
Blame it on the Barbarians: Ethnic Categorisation and Jingoism in the Cultural Memory of the Sack of Rome c.390BCE

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Abstract

As with much of the early history of the Roman Republic, the Sack of Rome c.390BCE is known more from legend than verifiable historical fact and is subject to several varying retellings in later Latin and Greek literature. One of the key variations, however, lies in who, precisely, is responsible for the attack on the city. The majority of accounts place the blame on a largely undifferentiated mass of Gauls, recently arrived in the Italian peninsula from beyond the Alps. This conflict gives rise to a centuries-spanning cultural enmity between Rome and the Gallic race in total. However, the unusually detailed first century BCE accounts of Livy and Diodorus both attribute the attack to the Senones, a single group of Gauls already resident in northern Italy for several generations. Since this latter version appears better supported by archaeological and linguistic evidence, it seems that cultural memories of the Sack gradually became warped, and the guilt of the Senones was transferred to the entire ethnic category in which they were placed. This paper aims to examine how and why this change occurred and its relationship with the rhetoric of jingoism, ethnic prejudice, and demonization in both the ancient and modern worlds.

Keywords: Gauls, Senones, Rome, Jingoism, Ethnicity, Cultural Memory, Prejudice.

One of the odder pieces of Classical Latin literature to survive to the present intact is the *Apocolocyntosis* of Seneca the Younger. This satire on the death of the Emperor Claudius (41-54CE) whose title puns on the apotheosis traditionally ascribed to deceased emperors, has the soul of the dead monarch summoned to defend his right to divinity before a hostile jury of the gods. One of its many jokes at its subject's expense relies on Roman stereotypes concerning the people of Gaul. Claudius' birthplace is identified as the city of Lugdunum (modern Lyon), making him a "Gallus germanus" ('a native Gaul'). And "as a good Gaul ought to do" he proceeded to capture the city of Rome.¹

Claudius' birth at Lugdunum is a fact independently supported by other primary sources.² However, given both his Roman ancestry and that the city itself was a Roman colony in Gaul rather than a native settlement, its use as an argument for his Gallic ethnicity is little more than a comical exaggeration.³ The reference to the capture of Rome, refers, on the one hand, to the controversial circumstances in which Claudius attained power.⁴ On the other, it refers to the infamous Sack of Rome c.390BCE, in which Gallic warriors occupied, looted, and burned most of the city, only the besieged Capitoline Hill surviving their assault.⁵

Seneca the Younger is far from the only Latin author to mine cultural memories of this event as a means of invective against Gallic individuals or groups. A century earlier, the orator Cicero evoked the image of the Sack of Rome in a legal case, defending the senator Fonteius against charges of malpractice while acting as a provincial governor in southern Gaul, denigrating the Gallic accusers in the eyes of his audience with reminders that they were of the same nations that besieged the holy Capitoline Hill and had returned to arrogantly menace the city again.⁶

In broader approaches to the history of Rome, both ancient and

¹Seneca the Younger *Apocolocyntosis* VI

²Suetonius, *Life of Claudius* II.1.

³The poem itself alludes to Lugdunum's status as a *colonia* in referring to its founder, the triumvir Marcus Antonius, as a "fellow-burgess" of the emperor. Seneca the Younger *Apocolocyntosis* VI.

⁴According to the biographer Suetonius, Claudius became emperor through a combination of accident, being supported as a candidate by a rogue army faction after fortuitously evading the conspiracy that assassinated his predecessor, and bribery, securing further military support against challenges from the Senate with offers of increased pay, *Life of Claudius* X.1-4.

⁵Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* V.32-49.

⁶Cicero, *Pro Fonteio* XIV.30-2.

modern, the Sack of c.390BCE is often viewed as the inception of a racial enmity between Gauls and Romans.⁷ It has even been credited with providing much of the impetus for Rome's expansionistic imperialism, motivating them to avoid any recurrence of such a humiliating defeat by pre-emptively subjugating any potential rival.⁸

A problem with views such as this, however, is that they poorly reflect the historical truth of the matter. As with many episodes of the Roman Republic's early history, the Sack of Rome is shrouded in layers of mythologisation, while its precise date, extent of destruction, and exact conclusion remain debateable.⁹ That which concerns us here, though, is the disparity between the most probable account of the origins of those who attacked Rome in the early fourth century BCE and the aspersions cast upon Claudius the scion of Lugdunum and the Gallic Allobroges who brought a case against Fonteius.

While authors such as Livy and Plutarch describe the attackers only as an undifferentiated mass of Gauls described as having crossed the Alps from the temperate lands of north-western Europe to reach Rome, a view under which nations such as the Allobroges or denizens of Lugdunum could be implicated, a substantial body of evidence challenges this view. Instead, it points to the Sack being the work of a single Gallic nation, the Senones, who had settled south of the Po Delta (in roughly the modern March of Ancona) before coming into conflict with the Roman Republic.¹⁰

⁷Appian, *Celtic Wars* Ep.I; Cicero, *De Provinciis Consularibus* XIV.34-5; Eckstein, 2006, 133-135.

