EXOTIC NAMES, NOTABLY IN SENECA’S TRAGEDIES

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I. How poetry exploits the names of remote regions, that is an attractive theme. For best effect, those terms should be general rather than specific, and above all not be obtruded in plethora. Such at least are the maxims enounced in a cursory but percipient survey of several English poets.¹

In excesses none equalled the Latins: use, abuse, misuse. Their habits avow a pervasive indifference to precision of nomenclature; and they encouraged the ignorance and lack of intellectual curiosity otherwise all too prevalent in the educated class. Whence firm censure.²

Virgil set the tune, who achieved well before his decease the dominance of a classic. The early and palmary specimen is a river of India displaced: ‘Medus Hydaspes’ (Georg. 4.211). The language of panegyric he lavished on Caesar’s heir, conqueror in the Orient and ruler of the wide world, made happy play with a selection of romantic names — and with ‘a nice derangement of epithets.’³

II. Manifold seductions adhere to the names of far lands and strange peoples. Various evocative and often euphonious or resonant, they confer adornment, they convey the exhilaration of space and distance. Moreover, they advertised the erudition cherished by exponents whose choice term of approbation was ‘doctus’. Some appellations had become familiar from their use in Greek poetry. Others however reflected recent accessions to knowledge. A prose author composing in the high style could be drawn upon. Influences are properly surmised that emanated from digressions in the Historiae of Sallust.

To be added is the direct impact from foreign wars. That is, the campaigns of Lucullus beyond the Euphrates, Pompeius operating towards Caucasus and the Caspian: to be followed and surpassed by victories of Caesar Augustus. Modest instruction emerges when the earliest occurrence is registered of certain names in poets of the time; and curiosity may be prompted to ask about omission as well as selection. In the dearth of prose that survives, poetic testimony (notably for the first decade of the reign) engrosses high estimation, sometimes inordinate and misleading. The world empire of Rome was an eager inspiration, enhanced by designs of further expansion attributed to the heir of Alexander — and promoted into realms of fantasy.

III. So far brief allusion to writers that brought up contemporary themes. When epic or drama throws back the scene into the heroic age, propriety and taste have a bearing on the employment of geographical terms. Some types might disturb. The question arises how far author or reader was sensitive to anachronism.
Discreet procedures which the Greek tragedians adopted offer some guidance on the flank. For example, they admit assemblies that vote; they are prepared to concede letters, but books are eschewed; and while metaphors from currency occur, no coins are specified.

As concerns Seneca, writing five centuries later than the tragedians he imitated, the author could employ without discomfort oriental names that became known in their epoch. On a further assumption, no objection might debar some that had accrued since then, especially from the campaigns of Alexander, and had been admitted to Hellenistic literature. Thus the Araxes, Armenian river, used by Apollonius the Rhodian (4.133). Enough if the illusion of 'long ago' were not impaired.

That is, remote names and not specific. In Seneca’s tragedies they tend to proliferate in the chorus. That was proper. The chorus commonly signifies escape. It declares aversion from pomp and power, as from dynastic crime. Detesting kings and courts, it recommends the simple life, not often to be found in that vicinity.

Exotic names win preference that had already been invested with classic consecration. A famous passage in the Medea predicts discoveries reserved for a future age: ‘nec sit terris ultima Thule’ (379). Virgil showed the way, in homage to Italy’s leader: ‘tibi serviat ultima Thule’ (Georg. 1.30). That is not all. Leading up to Thule, Seneca avers that the ends of the known world are now linked through foreign travel,

Indus gelidum potat Araxen
Albin Persae Rhenumque bibunt (373f.)
The model is patent,
aut Ararim Parthus bibet aut Germania Tigrim (Ecl. 1.62).
Again, Virgil brought the Araxes into high prominence on the Shield of Aeneas (Aen. 8.728). Others follow, and Seneca employs Araxes in two other lyrical passages (Phaed. 58; Oed. 428).

Like rivers in Armenia, ‘Ganges’ (once) and ‘Gangeticus’ (three times), although distinctive names in a sense, were too far away to disturb readers of tragedies that purported to reflect the heroic age. Nor is there any call to worry about ‘Nabataea quatiens regna’ (Ag. 483), not found in other poets. By the same token, the western lands. Rhodanus (Med. 587) had long been familiar to Greeks, but Virgil’s Arar would not have suited Seneca. However, instead of ‘Hister’ he admits ‘Danuvius’ (Med. 724; Thy. 376), which like the Arar was a name of quite recent emergence. Futher, Baetis (once) and Tagus (twice), Hiberus (once). Those rivers had probably cropped up in poems that celebrated exploits of Heracles in the Far West. For all that, Baetis is allowed to evoke the author’s natal province: ‘nomenque terris qui dedit Baetis suis’ (Med. 726). A personal motive would be enough to preclude Britain (the conquest of Claudius Caesar).

IV. Therefore no problems so far. Another passage in the Medea should superinduce perplexity since it carries an incongruity. Concocting her potion, the
princess blends the juices from noxious herbs of diverse provenance, all the way from chill Caucasus to the river Baetis. On the contributions of Arabs, Medes, Parthians follow

aut quos sub axe frigido sucos legunt
lucis Suebae nobiles Hyrcaniis (712f.)

