
TRAC Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference

www.trac.org.uk

Paper Information:

Title: The Just War: Graeco-Roman Texts as Colonial Discourse

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Pages: 1–10

DOI: http://doi.org/10.16995/TRAC1994_1_10

Publication Date: 31 March 1995



Volume Information:

Cottam, S., Dungworth, D., Scott, S., and Taylor, J. (eds) 1994. *TRAC 94: Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference, Durham 1994*. Oxford: Oxbow Books.

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1. The Just War: Graeco-Roman texts as colonial discourse

by Jane Webster

In their bid for power, the Aztecs, like all imperial nations, made a convenient marriage of politics and piety.

Roland Wright, *Stolen Continents* (1992: 34)

Thomas wants Cortes to be seen as a great man, so he plugs away at the theme of Aztec human sacrifice, thereby hoping to attenuate the moral queasiness we feel at Cortes' actions.

Frank McLynn, *Epic Thuggerly* (Review of Hugh Thomas *The Conquest of Mexico*, *New Statesman & Society*, 12 Nov 1993: 41)

The search for justification in wars of territorial conquest is as old as war itself (MacKenzie 1992: 3). Justificatory processes attempt to deflect both external and internal criticism, and have been a feature of even the most profitable colonial wars. Thus, the desire to deflect criticism at home was an important sub-text of the pro-colonial literature which accompanied the Spanish conquest of the New World (cf Harris 1992 on Francisco de Vitoria's 1539 lectures *De Indis et De Jure Belli*), and of the intense justificatory process at the time of the nineteenth-century British colonial campaigns (MacKenzie 1992: 4). The literature which accompanied the territorial expansion of the Roman Empire reflects a similar tension, wherein the rhetoric glorifying Rome as the 'capital of the world' (Balsdon 1979: 1), and her people as chosen for the greatness of Empire is enacted through tropes which betray an uneasy recognition of the need to justify expansion into the world of the 'other'.

This paper employs tools offered by colonial discourse analysis to suggest that deconstruction of tropes of the 'just-war' in pre- and early post-Conquest accounts of Gaul can offer valuable insights into Graeco-Roman perceptions of the relationship between coloniser and colonised. At the same time, it is argued that failure to read these Classical accounts as specifically colonial discourses has led us to offer simplistic readings of pre-Conquest 'Celtic' religion. Two topics from the Classical literature will be examined here: *aitia* (origin myths), and references to Gallic human sacrifice. Both themes have a moral and religious thrust; *aitia* by recourse to Classical myth, human sacrifice by stressing the barbarity of Gallic religion.

Colonial Discourse: decentering the West

One of the most important features of recent anthropological and ethnographic self-critique has been an exploration of the relationship between imperialism, colonialism, and ethnographic practice, in the generation of modern ethnography. Many anthropologists, including Asad (1973), Clifford and Marcus (1986), Fabian (1983), and Marcus and Cushman (1982) have examined the constraints which colonial contexts place on ethnographic practice, and the

power asymmetries structuring colonial discourse. This debate, it is argued here, has an immediate relevance for contemporary readings of Graeco-Roman 'ethnographies' of the *Keltoi*.

The development of post-colonial critique within modern ethnography in turn owes much to the broader post-structural interest in the deconstruction of European categories of knowledge (see Young 1990: 1–20 and 119–156). Young (1990: 11) emphasises the importance of the European colonial encounter within this project, as a point of questioning of the categories and assumptions of Western thought. Analysis of colonial discourse, defined by Hulme (1992: 2) as 'an ensemble of linguistically-based practices unified by their common deployment in the management of colonial relationships' is similarly contexted here. The present paper is indebted to critiques of colonial discourse offered by Hulme (1985, 1992), Fabian (1983), Said (1978; 1993), and Spivak (1985).

Herodotus and Columbus

Hulme (1992: 21) has argued that 'Herodotean' discourse is one of the discursive networks informing the earliest documentary record of the European colonial encounter with the Caribbean — Columbus' *Journal* of 1492–3. He goes on to argue that the Atlantic colonial discourse formulated after 1492 drew specifically upon the 'Herodotean' discourse of savagery, and emphasises that Herodotus was an unacknowledged source for the various *topoi* of the discourse of savagery 'as they journey through Hellenic and Latin texts up to Middle Ages and early vernacular literature' (1992: 270). Given that the present paper inverts Hulme's insight to suggest that Classical discourse can be read in terms of post-1492 colonial literature, a potential problem of circularity presents itself here. Two comments may be offered.