⁸Jones and Eirera, 2006, 16-17; Matyszak, 2004, 115-116.

⁹The date of the attack is variously given as 390BCE and 387BCE by various primary sources, c.f. Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* V.32, Diodorus Siculus, *The Library of History* XV.1.6. For the level of destruction compare and contrast Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* V.55 with Cornell 2000, 43. For the varying accounts of how the conflict was ultimately resolved see Polybius, *Histories* II.18., 1-4; Plutarch, *Life of Camillus* XXIX., 2-5; Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* V.49., 5-7; et al.

¹⁰It is beyond the scope of this paper to delve fully into debates concerning the full evidence concerning the arrival of the Gauls in the Italian peninsula and the early history of the Senones. Here it should suffice to note that the bulk of the argument in favour of seeing the early fourth century BCE Sack of Rome in the context of a local war with an opponent based in Italy lies in a combination of support by an array of literary sources pointing to them specifically (discussed further below), the combined evidence of Gallic-style warriors in mid-to-late fifth century BCE Etruscan art (Cunliffe, 1997, pp70-1, Holliday, 1994, pp26-32) and concurrent gradual spread of early La Tène style artefacts through the Po Valley (Haywood, 2004, pp19-21) suggesting the presence of Gauls south of the Alps for

Clearly, the cultural memory of the Sack became subject to warping factors that obscured its original culprits in favour of a tradition that tarred all Gauls, regardless of ancestry, nationality, or political allegiance, with the same brush. This allowed authors like Seneca and Cicero to frame those with only the most tenuous connections to the incident as somehow culpable for it. To understand how and why this occurred, it is necessary to examine how the Sack of Rome c.390BCE was commemorated in literary tradition and how stereotypes and political concerns influenced their perceptions of the Gauls as an ethnic category.

Furthermore, what this warping of historical traditions and elastic approach to ethnic labels suggests is that, far from deriving an authentic albeit erroneous historical tradition of Gallic culpability, the anti-Gallic polemics of Seneca, Cicero et al. rely on revisionist approaches to the past in response to contemporaneous political concerns.

Remembering the Sack of Rome

Remembering the past, '*memoria*' in Latin, was a way of life in Ancient Rome. The commemoration and re-enactment of historical episodes formed the mainstay of social spectacle and entertainment while the veneration and emulation of ancestors was central to moral and spiritual life.¹¹ Allusions and references to historical figures and events thus suffuse the literature of Rome regardless of genre or medium all participating in the preservation and revival of the Roman past.¹² This preservation of past traditions was, however, less a matter of rigid orthodoxy than it was of often dynamic, highly personal engagement with both individual and collective recollections of history.¹³ Such an approach tended to engender reworkings of the past for rhetorical ends more than the scrupulous transmission of fact.

Despite the many discrepancies that attend remembrances of the Sack of Rome in available literary sources, what remains largely consistent throughout is that the incident is seen as the worst tragedy ever endured by the city. The image of the city occupied and looted by for-

several decades prior to the attack, and the relative implausibility of the majority of accounts arguing for a sudden mass influx of migratory warriors from the north.

¹¹Wiseman, 2014, 51; Hölkeskamp, 2006, 491.

¹²Gowing, 2005, 9.

¹³Gowing, 2005, 96.

eign invaders and the sacred ground of the Capitoline Hill besieged was one of the most potent literary devices for conveying ruin and catastrophe in the Roman cultural lexicon. This can be observed from its use in a broad yet coherent range of contexts.

Within the extant canon of Classical Latin and Greek, recollections of the Sack of Rome were deployed in the service of causes as disparate as arguing in favour of Rome's divinely ordained imperial destiny and for the abandonment of traditional religion in favour of monotheistic conversion. For the late first century BCE poet Ovid and historian Livy, the Sack of Rome marked the nadir of Rome's historical fortunes, the proverbial rock bottom from which, by the grace of the gods, it would rise to glory.¹⁴ The later Greek writer Plutarch advocates a similar view, taking the incident as the key example of his thesis of how Rome's unusual good fortune (an aspect of divine favour) had manifested throughout its history to preserve it through even the worst crises.¹⁵ On the other hand, the same subject matter is used by the third century CE Christian author Tertullian to reach almost the opposite conclusion, that the tragedy of the Sack, especially the threat it posed to the temples of the Capitolium, is proof of the impotence of the Roman pantheon in comparison to the one true God.¹⁶

The fact that the Sack of Rome's status as the perennial crisis of Roman history was so embedded that writers of such differing, even antithetical, viewpoints and contexts could use it so similarly is significant to this discussion for two key reasons. Firstly, it establishes an important context in which the culprits, whether Gauls or Senones, were viewed: as the architects of Rome's greatest tragedy and thus ranked among its worst enemies. Secondly, it indicates that the placing the blame on one group or the other must be tied to how the groups in question were viewed, rather than changing perceptions of the event itself.