One at once asks what German ladies are doing on the south-eastern shore of the Caspian (otherwise the 'Hyrcanian Sea'). The word 'Suebus' is far from decorative, and it is hard to match in Latin poetry before Claudian, apart from the historical epic of Lucan (2.51). 'Suebae' has never in fact been impugned, but 'Hyrcaniis' could not fail to arouse disquiet. Why not 'Hercyniis'? That is, the great Hercynian Forest that extended eastwards from the Rhine, known already by report to Eratosthenes and to some other Greeks.

In his edition Avantius (in 1517) duly proposed 'Hercyniis', and it found favour with Gronovius (1687). Not so with any of the more recent editors. In defence of his text the robust Leo extracted from Seneca half a dozen instances of error or exaggeration in matters of geography.

None however comparable for the internal discrepancy. Nor did Leo adduce the prosody, viz. 'Hercynius'. That impediment is duly and briefly noted in the new and exemplary text of the tragedies.

The poetical testimony for the word might attract the curious. It happens to be very late: three times in Claudian and twice in Sidonius. One can add Avienus and Priscian in the hexameter versions they produced of the Periplus of Dionysius.

The question intrudes of metrical licences deemed permissible. For parallel (albeit imperfect), observe the Cadusii, a people who lived on the south-western shore of the Caspian. Once of historic note, their name survived in obsolete geography or in prose fiction but evaded Latin poetry until the last days, to appear, as 'Càdusus' in Avienus (907), as 'Càdusus' in Priscian (720).

Specimens less remote can be cited from classical poetry. Thus Virgil with 'Sícánus' (Aen. 5.24) and 'Sícáníus' (8.416); and whereas Martial had 'Brittònis' (11.21.9), Juvenal preferred 'Brittònis' (15.121). An extreme instance (a needless variant rather) was perpetrated by Valerius Flaccus, with the unique form 'Bàternae' (6.96). He registers a Germanic people, the Bastarnae, as is proved by the name of their leader, viz. Teutagonus.

On this notion, sharp alternatives confront: a licence taken by the dramatist in dealing with an exotic name not previously attested in the usage of poets or the visibly incongruous lodgement of 'Suebae nobiles' in Hyrcania.

The German ladies dwell in forests 'gelido sub axe'; and in another passage the country is styled 'sub aeterna nive/Hyrcana tellus' (Thy. 630f.). In Seneca's third reference the huntsman Hippolytus in prayer to Diana enumerates wild animals, from the beast that drinks the water of Araxes (Phaed. 58) to those whom 'Hyrcani celant saltus' (70).

Woodland and hence animals (primarily tigers), but not a chilly clime, that is the common connotation of Hyrcania. Thus in Lucan 'silvae' (3.268; 8.343) and
‘nemus’ (1.328), in Valerius Flaccus ‘luci’ (6.114).

VI. In the beginning Hecataeus knew of Hyrcania as a land of shaggy
mountains. Alexander’s brief incursion into this secluded realm revealed sundry
remarkable features, to be noted and enlarged upon in the pages of historians.
The lush vegetation on the coastal plain was surmounted by vast forests along the
northern slopes of Elburz. The tiger (i.e. the ‘Indian tiger’) was there at home,
and it persists to this day. It became proverbial for speed and ferocity. A vivid
anecdote relates the hazardous device used by hunters to capture a single cub
from a tigress.

Poets easily transferred those tigers to Caucasus or to Armenia. Hyrcania
itself at its first entrance (in Catullus) lacks colour or epithet. Virgil introduced
the tiger when Dido objurgates Aeneas (4.367). Next, Hyrcania occurs in a
context that alludes to Caesar Augustus: a consul who one day will unbar the
Gates of War and go out against distant nations, not omitting Hyrcani, Indi,
Parthi (7.601ff.).

Nothing remains to be said about the tigers. For relevance to Latin poetry,
the savage dogs of Hyrcania claim a brief word in passing. Lucretius put them to
employ (3.750). Next Grattius, with the fable of their mating with the local tigers
(161ff.). More plausible, but still fabulous, are bitches breeding ‘de patre
Geloneae/Hyrcano’ (195ff.). Dogs of the Geloni (cf. 157), or of the Seres (159),
that is enough. Neither species wins admittance to the *Cynegeticus* of Arrian.

VII. The Geloni conduct the enquiry towards other exotic names exploited
by Seneca. The silk people, the Seres, are furthest away and soonest despatched.
Seneca duly brings up ‘quaë fila ramis ultimi Seres legunt’ (*Phaed. 389*), and he
dismisses them with ‘quocumque loco iacent’ (*Thy. 378*).

Virgil began it (*Georg. 2.121*), and sheer fantasy soon took over. Arethusa in
her letter to Lycotas, deemed absent on distant campaigns, assigns mailed
horsemen (cataphracts) to this pacific people:

> te modo viderunt iteratos Bactra per ortus
> te modo munito Sericus hostis equo.

Thus Propertius (4.3.7ff.).

According to Horace, Maecenas is a victim to anxiety,

> sollicitus times
> quid Seres et regnata Cyro
> Bactra parent Tanaisque discors (3.29.26ff.).

Horace contemplates the conquest of the Seres (1.12.56). Finally, they figure
in a group of nations that will not transgress against the ‘edicta Iulia’ (4.15.23).

For present purposes, that will do for Seres. The Scythian Geloni afford
instruction of a different sort. They engross an ample rubric in early ethnography,
with explicit and startling details in Herodotus. Originally Hellenic colonists,
the Geloni dwelt in the country of the Budini. That people, though defined as
nomadic, possessed a large city built of wood; and they were blond and red-
haired. On the other hand, the Geloni were farmers and gardeners.

