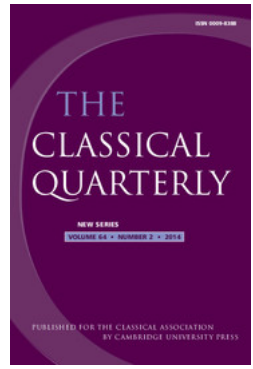

BEASTS AND BARBARIANS IN CAESAR'S *BELLUM GALLICUM* 6.21–8

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BEASTS AND BARBARIANS IN CAESAR'S *BELLUM GALLICUM* 6.21–8*

Caesar's description of the Germans' social organization and *mores* in the sixth book of his *Bellum Gallicum* (*BG* 6.21–8) has long been the subject of multiple scholarly controversies. Its focus on various seemingly random ethnographical details – above all the description of the Hercynian forest and its fantastical beasts – has so surprised readers that the very authenticity of the passage has been questioned.[1] It has been convincingly argued that interpolation is not likely.[2] However, the internal excursus describing the Hercynian forest, and the final section concerning its fauna in particular, remains a subject of intrigue, as a result of the extraordinary, semi-mythical nature of its contents. It is the latter portion of the excursus, concerning the beasts of the Hercynian forest, and the place and role of their portrayal within the ethnography as a whole, that I wish to elucidate in the present article. While it undeniably possesses great entertainment value, its presence cannot be justified merely on such grounds.

Any reader, then as now, experiences some surprise on reading the (extensive) ethnographic excursus pertaining to the Germans in the *Bellum Gallicum*'s Book 6. It seems redundant, because Caesar had already presented his reader at the beginning of Book 4 with a portrayal of the same German tribe, the Suebi, and the two passages (*BG* 4.1–4.3 and 6.21–3) contain many of the same elements of information. Scholars have explained this second German ethnography of Book 6 as a strategically placed digression.[3] Just

* An earlier version of this article was presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Philological Association in Montréal, Canada, in 2007. I would like to thank the anonymous readers and the *CQ* editor, Bruce Gibson, for their helpful suggestions. All translations are mine. The Latin is based on Hering's text (*Bibl. Teubneriana* 1987). Henceforth all citations are from the *BG*, unless otherwise specified.

[1] The interpolation theory was strongly advanced by e.g. A. Klotz, *Caesarstudien* (Leipzig, 1910). F. Beckmann, *Geographie und Ethnographie in Caesars Bellum Gallicum* (Dortmund, 1930), on the other hand, argued strongly in favour of the authenticity of the passage. On Klotz and the suspicions held concerning the geographical passages of the *Bellum Gallicum*, see C. Krebs, '"Imaginary geography" in Caesar's *Bellum Gallicum*', *AJPh* 127 (2006), 111–36, at 115 n. 21. A. Riggsby, *Caesar in Gaul and Rome: War in Words* (Austin, TX, 2006), 11–12 and 58 n. 37, discusses the arguments in favour of interpolation and their limits. See also H. Schadee, 'Caesar's construction of northern Europe: inquiry, contact and corruption in *De Bello Gallico*', *CQ* 58 (2008), 158–80, at n. 3, for additional bibliography.

[2] The debate does continue, however: see Schadee (n. 1), 178 n. 62.

[3] Caesar's calculated craft in writing the *commentarii* is well established. See e.g. M. Rambaud, *L'art de la déformation historique dans les* Commentaires *de César* (Paris, 1953), and, more recently, K. Welch and A. Powell (edd.), *Julius Caesar as Artful Reporter: The War Commentaries as Political Instruments* (London, 1998); also T. S. Burns, 'Through Caesar's eyes', in *Rome and the Barbarians, 100 B.C.–400 A.D.* (Baltimore, MD, and London, 2003), 88–139; Krebs (n. 1), 111 n. 2; and Schadee (n. 1), 158 n. 1. See also below, nn. 24 and 25. Whether and when Caesar made any significant revisions to the *commentarii* remains a debated issue: see Burns (this note), 89–90. Riggsby (n. 1), 9–15 (n. 31 for bibliographical references), offers a thorough discussion of the question of the composition

before it begins, Caesar states his intention to push further east, bridge the Rhine, and face the Suebi in their own territory (6.9–10). Immediately after the digression ends, he rescinds his plan (6.29.1). It has been demonstrated that Caesar's inclusion of the excursus at this point of the *commentarii* justifies, and at the same time detracts from, his decision not to face the Suebi within their territory across the Rhine.[4]

I submit that the presence of the Hercynian forest passage with its largely fantastical beasts fits with these broader military and political goals. The passage in Book 6 as a whole, including the section devoted to the Hercynian forest's strange creatures, fulfils the same purpose as the careful distinction that Caesar establishes between these Germans and the Gauls, which forms a backdrop to the entire ethnography – namely, to introduce subtle and deliberate differences from the earlier depiction of the Germans in Book 4, with the purpose of giving the reader a slightly different overall impression of them.[5] In what follows, I bring to light some of the overlooked similarities and linguistic correspondences in Book 6 between the description of the Germans and the portrayal of the (largely fantastical) beasts inhabiting their Hercynian forest. The crux of my argument demonstrates how the interconnectedness between the two corroborates the impression which Caesar seeks to make on his reader: that these Germans are a wild and unconquerable people.[6]

A brief recapitulation of those elements from Book 6 that constitute a significant shift in relation to the description of the Germans in Book 4 is in order.[7] While both descriptions mention the Germans' community of the land, annual war-raids, predilection for hunting, and tough resilience in the face of harsh living conditions, there are telling differences. In Book 4, agriculture and war are presented as similar priorities for the

of the *BG*. T. P. Wiseman, 'The publication of *De Bello Gallico*', in Welch and Powell (this note), 1–10, at 6, suggests we should distinguish two stages of composition, and place Books 5–7 in the second stage (53–51 B.C.), in which Caesar's style becomes more polished and elevated, moving away from '*commentarius* proper … to something which comes close to the status of full-scale historiography' as the political stakes were rising. For more on Caesar's style, see A. Vasaly, 'Characterization and complexity: Caesar, Sallust, and Livy' in A. Feldherr (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Historians* (Cambridge, 2009), 245–60, at 250–1, with bibliography (n. 8).

