character of the Romans and the incommensurability of their empire: he thus changes the practices of comparing of his ethnographic community. In this he once more resembles Herodotus, who praised many of the Persian *nomoi* in order to explain their successes.[51]

The contrast to Polybius' image of the 'northern barbarians' could not be greater. The Celts feature heavily in the narrative of the Second Punic War and its prelude. After all – according to Polybius – the length and scale of the Hannibalic War was not least the product of the earlier Gallic-Roman War of the 220s BC, which had forced the Romans to sign the Ebro Treaty in 226 BC and allowed Carthage to strengthen its position in Iberia.[52] Hence the attack on the cisalpine Gauls was a grave

[49] Pol. 6.56.9.

[50] Furthermore, in lengthy, ethnographic sections in the style of Herodotus, Polybius shows how burial rites served to motivate young men to strive for great deeds: Pol. 6.53.1–54.5. Cf. Eckstein 1995: 65–67.

[51] Schulz 2020a: 251–262. Polybius and Herodotus faced similar problems – a unique, mighty empire that threatened all Greeks – and chose similar solutions, as is also shown by McGing 2012, cf. Gieseke 2023: 67.

[52] Pol. 2.22.9–11. Cf. Urban 1991: 139–140.

mistake, and the culprit was the plebeian tribune Gaius Flaminius, whose policy had led to the outbreak of war.[53] Polybius hereby probably reflects the opinion of the Scipiones and takes a stance in a question of domestic Roman politics: a dangerous enterprise for a foreigner.[54] Therefore, he had to put at least part of the blame on the 'barbarians' and invokes a well-known *topos*: The cisalpine Insubres and Boii had convinced an Alpine warrior people called Gaesati to join their efforts by offering them generous rewards in gold.[55] This Gallic greed (πλεονεξία) was almost proverbial, stemming from the nearly constant presence of Celtic mercenaries in many Hellenistic armies and Brennus' raid of the treasures of Delphi.[56]

Despite this introduction, Polybius goes on to describe the campaign of the numerically inferior Gallic forces as cautiously planned and initially successful.[57] When the Romans confront their foes in a pitched battle at Telamon (Etruria) in 225 BC, however, Polybius resorts to the *topoi* of the Greek tradition, which would also have found the approval of his Roman readers – in fact, he may have already found these *topoi* in the account of Fabius Pictor. Pictor wrote in Greek, was one of Rome's first authors and certainly the first to describe foreign peoples in some detail, so Polybius would have been very interested in his writings.[58] Following Pictor, who fought at Telamon himself, he describes the scene vividly:[59] the Gauls impress the Romans with their sheer number, their tall bodies and loud voices and recklessly charge

[53] Pol. 2.21.8. In 2.33.7–8 he criticises the military leadership of Flaminius, now consul, in 223/222 BC.

[54] The Scipiones will have supplied him with sources, but most of his information on Gallia Cisalpina arguably came from the account of Fabius Pictor; cf. Cornell 2013: 48.

[55] Pol. 2.22.2–6.

[56] In 2.17.11 he says gold and cattle were their only possessions and in 3.78.5 he again portrays the Celts as only fighting for booty. Cf. Williams 2001: 90–92; González Rodríguez 2003: 155.

[57] Pol. 2.25.3–11; Urban 1991: 142. In 2.22.4 Polybius gives the Celtic force as counting 70 000 men, while the Romans, according to 24.3–8, mobilised 124 500 men for the campaign and left another 67 000 in Rome.

[58] Cf. Dion. Hal. *ant*. 1.6.2 for Pictor writing in Greek and for Lucius Cincius Alimentus, another early Roman historian, who may have written ethnographic passages.

[59] For the other statements on Pictor cf. Gieseke 2023: 136–137. Polybius did not blindly follow Pictor, however: Gieseke 2023, 170–171.

into the Roman formation.[60] And as the battle rages on, the attackers are quickly worn down, because they are not made for lengthy exertion, let alone in the warm climate of Etruria.[61] This is a hint towards the ideas of climatic determinism, which had been so popular in Greek thought since the 5th century BC.[62] As northerners who were brave, but used to the cold of the north, their high spirits quickly waned in the warmer, southern climate.[63] The savage Gaesati, who had come from the north before the campaign, even fight naked and become an easy target for the javelins of the Roman infantry.[64] Nudity was one of the classic markers of the Celts in Hellenistic art and thus a widespread *topos*.[65] Additionally, Polybius compares the moral behaviour of both sides: while the Celts directly carry the head of the fallen consul Gaius Atilius Regulus to their kings, even though the battle is far from won, the Romans, following their eventual victory, take care to give all the booty of the Gauls back to their previous owners.[66] On the one hand, the Gauls show typical 'barbarian' ὕβρις in celebrating the capture of a trophy before actually achieving victory, on the other hand, even when

[60] Pol. 2.29.6–7; 33.2 (charge), referring to a second battle in 223 BC. Hippocr. *AWP* 24 had already stated that the mountain people of Europe had tall bodies. The idea of climatic zones goes as far back as Parmenides of Elea, for whom Boia 2000: 18–19. The author of Περὶ ἀέρων, ὑδάτων, τόπων then postulated a causal relationship between ecological factors and the human character; he was also one of the earliest thinkers to speculate about the influence of the sun and its radiation: Hippocr. *AWP* 1; Müller 1997: 131–137; in more detail Jouanna 1996. Vitruvius, possibly following Posidonius, later explicitly claimed that the lack of development of the northerners was due to low levels of sunshine; Vitr. 6.1.3 = *FGrHist* 87 F 121; Müller 1997: 291–293. Loud voices are mentioned by Posidonius/Plutarch in Plut. *Marius* 20, 2 = F201 Theiler and the large number of 'barbarians', finally, was applied to every foe the Greeks had faced.

[61] The short endurance of the 'northern barbarians' is clearly formulated in Vitr. 6.1.9–10 = *FGrHist* 87 F 121 = F71 Theiler.

[62] The author of Περὶ ἀέρων, ὑδάτων, τόπων had postulated a causal relationship between ecological factors and the human character; see Hippocr. *AWP* 1; Müller 1997: 131–137.

[63] Again, see Vitr. 6.1.9–10 or Arist. *Pol.* 1324b; 1327b 24–34, cf. Gieseke 2023, 138–139.

[64] Pol. 2.30.1–4.

[65] See Kistler 2009 for an extensive analysis.

[66] Pol. 2.28.10 (Regulus); 2.31.3 (booty).

successful, the Romans do not take more than they are entitled to.[67] The historian thus establishes a legitimising order between the exemplary Romans and the irrational Celts.[68] Accordingly, he concludes: 'Every single step that the Gauls took […] (was) commended to them rather by the heat of passion (θυμός) than by cool calculation (λογισμός)'.[69] It was obvious for his readers that λογισμός described how Greeks would have approached the war. Meanwhile, Aristotle had already defined the θυμός as the defining attribute of the Gauls and this would have been well known.[70] For Polybius, this trait was the source of all of the Celts' abominable attributes: from their lack of order, sudden eruptions of violence and unreliability as allies to their perfidiousness.[71] His legitimising comparisons between the order and tactical adaptability of the Roman troops and the mindless charges of the Celts makes it clear that he wants to portray the Romans as agents of such Hellenic λογισμός. This served the aim to change the perceptions of his audience about the Romans as aggressive 'barbarians'.[72]

Having thus characterised the (cisalpine) Gauls as 'northern barbarians', it comes somewhat as a surprise that Polybius regards their home region, the Po valley, as one of the most prospering regions in the

[67] This 'hybristic' behaviour was a result of their unrestricted emotions, their θυμός, which Greek authors also attributed to other 'barbarian' enemies like the Persians, cf. Steinbock 2013: 52, 143, 147.

[68] Cf. Berger 1992: 520.

[69] Pol. 2.35.3. Translation from Paton/Walbank/Habicht 2010. 'διὰ τὸ μὴ τὸ πλεῖον ἀλλὰ συλλήβδην ἅπαν τὸ γινόμενον ὑπὸ τῶν Γαλατῶν θυμῷ μᾶλλον ἢ λογισμῷ βραβεύεσθαι.'

[70] Aristot. *pol*. 1327b 24–34; Aristot. *probl*. XIV, 8, 909b 9–10; 15, 910a 26–27; 16, 910a 38–39.

[71] Pol. 3.43.12; 5.111.1–7 (lack of discipline); 2.19.3; 18.37.9 (violence); 2.5.4–7.5 (traitors).

[72] For the last point, see above 107–109. Obviously, Polybius' work would only have been read by the elite, but since it became a landmark contribution in ancient historiography, certain information from it may have disseminated through wider parts of society and influenced their behaviour: Dueck 2020: 111–124 shows this with the example of proverbs. A further comparison should be noted: Polybius claims the swords and shields of the Romans were much more suitable for melee than those of the Gauls; Pol. 2.30.8.

oecumene. 'Its fertility is not easy to describe',[73] he comments, before supplying a list of prices for food and wine in the region, which are considerably lower than those elsewhere.[74] The differences to his native Peloponnese with its dry hills and rocky mountains are only too apparent. Gallia Cisalpina had all the conditions for a thriving, affluent civilisation, yet its inhabitants appear to be savage northerners. This discrepancy could only be explained by history: in a long distant past, the valley had been occupied by the Etruscans, but in the 5th century Celtic invaders overran the land and, according to Polybius, destroyed the towns to continue their old lives as primitive (semi-)nomads in a new home.[75] The skewed picture serves to underline the differences between the Gallic 'barbarians' on the one side and urban cultures like Etruscans, Romans or Greeks on the other:[76] while the Greeks came to foreign lands to found new cities, the Gauls came to destroy existing cities.