The Geloni enjoyed a long fortune in Latin poetry. First of all in the *Georgics*,

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either distant and indistinctive (2.115) or lumped together with Thracian tribes
(3.461); and the Shield of Aeneas musters them (as ‘sagittiferi’) in the strange
farrago of conquered peoples that adorn the triple triumph of the year 29 (8. 725).
In Horace the Geloni are duly curbed by Augustus,
  intraque praescriptum Gelonos
exiguis equitare campis (2.9.23 f.).
Horace also uses them as a symbol for far lands (3. 4.35); and they, although
‘ultimi’, will learn about his poems (2.20.19). The iterated mention of Geloni in
this season has evoked speculation.
  They had only just come to Roman notice, so a Horatian commentary opined;25
  and they lived not far from the Roman frontier, according to the standard
  investigation.26
  On the contrary, the Geloni had vanished long since, forfeiting their name or
  absorbed in other peoples of the steppe. Strabo, often a repository of the obsolete,
  knows them not. Nor does Ovid, who from his exile on the shore of Pontus
  became aware of the Sarmatian Iazyges, at this time close to the Danube mouth,
  like the Bastarnae.27
  Lacking appeal to Propertius as to Ovid, the Geloni occur in a chorus of Seneca
  among nations conquered by Bacchus: ‘ille dispersos domuit Gelonos’ (Oed.
  478). Their survival remains purely decorative. It is not easy to discover a
  composer of hexameters who disdains them, culminating in Claudian, with no
  fewer than eleven instances, with two to follow in Sidonius.
  VIII. In sharp contrast to Geloni stand the Heniochi, a people endowed with
  precise lodgement and an enduring history.28 Not in Virgil or Horace, but Seneca
  puts them where they belong,
    inhospitalis Caucasi rupem asperam
    Heniochus habitans (Thy. 1048f.)
  The Heniochi occupied the coast beneath the mountain of Caucasus, beyond
Dioscurias (which in due course became the extreme point of Rome’s direct
dominion). Narrow territory and a poor soil impelled them to assiduous piracy,
which they practised in small boats of a distinctive type.29
  Hence Ovid with a suitable allusion: ‘Heniochae nautis plus nocuere rates’ (Ex
  P. 4.10.26). In Lucan, Pompeius claims that he conquered the Heniochi (2.591),
  and they rally to his cause (3.270). In a catalogue the poet of the
  Argonautica was
  content with ‘Heniochosque truces’ (6.43). It may be noted that they earn a
  casual reference in Tacitus. The Parthian monarch Vonones when expelled by
  Artabanus made an attempt to escape into their region.30
  IX. Sallust’s digression De situ Ponti in Book 3 of his Historiae was a prolific
  source for later writers, prose as well as verse.31 It cannot have left out the
  Heniochi. A fragment describes Achaei and Tauri as ‘omnia feroissimii’
  (3.74): the Achaei came after the Heniochi along the coast. When the author in
  his circuit approached Maeotis and the river Tanais he extended his ambit
towards the north and the east to take in Scythians and Sarmatians. Thus ‘Scythe
  nomades tenent, quibus plausta sedes sunt’ (3.76).
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In itself that fragment does not say very much. No matter: Sallust was enamoured to excess of picturesque detail and legendary lore. For example, the lavish treatment of Sardinia (2.1–12), obtruded on the slightest of excuses, namely the end of M. Lepidus. The chance subsists that the author could not resist the Geloni.

Sallust meant more to Pomponius Mela than a model of style, it may be surmised. Observe the geographer on the Geloni (2.14) and their neighbours: ‘Budini Gelonion urbem ligneam habitant’ (1.116).

Geloni or Heniochi were surpassed by what Sallust no doubt had to report about Armenia when he narrated in Book 4 the campaigns that Lucullus conducted in 69 and 68. Marching through Sophene and crossing the Taurus (the high range that separates Armenia from Mesopotamia), Lucullus descended into the upper valley of the Tigris and won a signal victory hard by Tigranocerta. After which he proceeded eastwards to take up winter quarters in Gordyene: one of the products of that fertile region happens to be registered, the fragrant ‘amomum’ (4.72). From Gordyene the general proposed to go northwards in the next year and make for Artaxata, the other capital of Tigranes.

This was the juncture for bringing in Niphates. That great mountain tends to elude close identity.\(^3\) No wonder, since it had more utility for poets than for historians. Strabo by good fortune mentions it in relation to Gordyene (11.1 p.527). Further, Niphates is named (albeit laxly) by Plutarch when recounting Alexander’s passage of the Tigris and invasion of Adiabene (Alex. 31): compare Silius Italicus: ‘Pellaeo ponte Niphaten’ (13.765).

One is directed therefore to the huge massif in Kurdistan south-east from Lake Van that rises above 11,000 feet (i.e. Hakkâri). Strabo in another passage puts the source of the Tigris there (11.1 p.522, cf. 529). He ignored, it will be noted, the main stream of the Tigris, which rises a long way to the west and bends eastwards beneath the citadel of Amida (Diyabakir). His Tigris is therefore the Botan Su (the Centrites of Xenophon), which was often taken to be the Tigris itself. These arguments tell against the Ala Dağ, which some favour: a high peak a little to the northeast of Lake Van.