[4] Caesar's inclusion of the entire ethnographic excursus comparing Gauls and Germans has been attributed, since E. Norden, *Die Germanische Urgeschichte in Tacitus Germania* (Leipzig, 1920), esp. 94, to the principal military and political concern to justify his decision to turn back after crossing the Rhine. See Riggsby (n. 1), 69–70, on how Caesar contrasts the 'unavailability for conquest of the German nomads' with the desirable appropriation of the Gauls. Schadee (n. 1), 18–23, points up the positive impression made by the ethnographic digression on the reader despite the lack of any military success to relate on Caesar's part. W. M. Zeitler, 'Zum Germanenbegriff Caesars: Der Germanenexkurs im sechsten Buch von Caesars Bellum Gallicum', in H. Beck (ed.), *Germanenprobleme in heutiger Sicht* (Berlin, 1986), 41–52, discusses the narrative uses of the ethnography. On Caesar's self-portrait as an 'ideal leader' who presents himself as one whose circumspection serves the interests of his troops here as elsewhere, see Krebs (n. 1), esp. 132.

[5] On the different image of the Germans as portrayed in Book 6 in relation to Book 4, see e.g. Krebs (n. 1), 122–4; Riggsby (n. 1), 60–3; Schadee (n. 1), 175–9. On Caesar's conception and shaping of the Gallic and Germanic barbarians in general, see Y.A. Dauge, *Le Barbare: recherches sur la conception romaine de la barbarie et de la civilisation* (Brussels, 1981), 106 n. 116 (with bibliography), and below, nn. 24, 28, and 29. I return to the (artificial) distinction between Germans and Gauls below.

[6] Schadee (n. 1) analyses the discrete ethnographies throughout the *BG*, and how these advance Caesar's agenda through the comparisons which he implicitly and explicitly invites his readers to draw between the different categories of barbarians that he establishes.

[7] For a detailed comparison of the differences between the two, see A. Lund, *Die ersten Germanen: Ethnizität und Ethnogenese* (Heidelberg, 1990), esp. 49; and J.W. Beck, *'Germania' und 'Agricola': zwei Kapitel zu Tacitus' zwei kleinen Schriften* (Hildesheim, 1998).

Germans; by Book 6, Caesar downplays the place of agriculture among the Suebi, while playing up the position of war in their culture.[8] In fact, by Book 6 he writes that the Suebi are exclusively devoted to war and the related practice of hunting.[9] A similarly significant shift occurs regarding the diet of the Suebi: while in Book 4 Caesar mentions the fact that the Germans eat grain, in Book 6 he does not refer to grain at all; their diet, he says, consists mainly of milk and meat — the staple diet of less civilized peoples.[10] Corroborating this impression is the greater insistence on the Suebi's isolation in Book 6. In both books, the Suebi are nomadic.[11] Trade is mentioned only in Book 4; in Book 6 they are depicted as a tribe that actively and aggressively isolates itself from all others.[12]

The Suebi in Book 6 are also characterized by their *duritia*.[13] Building on the notion that a people's environment determines their temperament, Caesar describes how their toughness is reinforced by a great purity, both moral and physical.[14] Following this Utopian note concerning their sexual continence comes a complementary account of their chaste bathing habits — also a novel touch.[15] Both customs give Caesar's reader

[8] Caesar calls attention to the fact that 'they have no zeal for <it>', *agri culturae non student* (6.22.1). Contrast this statement with Book 4, where he describes the Germans drafting their men yearly for warfare in such a way that many remain at home, so that 'neither agriculture nor the theory and practice of war is interrupted' (*sic neque agri cultura neque ratio atque usus belli intermittitur*, 4.1.6). On the lack of agriculture as one of the stereotypical traits of northern, nomadic barbarians, associated with a passion for war by Caesar (6.22.3) and other Roman sources, see Dauge (n. 5), 622–3; G. Woolf, *Tales of the Barbarians: Ethnography and Empire in the Roman West* (Chichester and Malden, MA, 2011), 53 n. 19; C. Krebs, 'Borealism: Caesar, Seneca, Tacitus, and the Roman discourse about the Germanic North', in E. Gruen (ed.), *Cultural Identity in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Los Angeles, CA, 2011), 202–21, at n. 56.

[9] The statement from Book 4: 'They are much involved in hunting' (*multumque sunt in venationibus*, 4.1.8) evolves to a far more radical one in Book 6: 'their *entire life* consists of hunting and military practice' (*Vita omnis in venationibus atque in studiis rei militaris consistit*, 6.21.3). Italics or underlining in the Latin or italics in the corresponding translation, here as elsewhere, reflect my emphasis.

[10] Compare 'and they do not live much on grain, but mostly on milk and animal flesh' (*neque multum frumento, sed maximam partem lacte atque pecore vivunt*, 4.1.8) and 'the greater part of their diet consists of milk, cheese, and meat' (*maiorque pars eorum victus in lacte, caseo, carne consistit*, 6.22.1). In Book 5, Caesar establishes a similar distinction between the more civilized Britons who live near the coast and cultivate their land, and their more barbaric counterparts, who live further inland (hence further from the Gauls and their civilizing influence – see below), by making reference to the fact that the latter subsist on meat and milk. See Schadee (n. 1), 174.

[11] See 4.1.7 and 6.22.2. The Scythians, as portrayed in Herodotus, are the quintessential nomads (see F. Hartog, *Le Miroir d'Hérodote* [Paris, 1980]). Nomadism is *the* classic barbarian lifestyle, the very antithesis of civilization (see Dauge [n. 5], 620–6).