First, and fundamentally, modern colonial writing and Classical texts offer insights *into each other*, because they encode essentially similar discourses. This point is underscored, from the 1492 perspective, by Hulme himself:

The advantage of reference to Herodotus (or Pliny) is that it stresses the discursive nature of these [textual] phenomena, purely 'other' to the thus confirmed humanity of the Graeco-Roman and later Christian world.

(Hulme 1992: 270).

This is not to argue that all colonial discourses are simply interchangeable. There is no single colonial experience. Each colonial encounter generates discursive strategies of its own, and the shared 'discourse of savagery' which Hulme traces between Classical literature and post-1492 Caribbean texts is thus only one aspect of the colonial discourse of either world. But ancient and modern colonial discourse share a discursive similarity which renders them contextually analogous. Thus, insights on the western construction of the Orient (Said 1978) which for Hulme (1992: 33) is a quite separate discursive network to the Herodotean discourse of savagery, nevertheless offers important analytical tools for the analysis of Rome's construction of its others.

Secondly, it is important, in this context, that as the above quote implies, Hulme uses 'Herodotus' as a shorthand term embracing other strands of Classical ethnography. Hulme's contention that in 1492 'the discourse of savagery had in fact changed little since Herodotus' 'investigation' of Greece's 'barbarian' neighbours' (1992: 21) perhaps unintentionally denies the changes that occurred in Classical 'barbarian' discourse during the Graeco-Roman period

itself. Herodotus may be credited with the invention of an ethnographic logos (Tierney 1960, Hartog 1988), but this was initially employed in accounts of distant and even mythical peoples. Much of the writing Hulme groups under his 'Herodotus' shorthand concerns peoples far nearer to home, and was written in the specifically colonial milieu of Roman Imperial expansion. The textual similarities Hulme rightly finds between ancient and modern 'barbarian' discourse are contexted in colonial rule: and the line which Hulme traces between Classical ethnography and post-1492 colonial discourse underscores the argument of this paper: that we should resituate Classical ethnography as colonial discourse.

Myth and Territorial Sanction: Aitia

As Asad argues (1986: 164), there are asymmetrical tendencies in the languages of dominant and dominated societies. Inequality is embedded in the ethnographies of a conqueror. Among the most tangible expressions of this inequality is the denial of indigenous traditions of origin through the imposition of external mythical schema.

Aitia, tales drawing foreign peoples into the compass of Graeco-Roman mythical geography, are a common feature of Classical writing on the *barbaroi*. Most Classical versions of Gallic origins are of this type. Indeed, the sole writer to mention the Gauls' own belief in their origins (as autochthonous descendants of *Dis Pater*) is Julius Caesar (6.18, 1), and even here the deity in question is appropriated for Rome by the use of *interpretatio* (Webster, in press).

Although the genre yields some of the earliest Greek references to western Europe, the *aitia* of Gaul have received little attention (for a brief treatment see Rankin 1987: 81-2). The most common Classical protagonist in these tales is Heracles/Hercules. An archetypal hero, Heracles performed miraculous feats at the farthest ends of the earth. The tenth Labour of Heracles — the capture of the cattle of Geryon — sent the hero to the far west of Spain, as Geryon was said to live in the Islands of Erythea 'on the shore of the Ocean near Gadeira, outside the pillars of Hercules' (Herodotus, *Histories* 4, 8). There is no doubt that this Greek tradition of Heracles as a wanderer in the far west is extremely early, even pre-dating Greek colonisation in the western Mediterranean. As early as the eighth century, Hesiod (*Theogony* 289-294) wrote of Heracles returning overland to Greece from Erythea. Aeschylus (525-456 BC) mentioned Heracles' arrival among the Ligurians in the same context (*Prometheus Unbound* Frg. 326, repeated in Strabo *Geography* 4.1, 7) and the fourth-century writer Ephorus was said by Strabo (*Geography* 3.1, 4) to have referred — erroneously — to a temple of Heracles at the Sacred Cape (Cape St. Vincent).