Lucullus in his bold and ambitious march reached the river Arsanias, the southern branch of the Euphrates, and won a battle there, but could not get much further. Now the historian was alert to the sources of Euphrates and Tigris (4.77). He should also have mentioned the Araxes, which, rising in central Armenia not far from the sources of the Euphrates, flows eastwards towards the Caspian. Mela, one notes, has an ample and highly stylised description of that river in its whole course (3.46). To Sallust’s account of Armenia other items may have accrued. The historian would soon be coming to Pompeius’ operations towards Caucasus — had he survived.

Death cut Sallust short in 35, the year following Antonius’ invasion of Media. Like the author, the earliest readers of the Historiae found in the digressions ample resources for refreshment.\(^3\) Those who were pent up in Italy of the Triumvirs, a grim and austere prison house, longed for escape to far or fabled
climes, envying the opportunities enjoyed by partisans of Antonius who visited
the courts of princes or sojourned for long years in opulent cities of Asia and
Syria.

There were also hazards and hardships. The agile Dellius, whose talents had
been much in demand for diplomatic missions, went with the army on the long
march to Phraaspa and survived to recount the campaign. The retreat was an
arduous operation. They were glad to reach and pass the Araxes, the river that
divided Media and Armenia. 34

Counselling Dellius to keep an equal mind in prosperous seasons no less than
in adversity, Horace refrained from adding any embellishment of oriental names
(2.3). Niphates and Tigris he reserved for Valgius Rufus, senator and composer
of epic verse, who might celebrate ‘nova tropaea’ of the ruler (9.20f.).

X. Niphates brings on Virgil and poetry in the sequel. On the marble temple
Virgil proposes to construct beside the Minucius will figure triumphs. Further,
addam urbes Asiac pulsunque Niphaten (Georg. 3.30).

In his conception Niphates is not a mountain but a river. Horace was moved to
correct his friend gently,

\[
\text{potius nova}
\]
\[
\text{cantemus Augusti tropaea}
\]
\[
\text{Caesaris et rigidum Niphaten}
\]
\[
\text{Medumque flumen gentibus additum}
\]
\[
victis (2.9.18ff.).
\]

The ‘Medum flumen’, by the way, should be the Tigris, not the Euphrates. 35 In a
traditional conception (noted above) the source of the Tigris lay south-east from
Lake Van.

Virgil’s authority prevailed. Lucan conforms with ‘volventem saxa Niphaten’
(3.245). Likewise Silius (13.765, quoted above). Further, Juvenal (6.409),
suitably alluding to the campaigns of Trajan. Reparation had to wait for a long
time. For Claudian, Niphates is once a river, but twice a mountain; 36 and Sidonius
is correct (three instances). 37

XI. Next, the culminating scene on the Shield of Aeneas. The divine artificer,
after depicting ‘Lelegas Carasque’ (8.725) proceeded to ‘sagittiferosque Gelonos’,
and the rubric of conquered peoples terminates with

\[
\text{indomitique Dahae et pontem indignatus Araxes (8.728)}.
\]

Geloni and Araxes, that was to be expected. The Armenian river, introduced by
Sallust (one conjectures), was already to be found in the Panegyricus Messallae
(143). 38 Propertius took it over. Of Postumus, rebuked by Aelia Galla for
absence on warfare in foreign parts, it is stated ‘potabis galea fessus Araxis
aquam’ (3.12.8); and in the parallel missive the forlorn Arthesus is under
constraint to ascertain from geography and maps ‘qua parte fluat vincendus
Araxes’ (4.3.35).

The surprise is the Dahae, a nomad people in the steppe country east from the
Caspian to the north of Hyrcania. Lucan employs them twice, in rhetorical
contexts (2.296; 7.429). Likewise Seneca, each time in a chorus (Thy. 370; 603).
Otherwise they seem to fade out of poetry (not even in Claudian).

Like the Heniochi, the Dahae persist as a historical nation. Artabanus the Parthian king was reared among them; his brother Gotarzes could summon Dahae as well as Hyrcani for allies; and Gotarzes retreated into their country when attacked by Vardanes. 39

XII. The names, whether melodious or strong and harsh, satisfied a variety of requirements, most obviously to end a hexameter. Thus Araxes (apart from the two instances in Seneca), along with Geloni and Niphates. Some were highly evocative. The great mountain (absent from Seneca) suggests snow. Yet in spite of the Latin word 'gelu', the Scythian Geloni do not stand for a cold country: only distance, nomadic horsemen, speed and arrows.

Modest curiosity might attach to the varying preferences of Augustan poets. As is evident, Virgil and Horace cohere closely (although Horace neglects Araxes). Again, Propertius and Ovid fail to respond to the appeal conveyed by Niphates and Geloni.

As has been indicated, the decorative function ensures a long duration. The figures in Claudian reflect the ancient classics, viz. Araxes (5), Geloni (11), Niphates (3), Seres (7).

Claudian also avows a liking for Ethiopian Meroe (nine times). Important for geography and for astronomy, the name was both euphonious and romantic. 40 Yet Meroe is sparse on show in Augustan poetry. Ovid happens to use it with 'hinc Libys, hinc Meroe siccaque terra subest' (Fasti 4.570). 41 Propertius however rose nobly to the occasion in one of his latest poems,

ille paludosos memoret servire Sycambros
Cepheam hic Meroen fuscaque regna canat (4.6.77f.).