Even in Polybius' eyes, the climate of the Po valley was not without consequences for the Celts, however: its heat weakened them and they became victims of their hardier relatives who still lived in the Alps and occasionally raided them.[77] The pleasant plain, which evokes the image of the spring like Asiatic country in the influential Pseudo-Hippocratic work Περὶ ἀέρων, ὑδάτων, τόπων, degenerated them just like the

[73] Pol. 2.15.1. Translation from Paton/Walbank/Habicht 2011. 'περί γε μὴν τῆς ἀρετῆς οὐδ᾽εἰπεῖν ῥᾴδιον.'

[74] Pol. 2.15.1–6. For an interpretation of the prices cf. Walbank 1957–1979, vol. 1: 176.

[75] In 2.17.8–12 Polybius presents a short ethnographic excursus on the lifestyle of the cisalpine Gauls. Among other things, he claims they only possessed gold and cattle and lived in tiny, unwalled villages. This description not only contradicts the results of archaeological research, such as the excavations on Monte Bibele near Bononia, which demonstrate a continued, if less intensive, occupation of the Etruscan city; Frey 1995: 524–528; Williams 2001: 201; Vitali 2006. In fact, Polybius himself mentions the cultural exchange between Etruscans and Gauls (2.17.3) and the existence of a capital of the Insubres, Mediolanum (Pol. 2.34.10–14; in the place of Etruscan Melpum).

[76] Berger 1992: 123; Williams 2001: 80–81; González Rodríguez 2003: 160–162.

[77] Pol. 3.79.4 (heat), Pol. 2.18.4 (raids).

Etruscans before them.[78] In stark contrast, Polybius portrays the Alps as cold, remote and altogether hostile, producing savage men for whom nothing was sacred, not even the wreaths that were respected as signs of peace by 'nearly all the barbarians'.[79] Thus the cisalpine Gauls suddenly appear much less 'barbaric'; in fact, Polybius had explained their reasons for the war against the Romans, while the Alpine Celts only fought for the sake of fighting, like wild beasts.[80] These relativising comparisons are only indirect: not once does Polybius explicitly praise the cisalpine Celts – the negative stereotypes prevail. In the context of Roman experiences with the Celts and the view Polybius will have found in his 3rd century Greek sources, this is not surprising: though he could certainly insert nuances, a Greco-Roman audience still expected a largely negative interpretation of an ethnic group that was widely seen as a common enemy.[81]

A short look at his discussion of Iberia demonstrates a similar contrast between north and south. Polybius was one of the first Greeks who wrote about the peninsula on the basis of his own autopsy, a fact he was very proud of.[82] He may have seen the silver mines inland of New Carthage with his own eyes[83] and his account of their incredible revenues testifies to the wealth of southern Iberia. It was to show his readers both why the Romans had risked so much for its conquest in the

[78] Hippocr. *AWP* 12. If Backhaus 1976: 172 is right that the region should be identified with Ionia, Polybius might have intentionally reminded his reader of this classic example – after all, Ionia had also been the crown of Greek civilisation in the 6th century before being conquered and defeated (in the Ionian Revolt) by the Persians.

[79] Pol. 3.52.3. Translation from Paton/Walbank/Habicht 2011. 'σχεδὸν πᾶσι τοῖς βαρβάροις.' As Hannibal's army began their ascent of the Alps, the tribes offered their support under wreaths. Yet, as soon as the Carthaginians were in trouble, they betrayed them – only Hannibal's genius saved his forces; Pol. 3.52.3–8.

[80] As discussed above, for Polybius, Flaminius was the actual culprit. In difference to that, the alpine Celts attacked Hannibal's army even though he came in peace; cf. further Pol. 2.19.1–4.

[81] Individuals such as the Galatian ruler pair Ortiagon and Chiomara can appear in a different light (on them: Gieseke 2024: 10–13), but not the whole ethnos.

[82] E.g., in his Herodotean description of New Carthage, he assures his readers he had visited the city himself and had its circumference measured to correct older statements: Pol. 10.11.4.

[83] Pédech 1956: 14–18; Alonso-Núñez 1985: 265.

past and that Rome had almost limitless resources in the present day.[84] Both points are further underlined by what we can gather on his image of Turdetania, the southernmost country of Iberia: in the same way as he did with the Po Valley, Polybius cites prices for daily products to illustrate the fertility and productivity of the region.[85] Such an unusually quantitative approach was probably influenced by his Roman sources and thus a novel ethnographic practice. Due to the favourable climate, the Turdetanians are peaceful and cultured. Once again, there are apparent parallels to the pleasant Asian country, but this time the character of the inhabitants matches the character of the environment.[86] The qualities and prosperity of the Turdetanians even affected their Celtic neighbours, the Celtici, according to Strabo (citing Polybius): "The prosperity of their country results in the Turdetani as well as the Celts, owing to their proximity, or as Polybius says, owing to their kinship, having a quiet and orderly character."[87] The relativising comparison affords the Celtici a similar level of 'civilisation' as that of the Turdetanians: separated from their cold and barren home in the north, they have found a much more amenable environment in southern Iberia, which provides them with everything they need. Over time, they have apparently mixed with the natives,[88] so that Polybius can speak of their

[84] An important argument in his attempt to convince the leading men of Greece that further fighting against the Romans was futile. Cf. Walbank 1972: 176–179; Erskine 2005: 241–243 and e.g. Pol. 36.17.12–15 on the war of the Romans against the Macedonian pretender Andriscus. The discussion of the Iberian silver mines can be found in Strab. 3.2.10C147–8 = Pol. 34.9.8–11.

[85] Ath. *epit.* 8.330C = Pol. 34.8.4–10; further Ath. *epit.* 7.302E = Pol. 34.8.1–2 and Strab. 3.2.7C145 = Pol. 34.8. 3. In the manuscript Athenaeus puts Lusitania, not Turdetania. However, Walbank 1957–1979, vol. 3: 599, 601 thought this a mistake and assumed Polybius originally referred to Turdetania. This hypothesis is supported by Strab. 3.2.7C145, who located the oaks mentioned here off the coast of Roman Carteia (now San Roque near Algeciras) and thus in the area he called Turdetania. In addition, Strabo's representation of Turdetania is very similar to what Polybius says in the Athenaeus passage; Strab. 3.2.

[86] Cf. Hippocr. *AWP* 12.

[87] Strab. 3.2.15C151 = Pol. 34.9.3, translation from Paton, Walbank, Habicht 2012.

[88] After all, this is the later explanation of Posidonius/Diodorus for the name "Celtiberians": After initial enmities between the Iberians and the Celtic newcomers, the two groups had found a way to coexist peacefully and, through intermarriages, became a new ethnic group, the Celtiberians; Diod. 5.33.1 = *FGrHist* 87 F 117 = F 89 Theiler.

kinship (συγγένεια), and their character had radically changed.[89] The difference to Polybius' interpretation of the cisalpine Gauls, who had only become 'soft' through the influence of the climate, is striking: he must have been so impressed by Turdetania's highly developed society that he grants the Turdetanians the power to 'civilise' 'barbarians' – as if they were Greeks or Romans.

This idealising depiction was plausible for Greek readers because they knew southern Iberia from the stories of Tartessus and the adventures of Heracles in the far west.[90] In fact, in a fragment preserved by Athenaeus, Polybius consciously likens the wealth of the Turdetanians to that of the Phaeacians:

> The splendour of the table utensils of the house of Menelaus as described by Homer recalls Polybius' description of the house of a Spanish king, who, he says, vied with the Phaeacians in luxury, except that the bowls in the middle of the house which were made of gold and silver were full of beer.[91]

Through this structural comparison, Polybius creates a link with the Homeric myths, addressing the pre-existing knowledge of his readers about (southern) Iberia. Yet, he emphasises that the Turdetanians are drinking beer (οἶνος κρίθινος, "barley wine"), not wine: perhaps, they

[89] Strabo, however, adds ἀλλ' ἐκείνοις μὲν ἧττον: τὰ πολλὰ γὰρ κωμηδὸν ζῶσιν after the sentence cited. If this comment can be attributed to Polybius as well, as Walbank 1957–1979, vol. 3: 603 tentatively suggested, the Celtici would be much more similar to the Gauls of Northern Italy.

[90] Polybius' contemporary Pseudo-Scymnus locates the island of Heracles' adversary Geryon, Erythea, off the coast of Gades, while Ephorus had named the island of Gades itself Erythea. Ps. Scymn. 150–158 = *FGrHist* 70 F129b; Plin. *HN* 4.119 = *FGrHist* 70 F 192a. Both follow Hdt. 4.8.2.

[91] Ath. *epit.* 1.16C = Pol. 34.9.14–15. Translation from Paton/Walbank/Habicht 2012. Athenaeus speaks of the palace of Menelaus, but his description fits that of the wealth of Alcinous in Hom. *Od*. 7.88–106, as Walbank 1957–1979, vol. 3: 608 has rightly pointed out and it has therefore been adjusted in editions both of the Greek text and the translation**.** Again, the allocation to Turdetania is partly speculative as Athenaeus only says the king was Iberian, but it best fits their description. τοιοῦτον δέ τινα ὑφίσταται τῇ κατασκευῇ καὶ λαμπρότητι οἵανπερ Πολύβιος Ἴβηρός τινος βασιλέως οἰκίαν. [15] ὃν καὶ ἐζηλωκέναι λέγει τὴν τῶν Φαιάκων τρυφὴν πλὴν τοῦ τοὺς κρατῆρας ἐν μέσῳ τῆς οἰκίας ἑστάναι πλήρεις οἴνου κριθίνου, ἀργυροῦς ὄντας καὶ χρυσοῦς.

had also taken up a few of the customs of the neighbouring Celtici over the many centuries that had passed since the days of the Phaeacians and Tartessians.