These early *aitia* represent the imposition of an external mythical scheme: a Hellocentric form of cultural imperialism (Hartog 1988: 246). However, it may be argued that under the Roman hegemony, mythopoeia becomes a more complex form of colonial discourse, with the heroic paradigm serving to sanction territorial claims through the creation of a colonial family.

In the early references mentioned above, Heracles simply passed through Gaul but around 150 BC a territorial claim to Gaul was staked for the hero. Nicander of Colophon (writing c. 150 BC, cited in Antonio Liberalis 4.6) stated that the Celts, defeated in their plot to steal the Geryon Cattle from Heracles, thus forfeit their lands to him. In the period between the annexation of the Southern *Provincia* (c 125 BC) and the death of Augustus (AD 14) Gallic *aitia* occur more frequently than at any time before or after, and all make territorial claims to Gaul. References from this period are: Diodorus (*Bibliothèque* 4.19; 5.24, 1); Parthenius (*Narrationes Amatoriae* 30); Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Antiquitates Romanae* 1.40, 3, 14.1,

4); Livy (*Ab Urbe Condita* 5.34 *passim*). A much later tale by Ammianus Marcellinus (15.9, 4), is probably drawn from a lost work by Timagenes (b.c 80 BC). These references, bracketing the annexation of both Gallic provinces, are characterised by two tropes; the hero as civiliser and the hero as forefather.

Civilisation and Heroics

The claim to disseminate a higher civilisation is a common *topos* of the just war, and is frequently accompanied by the denigration of indigenous cultural achievement. Garlake's (1982) documentation of white settler responses to the ruins of Great Zimbabwe is instructive in this context. Following the occupation of Mashonaland and Matabeleland by the British South Africa Company in 1890, white settlers — prompted by Rhodes — actively promoted the myth that the white race was returning to a land it had formerly ruled. The ruins of Great Zimbabwe were held up as evidence not of the complexity of Shona culture, but as the remnant of an earlier phase of white civilisation. The contention that lost whites had shaped the prehistory of Zimbabwe employed claims to a mythically early phase of white rule to sanction a later territorial sequestration. Rhodes recognised the considerable propaganda value that evidence of ancient foreign settlement, preferably white and successful and with Biblical origins, would have (Garlake 1982: 1). Christian mythopoeia, as Garlake's comment implies, was a critical factor in a justificatory process aimed not only at external opinion, but at the white settler population itself.

Heracles, as Hartog remarks (1988: 26) was first and foremost a civilising hero. He was commonly depicted as bringing the benefits of civilisation to the lands through which he travelled. In the course of time, Heracles' lessons were forgotten, and the people returned to barbarity. One of Diodorus' accounts of Heracles in Gaul (*Bibliothèque* 4, 19) employs this trope explicitly:

Heracles...took his army and passing into Celtica and transversing the length and breadth of it he put an end to the lawlessness and the murdering of strangers to which the people had become addicted...and he founded a great city which is named Alesia (*Ale*) after the wandering on his campaign. But he also mingled among the citizens of the city many natives, and since they surpassed the others in multitude, it came to pass that the inhabitants as a whole were barbarised. The Celts up to the present time hold the city in honour, looking upon it as the hearth and mother city of all Celtica.

(*Bibliothèque* 4, 19)

Diodorus' encyclopedic *Bibliothèque*, begun c 56 BC and not circulated until the reign of Augustus, was many years in the making. But as these dates suggest, the work was compiled during the early years of Roman occupation of northern Gaul. Diodorus uses the trope of Heracles as civiliser to suggest a much older claim to Gaul. It is not insignificant that the specific site named in this passage as an Heracleian foundation is Alesia, publicised by Diodorus' contemporary, Caesar (*Gallic War* 7.33–56), as the scene of the collapse of unified Gallic resistance. Caesar's text, and his Gallic war triumph, during which the Arvernian Vercingetorix was publicly strangled (Rankin 1987: 129), had etched Alesia into both the national consciousness and the vocabulary of Roman imperialism.