To better understand what lies behind the attribution of guilt to either the Senones or the Gallic race itself, the next logical step is to survey by whom and in what contexts each are indicted in the available literary sources.

Gauls, Senones, or Senonian Gauls?

¹⁴Ovid, *Fasti* VI., 349-65; Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* V., 32-50; Mineo, 2015, 140.

¹⁵Plutarch, *The Fortune of the Romans* XII.

¹⁶Tertullian, *Apology* XL.9.

Who was it, precisely, that captured, occupied, and looted Rome in the early fourth century BCE? The extant canon of literary sources presents a variety of answers depending upon which version of events is favoured. Some find it sufficient to label the invaders merely 'Galli' ('Gauls'), or 'Keltoi' ('Celts') in the case of Greek sources, and are keen to stress their transalpine origins. Others, however, clearly and unambiguously specify the Senones as the enemy who did these things.

One issue in interpreting the literary record is that terms such as 'Galli' and 'Keltoi' (as well as the alternatives 'Celtae' in Latin and 'Galatoi' in Greek) are used to cover a vast array of people groups with little attention given to internal differentiation. Furthermore, rather than showing signs of consensus across the canon as to whom these labels apply, different authors demonstrate their own idiosyncratic approaches at almost every turn.¹⁷ As such, it may be the case that certain references to 'the Gauls' in relation to the Sack of Rome are oblique references to the Senones obscured by literary convention rather than implications of the entire Gallic race.

Conversely, it would be inaccurate to suggest that Roman authors or their audiences would have been unfamiliar with or unwilling to engage with the internal diversity of ethno-political groups within the umbrella term of 'Gauls'. Evidence for interest and engagement with Gallic ethnography in Roman literary culture can be seen in the relative sophistication of jokes made on its basis, such as Seneca's referencing of Lugdunum in relation to the nearby settlement of Vienne (showing a knowledge of local Gallic geography) and, in an earlier context, a Ciceronian pun linking the Treveri nation of north-eastern Gaul with the *Tresviri Capiales* of the Roman legal system.¹⁸ As such, the use of blanket references to the 'Gauls' in relation to the Sack of Rome should not be assumed to be a result of ignorance over internal distinctions, but

¹⁷Cunliffe, 1997 2-3, and Collis, 2003, 98-103, establish many of the issues with constructing questions predicated on 'Celtic' ethnicity that this raises. A demonstration of the frustrating lack of consistency in use of ethnic labels and categorisation can be seen in the contrast between Caesar's differentiation of the inhabitants of Gaul into three groups (only one of which is properly called 'Galli', *De Bello Gallico* I.1) and separation of those from the neighbouring Germany and Plutarch's quotation of a theory viewing all inhabitants of northern Europe west of the Pontic Steppe as 'Galatai' (*Life of Marius* XI.4-7)

¹⁸Seneca *Apocolocyntosis* VI. Cicero's joke relies on the two groups' shared association with the practice decapitation, on basis of reports of ritual headhunting as a custom of the Treveri and the *Tresviri Capiales*' responsibility for public executions in Rome, Cicero, *Epistulae ad Familias* VII.13.2; Shotter, 2007, 106-110.

examined as conscious literary choices.

Five texts in the surviving canon offer detailed, narrative accounts of the Sack, rather than mere references or allusions to it. Of these, only one offers a version of events in which the Senones might be specified as responsible for the attack on Rome, albeit while labelling the attackers as 'Gauls' or 'Celts' for the most part. Each of these texts offers subtly distinct versions of the conflict's events, though, pointing to different approaches as to how far the Gauls as a race could be implicated in it.

The earliest of the five canonical accounts comes from the mid-second century BCE Greek historian Polybius. While it makes note of the Senones, identifying them as one of the eight Gallic nations who settled in Italy shortly before coming into conflict with Rome, there is no mention of them in relation to the attack on Rome itself. Instead the Sack is described as occurring not long after the migrating Gauls' alpine crossing and is framed as the first act of the long struggle between them and Rome for control of the region.¹⁹ Here it seems that, while the Senones are subsumed into their wider category, culpability for the attack is collectively attributed to the Gauls of northern Italy if not to those beyond.