The poem goes on to predict Roman conquest in the Orient. It acquires a firm dating: the year 16 is given by the allusion to a subjugation of the Sugambri, from whom Horace expected a triumph (4.2.33ff.). In fact they had already offered hostages and submission before Augustus turned up in Gaul. 42

As for Meroe, the epithet is explained by Cepheus, an Ethiopian monarch in one version of the Andromeda story. 43 Meroe also came into the legends about Memnon. 44

Now Ethiopia had recently been brought to notice through the expedition conducted by P. Petronius in 22. He reached Napata. As the author of the Res Gestae was to declare, 'Napata cui proxima est Meroe'. 45 It is perhaps strange that neither Virgil nor Horace had been impelled likewise to exploit the name. For benefit to Propertius, it came from somewhere in Hellenistic poetry. A splendid epigram survives: one path to death, whether leading from Athens or from Meroe. 46

XIII. A sustained scrutiny of the exotic names, with diversion to Hyrcanian tigers or obsolete nations, might be dismissed as an exercise in compulsory erudition of a traditional sort. The subjacent theme is wider and deeper. It concerns the impact made by foreign wars, and it has various aspects.

In the first place, literary annals. Clues are sought that could serve to date
individual poems, sometimes in undue precipitance. Precision cannot always be hoped for (and it may not be needed). Even if alert to novel events, poets may fail to respond with alacrity. By paradox, an unfulfilled prediction about the Sugambri ties down poems of both Propertius and Horace.

Differing predilections obtain, and different types of writing. The subjugation of north-western Spain was the prime military achievement that marked the first decade of the reign, celebrated by the closing of Janus for the second time. Caesar Augustus himself had taken the field against the Cantabrians in 26. Hence ‘Cantaber’ no fewer than six times in Horace — but nowhere in any other poet. With emphasis on the campaign of 26, Horace eschewed Astures and Callaeci. All the more peculiar and noteworthy is his obtrusion of the Concani, a small tribe lurking on the extreme western edge of Cantabria. In a hyperbolical passage he shoved them in between Britanni and Geloni (3. 4.34). The source of his knowledge baffles.

Horace was all too prone to fantasy or wilful frivolity for purposes of adornment. A double corrective avails. First, the Carmen Saeculare enjoined solemnity. The Medes go in fear of the Roman fasses; and further, ‘iam Scythae responsa petunt, superbi/nuper et Indi’ (55f.). That was in place. Embassies had arrived from India, from Bastarnae and Scythians, and from Sarmatians that dwell on either side of Tanais. Second, a factual narration. When the Alpine campaign of Drusus is extolled, Genauni and Breuni claim entrance, names never known before, and seldom since (4.14.10f.).

XIV. The large theme is poetical language put to assiduous employ in elucidating the history of the time and the policy of the government. The motives of certain writers come into the count, their relation both to public opinion and to official aspirations. Their testimony has been confidently invoked to support the thesis that Caesar Augustus knew no bounds or limits in his ambition for world conquest.

Expansion of the empire both in Europe and in Asia is in cause. Brief treatment must suffice. To begin with, Britain furnishes guidance as an extreme paradigm, because of assertions promulgated incautiously by the historian Cassius Dio. First, after the campaign of 35 in Illyricum the Triumvir went to Gaul, proposing to invade the island. He was recalled by insurgent Dalmatians. On the contrary, further operations in Illyricum were imperative: to secure Italy against the event of a breach with Antonius. Second, in 27 Augustus departed to Gaul with the identical project. Warfare against Cantabri and Astures diverted his efforts. Once again, a reason manifestly suspect. Spain was the goal and the expedient task. On neither occasion would the ruler care to face the risk of being cut off and bottled up in a distant and profitless island. Tarraco to Ostia, Spain permitted a line of rapid transmission to and from the capital.

XV. While fancies about Britain faded before long, Parthia continued to supply nutriment for poets and the public. The settlement advertised in 20 by the recovery of the Roman standards did not abate the notion of war and conquest in
the eastern lands. Neither did the wilful conjunction of peace with Parthia and Janus closed which Horace proclaimed in two of his latest poems. 57

Propertius in the poem of the year 16 was happy to defer the avenging of Crassus: if Augustus forbears, a noble task awaits the sons of the Princeps (4.6.80f.). His prediction was fulfilled, after a fashion. When the temple of Mars Ultor was dedicated (in the summer of 2), the pageantry found suitable climax in a naval battle staged between Athenians and Persians. 58 Early in the next year the prince Gaius Caesar set out from Rome in the garb of war, 'paludatus'. To his account of the Naumachia, Ovid subjoined a long digression promising victory and a Parthian triumph (AA 177–228).

This rubric calls for a curt and merciful termination. At no time (so it can be maintained) did Caesar Augustus contemplate war with Parthia or conquest and annexation beyond the Euphrates. Diplomacy was the weapon all through.

XVI. In support of the contrary thesis (that is, aspirations concerning Europe as well), plain ignorance about geography has been adduced. Men of the time had no conception of the vast space that extended eastwards of Rhine and Danube to the lands of Scythians, Sarmatians, Seres. 59 Especial weight is assigned to the figures of distances which Agrippa registered in the 'commentarii' he provided to elucidate his world map. 60

Exhibited on a monument, the comprehensive panorama was designed to delight and instruct the populace, no matter if some of the estimates went back to Eratosthenes. The military had other requirements, and other sources of information when they planned or carried out campaigns in regions adjacent to the imperial dominion. By times of marches they reckoned, not by distances in miles. Mishaps in earlier wars had not been caused by mere ignorance of geography. Rather arrogance and incompetence or the treachery of native allies. Not that adequate estimates were beyond reach, as a pair of contemporary notices reveals. Velleius reported four hundred miles from Rhine to Elbe; and Strabo supposed about three thousand stades, a straight line being precluded by the forests and the marshy country. 61

A single item comes in to convince. To invade Bohemia in A.D. 6 the high command employed two armies. One set out from Mainz on the Rhine, the other from the vicinity of Vienna.