Polybius' image of the other Iberians can only be extracted from his narration of the Second Punic War.[92] The inhabitants of the Mediterranean coast also appear as urbanised peoples[93] and seemingly share the wealth of the Turdetanians: at Cannae, Polybius depicts them as wearing tunics bordered with purple – an indirect, structural comparison with the affluent Turdetanians and the Phoenicians, under whom they are now fighting, for Phoenicia was of course the origin of the purple.[94] However, Polybius also cites several cases of treachery against both Romans and Carthaginians to prove that they are 'barbarians' nonetheless.[95] This tendency to desert their allies (ἀθεσία) was generally seen as a hallmark of the Celts and hence it comes as no surprise that Polybius also ascribes it to the Celtiberians, who were dwelling in the interior of the peninsula.[96] They had betrayed the Scipiones at the start of the Second Punic War and had blatantly deceived their Carthaginian allies before the Battle of the Great Plains in 203 BC.[97] Yet, they were continuously hired by more 'civilised' powers, and this was not only

[92] Under the term 'Iberians' Polybius usually understands only the inhabitants of the Mediterranean coast of Spain and I will use it in this sense; Ciprés Torres 1999: 142.

[93] See for instance his portrayal of the Edetanian city Saguntum in Pol. 3.17.2–3.

[94] Pol. 3.114.1–4.

[95] In Pol. 10.34.1–35.8 Andobales and Mandonius, leaders of the Ilergetes, and Edeco of the Edetani change sides from Carthage to Rome, for which Polybius shows some sympathy, but later, Andobales and Mandonius also betray the Romans, thus confirming the 'barbarian' stereotype; Pol. 11.29–31. Earlier, he mentioned the seemingly loyal Iberian prince Abilyx, who betrayed the Carthaginians because he expected a Roman victory; 3.98.2–99.7.

[96] Polybius treats Gallic ἀθεσία e.g. in 2.32.8; 3.70.4.

[97] Polybius says the Celtiberian mercenaries at this battle had no hope of being spared by Scipio Africanus, because they had betrayed his father and uncle at the start of the war; Pol. 14.8.9–10. These events are related by Liv. 24.49.7–8; 25.33.1–3. Before the Battle of the Great Plains, the Celtiberians had told their Carthaginians allies they would number 10 000 men, although they were only 4000; Pol. 14.7.7.

due to their bravery (ἀνδρεία):[98] their swords were of the highest quality and they were tactically flexible fighters.[99] Their reputation was so great that during the conflict Polybius calls the 'Fiery War' (πύρινος πόλεμος) in the 150s BC, a panic broke out in Rome that spread even to the ranks of the military tribunes.[100] His comparison with wars in the Eastern Mediterranean is telling: while those were usually decided by a single pitched battle, the conflict in Celtiberia saw continuous fighting that only ever stopped during the night. Though the Celtiberians were on the one hand typical representatives of the 'northern barbarians',[101] Polybius on the other hand implicitly portrays them as far more dangerous than other Celts. None of these are explicitly mentioned as a *comparatum*, and yet the whole depiction of the Celtiberians is a relativising and structural comparison. First, it is relativising because it challenges the typical notions of Celts as mad warriors who appeared much more terrifying than they actually were. Though the Celtiberian mercenaries of the Carthaginians had claimed to be 10 000 men instead of their real number of 4000, they still fought better than the 26 000 Carthaginians and Numidians at the Battle of the Great Plains combined.[102] And secondly, it is a structural comparison since Polybius leaves no doubt that

[98] They proved their ἀνδρεία precisely in the Battle of the Great Plains: There they showed up to fight for the Carthaginians even though defeat was likely and would mean certain death, and thus when the Punic line broke, the Celtiberians alone resisted the Roman advance and fought until the bitter end: Pol. 14.8.9–14.

[99] Swords: Pol. *Sud*. (s.v. μάχαιρα) Fragm. 179 Büttner-Wobst = Fragm. 96 Hultsch = Fragm. 100 Bekker = F 182 Olson. Tactics: Pol. *Sud.* (s.v. ἴδιον) Fragm. 163 Büttner-Wobst = Fragm. 95 Hultsch = Fragm. 99 Bekker = F 166 Olson. In the latter fragment, Polybius reports that their horses were trained well enough to stay back and wait on the return of their riders when they decided they had to dismount to aid the Celtiberian infantry.

[100] Pol. 35.1.1–6 (Fiery War); Pol. 35.4 (panic).

[101] In his description of the peace negotiations in Rome in 152 BC, Polybius underlines the ὕβρις of the Arevaci, the most powerful of the Celtiberians: despite Roman successes, they were not ready to yield and demanded a return to the *status quo ante bellum*; Pol. 35.2.13–15.

[102] Pol.14.7.7 (number of Celtiberians); 14.7.9 (the whole army numbered 30 000 men); 14.8.8–14 (the battle).

the Celtiberians *were* Celts, yet within the peoples of the Keltiké, they took place of pride.[103]

In his extant passages on the peoples of Hispania, structural comparisons dominate and divide them into two groups: the wilder, more primitive and bellicose Celtiberians and their neighbours in the north,[104] and the more civilised, developed and amicable Iberians on the Mediterranean and southern coast, with the Turdetanians being the most advanced group. While the northerners share many traits with other Celtic *ethne*, the Iberians and Turdetanians in particular are much closer to Polybius' Greek readers. Both groups have two attributes in common, however, which explain the Roman struggles in the far west: thanks to their ἀνδρεία they inflicted many defeats on the Romans, and due to their ἀθεσία Roman control over Iberia had remained precarious. Polybius was apparently well able to distinguish between different groups of foreigners and even conceded that 'barbarians' could principally attain a higher level of development, as is shown by the Celtici.[105] On a macro level, however, he still often reiterated the classic dichotomy between Greeks and (northern) 'barbarians', reflecting the violent experiences of Greeks and Romans with these peoples in the 3rd and 2nd century BC.

The ethnography of Posidonius

The following decades brought significant changes: Scipio Aemilianus' destruction of Numantia in 133 BC, the establishment of Gallia Narbonensis in 118 BC and the weakening of the Galatians in Asia Minor meant that fewer and fewer Greeks experienced Celtic attacks.[106] At the same time, the expansion of Roman rule in the west continued to open up the Barbaricum for Greek thinkers. One of them, Posidonius of Apamea, undertook a lengthy trip from Italy through Gaul and Iberia

[103] Significantly, he always 'only' speaks of the ἀνδρεία or τόλμα of the Celts and Celtiberians, never of ἀρετή, which is reserved for Greeks and Romans; cf. Gieseke 2023: 139; 200–201.

[104] Cf. Pol. 3.14.2; 10.7.5 (Carpetani); 3.14.1; Strab. 3.4.13C162 = Pol. 34.9.13 (Vaccaei); further Schulten 1911: 576; Alonso-Núñez 1985: 266.

[105] Cf. Scherr 2022: 191–195.

[106] Similarly, Schulz 2016: 321.

in the 90s BC.[107] Like Polybius, he had excellent contacts within the Roman nobility.[108] Yet unlike his predecessor, he was not a pragmatic man of the military, but a Stoic philosopher and polymath. Posidonius visited the countries of the west specifically to obtain new knowledge for his research in natural philosophy and history. Although mostly interested in visiting Gades on the *okeanos* to prove the dependence of the tides on the influence of the moon, he also intended to illustrate the Roman conquest of southern Gaul and the *nomoi* of the Celts in his *Histories*. While the title of the work, the ethnographical digressions and the emphasis on personal autopsy followed the role models of Herodotus and Polybius, Posidonius interpreted the world from his very own perspective: in his philosophical theory, the whole earth was one living organism, within which a divine being, the world *logos*, had assigned a meaningful task to every living being, from flowers to animals to humans. Therefore no one, not even the most savage 'barbarian', could *a priori* be bad or evil.[109] Such a conviction had obvious consequences for his ethnography, which has only come to us in fragments from his *Histories* and a 'scientific' treatise called *On the Ocean*.

In the following, the editions of Jacoby, Theiler and Malitz will be followed in attributing fragments in Diodorus' *Library of History* to

[107] I am following the dating of Malitz 1983: 13, who also discussed Posidonius' route (170). Malitz is supported by Tierney 1959–1960, Rankin 1987 and Cesa 2019: 212 in thinking that Posidonius travelled outside the borders of Gallia Narbonensis. Nash 1976, Sassi 2001: 128, Maier 2012: 10 and Lampinen 2014 strongly object to this claim and point out that only Posidonius' visit to Massalia and its immediate hinterland is safely attested (by Strab. 3.4.17C164–5 = *FGrHist* 87 F 58a = F 269 EK = F 25 Theiler). The problem cannot definitely be resolved – though I strongly reject the idea presented by Rankin 1987: 75 that Posidonius might have visited the northern coast of Gaul or Britannia (!). For the present debate it shall suffice to focus on the fact that Posidonius had some first-hand knowledge of Gaul and access to reliable sources or personal experience of the Gallic headhunt and their banquets: Strabo claims that Posidonius had seen the practice of the headhunt and the exhibition of the trophies himself, before it was later forbidden by the Roman authorities; Strab. 4.4.5.C201 = *FGrHist* 87 F 55 = F 274 EK = F 34 Theiler.

[108] See e.g. Cic. *Att.* 2.1.2; Plut. *Cicero* 4.5 = T 29 EK (Cicero); Strab. 11.1.6C492 = *FGrHist* 87 T 8a; Plin. *HN* 7.112 (Pompey).

[109] The most authoritative discussion of Posidonius' philosophical ideas can still be found in Reinhardt 1921.