Three accounts of the Sack of Rome were produced in the late first century BCE, one by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, another by Livy, and the third by Diodorus Siculus. The great Latin historian Livy rejects the narrative of migration swiftly followed by attack, instead arguing for the arrival of the Gauls in northern Italy far earlier.²⁰ Thus, despite the historian's use of the term 'Gauls' and the absence of the Senones, it would be a stretch to see this version allocating responsibility for the attack onto the distant cousins of the Italian Gauls in transalpine lands, having already been separated from each other for centuries by the time it occurred. As with Polybius, the blame is detached from the Senones specifically, but not necessarily projected onto the entire Gallic race.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus, meanwhile, follows Polybius in placing the Sack in the context of the initial Gallic migration, but instead emphasises the projection of wider, racial culpability in attributing the migration itself to the involvement of transalpine Gauls in the ongoing Roman-Etruscan conflicts which preceded the Sack, with the Senones nowhere to be found.²¹

¹⁹Polybius, *Histories* II., 17.1-18.3.

²⁰The historian dates the great migration to the reign of the Roman King Tarquinius Priscus (616-579BCE). Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* V.34.3-11.

²¹Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* XIII.11.

It is Diodorus Siculus who uniquely specifies that the army which precipitated conflict with Rome, leading to the Sack, belonged to the Senones living in the south-easternmost reaches of the lands they had taken from the Etruscans in their earlier migration.²² The historian does, however, revert to the term 'Celts' in labelling the attackers of Rome itself, leaving the account somewhat more ambiguous in its attitude to upon whom and how many the blame should fall.

The chronologically latest of the accounts, given by the early second century CE scholar Plutarch attributes it firmly to the Gauls as an undifferentiated mass and ties its origins closely to their migratory wanderings across Europe as an undivided people group.²³ This makes it the least ambiguous version as far as potentially implicating all Gauls everywhere in at least some ancestral culpability for events at Rome in the early fourth century BCE.

Turning to those literary sources that instead offer simple references or mentions in passing of the Sack of Rome, we find a far greater willingness to credit the Senones rather than the Gauls in toto. Though, as noted earlier, writers such as Cicero, Ovid, and Seneca the Younger are keen to lay blame at the feet of the Gallic race, this approach appears to have become less and less popular from the first century BCE onwards. A fuller survey of this trend can be found in the table below.²⁴

What factors, then, could have prompted certain authors to make the choice of tying responsibility for the Sack to the Gauls as a group rather than to the Senones?

Jingoism and the Uses of Ethnic Guilt

A factor that cannot be ignored in relation to the commemoration of the Sack of Rome and the perception of those responsible for it is the phenomenon of jingoism: bullish, self-aggrandising patriotism framed against an external Other. As a historic national tragedy perpetrated by a foreign group, the Sack provided a potent source of cultural capital for just such a sentiment. It may then be said that the purpose of holding the Gauls, as an ethnic group in the broader sense, responsible for the

²²Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* XIV.113.3-5. The historian also provides a potential justification for lumping the various implicated Gallic nations together in that he comments that the Senones gathered allies from neighbouring communities before marching to war with Rome (" XIV.114.1).

²³Plutarch, *Life of Camillus*, XVI.2-XXIX.2.

²⁴See Table 1.

Literary Sources for the Gauls vs the Senones as culprits of the Sack of Rome^a

| Author | Language | Period | Gauls or Senones? |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| Polybius | Greek | 2nd century BCE | Gauls height Cicero |
| Latin | Early to mid-1st century BCE | Gauls height Dionysius of Halicarnassus | Greek |
| Late 1st century BCE | Gauls height Livy | Latin | Late 1st century BCE |
| Gauls height Diodorus Siculus | Greek | Late 1st century BCE | Senones/ Gauls height Ovid |
| Latin | Late 1st century BCE/early 1st century CE | Gauls height Valerius Maximus | Latin |
| Early 1st century CE | Senones height Seneca the Younger | Latin | Mid-1st century CE |
| Gauls height Pliny the Elder | Latin | Mid-1st century CE | Senones height Silius Italicus |
| Latin | Mid-1st century CE | Senones height Juvenal | Latin |
| Senones/ Gauls height Plutarch | Senones/ Gauls height Tacitus | Latin | Early 2nd century CE |
| Greek | Early 2nd century CE | Early 2nd century CE | Gauls height Appian |
| Mid-2nd century CE | Senones height Aulus Gellius | Gauls height Annaeus Florus | Latin |
| Senones height Tertullian | Latin | Latin | Mid-2nd century CE |
| Latin | 4th century CE | 3rd century CE | Senones height Prudentius |
| 5th century CE | Senones height | Senones height Sidonius Apollinaris | Latin |