Roman Imperialism: Greek perspectives

Diodorus was a Greek, born in Agyrium, Sicily, and Heracles is foremost a figure of Greek myth. It is an over-simplification (though one often made) to assume the existence of a single, Graeco-Roman viewpoint on the *barbaroi*. Whilst there is little to suggest that any Greek ethnographer produced overtly anti-Imperialist literature (Balsdon 1979: 182ff), it is important to remember both that Greek portrayal of peoples who, like themselves, were subject to Rome, would not necessarily mirror Roman concepts, and that Roman territorial expansion was not viewed in entirely the same way by Romans and Greeks (Momigliano 1975). For the majority of Greek writers by the late Republic, ideological identification with the success of Rome negated any anti-Roman feeling. Momigliano (1975) stressed that the large-scale infiltration of Hellenistic thought and custom into the Roman world in the third and second centuries BC provided a common basis of understanding for Greek and Roman intellectuals, whilst at the same time the interests of the Greek elite were intimately tied to the survival of the Empire. Nevertheless, social stigma remained for many Greek intellectuals, for whom, as Wiseman remarks (1982, 34) 'the question of social definition is comparatively straightforward since dependent status was inherent in their very Greekness'. This dependency was unlikely to promote public expression of anti-Roman sentiment, but such sentiments remained. Timagenes, an Alexandrian brought to Rome as a slave in 55 BC, was asked why he cried on seeing a burning house in Rome. His answer was: that a bigger one would be built in its place.

Heracles was of course adopted into the Roman pantheon, and there is no doubt that Heracleian *aitia*, in both Greek and Roman usage, sanction Roman territorial claims. But through the subtle reminder that Heracles, not Hercules, was there first, the Gallic *aitia* may also have served a peculiarly Greek agenda, enabling Greek writers to countenance a colonialism which, from their perspective, was not to be welcomed unequivocally.

In claiming Alesia for Heracles, Diodorus sanctions Roman rule in Gaul in much the same way Rhodes was to do for Zimbabwe. Each colonial encounter develops its own discourses, however, and while for white South Africans, the issue of race precluded the development of claims of biological ancestry, this was not the case in Roman Gaul, where the notion of a mythical but direct ancestry was commonly promoted.

Heracles: a man of many ways

Following annexation of the *Provincia*, and particularly after the Conquest of northern Gaul, Heracles was promoted to founding father of the Gallic race. The antiquity of the earliest Heracleian *aitia* have already been mentioned, and traditions of Heracles as an ancestral father of non-Greeks are similarly old. Herodotus (4, 8–10) gave a Black Sea Greek version of the origins of the Scythians in such terms, and as Hartog remarks (1988: 27) the Hellenocentric placing of a Greek hero as the father of non-Greek peoples is a constant feature of Greek anthropology. But under the Roman hegemony, the Hellenocentric *topos* of the 'founding marriage', which as Hartog argues had in early Greek usage served to *distance* the Scythians both spatially and culturally from the Greeks (1988: 23), became an allegory in which the power asymmetries of the Roman colonial encounter are embedded.

Analysing the tropes by which coloniser-colonised relationships were defined in the Americas, Hulme (1985: 20) points out that tropes of mobility and sexuality were often united in the heroisation of leading (male) protagonists of early colonial encounters. Hulme refers to these heroes as 'polytropic'. Mobility is of course a defining characteristic of the heroes of

Classical myth — the term polytropic derives from an epithet used by Homer for Odysseus, and means ‘the man of many ways’ (Hulme 1985: 20).

In *aitia* written after the Gallic War, Heracles assumed a polytropic role. His travels became sexual encounters, partnering the hero with a variety of Gallic spouses. Through the resultant eponymous offspring, Heracles is presented as the forefather of the Gallic race. Parthenius offers an example:

Hercules, it is told, after he had taken the kine of Geryones from Erythea, was wandering through the country of the Celts and came to the house of Bretannus, who had a daughter called Celtine. Celtine fell in love with Hercules and hid away the kine, refusing to give them back to him unless he would first content her. ... a son called Celtus was born to them, from whom the Celtic race derived their name.