[12] At 4.2.1, Caesar mentions trade: 'Traders are granted access to their land, mostly so that they can have someone to whom they can sell what they have acquired in battle' (*Mercatoribus est aditus magis eo, ut quae bello ceperint quibus vendeant habeant*), while at 6.23.1–2 he dwells rather on the Suebi's ferocious isolation from all other settlements: 'For their tribes, the highest source of honour comes from devastating their borders, and thus having as vast an uninhabited area around them as possible' (*Civitatibus maxima laus est quam latissime circum se vastatis finibus solitudines habere*). Dauge (n. 5), 620–6, mentions the role played by 'vast uninhabited areas' (*barbariae inmensas solitudines*, quoting from Valerius Maximus 4.6) surrounding nomadic barbarians in maintaining them in a state of primitivism (see ibid., 621 n. 150, which provides multiple references to ancient sources that reflect this belief).

[13] See 6.21.4: 'from childhood they dedicate themselves to toil and hardiness' (*a parvulis labori ac duritiae student*); compare Book 4, where *duritia* is implied (see the description of the cold climate and simple animal skins worn by the Germans, who bathe in rivers [4.1.10]) but not explicitly named.

[14] See 6.21.5 on the high esteem in which they hold prolonged virginity, and the role that it is believed to play in developing their youth's strength (a detail absent from Book 4); cf. Tacitus' *Germania* (20.2), with Riggsby (n. 1), 60–2.

[15] See the description of their customarily bathing in the nude, all together (6.21.5). Chastity and

the sense that they are not only geographically but also socially and culturally detached from the civilized world.[16] The subsequent statement concerning their use of plunder as a means of proving their valour heightens the reader's sense of the Germans' purity, which was a typical attribute of primitivism.[17] That they resort to banditry is not so much a sign of their status as outlaws, but an additional detail that plays up 'their complete divorce from human civilization'.[18]

It hardly bears repeating that, whether in Books 4 or 6, or in any of Caesar's ethnographies for that matter, we are not for the most part dealing with authentic descriptions of traits observed *de visu*.[19] Rather, the presentation of the Suebi's lifestyle and the various habits and customs noted above are to a large extent constructs that resort to standard components and ethnographic *topoi* from a well-established literary and historiographical tradition.[20] Caesar borrows choice elements from this tradition in both portrayals, but selects slightly different stereotypical habits and characteristics in Book 6 in order to portray the Suebi in a different light. By Book 6, they are an isolated, primitive, and pure population of nomads who are exclusively devoted to war and hunting – northern barbarians whose traits place them firmly within the category of 'hard primitivism'.[21] Caesar thus leads his reader to consider these Germans to be beyond

sexual continence are ascribed to the noble savage type, in contrast to the well-attested *topos* of the sexually promiscuous barbarian (for which see e.g. Amm. Marc. 14.4.4 on the Saracens, and Dauge (n. 5), 661, for other examples).

[16] The Suebi's cultural divorce from human civilization is both a result of and corroborated by their geographical remoteness and lack of physical contact.

[17] See 6.23.6: 'They do not consider plunder which is perpetrated beyond the frontiers of their community to be disreputable, and they claim that it trains the youth and causes their laziness to diminish' (*Latrocinia nullam habent infamiam quae extra fines cuiusque civitatis fiunt, atque ea iuventutis exercendae ac desidiae minuendae causa fieri praedicant*). Far from being considered immoral, plunder as a means of survival was a sign, and even a guarantee, of a people's purity, and the prerogative of those who had remained removed from the corrupting influence of civilization: see R. Thomas, *Lands and Peoples in Roman Poetry: The Ethnographical Tradition* (*PCPhS* suppl. 7, Cambridge, 1982), 112.

[18] Riggsby (n. 1), 61–2. On banditry in the Roman Empire (and the separate category formed by the raiders on the edges of the empire), see B. Shaw, 'Bandits in the Roman Empire', *P&P* 105 (1984), 5–52.

[19] On the place and role of set pieces in the Roman historiographic tradition, see R. Ash, *Tacitus: Histories Book II* (Cambridge, 2007), 4–5, and n. 43 for further bibliographic references. In all Roman historians' accounts of barbarian customs, actual, historic observations mingle with literary stereotypes to a largely unknowable degree. Just before the description of the Hercynian forest (6.24.2), Caesar acknowledges having read Eratosthenes and other Greek geographers; the degree to which he relies on these and other sources remains a matter of speculation.

[20] On Caesar's ethnography and its relationship to the ethnographic tradition, see Riggsby (n. 1), 47–71; also E. Gruen, *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ, 2011), 141–2, and Schadee (n. 2), 158 n. 3, with bibliography. For an overview of the ethnographic tradition in prose, see Thomas (n. 17), 1–7. Rives's introduction in J. Rives (ed.), *Tacitus: Germania* (Oxford, 1999), offers a useful overview of Roman writers' literary treatments of the Germans.

[21] This hard primitivism is frequently the purview of the 'noble savage'. Examples of the morally pure 'savage' abound among ancient authors; compare for instance the idealization of another northern people, the Scythians, by Ephorus, as reported in Strabo (fr. 42 Jacoby, quoted by Strabo 7.3.9). Regarding the ancient concept of the noble savage and its various attestations, see A. Lovejoy and G. Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (Baltimore, MD, 1935, repr. 1997), 287–367; concerning the definition and characteristics of the 'hard primitivism' of the noble savage in particular, see 10–11. On Roman discourse(s) about the North (or 'Borealism'), see C. Trzaska-Richter, *Furor Teutonicus: das römische Germanenbild in Politik und Propaganda von den Anfängen bis zum 2. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Bochumer Altertumswissenschaftliches Colloquium, Bd. 8, Trier, 1991), 14–8, and Krebs (n. 8). Tacitus' Germans in the *Germania* possess some of the very same alleged 'purity' traits that Caesar seeks to bring out in Book 6: see E. O'Gorman, 'No place like Rome: identity and difference in the Germania of Tacitus', *Ramus* 22 (1993), 135–54, at n. 2; H.W. Benario,

the boundaries of civilization, and not at a stage that would justify their being a point of focus for Roman conquest, seemingly executing an artful extension of his statement concerning the Suebi to the Germans in general.[22]