In central Europe the primary aim and need was to acquire the land route from northern Italy to the Balkan lands. 62 That entailed conquests in Illyricum and expansion of direct rule as far as the Danube (with claims to suzerainty beyond the river). Hence balance and solidity for an empire that extended laterally all the way from Gades to the Euphrates. On that showing, western Germany can be regarded as subsidiary. Illyricum was overshadowed by the prominence accorded in historians to German campaigns — and by the disaster that cost three legions.

XVII. The present disquisition announced emphasis on exotic names in their ornamental function; and it went on to deprecate their incautious exploitation when the foreign policy of Caesar Augustus is put under scrutiny. One topic that surfaced was poems to be dated through allusions to contemporary transactions.
Of scant promise for Seneca's tragedies. In general, passages may be quoted that bear upon the predicament of a senator under despotism and commend a quiet life; and strictures on dynastic crime in the House of Atreus or the presentation of angry and ruthless ladies will recall the reign of Nero, Poppaea as well as Agrippina. Quite so. Yet Seneca would not have composed a different Thyestes had he been writing as a young man in a private station during the early and better years of Tiberius Caesar.

A clue in Tacitus has not been missed, albeit faint and imperfect. In the year 62 Seneca began 'carmina crebris factis tare', to outdo Nero's efforts, so enemies alleged (Ann. 14. 52.3). A veteran adept may now have reverted to earlier pastimes, since he was on the way out and soon to petition for retirement.

An approach can now be made to an item in which close relevance has been detected to a late epoch in the reign. Seneca (once, in Thyestes 630) and Lucan (twice) happen to be the first Latin authors to name the Sarmatian Alani. Put on record a long time ago, the item was not neglected by scholars in the sequel.

Nero designed an expedition to the Caucasus. Tacitus referred to it when mentioning the movements of troops, 'quos idem Nero electos praemissosque ad claustra Caspiarum et bellum quod in Albanos parabat . . . revocaverat' (Hist. 1.6.2). For 'Albanos' Mommsen's 'Alanos' has a certain claim. No need to add that as elsewhere the Caspian Gates are the Pass of Darial, behind the land of the Iberi.

For that purpose Nero raised a new legion, viz. I Italica, which received its eagle on September 20 of 66. A question arises, how soon the Caucasian project was mooted. Nero's first fancies attached to Hellas, with an abortive journey as far as Beneventum early in 64, after which he returned to Rome, 'principias Orientis, maxime Aegyptum, secretis imaginationibus agitans' (15. 36.1). It would have to be supposed that Caucasus and the Alani had come into discussion some time before the deaths of Seneca and Lucan (in sequence to Piso's conspiracy in the spring of 65). Not indeed that it is necessary to adduce the maps of the region brought back by some of Corbulo's men: they took in the 'portae Caspiae'.

The relevant passages in the two poets demand close inspection. First, the items in Lucan. One is indistinctive, namely Caesar installed in the palace at Alexandria, in fear of assassination: 'quem non violasset Alanus/non Scytha' (10. 453 f.). The other helps. Pompeius in a vaunting reference to his campaigns asserts

> peterem cum Caspia claustra
> et sequeru duros aeterni Martis Alanos (8. 222 f.).

Now Alani are absent from the long catalogue in Book 3 naming the oriental peoples that muster for Pompeius (229 ff.), although it includes for example Heniochi, Sarmatians, 'volucresque Geloni'. Therefore, it follows, the Alani had not yet entered the poet's ken, his first three books having been completed by the end of 63 (such is the assumption). Hence a sure 'terminus post quem', so it is stated. Furthermore, the reference in Seneca's Thyestes conforms — and attests
its own dating.\textsuperscript{71} The passage is more often cited than quoted. It runs
\textit{an feris Hister fugam}
\textit{praebens Alanis, an sub aeterna nive}
\textit{Hyrcaana tellus, an vagi passim Scytheae?} (629 ff.).

Mentioning the Danube, the phrase shows that the author had in mind the other Sarmatian people, the Rhoxolani, in the plains northwards from the mouth of that river. Seneca therefore lapses, and the thesis is left with Lucan—and a very tight chronology, along with a very rapid rate of productivity during the last eighteen months of the young poet’s life.

The Rhoxolani first entered history when attacked by generals of Mithridates, as Strabo reports.\textsuperscript{72} But Strabo ignores the Alani, and neither people occurs in Mela. In Pliny they are named together: not however in his account of Scythia and Sarmatia, but in a brief passage in another book.\textsuperscript{74} The Rhoxolani were documented in an oration of Vespasian when he paid retarded honour to Plautius Silvanus Aelianus: when governor of Moesia c. 63 Aelianus had dealings with the princes of the Rhoxolani and Bastarnae.\textsuperscript{75}

XVIII. As concerns the Alani, it was premature to assume that literate Romans abode in total ignorance until the closing epoch of Nero’s reign. Alani came into the notable transactions of 35 and 36, copiously narrated by Tacitus (6. 31–37). When the Parthian monarch Artabanus provoked trouble, Tiberius put L. Vitellius in charge of comprehensive measures for deterrence, among them employment of the Iberians, who invaded Armenia and captured Artaxata. Commanding the Gate of Caucasus, the Iberians brought in the Sarmatians: ‘Caspia via Sarmatam in Armeniam raptim effundunt’ (6. 33.3).