(*Narrationes Amatoriae* 30)

In a similar tale from Diodorus (*Bibliotheca* 5.24, 1), the son of Heracles is called Galates. These *aitia* are allegories. They enable colonialist discourse to allegorize a personal relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. At the same time, as Hulme (1985, 1992) has argued for the naming of new lands by colonists of the Americas, the sexual opposition of male:coloniser, female:colonised embedded in the allegory affirms the power asymmetries structuring the colonial relationship itself (cf. the engraving of Vespucci’s encounter with the female ‘America’ by Jan van der Straet (c 1600): Hulme 1992: Fig 1). Through allegories such as these, the colonial ‘family’ was constructed and the dominant position of the coloniser constantly reaffirmed.

Heroism and Empire

MacKenzie (1992: 115) draws a comparison between the heroes of nineteenth-century imperialism and those of earlier myth. Entering geographic and ethnic space, both types of hero prepared the way for moral conquest, and so justified the rise of the imperial state. As MacKenzie notes, the ‘imperial heroes’ of the nineteenth-century (Havelock, Livingstone, Gordon, and TE Lawrence) were located not in myth, but in the present. But the mythical Heracles may have served a similar role in Graeco-Roman colonial discourse. As suggested above, it may be a particularly Greek subtlety that emphasises Heracles as the hero of Gallic *aitia*; but at same time, heroisation itself was crucially important in imperial contexts. Operating through the collective consciousness the hero ‘gave specific corporeal shape to the combination of god-like virtues, dilemmas of power, and the major spiritual and personal anxieties that represent the human condition’ (MacKenzie 1992: 135). In this sense, Heracles and Havelock may be seen as analogous.

The barbarity of human sacrifice

In the just war, the trope of Rome as civiliser is employed in a second context: the demonstration of the unsuitability of the conquered to rule themselves. The unfitnes of the Gauls for self-determination is a subtext of many accounts of Gaul, and most play the shared tune of human sacrifice. The earliest reference to human sacrifice is Sopater’s comment (*Comedy Frag.* 6, cited by Athenaeus) that the *Galatae* sacrifice prisoners of war to the gods.

Sopater (d. c230 BC) was conceivably referring to Gaul, but more probably to the Galatians of Asia Minor. The majority of Classical sources date to the Later Iron Age (for Gaul, La Tène III — Gallo-Roman précoce: 120 BC – AD 14). Accounts are given by Posidonius (in Strabo *Geography* 4.4, 6), Caesar (*Gallic War* 6.16, 1–5), Cicero (*Pro Fonteio* 13.31, *De Res Publica* 3.9, 15), Varro (in St. Augustine *City of God* 7.19), Diodorus (*Bibliothèque* 5.31, 4, 5.32), and Strabo (*Geography* 4.4, 5).

Most accounts do not specify the victim, but two prevalent categories may be noted: captives (specifically those taken in battle), and criminals. Caesar does mention the sacrifice of ‘innocents’ — a term at once emotive and opaque — but captives and criminals are the main categories. It is difficult to know how to read these references. First, the stress on the sacrifice of prisoners could reflect combative experience. But at the same time, the sacrifice of prisoners of war was an emotive issue, as it broke Graeco-Roman codes of conduct in war, and to stress the theme thus offered a double emphasis on Gallic barbarity. It is also clear that some writers made personal capital by labouring this point. A good example here is Cicero’s *Pro Fonteio* (13.30). Fonteius, a governor of the *Provincia*, had been accused of embezzlement by the Allobroges. As Fonteius’ advocate, Cicero’s defence proceeded from the position that, as practitioners of human sacrifice, the Allobroges lack *pietas*, and could not be considered trustworthy under oath. Fonteius was acquitted.

Yet at the same time, a sense of moral outrage pervades the literature. Was this, too, cynically professed? There is much to suggest that condemnation of Gallic sacrifice was a complex colonial discourse. *Contra Wait* (1985: 194), who suggests Gallic human sacrifice had a real oddity value for Classical commentators, human sacrifice was not as far removed from Graeco-Roman culture as writers tended to imply in their condemnation of the rites among the *barbaroi* (Rankin 1987: 286–7). It was not until 97 BC that human sacrifice was forbidden in Rome, and the elder Pliny remembered the interment alive of a Greek and Gallic couple in Rome (Balsdon 1979). As late as AD 213, Caracalla, having slept with a Vestal Virgin, was responsible for her burial alive at the Colline Gate (Balsdon 1979). That such rites could apparently be overlooked in condemning barbarian sacrifice is for many writers explicable only as Roman hypocrisy, or remains an inexplicable paradox (Brunaux 1988: 129).