^aPolybius, *Histories* II.17.1-18.3; Cicero, *Pro Fonteio* XIV.30-2; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* XIII.11; Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* V.34.3-11; Diodorus, *Siculus Library of History* XIV.113.3-5, Ovid, *Fasti* VI.349-65; Valerius Maximus, *Factorum et Dictorum Memorabilium* VI.1a; Silius Italicus *Punica* IV.555-6; Seneca the Younger, *Apocolocyntosis* VI; Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia* III.15.116; Juvenal, *Satires* VIII.234; Tacitus, *Annales* XV.41; Plutarch, *Life of Camillus* XVI.2-XXIX.2 and *The Fortune of the Romans* XII; Appian Celtic Wars Ep. I; Annaeus Florus, *Epitome of Roman History* I.7.13; Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* XVII.2-3; Tertullian, *Apology* XL.9; Prudentius, *Reply to Symmachus* I.688-9; Sidonius, *Apollinaris Panegyric of Anthemius* I.68.

events of c.390BCE was likely motivated by its political usefulness as a prop for exclusion and hostility towards Gallic individuals and groups, whether in the form of prejudice, discrimination, or even war.

Cicero's *Pro Fonteio*, with its evocations of the memory of the Sack meant to arouse his audience's hostility to the Gauls bringing a case against their former governor is a prime example of this jingoistic trend.²⁵ It illustrates that by aligning all Gauls with those who looted the Eternal City and besieged the Capitolium, Cicero is able to bring those memories to bear against his legal adversaries, despite the fact that, being members of the Allobroges nation, their geographic origins and political affiliation are far removed from the Senones.

The *Apocolocyntosis*' attitude to the Gauls is similarly rooted in jingoism. The context in which Seneca's accusations of Gallic origins for Claudius is in response to the deceased emperor's own claims to Trojan ancestry.²⁶ This exchange adds another layer of political significance to proceedings. As a member of the Julio-Claudian family, Claudius' claims are mainly predicated on his descent from the mythological Trojan hero Aeneas.²⁷ However, his birthplace, Lugdunum, was situated in the territory of the Aedui, a Gallic nation whose traditionally strong diplomatic ties with Rome were partially supported by a legendary Trojan ancestry of their own.²⁸ In ridiculing these claims, and firmly categorising Claudius as a native of Lugdunum above all else, Seneca is not only attacking the emperor with associations with the Sack of Rome but the Aedui as well, castigating them for the temerity of attempting to disassociate from their barbarian roots.²⁹

The connection between Seneca's apparent hostility to the Aedui and other inhabitants of the Lugdunensis province and jingoistic political discourse goes even further, however, since it should be read in the light of Claudius' controversial extension of the Roman senatorial franchise to them in 48CE. While the account of the emperor's motivations for this can be independently verified by an inscription found at Lugdunum outlaying them, records of the opposition from conservative elements in the Senate come solely from the historian Tacitus.³⁰

²⁵Vasaly, 1993, 194.

²⁶Seneca the Younger, *Apocolocyntosis* VI.

²⁷Virgil, *Aeneid* VI.

²⁸Lucan, *Pharsalia* I.427-428; Ammianus Marcellinus, *Histories* XV.9.5.

²⁹Braund, 1980, 420-424.

³⁰'Lyon Tablet' *CIL XIII* 1668. Tacitus, *Annales* XI.23.

In this case it is the opponents of reform, presented anonymously, who are quick to conflate Gauls regardless of national affiliation with those who once stormed the city, slaying its Roman defenders in the process. Claudius' rebuttal, on the other hand, makes specific mention of the Senones, though without direct connection to the Sack, in comparing them to other neighbouring groups with long histories of conflict with Rome, such as the Etruscans, Samnites, and Volsci, who were nevertheless assimilated into the populace and even into the highest echelons of society.³¹ While the emperor's arguments prevailed in passing the reform into law, Seneca the Younger's treatment of Claudius' Gallic associations heavily implies that antagonism over them persisted even after the emperor's death over a decade later.³²

Tacitus' mention of the Senones in relation to prejudice towards all Gauls seems at most a subtle rebuke, rather than an argument in favour of differentiating the former from the latter in terms of historical culpability. However, the jingoistic nature of the opposition's arguments is clear in their overtures to a, largely imagined, glorious past of purely Roman senatorial composition and fears that native aristocrats would find themselves crowded out by the foreign *nouveau riche*. Their allusion to the Sack of Rome is deployed in a context in which it is not only discriminatory, but nakedly, self-servingly, partisan.

Claudius is not the only deceased figure whose memory satirists attacked with Gallic associations. Juvenal, lamenting the long-term decline of aristocratic morality in Rome, censured L. Sergius Catilina, leader of a failed coup against the Senate in 65BCE, for betraying his noble ancestry in behaving in the manner of 'wearers-of-bracae' (i.e. Gauls) and descendants of the Senones.³³ The satirist specifies that the behaviour in question is plotting a nocturnal attack on Roman homes and temples as well as attempted arson.³⁴ The allusion to the Sack of Rome

³¹Tacitus, *textitAnnales* XI.24. For further reading on the diverse origins of Rome's social elite in the Late Republican and Early Imperial see Syed, 2007, 361, and Farney, 2007, 230 and 239-41.