Posidonius.[110] The great parallels between the passages in the *Library* and the safely attested fragments in Athenaeus and Strabo remain the main argument for following this school of thought.[111] There can also be no doubt that Posidonius stood in the Herodotean tradition of ethnographic thought, nor that he was a central link between Polybius and Strabo: the Apamean was a pupil of Panaetius of Rhodes, who probably knew Polybius, he also wrote extensively on the northern 'barbarians' and, like Strabo, composed a *History after Polybius*.[112] Furthermore, his grandson Aristodemus was the principal teacher of Strabo in the latter's youth.[113] Most importantly, Posidonius was well connected in both Greek and Roman circles, unlike Diodorus, and visited the west himself, thereby gaining first-hand knowledge of the peoples he would later describe. However, while Diodorus may not have been as original as Posidonius, recent scholarship has rightly pointed out that he was a serious historiographical author in his own right.[114] Therefore, the fragments in the *Library* shall not be treated as direct quotes from Posidonius' text, and accordingly, deformations, purposeful changes and abbreviations will be taken into account.[115]

Posidonius began his extensive investigations in Gaul. Though it is unclear how far exactly he advanced into the interior, his in-depth descriptions of Gallic banquets speak at the very least for well-informed

[110] Jacoby's *FGrHist* 87, Theiler 1982a & Theiler 1982b, Malitz 1983.

[111] Gieseke 2023: 212–216.

[112] Panaetius: Vell. 1.13.3; col. 56, ed. Traversa p. 78; Cic. *rep*. 1.34. I do not intend to argue for the existence of a Scipionic circle, but it does at least seem likely that Polybius knew the writings of Panaetius, though not as well as Posidonius would. For both authors choosing to write a *History after Polybius* see Engels 1999: 164.

[113] Strab. 14.1.48C650, Dueck 2000: 8.

[114] Cf. Sacks 1990 or Sulimani 2011. Yet, many remain unconvinced of Diodorus' talents, see, e.g., Rathmann 2016: 37–42, with further bibliography in 38 n. 101, and Corcella 2017. I cannot adequately contribute to this debate here, but the ongoing criticism of Diodorus' originality presents a number of serious arguments, which certainly make it possible to follow the 'Posidonian school' in regard to the fragments – albeit only within a critical framework that does prevent a blind equation of Posidonian and Diodoran texts. This also prevents the pitfall of simply stripping Diodorus of all his more complex passages, as Clarke 1999: 132 cautioned against.

[115] Thus also following the warnings issued by Kidd 1988.

sources, if not for personal participation.[116] At first glance, this excursus seems to adhere to common *topoi* about the northerners: the text in the *Library* highlights their wild eating habits and compares their looks to those of satyrs:

> The Gauls are tall of body, with rippling muscles, and white of skin, and their hair is blond, and not only naturally so, but they also make it their practice by artificial means to increase the distinguishing colour which nature has given it. For they are always washing their hair in lime-water, and they pull it back from the forehead to the top of the head and back to the nape of the neck, with the result that their appearance is like that of Satyrs and Pans, since the treatment of their hair makes it so heavy and coarse that it differs in no respect from the mane of horses. Some of them shave the beard, but others let it grow a little; and the nobles shave their cheeks, but they let the moustache grow until it covers the mouth. Consequently, when they are eating, their moustaches become entangled in the food, and when they are drinking, the beverage passes, as it were, through a kind of a strainer.[117]

The structural comparison puts the Gauls on one level with mythical half-monsters and confirms the 'barbarian' image of Polybius and other

[116] Even Nash, who insisted that Posidonius' travels beyond Massalia are not proven, admitted that his descriptions fit archaeological finds (Nash 1976: 123) and Kistler 2009: 92–101 demonstrates that Posidonius' description of the outward appearance of the Gauls can be related not only to Hellenistic art, but also to the coins of the Celts themselves, thereby possibly reflecting his own autopsy since he would have seen Celts himself on his travels.

[117] D.S. V5.28.1–3 = *FGrHist* 87 F 116 = F 169 Theiler. Translation from Oldfather 1939. Cf. Ath. *epit.* 4.151E–152D = *FGrHist* 87 F 15 = F 67 EK = F 170 Theiler. Οἱ δὲ Γαλάται τοῖς μὲν σώμασίν εἰσιν εὐμήκεις, ταῖς δὲ σαρξὶ κάθυγροι καὶ λευκοί, ταῖς δὲ κόμαις οὐ μόνον ἐκ φύσεως ξανθοί, ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ τῆς κατασκευῆς ἐπιτηδεύουσιν αὔξειν τὴν φυσικὴν τῆς χρόας ἰδιότητα. Τιτάνου γὰρ ἀποπλύματι σμῶντες τὰς τρίχας συνεχῶς {καὶ} ἀπὸ τῶν μετώπων ἐπὶ τὴν κορυφὴν καὶ τοὺς τένοντας ἀνασπῶσιν, ὥστε τὴν πρόσοψιν αὐτῶν φαίνεσθαι Σατύροις καὶ Πᾶσιν ἐοικυῖαν· παχύνονται γὰρ αἱ τρίχες ἀπὸ τῆς κατεργασίας, ὥστε μηδὲν τῆς τῶν ἵππων χαίτης διαφέρειν. Τὰ δὲ γένεια τινὲς μὲν ξυρῶνται, τινὲς δὲ μετρίως ὑποτρέφουσιν· οἱ δ´ εὐγενεῖς τὰς μὲν παρειὰς ἀπολειαίνουσι, τὰς δ´ ὑπήνας ἀνειμένας ἐῶσιν, ὥστε τὰ στόματα αὐτῶν ἐπικαλύπτεσθαι. Διόπερ ἐσθιόντων μὲν αὐτῶν ἐμπλέκονται ταῖς τροφαῖς, πινόντων δὲ καθαπερεὶ διά τινος ἠθμοῦ φέρεται τὸ πόμα.

earlier authors, thereby rendering the description more plausible.[118] It is conspicuous how much detail is devoted to the outward appearance of the Celts – before this time, only the authors of *Airs, Waters, Places* and the *Physiognomy* had shown a similar concern for such features and it is probably testimony to the polymath Posidonius' genuine interest in the physiognomy of men as the product of their environment.[119] This is not the only novel tendency we find in the text: the author also equates the Gallic noblemen with Homeric heroes. Therefore, the bravest Celts enjoy the same reputation as Ajax did after his victory over Hector, and just like the men of the *Iliad*, the Gauls eat while sitting on furs on the ground – a significant part of this information, and the explicit comparison with Ajax in particular may have been added by Diodorus, who wrote for a broader audience.[120] The whole seating arrangement and the course of the meal resembles the customs of archaic Greece:[121] Diodorus/Posidonius puts Celtic society on the timeline of Greek history, and although the Gauls are far more primitive, they have

[118] In Xen. *Anab*. 7.22 the Thracian king Seuthes follows the local custom to throw bread and meat at his guests, which seems a similarly wild dinner habit. Furthermore, in D.S. 5.31.3 = *FGrHist* 87 F 116 = F 169 Theiler human sacrifice is being mentioned, which had already been attributed to northern 'barbarians' by Herodotus for the Scythians (e.g., Hdt. 4.62.3–4). The comparison with satyrs likewise drew on a popular tradition as Kistler 2009: 88–191 has shown.

[119] Pseudo-Hippocrates and Pseudo-Aristotle; cf., e.g., Hippocr. *AWP* 12–24. Dodds 1973: 19 sees Posidonius' work as the beginning of anthropology. However, with Thomas 2000: 63–74, Herodotus can be seen as equally interested in the influence of the climate on bodies – and therefore proto-anthropology – and Posidonius may in fact have been inspired for his own investigation in these matters by Herodotus.

[120] D.S. V, 28, 4 = *FGrHist* 87 F 116 = F 169 Theiler; Il. 7, 321 is quoted. While Posidonius wanted to prove his philosophical theories and may have thought that explicit comparisons bore his readers, Diodorus wanted to offer a summary of the history of the world in a single work, and Homeric allusions would have certainly helped to make the text more accessible and enjoyable for a larger audience. Ath. *epit.* I, 18F attests that the Homeric heroes sat at dinner, instead of reclining. I thank Johannes Engels (Köln/Bonn) and Francesco Reali (Bologna) for their kind advice on Diodorus and Homer (the latter is also to thank for the comment on ἐπιεικής in n. 139 below).

[121] See the long passage Ath. *epit.* 4.151E–152D = *FGrHist* 87 F 15 = F 67 EK = F 170 Theiler, where Posidonius describes armed guards behind the noblemen and the various dishes, drinks and table manners.

also remained closer to primeval times and thus the Golden Age.[122] In those happy times, humanity had been ruled by the wisest men – as Posidonius relates in another fragment.[123] He seems to identify the druids with these early Greek philosophers and accordingly describes them as searching for the true divine, just like he did himself.[124] This *interpretatio Graeca* therefore represents a relativising comparison that acknowledges the worthiness of Celtic religious ideas and it is a structuring comparison that emphasises the temporal differences between Greek and Gallic societies. Finally, it helps the author to confirm his own hypothesis: since the druids were yet closer to the primordial state of mankind, the fact that they shared the Stoics' belief in the immortality of the soul proved to the stoics Posidonius and Diodorus that the assumptions were right.[125]

Despite all the similarities, the Gallic banquets remain in stark contrast to Greek symposia: in another fragment, Posidonius relates how there were often spontaneous fights, which could well result in the death of one of the participants.[126] In the same vein, the retainers of the nobles always remain armed, like the Greeks of archaic times.[127] Combined with the wild demeanours at dinner and the excessive consumption of unmixed wine, this constant presence of weapons conflicts with

[122] Yet, the view that Posidonius mainly depicted the Celts in a negative way still persists, e.g. in Heitz 2009: 34–51. Voillat Sauer 1992 offers a clear overview of the more savage and thus negative elements of the *Keltika* on the one and the more heroic and therefore positive elements on the other side.

[123] Sen. *Ep.* 90.4–20 = F 448 Theiler = F 284 EK.

[124] As D.S. 5.31.5 = *FGrHist* 87 F 116 = F169 Theiler, quoted at the beginning of this article, shows.

[125] D.S. 5.28.6 = *FGrHist* 87 F 116 = F169 Theiler. Cf. Hofeneder 2005: 138–141.