Contributing to driving this point home is the series of oppositions which Caesar draws up between the Germans and the Gauls.[23] Mention of the Gauls provides an ideal counterpoint to the Germans.[24] The discrete geographical position of each affects their relationship to Rome (or lack thereof), and the description of their land and its lay-out is put to use by Caesar as a means of reflecting the Gauls' and Germans' antithetical characteristics.[25] The Gauls as a people are close by and therefore more civilized.[26] Their territory and its boundaries are clearly defined, and hence graspable; this is what makes them conquerable.[27] By creating this artificial, dual categorization, Caesar skilfully harnesses his contemporaries' cultural preconceptions regarding the correlation between proximity and degree of civilization.[28] Since proximity and contact

Tacitus: Germania (Warminster, 1999); Rives (n. 20), e.g. 200–1. Tacitus' portrayal of the Germans is ambivalent, however: see Gruen (n. 20), 159–78. The British ethnography of Tacitus' *Agricola* also makes for an interesting comparison; see Woolf (n. 8), 90–2 (with a succinct overview of the conventional paradigms deployed).

[22] See Riggsby (n. 1), 60; Schadee (n. 1), 19.

[23] The distinction is the very justification which Caesar provides for launching into his vast ethnographic digression to begin with: 'It seems not inappropriate, since this point has been reached, to relate the customs of the Gauls and the Germans, and how much these peoples differ from each other …' (*quoniam ad hunc locum perventum est, non alienum esse videtur de Galliae Germaniaeque moribus et, quo differant hae nationes inter sese* …, 6.11.1). The Gauls are made to seem far less fierce in the context of the German ethnography relative to earlier passages of *BG*: they serve as a 'relatively civilized touchstone' in contrast with the German barbarian (Schadee [n. 2], 176). Conversely, in his portrayal of the Germans in his *Germania*, Tacitus actually *assimilates* the two, by utilizing a different set of available stereotypes: see Krebs (n. 8), 202–21. On the importance of polarity and duality in ancient discourses representing barbarians, see O'Gorman (n. 21), *passim*.

[24] The differentiation between the two is a calculated artifice, and was probably Caesar's invention; see e.g. Burns (n. 3), 118–20. On the artificiality of the distinction between the Gauls and the Germans, see C. Jullian, *Histoire de la Gaule* (Paris, 1906–28), 231–9; Rambaud (n. 3), 336. In M. Rambaud, *Autour de César*, ed. M. Bonjour and J.-C Fredouille (Lyon, 1987), 223–33, Rambaud stresses the lack of any linguistic or archeological basis for it. For a different view, see Dauge (n. 5), 108–9 and nn. 120–1 for bibliography and discussion. On Caesar's motivations for establishing and featuring this distinction so prominently, see Lund (n. 8); Burns (n. 3), 131–5; Krebs (n. 8), 204–5; Riggsby (n. 1), 50–71; Schadee (n. 1), 175–8. See also Rives (n. 20), 21–7.

[25] Gruen (n. 20), 141–58, discusses Caesar's deliberate use of and deviation from conventional Gallic clichés. The distinction between the two peoples and their lands also serves Caesar's goal of self-aggrandizement by enabling him to present the conquest of Gaul as completed, to compensate for the aborted forays into Germany. See Riggsby (n. 1), 69.

[26] In Book 4, contact and propinquity are presented as *the* civilizing factor for a German tribe that offers a perfect antithesis to the Suebi: the Ubii (4.3.3); see below p. 691. Dauge (n. 5), 604 n. 93, lists ancient sources that establish a correlation between barbarians' *feritas* and *ferocia* and their distance from Rome. Conversely, Paolo Soverini, in his commentary on Tacitus' *Agricola* (11.4), *Agricola: introduzione, testo critico, traduzione e commento* (Alexandria, 2004), 162, cites ancient sources illustrative of the *topos* according to which peace and civilization were considered debilitating.

[27] Caesar explicitly positions them at the opposite end of the spectrum from the Germans when it comes to their military capabilities (6.24.5–6); see below, p. 692. For an overview of the Roman concept of Gallic acculturation, see C.B. Champion '"Romanization:" cultural assimilation, hybridization, and resistance', in *Roman Imperialism: Readings and Sources* (Malden, MA, and Oxford, 2004), 214–57, and G. Woolf's discussion of Gallic *humanitas* in his *Becoming Roman: The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul* (Cambridge, 1998), esp. ch. 3, 'The civilizing ethos'.

[28] In Book 1, Caesar also creates a contrast between Gauls and Germans, but with the aim of making war with the barbarian tyrant Ariovistus appear necessary and inevitable. To do so, he resorts to another negative ethnic stereotype in his famous depiction of Ariovistus as 'barbarous, prone to fits of

bring about civilization and a resulting loss of valour or fierceness for the Gauls, the Germans' distance from the Romans (and Gauls) implies a preserved primitiveness and lack of civilization, and no such depletion of their martial valour.[29]