³²Before turning to the circumstances of Claudius' birth, the poem is quick to joke that the Fates hurried along his death to avoid permitting him extending the franchise even further (including Iberians and even Britons among the Roman citizenry) and denuding the world of foreigners. Seneca the Younger, *Apocolocyntosis* III.

³³*Bracae* is the Latin term used for the trouser-like garments traditionally worn by men in Iron Age northern Europe, sharply contrasting with the traditional Greek himation and Roman toga.

³⁴Juvenal, *Satires* VIII.231-4.

in this passage though partly established by the specifically nocturnal nature of his planned attack (evoking images of the attempted night-time raid on the Capitolium), the clearest indication that the c.390BCE conflict is meant is the mention of the Senones. What is crucial here is that while the Senones are mentioned in a way that closely ties them to the Sack, it is done so in a way that implicates Gauls generally as similarly guilty of malice against Rome.³⁵ Here the role of the Gauls is to serve as the ultimate representation of Rome's enemies, against whose villainous hostility the actions of traitors such as Catilina can be compared, a role more dramatically served by a sweeping generalisation than a somewhat pedantic specification.

The downplaying of the Senones in retellings of the Sack of Rome in favour of the more all-embracing label of 'Gauls' thus reflects a strong vein of jingoism in Roman attitudes to the latter group and exposes the use of the cultural memory of the disaster as a source of cultural capital. For those living, speaking, and writing in a world of political tension between Rome and at least one Gallic nation or other, a touchstone of common hostility against Gauls was likely far more useful than one that applied to only a single group of them.

The Fate of the Senones

In addition to the relative political usefulness of blaming the Gauls wholesale rather than the Senones solely, another factor in the disparity likely resulted from perceptions of the Gauls as one of, if not the, greatest foes faced by Rome, a situation that both prompted much of the jingoism discussed above and, retroactively, made them attractive candidates for the role of agents of Rome's greatest historic disaster.³⁶ The Senones, though, could not fill the role so easily, one factor likely being the somewhat early and anticlimactic fate they, as a nation, suffered at Roman hands in the course of history.

³⁵Juvenal's views on who precisely sacked Rome in the distant past are never laid out clearly, though *Satire XI*.111-4, in which the attacking Gauls are described as "streaming from the Ocean", would suggest that in his writings he primarily defaulted to the position of attributing it to migrating Gauls from beyond the Alps.

³⁶Roman perceptions of the Gallic threat in the first century BCE in particularly are perhaps most eloquently illustrated by Cicero's statement that "From the very beginning of our empire we have had no wise statesman who did not regard Gaul as the greatest danger to our empire" *De Provinciis Consularibus XIII*.33. C.f. Steel, 2001, p186.

Appian's work frames the conflicts between Rome and Gaul as a mighty struggle spanning nearly four centuries, pitting the emerging world empire against the fearsome race of northern barbarians and concluding with the unprecedented campaigns of Caesar's conquest of Gaul proper.³⁷ The same historian's record of war between Rome and the Senones, on the other hand, covers barely more than a century of the Republic's early years and concludes with a punitive massacre of the Senonian civilian population.³⁸ For historians of the Augustan Era and later Imperial periods, most notably Livy, foregrounding conflict with the prematurely doomed Senones in relation to the c.390BCE Sack, widely held to be the nadir of Roman fortunes, may have introduced a note of bathos to the narrative.

Unfortunately, when it comes to examining the place held by the Senonian Wars in Roman historiography, it is difficult to avoid arguments from silence, since accounts of their conquest by Rome c.283BCE are frequently lacking in detail. The account originally provided by Livy survives only in the form of a spare epitome barely acknowledging the actual conquest in favour of the vignette of the Senones' murder of Roman envoys.³⁹ Polybius' description of events is similarly terse, noting the Senones' death or expulsion from their territory at the hands of Rome after an act of diplomatic outrage.⁴⁰ Dionysius of Halicarnassus fails to even offer context for the event, introducing it as a tangent identifying P. Cornelius Dolabella as the consul under whom the Senones had been put to genocide.⁴¹ None of these offer much in the way of the kind of dramatisation or narrative gravitas found in most accounts of the Sack of Rome. Furthermore, the fact that Appian's account of the events is relegated to, or at least features more prominently in, his work on historical embassies rather than that of the wars between Rome and the Gauls suggests that aside from its notorious act of provocation the war itself was considered of little consequence.

A reconstruction of events of the final Senonian War by Rosenstein makes for a plausible version of the fuller story, with the root of the conflict lying in Senonian involvement in an ongoing Roman-Etruscan war, the offending murder of diplomats taking the form of a rejected

³⁷Appian, *Celtic Wars* Epitomes I-IV.