These Sarmatians had for conspicuous weapon the long heavy spear suitably styled a ‘contus’ (35.1).\textsuperscript{76} They are patently Alani. As is briefly stated by Josephus: under persuasion (and subsidies) from Tiberius, the kings of the Iberi and Albani opened the Caspian Gates and let in the Alani.\textsuperscript{77}

At this point a neglected passage in the \textit{Thyestes} comes in providentially. To illustrate by antithesis the maxim ‘regnum mens bona possidet’, the chorus evokes for dispraisal a variety of monarchs. Among them,
\textit{qui Caspia fortibus}
\textit{recludunt iuga Sarmatis} (374 f.),

That is, the Alani brought through Caucasus by the rulers of Iberia and Albania.

In the season of those events, Seneca (born c. 2 B.C.) was entering the Senate by his late quaestorship. Otherwise, an eloquent historian offered. Consul in 35, Servilius Nonianus had been in a position to acquire precise information. Without discomfort and to some advantage it will be assumed that Tacitus derived from Nonianus his long and ample narration.\textsuperscript{78}

XIX. Pursuant to the caution enjoined, it was expedient that the references to the Alani be submitted to rigorous scrutiny. Nevertheless, a late dating for \textit{Thyestes} will be held acceptable. Concern with Pontus and Caucasus, fostered among other things by Corbulo’s Armenian campaigns (in 58 and 59), had been
growing well before Nero's designs took shape.

Nor should the literary affinity between Seneca and Lucan be overlooked. The author of *Thyestes* may have been writing under influences from his nephew. Heniochi and Dahae did not often attract poets. Both peoples occur in Lucan, twice. Seneca exhibits Heniochi (once), Dahae (twice): in his *Thyestes* (as registered above).

Seneca had been drawn to geography long since. Perhaps his horizon was now widening. About the year 63 he reported the mission of two centurions whom Nero despatched to look for the sources of the Nile. In Pliny's version a party commanded by a Guard tribune explored the whole tract from Syene as far as Meroe.

Finally, an argument of a different kind has recently been invoked to support the notion that *Phoenissae* and *Thyestes* are the latest in date of the Senecan tragedies. Namely the frequency of 'sense pauses' within lines of verse.

The *Phoenissae* is manifestly an incomplete piece of work. Dating apart, every reason enjoins and rewards concentration on the *Thyestes*.

XX. Epilogue. Initial prominence was accorded to propriety in the choice of names, with avoidance of flagrant anachronisms. Suebi came up (*Med.* 713). Not, it was observed in passing, a seductive name — but nothing debarred the Hercynian Forest, preferable to putting their habitat in Hyrcania.

Seneca’s employment of certain distant rivers came into the count. As for Italy, Eridanus had a long past in the fables of the Greeks before it acquired prosaic identity as the Padus. But Seneca would surely keep off Padus no less than Tiberis.

It may (or may not) arouse mild disquiet that in *Thyestes* Atreus is allowed to compare himself for sagacity with a hound of the Umbrian variety (*Thy.* 497 ff.). Was Seneca inadvertent, or rather now bolder? The sexagenarian author nowhere betrays signs of senescence.

Some of his latest letters declare wit and irony as well as vigour and coherence. For example, vagaries in literary style (114) or the habits of voluptuaries (122). Above all (and suitable for terminating this disquisition), the censure visited on classical erudition (*studia liberalia*). The Homeric Question is dismissed along with other problems that vexed or enchanted the professors, not worth knowing even if knowable: ‘non magis ad rem pertinet quam scire, cum minor Hecuba fuerit quam Helena, quare tam male tulerit aetatem’ (88.6).

NOTES

3. To modify Sheridan's Mrs. Malaprop ('epithets' in place of 'epitaphs').
5. Figures stating frequency will not take in *Hercules Oetaeus*, commonly denied to Seneca.
6. Introduced (one supposes) by the *Bellum Sequaniicum* of Narbo's poet, Varro Atacinus.
7. First in Caesar and Sallust. On which, J.G. de Pachtère, 'Salluste et la découverte du Danube',

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Since Cons. ad Liviam 311 is not a serious exception. As in Lucan, a distinction can be drawn between the ornamental and the factual.