I come now to the crux of my argument: the end of the description of the Suebi and specifically the appearance of the large segment devoted to the Hercynian forest and its fauna.[30] Pinpointing the overlooked connections between the beasts and the overall depiction of the Germans in the excursus, including the above distinction between Germans and Gauls, is central to our understanding of the surprising digression's very existence and function. The point of the description of the forest itself seems clear. Caesar conveys its apparently infinite size and immeasurable depth with noteworthy emphasis to show that, in addition to being more remote and removed from civilizing Roman contact and its enervating consequences, the Germans' land is also boundless.[31] He intimates that its remoteness, isolation, and sheer immensity make it both unfathomable and impenetrable.[32] In so doing, he puts to use the distinction that he established between German and Gaul, and between their respective territories. While he goes to great lengths to define, delineate, and divide Gaul into three distinct parts from the famous outset of his *Bellum Gallicum*, he intimates that the Germans' Hercynian forest, with its lack of defining borders, cannot be properly measured, intellectually grasped, nor militarily conquered.[33] After impressing on his reader the Suebi's uncivilized, alien, and fierce nature, he casts their wildness and elusiveness in an environment that corroborates and mirrors these traits.[34]

Having thus set the stage, Caesar completes his tableau with a colourful series of animal portraits, shifting the reader's interest from the forest itself to the fauna inhabiting it

anger, and reckless' (*barbarum, iracundium, temerarium*, 1.31), in contrast to the pitiable tribes of loyal Gauls under Diviciacus, who weep for Caesar's assistance (1.32).

[29] In Book 1, building on traditional Greco-Roman beliefs, Caesar states that the hardy Belgae have maintained their indomitable strength and exemplary *virtus* because 'they are the farthest away from the culture and civilization of the <Narbonensis> province' (*a cultu atque humanitate provinciae longissime absunt*, 1.1); see Burns (n. 3), 94, 134–5, and Schadee (n. 1), 163–5. Caesar's positive assessment of those Gauls who remain detached from Roman influence (and particularly those who resist the Germans) and their *virtus* is not without ambivalent implications regarding Rome's degeneracy: see Gruen (n. 20), 148–58; Riggsby (n. 1), 83–96. Compare the Germans of Tacitus' *Germania* 5.3, infected by commerce with Rome: see O'Gorman (n. 21), 140–1; Krebs (n. 8), 203. By contrast, the fierceness of the Britons in Tacitus' *Agricola* (8.1, 16.1, 17.3–4, 21.1, 27.4, 29.3–4, 30.1) is allegedly due to their lack of any debilitating contact with Rome (11.5–6).

[30] Four out of the eight sections that make up the ethnographic excursus are devoted to the forest and its animals (6.25–8).

[31] The description of the forest begins with a paragraph devoted exclusively to its size and to creating an impression of infinite depth through references to its lack of definable borders and incalculable vastness (6.25.1, 3–4). Caesar had already made reference to the vast expanses of wilderness surrounding the Germans (6.23.1–2).

[32] There is no mention of trade; outsiders are not likely to settle nearby, since the Suebi deem it 'the greatest sign of valour' (*hoc proprium virtutis*, 6.23.2–3) to drive neighbours out of any land adjoining their own.

[33] The archaic Greeks already considered a boundless (ἀπείρων) space uncrossable, because of the uncertainty attached to formlessness: see J. Romm, *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought: Geography, Exploration, and Fiction* (Princeton, NJ, 1992), 10–11. Numerous ancient sources define desolate spaces (*solitudines*) as an obstacle to civilization and a breeding ground for those barbarians exclusively devoted to war and destruction. Dauge (n. 5), 482–6, provides an overview of Roman accounts of barbarians' relationships to their environment; primitivism is characteristic of forest dwellers (483 n. 172).

[34] Schadee (n. 1), 178–9, touches on the strangeness and undefinable qualities of the Hercynian forest as 'the antithesis of civilization'.

(6.25–8). The role of these vivid portraits of various beasts can be understood if we turn our attention to some overlooked linguistic and thematic echoes linking these creatures who live in the German tribe's immediate environment with the Suebi themselves.[35] The passage is suffused with key terms which accentuate the animals' difference from any other being heretofore known to the Romans and create a number of parallels with the portrayal of the Germans that precedes it.[36] A close examination reveals the extent to which the entire description of the Hercynian forest's curious wild creatures mirrors and enhances the Germans' strangeness, and reinforces the message underlying the artificial opposition (surveyed above) between the tame(d) Gaul and the untamed, fierce German. Simply put, these Germans are a fundamentally alien people, similar not just to the impenetrable land which they inhabit but also to the fundamentally alien creatures lurking in its unfathomable depths.[37]

The manner in which Caesar begins his survey of Hercynian wildlife is telling in this regard. He appears to anticipate the reader's perception of it as a further digression and puts forward a justification of sorts from the start, alleging that its animals are unlike anything the Romans have ever seen, and that they are therefore worth mentioning for the *mirabilia* that they are (6.25.5): 'It is well known that in it are born many kinds of wild beasts which *have not been seen in any other place*; among these, the following are those which are *the most different from all others that exist*, and seem worthy of mention' (*Multaque in ea genera ferarum nasci constat quae reliquis in locis visa non sint; ex quibus maxime differant ab ceteris et memoriae prodenda videantur haec sunt*).[38] From the outset, Caesar foregrounds the unfamiliar and radically different nature of the various strange Hercynian forest beasts as the very reason for which he proposes to examine them in further detail. The account of the Suebi followed the same thematic lines: they are *the* true barbarians, and the purest antithesis of the Romans.[39]

A telling parallel, both thematic and linguistic, can be noted between the introductory formulation to the forest's creatures (*maxime differant ab ceteris*) and the phrase used to introduce the German ethnography in Book 6 (6.21.1): 'The German customs differ greatly from this one' (*Germani multum ab hac consuetudine differunt*).[40] In a ring composition of sorts, when Caesar brings his zoological excursus to a close with a description of the Hercynian forest's aurochs, he returns to the central theme of radical

[35] In comparing barbarians with animals, Caesar is building on a well-established tradition. The attribution of bestial characteristics to barbarians is pervasive throughout ancient sources (and beyond); they often point up negative traits which the Romans associated with a lack of civilization and social organization, such as irrationality and related forms of savagery. See Dauge (n. 5), 604–9; B. Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ, 2004), esp. 196–207; A.N. Sherwin-White, *Racial Prejudice in Imperial Rome* (Cambridge, 1967), *passim*. Tacitus mentions a 'fable' according to which the Hellusii and Oxiones possessed human faces, but the limbs and bodies of wild beasts (*Germ.* 46.4), though he cautiously refuses to vouch for its veracity.