It may be argued that frequent reference to the rite in the Later Iron Age is partly to be explained by the very fact that Rome had so recently abolished similar practices. Reference to human sacrifice among the *barbaroi* offered the potential for self-congratulation and reassured the Romans as to their own, newly-acquired higher measure of civilisation. This process of reassurance involved a further collusion, in that Romans were brought up to believe that human sacrifice had been shunned deliberately or else abolished at an early period (Balsdon 1979).

In such ways, later Republican and early Imperial writers were able to draw clear, but uneasy, conceptual distinctions between some of their own practices, and those of the Gauls. For Brunaux (1988: 129) it is paradoxical that texts condemn the sacrifice of criminals in Gaul, when the execution of criminals was legal in Greece, and when the Romans themselves employed execution in the course of a warrior rite (the public strangulation of high-ranking enemies, as noted for Vercingetorix, above). This duality is not a simple matter of hypocrisy: it illustrates the collusive power of colonial discourse. By the mid first century AD, human sacrifice had been harnessed to the trope of Rome as civiliser, and writers contended that Rome had put paid to this aspect of Gallic barbarity. Writing c43 AD, Pomponius Mela (*De Chorographia* 3.2, 18) asserted that human sacrifice had been replaced by a symbolic act, and Pliny (*Natural History* 30.4) also referred to the cessation of human sacrifice.

The archaeology of human sacrifice

Human sacrifice is the most frequently documented Gallic rite in Classical literature. But as the above discussion suggests, it is extremely likely that this is an exaggeration effected by colonialist discourse. Human sacrifice has nevertheless entered the modern construct of 'Celtic' religion. It has done so on basis of the above mentioned literary sources, because, as Brunaux concluded (1988: 136), our knowledge of Iron Age human sacrifice rests almost wholly on text. Archaeological evidence for human sacrifice is almost always equivocal. To demonstrate the votive character of human bone deposits is not to preclude the possibility of fortuitous death, and as Brunaux (1988: 133) points out, even where human remains occur in unequivocal cult contexts, as at Gournay-sur-Aronde (Oise; Brunaux et al. 1985) and other Picardy sites including Ribemont-sur-Ancre (Cadoux 1991), the demonstration of violent death and post-mortem mutilation of human remains is not itself evidence for human sacrifice (see also Brunaux 1986: 323–4). The texts themselves offer little help in this context, since nothing is said of the post-mortem deposition of sacrificial remains, on which archaeological approaches to human sacrifice must necessarily concentrate.

Human sacrifice is on occasion argued from archaeological evidence. de Navarro (1972: 17–18), for example, argued for human sacrifice at La Tène, and Wait (1985: 117 and 119) suggested that complete inhumations under ramparts in Southern Britain represent foundation sacrifices. A more recent contender has been the Lindow bog body (Ross 1986: 162–4) whose multiple injuries — axe blows, strangulation by garrotte, and a cut throat — are unlikely to have been the result of a simple act of violence (Stead et al. 1986). But it is through the literature that human sacrifice retains its high profile in accounts of Celtic religion, and in this respect, modern narratives often out do the Graeco-Roman ones. Green (1986: 28), for example, took Caesar to suggest that it was through human sacrifice alone that the Gauls controlled the power of the gods, although Caesar nowhere made such an assertion in his account of Gaul. The discourse of savagery remains a persuasive one.

Pax Romana: tropes of peace

A just war must be followed by a just peace, and under the early Empire, the just war tropes of sacrifice and civilisation are harnessed to the discourse of pacification. This is a discourse which serves to subvert and to mask resistance, but which at the same time encodes the power asymmetries structuring the relationships between the coloniser and the colonised. This paper has suggested that for Caesar's *Gallic War*, as for Columbus' *Journal*, the deconstruction of colonial discourse is an important analytical tool in the articulation of such relationships.

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