[126] These were fought over influence and standing between men of different rank. D.S. 5.28.5 = *FGrHist* 87 F 116 = F 169 Theiler; Athen 4.154 A–C = *FGrHist* 87 F16 = F 68 EK = F 171a Theiler. The similarities speak for the Posidonian origin of the fragment in Diodorus' *Library*.

[127] Ath. *epit.* 4.52B = *FGrHist* 87 F 15 = F 67 EK = F 170 Theiler.

Hellenic ideas of the symposium as a harmonious event.[128] That some of the Celts ate 'in a lion-like way'[129] is a direct allusion to Homer's characterisation of the cyclop Polyphemus. These legitimising comparisons entertain the Greek readers and reassure them about their cultural superiority – despite the idea of one mankind, even late stoic authors would still prefer Greek culture above anything else.[130] Posidonius thus blends idealising and degrading elements, evoking images of the life of the earliest humans, which had been defined by hardship (*χρεία)*. The Gauls are primitive, but also untainted by the decadence of civilisation. Posidonius and Diodorus do not locate the Celts as being outside of history, but rather position them on a lower level of development:[131] Posidonius' comment that they ate 'a few loaves of bread' [132] implies an increasing significance of agriculture, and he is well aware that the Roman conquest will destroy the traditional lifestyle of the Celts. Posidonius depicts the panorama of a world that will soon be lost forever, but he manages to demonstrate that even before the coming of Rome, the Gauls had been part of Mediterranean history and culture. This fits

[128] Wine consumption: D.S. 5.26.3 = *FGrHist* 87 F 116 = F 169 Theiler. The typical Greek symposium is portrayed in the homonymous texts by Xenophon and Plato, whose focus is not on the actual eating or drinking, but on the intellectual discussions. In reality, most Greek symposia will have been much more similar to the image of the Celtic dinners, as can be seen by the common depictions of drunken Greek noblemen on vases and the popularity of hedonistic behaviour at Hellenistic courts. From archaic times on, however, these Greek drunkards were equated with Scythians, the 'predecessors' of the Celts as typical 'northern barbarians', and the *topos* persisted in Hellenistic times. As a stoic polymath Posidonius will obviously have been critical of both Greek hedonism and constantly intoxicated 'barbarians' and he will thus have used the 'barbarian' symposium as a mirror of Hellenic society. Kistler 2009: 118–124; 135–143; 161–172.

[129] Ath. *epit.* 4.151F = *FGrHist* 87 F 15 = F 67 EK = F 170 Theiler. Translation from Olson 2006. 'λεοντωδῶς δέ'. Hom. *Od.* 9, 292.

[130] Cf. Timpe 1996: 49–50. Meanwhile, Roman readers could read this as a justification for their conquests of the land, even though the descriptions also imply an indirect criticism.

[131] Quinn 2013 suggested that Polybius represented such a view of 'barbarians' without history. While Polybius certainly had more negative view of the Gauls than Posidonius, the section above (p. 113) shows that Polybius envisaged several events of (cultural) exchange between the Gauls and their southern neighbours.

[132] Ath. *epit.* 4.151E = *FGrHist* 87 F 15 = F 67 EK = F 170 Theiler. Translation from Olson 2006. 'ἡ τροφὴ δ'ἐστὶν ἄρτοι μὲν ὀλίγοι.'

his idea of a unity of mankind in all its forms. Posidonius' Celts have far more in common with Greeks and Romans than his predecessors would ever have admitted, and he seems to urge his readers to accept that Celtic peoples were now a permanent part of the Roman Empire.[133]

His ethnographical descriptions of the Iberian Peninsula match this pattern. They, too, are now inseparable from those of Diodorus, who may also have had access to more recent, Roman sources, but the possible fragments mainly concern events from the second half of the 2nd century BC and Posidonius will thus have offered better information.[134] Posidonius himself would have consulted Polybius, however, and there is no safe way to tell which information stems from which author anymore, so we can only interpret the surviving text as such.[135] Just like Polybius, both Posidonius and Diodorus were initially confronted with the question how the Celtiberians had been able to resist Roman expansion for almost a century until the destruction of Numantia in 133 BC. Their answer drew on the etymology of their name: Celts and Iberians had apparently mixed through inter marriage and joint settlements, and since both groups were known for their martial prowess, the Celtiberians had become brave fighters, excellent at horse riding and tactically flexible in battle.[136] Their round shield is explicitly compared with the ἀσπίς of Hoplites – probably Diodorus' own insertion – and

[133] An earlier 2nd century BC work, predating Posidonius and ascribed to Scymnus, already paints the Celts in a positive light; Ps.-Scymn. 183–187. The author may, however, have followed the older, almost naive image of the Celts in the *Histories* of Ephorus (Strab. 4.4.6C199 = *FGrHist* 70 F131), who is later cited as a source (Ps.-Scymn. 843, 871, 880). The anonymous author also quoted from Ephorus' work when discussing Iberia; Ps.- Scymn. 152–166 = *FGrHist* 70 F129b.

[134] Very few of these fragments name Posidonius at all and they were therefore not included by Edelstein, Kidd 1972.

[135] On the question of Polybius as a source for the Lusitanian wars especially see Gieseke 2023: 276 with the literature in n. 474. Additionally, Asclepiades of Myrlea, who lived in Turdetania, may have been an important source, as he probably was for Pompeius Trogus; Woolf 2009: 212.

[136] D.S. 5.33.1 = *FGrHist* 87 F 117 = F 89 Theiler (mix); D.S. 5.33.2 & 5 = *FGrHist* 87 F 117 = F 89 Theiler (warfare). The text largely follows the description of Polybius; see above XX–XX.

other elements equally resemble Greek equipment.[137] The later authors thus followed and expanded Polybius' characterisation of the Celtiberians as courageous warriors by showing similarities to Greek soldiers that further relativise their backwardness. The great focus on military details was probably an acknowledgment of the interests of Roman readers, as neither Posidonius nor Diodorus possessed much military experience, and a continuation of the practices of Polybius, who had introduced a greater emphasis on military details to the ethnographic community.[138] The *library* then goes on to describe the banquets of the Celtiberians, which is in line with Posidonius' discussion of Gallic dinner customs so that the surviving text is probably an abbreviated version of an original by Posidonius. He claims the Celtiberians were 'moderate (ἐπιεικής) and humane (φιλάνθρωπος) […] toward strangers' and praised the ones among them chosen to host the visitors 'as beloved of the gods' (θεοφιλής).[139] The adjectives are typical of Diodorus, who might have added them to reinforce the existing message of Posidonius. In contrast to the Gauls, however, the Celtiberians mainly ate meat and no bread at all. Yet, once more the apparent primitivism is put into perspective: they serve 'meats of every description' (παντοδαπός) [140] and therefore their diet is far more diverse than it ap-

[137] D.S. 5.33.3 = *FGrHist* 87 F 117 = F 89 Theiler. They also use the oblong *thyreos* shield, which was a typical symbol of Celts on Greek iconography, yet had been adopted by Greek troops in the 3rd century BC; Serrati 2013: 186. The gaiters mentioned here are evocative of the so called 'iphicratids' used in Athens; D.S. 15.44.4.

[138] As *prytanis* of Rhodes during the First Mithridatic War in 88/87 BC (Strab. 7.5.8C316 = *FGrHist* 87 F 93 = T27/F235 EK = F46 Theiler; cf. Malitz 1983: 13–16) Posidonius will have somewhat familiarised himself with naval warfare and a treatise called *Taktika* is ascribed to him: Aelian. *tact.* 1.2 = F 80 EK & Arr. *tact.* 1.1–2 = F 81 EK. However, it is unlikely he ever fought himself and philosophical investigations were his primary goal.

[139] D.S. 5.34.1 = *FGrHist* 87 F 117 = F 89 Theiler. Translation from Oldfather 1939. 'πρὸς δὲ τοὺς ξένους ἐπιεικεῖς καὶ φιλάνθρωποι […] καὶ θεοφιλεῖς.' I have replaced Oldfather's 'honourable' with 'moderate', as the translation fits an ethnographic digression, where the author wants to emphasise that the Celtiberians were not just wild savages. Instead, as a moderate people they are much closer to Greek ideals and Aristotle's Golden mean and this to me seems to be what the stoic philosopher would have wanted to express, and the equally stoic Diodorus chose the fitting word ἐπιεικής for it.

[140] D.S. 5.34.2 = *FGrHist* 87 F 117 = F 89 Theiler. Translation from Oldfather 1939. 'κρέασι παντοδαποῖς.'

pears at first sight. The comparisons are only indirect, but the old view of the 'barbarians' is being relativised with this emphasis on the kind character of the Celtiberians.

While there are differences between Gauls and Celtiberians – e.g., the latter do not wear the *braccae* common in Gaul – these can mainly be attributed to Iberian influences.[141] All in all, the customs of the Celtiberians, from their appreciation of war to their hospitality, bring to mind those of their northern cousins. And as with them, Posidonius draws a much more positive image than his predecessors.[142] This impression is reinforced by his account of the Roman wars in the region: at least the surviving fragments suggest that he did not glorify the Roman conquest; rather, he expressed his sympathy for the vanquished. The Numantines especially had fought for their freedom (ἐλευθερία) until the bitter end, as many Greeks had in the past. By choosing death from starvation over captivity, many Celtiberians did not submit to the Romans even in death.[143] Those who were captured bitterly lamented their fate when the Romans deported them from their ancestral home. Posidonius/Diodorus describes the scene:

> Each of the (Roman) soldiers felt a divine awe when he saw the emotions of his fellow humans, and observed that even the most savage barbarians, when fate separates them from the bond of their homeland, do not forget their love for the land that reared them.[144]

The indirect, relativising comparison is typical of Posidonius' fragments in various later works[145] and emphasises the similarities between

[141] At least the surviving text (mainly D.S. 5.33.2–3 = *FGrHist* 87 F 117 = F 89 Theiler) does not mention them.