[36] On the propagandistic potential of the exotic in ethnographic discourse, see Woolf (n. 8), 84–5, including bibliographical references.

[37] In his *Germania*, Tacitus describes the Semnones (the most ancient and noble of the Suebi) and their special relationship to a forest which they revere and honour (*Germ.* 39.1–2). As with the Hellusii and Oxiones (see n. 35 above), there is a fusional relationship of sorts between this Germanic tribe and their environment.

[38] Woolf (n. 8), 83–9, discusses the representation of the extraordinary in the ancient world. On *thaumata* in the Greco-Roman ethnographic tradition more specifically, see Thomas (n. 17), 2; Riggsby (n. 1), 70 nn. 69 and 70, with bibliography.

[39] See Burns (n. 1), 128–9.

[40] The *consuetudo* being referred to is that of the Gauls.

difference in a way that further highlights its importance (6.28.5): 'The great size of their horns, their shape and appearance – *all are very different from those of our oxen*' (*amplitudo cornuum et figura et species multum a nostrorum boum cornibus differt*).

Following this note of introduction, Caesar then begins the catalogue proper of the three great Hercynian wonders in that very same vein, starting with the animal whose outlandishness is the most extreme: the unicorn.[41] Lest the presence of a single horn in the middle of the beast's forehead not suffice, he underscores its extraordinary nature by calling attention to its uncommon height (6.26.1–2): 'There is an ox with the shape of a deer; projecting out of its forehead, in the middle, between the ears, is a single horn, *which is both longer and more upright than those horns we are used to seeing*' (*Est bos cervi figura, cuius a media fronte inter aures unum cornu exsistit excelsius magisque derectum his, quae nobis nota sunt, cornibus*). In so doing, he presents the unicorn as a strange creature of semi-fantastical proportions – one perfectly appropriate for the Hercynian realm which he is at pains to portray as both unknown and unknowable.

The description of the second Hercynian wonder, the elk, conveys the same sense of strangeness, in an equally forceful manner. The Hercynian elk's singular nature lies in the fact that it has no articulations in its legs. Hunters are able to catch it by sawing the trees against which it leans while sleeping: once fallen, it is an easy prey, owing to its inability to bend its legs and get back up on its feet again (6.27.2). The description of these elk has provoked much surprise, scepticism, and a good deal of hilarity in the modern reader. It is not, of course, to be taken as a genuine description.[42] Its artificial nature is patent, both from the glaring improbability of Caesar's zoological observations and from the fact that he has borrowed elements from earlier accounts of *mirabilia* and extraordinary fauna for his portrayal of the elk, including previous depictions of animals as biologically foreign to elk as elephants.[43] As with the portrayals of the Germans, these animal descriptions are not based on reality but are, to a great extent, a construct, relying on a long-established tradition.[44] The dubious scientific value of his account of elk hunting matters not to Caesar. The hunting details are part of an artifice intended to play up the unfamiliar nature of the Hercynian *alces*, and the passage is successful in that respect. The introduction of an additional marvel enriches the excursus with further exotic detail, and reinforces

[41] In his notes on the *BG*, A. Garzetti, *La Guerra Gallica/Gaio Giulio Cesare* (Turin, 1996), 574–5, draws attention to the doubly artificial nature of the unicorn passage: even the real creature on whom the fantastical creature is based (namely the reindeer) is to some extent an invention on Caesar's part, for the animal had already been extinct in Germany for some time.

[42] Aili (a scholar who has participated in Swedish elk hunts) makes an ingenious attempt to rehabilitate Caesar's unlikely account of the Hercynian forest's fauna by suggesting that particular weather conditions and low visibility may have warped his perception (H. Aili, 'Caesar's elks and other mythical creatures of the Hercynian forest', in M. Asztalos and C. Gejrot [edd.], *Symbolae Septentrionales: Latin Studies Presented to Jan Öberg* [Stockholm, 1995], 15–37).

[43] Similar accounts of animals without articulations can be found among other ancient historians. Ctesias of Cnidus is one possible source for Caesar's present account (our only source is Aristotle's harsh criticism of Ctesias' description of elephants [*Hist. an.* 2.498a8]). Ctesias himself was probably already importing material from an earlier, perhaps eastern, source. T.P. Wiseman, 'Lying historians: seven types of mendacity', in J. Marincola (ed.), *Greek and Roman Historiography* (Oxford, 2011), 314–36, at 323, quotes Lucian's preface to his *True History* (1.3), in which Ctesias is featured as one who, like many other writers, presents accounts of his travels that include strange beasts, savages, and peculiar lifestyles, without having ever actually seen or even heard of them.

[44] A. Pease, 'Analogues of the Hercynian elks', *CPh* 34 (1939), 372–3, includes a discussion of Caesar's possible sources.

the impression on the reader that the forest being described is full of creatures of a nature heretofore unheard of.

The most compelling parallel between Caesar's portraits of the Hercynian forest's animals and the Germans lies in the description of the third and last animal: the ure-ox (or aurochs). These *uri* are notable for their ferocity and consummate hunting skills – not unlike the Germans (6.28.2):[45] 'Great is their strength, and great is their speed; and they do not spare any creature, human or beast, which they have caught sight of' (*magna vis eorum est et magna velocitas; neque homini neque ferae, quam conspexerunt, parcunt*).[46] Their indomitable ferocity is related to the impossibility of taming them: 'even if they are caught very young, the animals *cannot become accustomed* to human beings and be tamed' (*sed adsuescere ad homines et mansuefieri ne parvuli quidem excepti possunt*, 6.28.4). This seemingly innocuous remark comprises a key term, *adsuescere*, which demands our attention. Elsewhere in the *Bellum Gallicum*, Caesar uses the verb and its cognates only when describing humans – in fact, he applies the term *only to the Germans*. Moreover, every occurrence of the term is found within Books 4 and 6 (most often in the participial form *adsuefactus*), in combination with a negative adverb.[47] Without exception, the point being made in every case is that the Germans in question (the Suebi) are not *accustomed* (*adsuefacti*) to anything truly Roman and civilized (*humanum*).