10. O. Zwierlein (OCT 1986), 455; 'hercynius Avantius (metro refragante); cf. Leonem 1.202.' The metrical question was not noted by C.N.D. Costa in his edition (Oxford, 1973). Suggesting a confusion between the two words on the part of Seneca, he went on to state 'but we may vindicate him by supposing with Avantius that he wrote Hercynis'.
12. Claudian, IV Cos. Hon. 451; Cos. Sil. 1.228; Sidonius, Carm. 5.283; 7.326.
13. Avienus 420; Priscian 275.
14. Hecataeus, FGrH 1, F 179.
17. Mela 3.43; Pliny, NH 8.66.
18. e.g. Virgil, Ecl. 5.29; Propertius 1.9.19.
19. Catullus 11.5: 'sive in Hyrcanis Arabase molles.' The Sacae in the next line seem to evade poets until Claudian (Cos. Hon. 1.157).
20. After A.S. Pease in his Commentary (1935), on Aen. 4.367 (quoting e.g. three items from Shakespeare). Duly economical, Steier in RE 6 A, 946 f.
21. It is strange that Seneca allowed himself to name the sagacious Umbrian hound when Atreus alludes to his own activities (Thy. 498). For those dogs, Grattius 172 ff.
22. The Commentary of Nisbet and Hubbard (1970), while citing three later poets, failed to include Georg. 2.121 and Odes 4.15.23.
26. Kiessling, RE 7,1017 f. (citing Augustan poetry). Furthermore, the Geloni preserved their identity until the 'Völkerwanderungszeit'.
27. Ovid, Ex P. 1.2.77; 4.7.9; Ibis 133.
29. viz. 'camarae'. See Strabo 11, p.495 f. And cf. Tacitus, Hist. 3.47.3.
30. Tacitus, Ann. 2.68.1.
31. For the detail, Maurenbrecher in his edition.
32. See G.F. Weidner, RE 17,706f. Unlike some other scholars, he got the general location right. But he cited only the first of the four references in Strabo (11, pp. 522, 523, 527, 529).
33. cf. Sallust (1964), 232 (noting inter alia the Fortunate Isles).
34. Plutarch, Antonius 49.
35. Nisbet and Hubbard in their Commentary (1978) assume the Euphrates. Further Niphates, there opening a long and valuable exposition, is styled 'a mountain range in central Armenia.' Milton knew it as 'th' Assyrian mount' (PL 1.4,126, cf. 3. 742).
36. Claudian, III. Cos. Hon. 72 (still a river); De rapta Pros. 3.263; In Eutrop. 1.16.
37. Sidonius, Epp. 9.13.5, 1.21; Carm. 2.444; 23.94.
39. Tacitus, Ann. 2.3.1; 11.8.4; 10.2.
40. Thus Milton's 'Meroe, Nilotic isle' (PR 4.71).
41. The item was overlooked when Meroe was discussed in History in Ovid (1978), 49.
42. Dio 54.20.6. The preceding mishap of M. Lollius (in 17, cf. Obsequens 71) was later magnified beyond measure, with repercussions in most modern accounts of imperial policy.
43. Ovid, Met. 4.668.
46. *Anth. Pal.* 10.3. Meroe is not in Apollonius or in Callimachus (as extant).
47. Their location is given only by Concana in *Ptol.* 2.6.50.
49. *RG* 31.
50. The Sugambri illustrate the distinction. Beginning as 'factual', they were abolished by Tiberius in the campaign of 8 B.C. but survived for ornamental purposes. Thus six times in Claudian.
52. See also remarks on the poetical testimony in *History in Ovid* (1978), 48 ff.; 185 ff.; *The Augustan Aristocracy* (1986), 382 f.
53. Dio 49. 35.2.
54. Nevertheless Nisbet and Hubbard conclude that 'the poets cannot have misinterpreted the intentions of the régime' (on 1. 35.30).
55. Dio 53. 22.5; 25.2.
56. The commentators appear more cautious this time (*Vol.* 1, Intr. d., p. xxx).
57. *viz*.* Odes* 4. 15.6 ff.; *Epp.* 2. 1. 255 f. Hence the notion, sponsored by several scholars, that the third closure of Janus belongs to 13 B.C. Against which, *AJP* 100 (1979), 202 = *Roman Papers* 3 (1984), 1190.
58. Accorded great prominence by the ruler (*RG* 23).
59. Hence Nisbet and Hubbard discussing the Seres: 'their conquest and that of India did not seem a wild dream to people of Horace's age' (on 1. 12.56).
60. P.A. Brunt, *o.c.* 175.
61. Velleius 2. 106.3; Strabo 7, p. 292.
62. For this conception, *CAH* 10 (1934), 351 ff.; 380 f.
68. Pliny, *NH* 6. 30; 40.
69. The day but not the year is supplied by *CIL* 3. 7591.
71. Täubler, *o.c.* 17.
72. Täubler, *o.c.* 17 n. 5.
73. Strabo 6, p. 307.
74. Pliny, *NH* 4, 80.
75. *ILS* 986 (the mausoleum near Tibur).
76. The 'contus' is attested for the Rhoxolani, who made an incursion into Moesia at the beginning of the year 69 (*Hist.* 1. 79). Valerius Flaccus mentions it, as do Silius and Statius, cf. *CQ* 23 (1929), 129 ff.
78. Nonianus, and not Aufidius Bassus, who on the preferable view (that of Mommsen) ended with the year 31. Other matters of 'Quellenforschung' come in, *viz.* the abridged account in Dio (57.26.1–4) and Suetonius on foreign affairs in the last epoch of the reign (*Tib.* 41), miserable and misleading.
79. Seneca, *NQ* 6.8.3. He had once written about Egypt (Servius on *Aen.* 6.154; 9.30), and also about India (Pliny, *NH* 6.60).
82. As splendidly exemplified by C.J. Herington, *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature* 2 (1982), 519–30. No opinion was there expressed about the dating of the tragedies. For that vexatious problem see now the arguments of O. Zwierlein, *Prolegomena zu einer kritischen Ausgabe der Tragödien Senecas* (1983), 233 ff. He puts most of them antecedent to the year 54, and none later than 60.
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