[142] Assuming Diodorus did not alter the message of Posidonius' text, which is highly unlikely.

[143] *Exc. de leg.* 1.406.29 = D.S. 34/35.4.1 = F 139 Theiler.

[144] *Exc. de leg.* 1.406.29 = D.S. 34/35.4.2 = F 111 Theiler. Translation from *Diodorus Siculus: Historical Library*. Ἕκαστος γὰρ τοῖς κοινοῖς τῆς φύσεως πάθεσιν ἐχειροῦτο θείῳ φόβῳ, θεωρῶν ὅτι καὶ βαρβάρων ψυχαὶ θηριώδεις, ὅταν ἡ τύχη διαζευγνύῃ τὸ σύνηθες ἀπὸ τῆς πατρίδος, ὅμως οὐκ ἐπιλανθάνονται τῆς πρὸς τὴν θρέψασαν γῆν φιλοστοργίας.

[145] Cf. Gieseke 2023: 296.

all human beings: even the wild (θηριώδης) Celtiberians loved their home (πατρίς) and understood the pains of exile – just like the inhabitants of 'civilised' city states. And even their Roman conquerors cannot hide their sympathies: the sides may have been enemies, but there were all humans.[146] Furthermore, Posidonius, who also criticised the brutal exploitation of slaves in the mines of southern Iberia, ruthlessly highlights the dark side of the Roman dominion.[147] Not least thanks to his Roman friends, Posidonius was well aware of the political and social crisis of the Late Republic, and he identified the same decadence and cruelty behind these developments that he thought responsible for the decay of the Ptolemaic and Seleucid empires.[148] In difference to the Hellenistic kingdoms, however, the Roman Republic was not yet lost and could be saved, if only the Roman nobility reclaimed the values of the *mos maiorum*.[149] Fittingly, Cicero, Pompeius and the Iunii Bruti were among his closest contacts in Rome: just like them, the Greek philosopher could only interpret the events of his day as the result of moral decline.[150]

His critique of Roman rule was in fact so far reaching that he idealised Viriatus, the leader of the Lusitani, despite or even due to his (in)famous opposition against Rome. Posidonius probably narrated his rise from a hardened shepherd who lived in the mountainous interior,

[146] Though Posidonius calls the souls of the Celtiberians θηριώδης, he does so in the context of the events after the terrible siege of Numantia: The brutality of war, he may imply, had had a profound effect on the losers. Cf. Malitz 1983: 131 n. 265.

[147] D.S. 5.35–8 = *FGrHist* 87 F 117 = F 89 Theiler. The description of Iberian mining can also be found in Strab. 3.2.9C147 = *FGrHist* 87 F47 = F 239 EK = F 19 Theiler, though without the passages on the suffering of the simple workers.

[148] Posidonius also depicted the merciless oppression of slaves by the Romans and the brutality of the slave wars in his time; Malitz 1983: 146–162 offers an overview with the corresponding fragments. On his view of the Seleucids see Bringmann 2020; on the Ptolemies e.g. *Exc. de virt. et vit.* 2.1.301.322 & 323 = D.S. 33.22–23 = F121–122 Theiler; Ath. *epit.* 12.549D–E = *FGrHist* 87 F6 = T7/F58 EK = F126 Theiler.

[149] This can be inferred from his praise of the *mos maiorum*, which is contrasted with the customs of the present: Ath. *epit.* 6.273A–275D = *FGrHist* 87 F59 = F125c/F81 Theiler. Cf. Engels 1999: 182–183 for the comparison.

[150] For Pompeius, this may be an exaggeration, but he ended up leading the Republican side. For Posidonius' familiarity with Pompeius cf. Strab. 11.1.6.C492 = *FGrHist* 87 T 8a; Plin. *HN* 7.112 = *FGrHist* 87 T8b = T 36 EK = T 16 Theiler; for the Brutii: Plut. *Brutus* 1.6–8 = *FGrHist* 87 F 40 = F 256 EK = F 129 Theiler.

to a successful and seemingly invincible general in the 140s BC, who impressed friends and enemies alike with moderation and valour.[151] In his character, he combined all that was good about his people: they were frugal and humble and indeed even braver and more agile in combat than the Celtiberians.[152] Even more surprising than this praise for 'northern barbarians' is the fact that Posidonius put the Lusitani into this ethnographical category in the first place, since the climate of their country was and is neither in his imagination nor in reality actually cold. Rather, the author draws on the old idea of an opposition between highland and lowland, village and city to explain the primitive and heroic nature of the Lusitanians.[153] Implicitly, Posidonius/Diodorus compares their customs to those of the Spartans, who as an unusually martial Greek ethnos served as the perfect *comparatum* for a structural comparison that was to prove to his readers that the Lusitanians were the greatest warriors among the 'barbarians'. The comparison explained how – despite their small number and apparent poverty – the Lusitani had been able to inflict a number of disastrous defeats on Roman armies for well over a century.[154] Viriatus had led them to the peak of their power, threatening all of Roman Hispania, if we are to believe Posidonius. The personality and feats of Viriatus proved for Posidonius

[151] Phot. 6.146 Henry = D.S. 33.1.1–4 = F96a Theiler. For Posidonius as the main source on Viriatus: Simon 1962: 137. Some of the passages on the Lusitanians are from Photius' excerpts of Diodorus and are thus excerpts of fragments and must be treated with caution.

[152] D.S. 5.34.4–5 = *FGrHist* 87 F 117 = F89 Theiler (bravery and agility of the Lusitanians); *Exc. de virt. et vit.* 2.1.296.312 = D.S. 33.7.1–3 = F 105a Theiler; *Exc. de sent.* 4.383.388 = D.S. 23.7.4–7 = F105b Theiler (Viriatus' frugality as typical for his people).

[153] The idea that this opposition determined the character of peoples can already be found in the Corpus Hippocraticum; Hippocr. *AWP* 23–24. Most ancient authors defined mountain dwellers as brave, but primitive, as Graßl 1996: 189–192 demonstrates. At the same time, the simple life of shepherds was often hailed; Graßl 1996: 195.

[154] In D.S. 5.34.6 = *FGrHist* 87 F 117 = F89 Theiler, he gives an account of an institution that is similar to the Spartan *krypteia*. The fact that Strabo compares further Lusitanian customs with those of the Lacedaemonians in Strab. 3.3.6C154 supports the assumption that Posidonius consciously drew a parallel between both peoples and that he was Diodorus' source; Trotta 1999: 89. As for the length of resistance, the first battles are attested for the early 2nd century BC, and the Lusitanians were only fully subdued by Caesar in 61/60 BC; Plut. *Caesar* 12.1.

the equal capabilities of all men: under the stewardship of such a leader, even the most primitive 'barbarians' could achieve as much as Greeks or Romans.

Ethnographic Descriptions in the *Geographika* of Strabo

Towards the end of the paper, I want to outline some new developments that can be found in the ethnographical passages of Strabo of Amasia (*ca.* 63 BC–AD 24), who followed his predecessors in many other ways. Like Posidonius, Strabo composed a historiographical work titled *Histories after Polybius*, which is lost but for a few fragments.[155] In contrast, the *Geographika*, originally planned as a companion for the *Histories*, survived almost in full. In the work, the author treats all regions of the *Imperium Romanum* at the beginning of the 1st century AD. Since, for him, the empire had become synonymous with the *oecumene*, he portrayed all territories beyond its borders as irrelevant and poor.[156] The worst 'barbarians', however, he found in the cold and harsh north: he saw the Britons as particularly primitive and miserable, and characterised the inhabitants of Ierne (Ireland), which he located north of Scotland, as incestuous cannibals unbound by law or morale.[157] This explicitly negative image of the northernmost people can be seen as a clear rejection of the idea of the Hyperboreans, an ever happy and healthy people that could live for centuries and had always been put just under the Arctic Circle by Greek authors. Even though Herodotus had already ridiculed the whole concept, the imagination of the Hyperboreans remained popular throughout the Hellenistic period and had

[155] Engels 1999: 9–15, 164. Some of the passages below are also listed as Posidonian fragments by Theiler and I will mention that in each case. However, since these mainly concern the inhabitants of northern Iberia, which the Romans hardly reached in Posidonius' time and would only conquer under Augustus, I am much more sceptical here when it comes to attributing the information to the Apamean author. For Strabo's sources on Cantabria cf. Roller 2018: 161–163.

[156] Even those controlled by the Parthian Empire: Engels 2017.

[157] Britons: Strab. 4.5.2–3C199–201; Ierne: Strab. 4.5.4C201. Strabo admits that he has no reliable eyewitnesses for the practices he reports for Ireland, yet he decides to record them anyway.

been defended by authorities as famous as Posidonius.[158] Yet, Strabo disagreed: for him, no one outside the *imperium* could genuinely be happy or boast admirable *nomoi*.[159] Drawing both on Polybius' model of successive world empires that ended with the rule of the Romans, and on Augustus' imperial ideology, he interpreted Rome's conquest of the world as meaningful and teleological, bringing benefits to everyone.[160]

In this grand structural comparison, all peoples within the *limites* would inevitably be 'civilised'. When writing about Gaul, Strabo may initially mention the old *topoi*. Yet, he states that in his own time these would now only fit to the *Germani* who lived outside the empire.[161] The Gauls, in contrast, would enjoy Roman peace and order and were beginning to appreciate Greek and Roman literature.[162] Since the *Germani* of the present were akin to the Celts of the past, Strabo implies that the conquest and subsequent 'Romanisation' of the Germanic peoples would be equally possible in the future.[163] In fact, he depicts the Belgae, whose home was at the fringes of both Gaul and Germania, as yet wilder and less 'civilised' than other Gauls, but as inevitably falling under Roman influence – another structural comparison.[164] Therefore, distance to the Mediterranean, environmental conditions and historical developments were the factors that decided how 'Barbaric' a foreign ethnos was.[165] The βάρβαρος became a status, which could be overcome by affiliation with the empire and access to Greco-Roman παιδεία, and

[158] Hdt. 4.36. Apollonius Rhodius (1st half of the 3rd century BC) had the Celts believe in the existence of the Hyperboreans and Posidonius located them in the Alps; Apoll. Rhod. 4.611–615; Schol. Apoll. Rhod. 2.675 = *FGrHist* 87 F 103 = F 270 EK = F 70 Theiler. On the evolving image of the Hyberboreans: Bridgman 2014.