A closer look at the various contexts in which Caesar uses *adsuescere* throughout Books 4 and 6 regarding the Germans makes clear how significant and deliberate his use of the term to describe the aurochs is. At the very beginning of Book 4, he explains the Suebi's tremendous strength and hardiness by the fact that they are not brought up to be *accustomed* to any sense of duty or discipline (4.1.8–9):

… multumque sunt in venationibus. quae res et cibi genere et *cotidiana exercitatione* et libertate vitae, quod *a pueris nullo officio aut disciplina adsuefacti* nihil omnino contra voluntatem faciunt, et vires alit et immani corporum magnitudine homines efficit.

... they hunt frequently. This is what develops their strength and turns them into men of tremendous size – through their diet, daily exercise, and the freedom with which they live: for from childhood, *they are not accustomed to any form of duty or discipline*, and they never do anything against their will.[48]

The similarity in the language used in Book 4 regarding the Suebi (*nullo officio aut disciplina adsuefacti*, 4.1) and that used in Book 6 regarding the aurochs (*adsuescere et mansuefieri ne … quidem … possunt*, 6.28) is unmistakable. Caesar resorts to parallel formulas to chronicle the untameable nature of man and beast respectively, and thus creates an analogy between the two groups, which is made even more apparent by the introduction of an additional shared characteristic associating the two: both the Suebi and the beasts of their forests are characterized by a wildness and lack of

[45] See 4.1.8 (quoted below).

[46] It is worth noting that, unlike the reindeer, on which Caesar's account of the unicorn was probably based, the aurochs were not extinct at the time Caesar was writing. Fossil evidence points to gigantic beasts weighing up to 4.5 tons. See F.D. Provenza, J.J. Villalba, J. Haskell, J.W. MacAdam, T.C. Griggs, and R.D. Wiedmeier, 'The value to herbivores of plant physical and chemical diversity in time and space', *Crop Science* 47 (2007), 382–98, at 382. I am grateful to Andrew Riggsby for bringing this article to my attention.

[47] As here in the case of the aurochs: *adsuescere … ne quidem possunt.*

[48] Compare the notorious lack of discipline of Tacitus' Germans; see Beck (n. 7), 26–7 (with bibliography at n. 37).

tameability 'from youth' (*a pueris*, 4.1.9, echoed by *ne parvuli quidem* regarding the aurochs, 6.28.4).[49]

The term *adsuefactus* plays a key role within these same books in differentiating between those German barbarians with a potential for acculturation and those without.[50] The only instance in which it is not combined with a negative adverb (as it always is in the case of the Suebi) occurs in a passage from Book 4 intended to single out the Ubii as an exceptional German tribe in that they have become 'more civilized' (*humaniores*) than the rest (and than the Suebi in particular). This greater degree of civilization is, he explains, due to the contact they have had with the Gauls: geographical propinquity has made the Ubii become *accustomed* to the Gauls and their ways (4.3.3):

Ad alteram partem succedunt Ubii, quorum fuit civitas ampla atque florens, ut est captus Germanorum. Et paulo quam eiusdem generis ceteri sunt humaniores, propterea quod Rhenum attingunt multumque ad eos mercatores ventitant et quod ipsi propter *propinquitatem* Gallicis sunt moribus *adsuefacti*.

On the other side <from the Suebi> come the Ubii, whose nation was large and prosperous, as far as Germans are capable of being so. And they are somewhat more civilized than the rest of their fellow Germans, because they live along the Rhine and traders come to them regularly, and because they themselves *have become accustomed* to the Gauls' customs.

In Book 6, the connection between *propinquitas* and becoming *adsuefactus* or 'tame' (and hence non-threatening) is again made, concerning the Gauls this time.[51] Like the Ubii earlier, the Gauls in question are not threatening nor ferocious, though they live close to the Hercynian forest, because of the contact they have had with the known world (especially the Romans) – a contact which has led to their becoming *gradually accustomed to defeat* (6.24.1–6):

Ac fuit antea tempus, cum Germanos Galli virtute superarent, ultro bella inferrent, propter hominum multitudinem agrique inopiam trans Rhenum colonias mitterent. Itaque ea, quae fertilissima Germaniae sunt loca circum Hercyniam silvam, … Volcae Tectosages occupaverunt atque ibi consederunt. Quae gens ad hoc tempus, his sedibus sese continet summamque habet iustitiae et bellicae laudis opinionem. Nunc quoniam in eadem inopia egestate patientia, qua Germani, permanent, eodem victu et cultu corporis utuntur. *Gallis autem provinciarum propinquitas* et *transmarinarum rerum notitia multa* ad copiam atque usus largitur, *paulatim adsuefacti superari* multisque victi proeliis ne se quidem ipsi cum illis virtute comparant.

There was formerly a time when the Gauls surpassed the Germans in power, voluntarily made war, and, because of the number of their men and lack of land to accommodate them, sent colonists across the Rhine. And so the Volcae Tectosages seized and settled in those parts that are the most fertile regions of Germany, surrounding the Hercynian forest. They remain in that region to this day, and have a high reputation for justice and valour in war. Now also they continue in the same poverty, want, and endurance as the Germans, and hence have the same diet

[49] In Book 4, when describing the Suebi's dealings with horses, Caesar has already established a particular affinity between the Germans and their beasts, by using the same expression, *cotidiana exercitatione*, to describe, on the one hand, how the Suebi achieve their remarkable strength through diet, *daily exercise*, and rigorous devotion to hunting (4.1.8), and on the other, how they make their animals into the most efficient workhorses by subjecting them to a similarly harsh regimen of daily exercise (4.2.2–3).