³⁸Appian, *The Embassies* Epitome XI.

³⁹Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* Epitome of Book XII.

⁴⁰Polybius, *Histories* II.19.7-13.

⁴¹Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* XIX.13.2.

demand for neutrality, and the consular army rapidly from Etruria slaying adult men and enslaving women and children in response.⁴² While reasonable doubt has been cast on to what extent this constituted a complete eradication of the population, it is nonetheless reasonable to conclude that this marked the dissolution of the Senones as a political or national entity.⁴³

Arguably, the greatest historiographical significance ascribed to the ignominious downfall of the Senones was Polybius' argument that it shifted the footing of Roman-Gallic relations from one of aggressive rivalry to one of Gallic existential angst.⁴⁴ In this it serves not as an epilogue to the Sack of Rome, but as a preamble to the climactic Battle of Telamon 225BCE, when the arrayed forces of the Cisalpine Gauls clashed with those of Rome and its Italian allies for the future of the peninsula.⁴⁵ Thus, the Senones only have significance in that they are Gauls, and in relation to other Gauls, rather than for their own actions, historical or otherwise.

The limits on the historical reputation of the Senones, in contrast to stereotypes and perceptions that applied to Gauls as a broader ethnic category, are likely to have been a factor in their frequently downgraded role in the frequently dramatic, emotionally charged retellings and remembrances of the Sack of Rome.

Gaul Before and Beyond the Alps

In addition to the issues raised by often ill-defined semantics of Gallic ethnicity in Classical texts, another complicating factor in understanding attitudes towards the 'Gauls' in Roman and Imperial Greek literature is the complex and often elastic nature of 'Gaul' as a geographic construct. Shifts and developments in understanding what constituted 'Gaul' were often closely tied to changing perceptions of its inhabitants and the historical actions imputed to them.

After several centuries in which Greek and Roman understandings

⁴²Rosenstein, 2012, 36-38.

⁴³A strong argument the notion of Senonian territory being reduced to an uninhabited wasteland by a Roman act of genocide lies in the fact that it was not officially redistributed by the Senate until fifty years after its conquest in the Lex Flaminia 232BCE. One very likely reason for this apparent inactivity was the presence of dispossessed enclaves of Senones scattered across the region, whose hostility would threaten any unprotected settlers. Roselaar, 2010, 57.

⁴⁴Polybius, *Histories* II.20.1-10 and 21.8-9.

⁴⁵Williams, 2001, 19.

of the lands around and beyond the Alps remained vague and limited, a relatively coherent conception of 'Gallia' (i.e. 'Gaul') appears to have taken shape around the turn of the second and first centuries BCE.⁴⁶ Per this approach, *Gallia* was a realm that incorporated a vast swathe of what is now western Europe divided into three regions. By this time two of these regions had been incorporated into the sphere of the Roman Republic as provinces: 'Gallia Cisalpina' denoted the Po Valley and Alpine foothills of what is now northern Italy (including the former lands of the Senones), and 'Gallia Transalpina' referred to an annexed strip of land along the Mediterranean coast between the Alps and Pyrenees.⁴⁷ The third region, 'Gallia Comata', marked the lands that extended away to the north beyond Roman dominion.⁴⁸ Thus, while compartmentalised, 'Gallia', the land whose inhabitants were 'Galli' or 'Gauls', was a term which could cover vast swathes of diverse territory at a single stroke, making generalisations deceptively easy.⁴⁹

The situation was altered, however, by the conquest of Gallia Comata in a series of campaigns led by Caesar 58-50BCE and the region's subsequent provincialisation.⁵⁰ Caesar's own writings on the conflict, the *Commentarii De Bello Gallico*, were instrumental in shifting perceptions of Gaul, refocussing them around the lands and peoples with which he had recently engaged.⁵¹ The opening line of the work ("*Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres*") reflects this concern.⁵² In framing the regions that became Caesar's theatre of war (Gallia Comata) as reflecting Gaul in its entirety, the text erases the status of Gallia Cisalpina and Gallia Transalpina as regions of Gaul, and invalidates the status of earlier conflicts in those regions as 'Gallic wars' in contrast to his own achieve-

⁴⁶Williams, 2001, 30-31.

⁴⁷Ebel, 1976, 2.

⁴⁸Roughly translatable as 'hairy Gaul', the name is thought to reflect its inhabitants' lack of adherence to Roman norms of personal grooming. Drinkwater, 1983, 5.

⁴⁹See Fig. 1, Appendix.

⁵⁰Drinkwater, 1983, 20-21.