[159] Günnewig 1998: 267–275.

[160] Pol. 1.2.1–7; *R. Gest. div. Aug*. 25–33.

[161] Strab. 4.4.2C195–6.

[162] Strab. 4.4.2C195.

[163] Cf. Roller 2018: 196. It is unfortunately not possible to date this statement to a precise year (e.g., Clarke 1997: 103), as its relation to the defeat of Varus would reveal more about Strabo's intention here. The term 'Romanisation' I use in inverted commas to mark it as problematic. It is here used in the sense of a mutual and complex process that connotes the increasing adoption of Roman customs and laws as well as the Latin language. See the overview of Mann 2011: 16–23 and the take on Gaul in Woolf 1998: 1–23.

[164] Strab. 4.4.3C196. For the Belgic style of life see Strab. 4.3.5C194.

[165] Cf. Thollard 1987: 6–7.

this feat could be proven by comparisons which showed similarities to Greeks and Romans and differences to the outside peoples. Strabo had realised that his own Greeks were as much living in the shadow of the Roman Empire as the peoples of the northwest, and therefore the old *topoi* for the Gauls were not applicable anymore.

Strabo's views on Hispania fit the mould. Again, temporal comparisons prevail: once the Celtiberians had been a backward warrior society, but now they were wearing *togae* and living like Italics.[166] In the same vein, he stresses that Lusitania had always been a fertile country, but that the attacks of the predatory mountain dwellers had forced the peaceful peasants of the plains to adapt to their rogue lifestyle, thus turning Lusitania into a wasteland. This seemingly anarchical state only ended when the Romans conquered the region and restored law and order.[167] The temporal comparisons are relativising old views of these ethne, but the structural changes are not their own achievements, they are due to the external interventions of the Romans. A decisive element in the process of 'Romanisation' was the widespread planting of *coloniae*: since most 'barbarians' had lived in villages, Strabo was convinced – as much as Augustus – that urbanisation would necessarily force them to change their customs and learn the Latin language.[168] Furthermore, new foundations like Caesaraugusta (Zaragoza) in Celtiberia, located in the fertile Ebro valley, connected the hitherto inaccessible inland with the coast, thus helping the 'barbarians' to overcome their spatial and cultural isolation.[169] This possibility even existed for those who dwelt in modern day northern Spain, peoples that had not been studied by any ethnographic writer before Strabo. In traditional style, Strabo introduces them as primitive and cruel savages, whose character

[166] Strab. 3.4.20C167; 3.2.15C151. Cf. Alonso-Núñez 1999: 115.

[167] Strab. 3.3.5C154. The historical context may be the whole development from the time of Viriatus to Caesar's pacification of Lusitania, or only the latter in 61/60 BC; on which cf. Novillo López 2010: 208–211.

[168] Van der Vliet 1977: 251–255. Augustus proudly mentions his programme in *R. Gest. div. Aug*. 3; 16; 28.

[169] Strab. 3.2.15C151 (foundation of Caesaraugusta); 3.4.20C167 (the peoples on both sides of the Ebro are being Romanised). For the role of Caesaraugusta: Curchin 1991: 117.

was the product of their remoteness.[170] Yet, he finds parallels to Greek and other eastern Mediterranean *nomoi* and quotes Asclepiades of Myrlea's (around 100 BC) report that Teucrus of Salamis and Amphilochus of Argos had come to Gallaecia after the Trojan War, while a group of Spartans had reportedly settled in Cantabria.[171] Taken together, the comparisons between the customs of the Cantabrians and their neighbours on the one side and the Mediterranean peoples on the other side relativise the accepted structure and are subsequently explained by the origins of these 'barbarians'. Apparently, these people had, however, rejected Hellenisation beyond the adoption of a few select *nomoi*, instead conserving their primitive ways in their isolated home.[172] Hence it was not until the Roman conquest and their incorporation into the Imperium that the Cantabrians and their neighbours would fall under the 'civilising' influence of a superior culture and thus eventually be lifted out of their 'Barbarism'.[173] Once more, the temporal comparison between a rather static past and a dynamic present reveals Roman expansion as a motor of change for the better. As part of his ethnographic practice,

[170] Strab. 3.3.7C154–5 (Simple lifestyle, no usage of money, primitive diet. This is Theiler F22 and Posidonius may have been the source for some of the things described here, though northern Spain was only opened up in Strabo's time, so the text is mainly his); 3.4.16C163–164 (primitive lifestyle and 'barbarian' diet, bathing in urine. Theiler lists this as F24 (= *FGrHist* 87 F 52), but the same is true as for F22); 3.4.17C165 (women are as brave as the men). Theiler (F 25) includes the latter as a Posidonian fragment, but it seems unlikely that Posidonius could have gained any info about the Cantabrians long before Augustus' wars in the region and I thus agree with Edelstein, Kidd, who only attribute the anecdote about Ligurian women to Posidonius (F 269 EK; cf. the similar *FGrHist* 87 F85a). For Strabo's sources on Cantabria see Roller 2018: 161–163.

[171] Strab. 3.4.3C157 = *FGrHist* 697 F 7. As for the similarities: E.g., their punishment for patricide was being stoned to death outside the borders of the community, which shows that the Cantabrians and their neighbours feared exile, just like the inhabitants of *poleis*: Strab. 3.3.7C155 (again, F22 Theiler); cf. Van der Vliet 1977: 267. Stoning was common in Archaic Greece; cf. Forsdyke 2005: 37–41. Lowe 2017: 73 discusses further passages in Strabo's work which can possibly be attributed to Asclepiades.

[172] Strab. 3.3.8C155–6.

[173] Strab. 3.3.8C156.

Strabo deliberately presented a selective version of Iberian history that teleologically ended in the contemporary Roman world order.[174]

Significantly, Strabo is the first (known) Greco-Roman author to portray the religious customs of the Hispanic peoples in detail. Just like Polybius, who discussed the religion of the Romans, he followed the tradition of Herodotus, whose ethnographic descriptions seem to have had a much larger influence on Strabo than is commonly assumed.[175] Like the 'father of history', Strabo used the *tertium* of belief systems to point out both similarities and incommensurabilities between 'barbarians' and Greeks: on the one hand, the inhabitants of northern Spain worshipped Ares and offered up hecatombs in the Hellenic way, in the same manner as Herodotus' north African nomads sacrificed to partially Greek gods in a Hellenic rite – these comparisons clearly serve to relativise the primitivity of (some of) the natives.[176] On the other hand, the religion of the Gallaeci was seemingly so unintelligible for Greek observers that they presumed it was nontheistic; in the same vein, in Herodotus, the Greeks and the Indian Callatiae were unable to comprehend the other's treatment of their dead.[177] Such a declaration of incommensurability emphasised the otherness of the Gallaeci and Callatiae and showed, in the case of the former, that they had to give up their (non-)beliefs if they were to become part of the Imperium. Adopting Herodotus as a role model was not the only reason for Strabo to discuss the religious *nomoi* of the Iberian Peninsula in such a prominent way: Augustus had made the renaissance of religious virtues one of the central elements of the orchestration of his regime, presenting the revival of old cults and the display of *pietas* as well as the restoration and construction of temples as signs of the new Golden Age.[178] He contrasted this with the preceding chaos of civil war, during which pious

[174] Dueck 2017: 221 also discusses this methodological approach by Strabo, which made his work unique.

[175] I am thus following the argument of Engels 2008: 148 against Dueck 2000: 46, who claimed Strabo was not influenced by Herodotus – a view shared by Murray 1972: 210.

[176] Strab. 3.3.7C155 (= Theiler F22, for which see n. 170 above); Hdt. 4.188–190.

[177] Cremating and eating of the corpse respectively; Strab. 3.4.16C164 (= Theiler F 24, for which see n. 170 above); Hdt. 3.38.3–4.

[178] *R. Gest. div. Aug.* 19–21. Cf. Orlin 2007 passim.

religious practices had been neglected.[179] For Strabo, Augustus represented all the benefits of the Roman Empire, so that it may be assumed that some of his judgments about the peoples of the northwest were directly based on the *Res Gestae*. The geographer thereby supported the 'propaganda' of the Princeps. For Strabo, the Romans and the *imperium* became a reference for his own identity, a permanent *comparatum* for ethnographical comparisons that complemented his Greek identity. While Roman influences existed since the 2nd century BC, Polybius had still primarily been defined by his *polis* and *koinon*, and Posidonius' research had mostly been guided by the premises of universal stoicism; with Strabo, Greek ethnography entered the service of the Roman Empire. In a way, what Augustus had forged in the senate and on the battlefield, Strabo completed on paper for the Greek mind. This, of course, sounds very neat, and in fact it is too neat. Not everyone agreed with the likes of Posidonius or Strabo: authors such as Metrodorus of Scepsis (around 100 BC), the court historian of Mithridates VI of Pontus, continued to characterise the Romans as violent 'Barbarians', retaining the old *topoi*.[180] A few decades later, Timagenes of Alexandria, who came to Rome as a prisoner in 55 BC and gained Augustus' *amicitia* before eventually losing it, may have continued the pattern.[181] Some of the fragments from his work have been interpreted as criticism of Rome and praise of the 'Barbarians'.[182] Yet, we have seen that similar statements can be found in the texts of Posidonius and we should perhaps not exaggerate the few extant fragments of Timagenes. In any case, the erection of the empire brought a closer fusion of Greek and Roman cultures and there can be no doubt Strabo is more representative for the developments of this period than Metrodorus or Timagenes.