[50] See above pp. 685–6 regarding the correlation which Caesar establishes between propinquity and contact with the Romans, and a barbarian people's potential for (or incipient degree of) civilization.

[51] It is noteworthy that the passage occurs a mere four paragraphs before Caesar uses *adsuescere* concerning the aurochs to convey the beasts' preserved wildness, which results from their complete removal from civilization.

and way of dressing. But in the case of the Gauls, the *proximity of their provinces* <to ours> and their *familiarity with goods from overseas* provides them with many things, both luxurious and necessary, and they have gradually become *accustomed to defeat*; now that they have lost many battles against them, they do not even compare themselves with the Germans when it comes to martial prowess.

The Volcae Tectosages share some of the characteristics of the Germans, because they live in similarly difficult conditions.[52] Like their German counterparts, they are subjected to poverty and want, and have come to adopt a similar diet (and even comparable clothing). However, they remain fundamentally different from the Germans because of their physical proximity to the Romans and their contact with the known world, which has made them less fierce, to the Romans' advantage.[53] Conversely, the Suebi's lack of familiarity and contact with either the Gauls or the Romans has led to their preserved wildness: in remaining *unaccustomed* to any other ways but their own, they have also remained so brave and fierce in battle that even those Gauls who face the same hardships as they do, and live a similar life to theirs, 'do not even compare themselves with the Germans when it comes to martial prowess' (*ne se quidem ipsi cum illis virtute comparant*, 6.24.6).

Though producing a different image of the northern barbarian from the one created by Caesar in Book 6 of his *Bellum Gallicum*, Seneca's *De ira* offers an interesting point of comparison, in that it also highlights the intractability of the Germans by explicitly comparing them with wild animals (a testament, if nothing more, to the enduring power of the analogy): *Omnes istae feritate liberae gentes leonum luporumque ritu ut servire non possunt, ita nec imperare; non enim humani vim ingenii, sed feri et intractabilis habent; nemo autem regere potest nisi qui et regi* ('All those peoples whose savagery is what makes them independent are like lions and wolves: just as they cannot serve another, so they also cannot command; their strength is not that of human intellect, but of *wild and intractable beings*; *for no one can command who cannot also be commanded*', *De ira* 2.15). The quote is of particular interest to us because of the political and imperial consequences which these bestial characteristics are said to have when found among humans: according to the philosopher, they cannot be commanded, nor command themselves in turn (*nemo autem regere potest nisi qui et regi*). I believe Caesar is pointing his reader towards the very same conclusions in drawing an analogy between German barbarians and beasts.[54]

One can see why the description of the Hercynian forest and its strange creatures would conclude Caesar's polarized ethnography in Book 6. The thrust of the ethnographic excursus is to point up the differences between the Germans and the Gauls: the Gauls' enfeeblement through contact with the Romans, and their resulting 'tameability', in contrast with the Germans, who have remained far removed from Rome and have preserved their strength and ferocity. In his description of the Hercynian forest's occupants, Caesar corroborates this distinction and its implications in a subtle and effective manner, by suggesting analogies between the Germans and their beasts, all of which

[52] On the various traditions regarding the Volcae Tectosages 'rich in gold' (Strabo in particular), see Woolf (n. 8), 74–6.

[53] The seamless progression from *notitia* to *adsuefacti* to *victi* brings out the relationship between cause (propinquity) and effect (enfeeblement). On *virtus* in the *BG* and its (positive) connotations, see above n. 29.

[54] On the depiction of the German barbarian in Seneca's treatise, and its influence on Tacitus' own in his *Germania*, see Krebs (n. 8), 207–9.

point to their shared, indomitable nature. The German barbarians beyond the Rhine, like the Hercynian creatures who inhabit their land, cannot easily, or even reasonably, be 'tamed', nor would such an attempt be advisable or worthwhile.[55] Far from being a merely ornamental digression-within-a-digression, the Hercynian forest and its fauna serve no doubt in part to distract his readers but also to draw them into a fantasy world where the German appears more unknowable than ever, and to highlight Caesar's own prudence in the face of such fundamental strangeness.[56] Caesar's greatest feat in the writing of this excursus lies perhaps in his ability to make his inquiry into new land appear to be an achievement in and of itself, despite the absence of any tangible military progress resulting from it.[57] The sheer discovery of the realm beyond the Rhine comes with such extraordinary accounts of novelty that it is a source of glory unto itself.

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[55] On the Germans as 'too primitive to be worth the sacrifice needed to subdue them', see Burns (n. 3), 137 (with bibliography in n. 77).

[56] In explaining his decision, Caesar also mentions practical considerations (6.29.1): 'Caesar, when he discovered through the Ubian scouts that the Suebi had retreated into their forests, fearing a shortage of food (because, as we demonstrated above, the Germans have close to no zeal for agriculture), decided not to progress any further' (*Caesar postquam per Ubios exploratores comperit Suebos se in silvas recepisse, inopiam frumenti veritus, quod, ut supra demonstravimus, minime omnes Germani agriculturae student, constituit non progredi longius*). Note that Caesar specifically stresses the fact that the Suebi have retreated into their forests as a major factor in his decision. Yet, as pointed out by Schadee (n. 2), 179, the forest they have retreated to (called Bacenis, 6.10) is actually not the same as the Hercynian forest that he has just described. Regardless of this issue, the entertaining and extensive ethnography also gives the illusion, because of its length (spanning 6.11 to 6.28), of a greater time lapse between Caesar's decision to cross the Rhine and his subsequent *volte-face*, thus muting the flagrant nature of his change of plans.

[57] On ethnographic descriptions as deliberate delays in historians' narratives intended to build up tension and highlight the importance of what follows, see Woolf (n. 8), 87–90.