⁵¹Evidence of the almost immediate impact of the commentaries on Roman literary culture can be read into the evidence of now lost works composed in its wake such as an epic recounting the expeditions to Britain by Cicero and his brother Quintus (who had served as an officer under Caesar's command on campaign), and a historiographical *Bellum Sequanicum* (war against the Sequani nation of eastern Gaul) by Varro. Dimitrova, 2018, 58.

⁵²"Gaul as a whole is divided into three parts" (Caesar, *De Bello Gallico* I.1.

ments.⁵³ The enfranchisement of those living in Gallia Cisalpina as Roman citizens in 48BCE and the area's incorporation as an administrative district of Italy six years later, as well as mass settlement of Roman colonists in Transalpina (shortly to be renamed 'Gallia Narbonensis') within the same timeframe, further helped disassociate those lands from the Gallic label.⁵⁴ While the effect was not immediate, as can be observed in Livy, Seneca, and Plutarch, this refocussing of the Gallic label on the area of Gallia Comata, far removed from Italy, increasingly distanced the term 'Gauls' from associations with the Cisalpine Gauls (such as the Senones) traditionally attributed with the sack of Rome.⁵⁵

Bridging this gap between the evolving connotations of 'Gauls' and traditions of their presence in Italy and Rome itself may well be a factor in the close relationship between the Sack of Rome and Gallic migration into the peninsula constructed by writers in the wake of the Gallic Wars, such as Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Plutarch. This would allow them to reconcile increasingly widespread perceptions of the Gauls as a people-group hailing from the north and west of the Alps with their presence deep in the heartlands of the Italian peninsula.

Another way in which the conquest and integration of Gallia Comata into the Roman Empire factored into the long-term chronological shift towards holding the Senones rather than Gauls responsible for the Sack, is that it resulted in considerable changes in how the Gauls were stereotyped. Thanks to Caesar's thorough, even brutal, subjugation of the region, as well as the rather ignominious failure of attempted provincial rebellions in 21CE and 69CE, the Gallic reputation as warriors who posed a threat to the Mediterranean world gradually eroded. We may usefully compare the early first century BCE historian Sallust's claim that the Gauls, in their ferocity, had surpassed the Romans as figures of martial prowess, with the late first century CE description of Tacitus that the Gauls had sunk into submission and were mostly

⁵³Notably, Caesar consistently refers to Gallia Transalpina as "*provincia nostra*" ('our province') in the text, a factor in the etymology of 'Provence' as the modern French name of part of the region.

⁵⁴Riggsby, 2006, 31; Drinkwater, 1983, 17-18.

⁵⁵This notion of a geographic perception shift in favour of seeing Gaul foremost as a transalpine, temperate European region after Gallic Wars is complicated by the existence of what appear to be poetic anachronisms, such as the late first century CE poet Silius Italicus' description of the northern Italian River Trebia lying in '*Celtica*' (*Punica* I.47).

characterised by their laziness.⁵⁶ For those living in a world where the people of Gaul enjoyed a reputation as great warriors they made for effective antagonists and bogeymen in the legend of Rome's darkest hour. For those living in a world where the people of Gaul were docile, assimilated imperial subjects it may well have been more evocative to specify the Senones, avoiding comparisons with the Gauls of the day by referencing obscurer figures of old, especially ones whose greatest notoriety derived from an act of egregiously violent impiety.

Conclusion

While neither the Emperor Claudius, whose Gallic ethnicity was never a matter of serious contention, nor the disgruntled Allobroges aiming to prosecute Fonteius could feasibly be held responsible for the early fourth century Sack of Rome, they were able to be implicated as such because Roman culture's approach to its past was sufficiently malleable to allow for it. Within the context of each of these instances, a greater amount of cultural capital was to be gained from spreading metaphorical culpability as widely as possible among Gauls (and even pseudo-Gauls in Claudius' case) than from adhering to the more plausible, if not strictly verifiable, version of the Senones' guilt.

Given the gulf of time between the Sack and the proliferation of accounts pointing to the Senones as culprits, it follows that information concerning them and their historical activities must have been preserved through the intervening time. So long as tensions with Gallic nations of any stripe remained a potential source of political capital, the impetus to see culpability for the events of c.390BCE spread as widely among the Gauls remained. However, as conflict with the Gauls, whether those of northern Italy or temperate Europe, became more and more of a distant memory, it was left for the Senones alone to loom large in the Roman cultural memory.

The Sack of Rome cannot, then, be the origin point of Romano-Gallic animosity, nor a root motivation for Roman Imperialism. Its legacy was less that of a scar on the cultural psyche, its clear memory colouring all that followed, than that of a rallying cry to be intermittently revived and intentionally deployed.

⁵⁶Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* XL.1-2; Tacitus, *Germania* XXVIII.

Appendix



Fig. 1: The 'Gallic' nations of northern Italy and western Europe⁵⁷

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