[179] *R. Gest. div. Aug*. 21, 24.

[180] For instance, Plin nat. hist. 34.34 = *FGrHist* 184 F6a; Ov. 4.14.37–38 = *FGrHist* 184 F 6b. Cf. Fuchs 1938: 14–15, Muccioli 2006: 67.

[181] Suda (s.v. Τιμαγένης, Tau 588) (arrival in Rome), Sen. *De ira* 3.23 (*amicitia*).

[182] See especially Sordi 1982, cf. Muccioli 2006: 62. Fragments such as Amm. 15.9.2 = *FGrHist* 88 F 2 about the Gauls. Cesa 2019: 219–220 rightly shows, however, that the Timagenian description of the Gauls is very much in line with the interpretations of Posidonius.

Conclusion

What, then, is the added value of seeing passages like the geographical descriptions of Strabo as contributions to an ethnographical community of practice? First of all, this perspective allows the historian to trace the lasting influence of Herodotus: even though Polybius never mentions the 'father of history' by name and Strabo largely criticises him, both of them, like Posidonius, follow the methodological example of Herodotus, are interested in similar ethnographic questions, deploy similar *topoi* and draw on similar macro-theoretical models such as the ideas of environmental determinism and a continuous development of all peoples at different paces. Second, all three emulate Herodotus in allowing ample space for *thaumata*: several passages from book 34 of Polybius' *Histories* and, e.g., Strabo's tales of the Lotus eaters in North Africa contradict the idea that Posidonius was the only late Hellenistic author to incorporate such mirabilia in his work;[183] Timagenes might even have written a separate treatise called θαυμάσια:[184] wonders continued to inform the understanding of the natural world, like in the days of Herodotus.[185] Third, the continuation of ethnographical practices in a community of successive authors can help to explain why the old *topoi* persisted even when they were disproven by new empirical knowledge. After all, their usage did not end with Strabo either: rather, Roman writers transferred them to ethnic groups living outside the Imperium. Accordingly, Tacitus often uses *topoi* formerly associated with Celtic peoples when he characterises the *Germani*, and he discusses the drawbacks of 'Romanisation' in the same style as his Hellenistic

[183] Ath. *epit.* 8.322A = Pol. 34.10.1–3 (underground fish); Plin. *HN* 31.131 = Pol. 34.16.3 (healing sponges); Strab. 3.4.3C157 (lotophagi). The view on mirabilia rejected here can for instance be found in Bloch 2002: 37. Similarly, Trüdinger 1918: 80 maintained that Hellenistic ethnography aside from Posidonius was not interested in religion.

[184] Muccioli 2006: 63 on Strab. 15.1.57C711 = *FGrHist* 88 F12.

[185] Cf. Thomas 2000: 141. Since even the works of Strabo and Polybius are not fully extant and many other texts are lost, caution is needed when generalising, but the examples are enough to demonstrate that θαυμάσια did not disappear completely.

precursors.[186] The emergence of the Roman dominion forced Greek and Roman authors alike to write 'ethnography' in this imperial context: other late Hellenistic authors, too – among them Alexander Polyhistor, Nicolaus of Damascus or Timagenes[187] – tried to fulfil Polybius' demand that every ethnos in the *oecumene* had to be investigated in its relationship to the power of Rome.[188] As far as we can tell from the extant texts, comparing therefore acquired even more significance than before.

Hellenistic ethnography is thus hardly conceivable without its practices of comparing. The typology outlined in the introduction can now be filled with the results of the empirical analysis: the first contacts between Greeks and foreign peoples were usually dominated by simple, explanatory comparisons. It is therefore no surprise that they were regularly deployed by Polybius, who still had to illustrate the world of the west for a readership largely unfamiliar with these lands.[189] Things had dramatically changed one and a half centuries later: Strabo could presuppose that every educated Greek or Roman knew the geography of northern Italy, and he was thus often able to abstain from deploying any explanatory comparisons. This seems straightforward enough to

[186] Among other things, Tacitus' *Germani* are addicted to drinking (Tac. *Germ.* 23) and their whole life is about war (e.g. *Germ.* 29.2 on the Batavi. The same is true for the Chatti, whose bodies correspond to the ideas of the climate theory; *Germ.* 30, 1–2). On 'Romanisation': Some Gallic nobles rise into the ranks of the Roman nobility, but the Romanised Aedui have become unwarlike; Tac. *Ann.* 11.23–25.1 (offices); 3.46.2 (decadence). Similar parallels have been observed by Perl 1990: 33–35, 144, 191, 203; Krebs 2011: 209 and Lampinen 2021: 49. Under this angle, the leader of the Caledonii in modern Scotland, Calgacus, in whose famous speech Tacitus criticises Roman imperialism and expansionism, seems like a second coming of Posidonius' (and Diodorus') Viriatus (Tac. *Ag*. 30).

[187] On the ethnographical interests and the works of these authors: Muccioli 2006, Dueck 2000: 130–144, Engels 2010: 73–79, Engels 2014: 165.

[188] In 6.3.1–4 Polybius asserts that the Romans can only be understood if their *nomoi* are analysed, and his descriptions of other peoples show that he was interested in the question why they had been overcome by the Romans either with ease or with difficulties – hence their institutions had to be compared to those of Rome; see e.g. 1.37.7–10 and 1.64.6 on why the Carthaginians had been able to prolong the First Punic War for so long, yet eventually lost.

[189] For instance, by comparing the Alps with Mount Olympus: Strab. 4.6.12C208 = Pol. 34.10.15–16.

assume that it is probably representative for Hellenistic ethnographic texts at large, even if many survive only as fragments or not at all. In a next step, structural comparisons served to attach the southernmost inhabitants of both Gaul and Hispania to the Mediterranean, whereas they assigned the classical image of 'northern barbarians' to those who dwelled in the northern parts or in the mountains of the west. Like the explanatory comparisons, structural comparisons were an inescapable part of most ethnographic descriptions.[190] Legitimising comparisons then reaffirmed the cultural inferiority of these peoples, while relativising comparisons elated their simple way of life to an – albeit only theoretical – ideal. The latter two types of comparisons form a pair of opposites and the usage of either type was different from author to author, betraying much of their intentions, while some authors would have abstained from using either. Finally, singularising comparisons acknowledged the unique character of each group that could be found among the vast lands of the empire. None of them, however, was as unique as the Romans: for Polybius, they enforced the will of the *tychē* and shaped the destiny of men, and for Posidonius, the world *logos* had chosen them to lead.[191] Strabo, finally, ascribed to them the power to resettle whole cities or tribes and change their names.[192] As Polybius had stated in his famous comparisons of successive world empires, the might of Rome was incommensurable and limitless.[193] Even for those men of letters who rejected Roman rule, the empire was a singular historical occurrence.[194] And with many Greeks increasingly accepting the rule of the Romans, their new overlords evolved from ethnographical subjects into a similar point of reference as Greek culture. They also

[190] For instance, Nicolaus of Damascus also identifies the Celts as 'northern barbarians' by saying they are aggressive warriors who fear nothing: Stob. 4.2.25 = *FGrHist* 90 F 103e; Stob. 3.7.39 = *FGrHist* 90 F 109.

[191] The most explicit formulation of this idea can be found in Vitr. 6.1.10–11 = *FGrHist* 87 F121 = F71 Theiler.

[192] E.g. Strab. 3.1.8C140 on the Mauretanian city Zelis, which was transplanted to the Iberian coast and renamed Iulia Ioza; in 3.4.20C166–167 he says they changed the meaning of the name 'Lusitanians'.

[193] Pol. 1.2.7; Pol. 39.8.7 is similar.

[194] For instance, as mentioned above (32), many of the fragments of Metrodorus of Scepsis concerned the Romans. By definition, anti-Roman writers were very interested in Rome as a negative point of reference.

changed the ethnographical representation of the former 'barbarians' in the west and the east, causing e.g. a stronger interest in military equipment and tactics as ethnographical *tertia*, while Roman sources such as provincial lists allowed a greater focus on the economic and political structures of the foreigners. Last, but not least, it was Roman imperial expansion that opened learned Greek men the way to the west – though what they saw there, they certainly portrayed from a thoroughly Hellenic perspective. Late Hellenistic Ethnography and its comparisons were thus a product of major historical changes on the one and the continuously strong influence of the practices of Ionian scholars like Herodotus and (Pseudo-)Hippocrates on the other hand. The Hellenistic scholars, their descriptions, ideas and interpretations would shape the form of Roman ethnography until the end of antiquity and beyond, and their *topoi* and ideas about the influence of the environment on the human character are still being picked up today.

Fig. I. A typology of ethnographic comparisons

Type	**Function**	**Occurrence**
Explanatory Comparison	Explanation of the unknown through comparison with the known	First contact, e.g. Polybius' description of the Alps
Structuring Comparison	Assigning known group classifications and *topoi* to the new ethnographical objects	After the first contact; for instance, Polybius identifies the Celtiberians as Celts
Legitimising Comparison	Confirmation of the own superiority… OR legitimising the conquest of a foreign land	In the representation of peoples perceived as primitive and hostile, such as the Celts in Polybius' works… OR the inhabitants of the Roman west in the writings of Strabo

Relativising Comparison	Modifying and challenging older ideas	When discussing an ethnos that has been exclusively defined through negative *topoi*. For example, Posidonius' description of the Gauls
Singularising Comparison	Emphasising and acknowledging the uniqueness of an ethnic group	Ethnography of peoples that appear partly superior to the Greeks and therefore worthy of imitation; e.g. Polybios' VI. Book on the Romans
Comparison to strengthen a line of argument	Finding evidence for a philosophical theory	In the description of foreign *topoi* by a Greek philosopher; e.g., Posidonius' characterisation of the Gallic druids as Greek philosophers

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