

NOVISQUE REBUS INFIDELIS ALLOBROX
(HOR. EPOD. 16. 6)

At the beginning of his *Epode* 16, Horace contrasts civil wars with external threats that could not destroy Rome: the Marsi¹ or the Etruscans, competition with Capua, the rebellion of Spartacus,² *novis rebus infidelis Allobrox*,³ the fierce Germans⁴ or Hannibal, who had terrified⁵ the Romans' ancestors (vv. 1–8):

Altera iam teritur bellis civilibus aetas,
suis et ipsa Roma viribus ruit.
quam neque finitimi valuerunt perdere Marsi
minacis aut Etrusca Porsenae manus,
aemula nec virtus Capuae nec Spartacus acer
novisque rebus infidelis Allobrox
nec fera caerulea domuit Germania pube
parentibusque abominatus Hannibal.

It is clear that this is not a chronological listing of historical episodes. On the contrary, recent threats make way for those that are almost mythological, while two enemies close in time, Capua and Hannibal, are spaced apart on the list, at the end of which one can see a *gradatio*.⁶ Why the Allobroges⁷ appear on the list of powerful enemies of Rome is far from clear. This was

¹ The Marsi initiated (“*primi moverunt*”, as the Scholia IV termed [Keller 1902, 433]) the Social War, also called the Marsic War (Bellum Marsicum). Mankin 1995, 247 discusses whether this episode may be considered as an external aggression, while Watson 2003, 490 sees no complication here.

² One can conclude that they perceived Thracian Spartacus as a foreign enemy.

³ We meet *singularis* only here. *Pluralis* is *Allobroges*, *-um*.

⁴ Since the invasion of the Cimbri and Teutones, Germanic tribes were considered as a dangerous enemy of Rome. However, it might also refer to recent campaigns of Caesar.

⁵ Probably from the religious formula *quod abominor* (God forbid that!).

⁶ Watson 2003, 494.

⁷ E.g. Watson 2003, 402 calls the mention of the Allobroges as a major enemy at least “odd”.

a Gallic tribe living on the banks of the Rhone, familiar to us primarily from Book 1 of the *Commentarii de bello Gallico*. Two questions arise at once: (1) which historical episode related to the Allobroges could have been worthy of such a reference?⁸ and (2) how should we define a case and function of *novis rebus*,⁹ as *dativus (commodi/incommodi)* or as *ablativus (instrumenti, temporis, causae, of attendant circumstances*¹⁰)?

Supposing that this refers to a **single historical event**, we find ourselves confronted with a choice: the Allobroges, “disloyal in time of tumult” (let us prefer this translation at this point),¹¹ appeared several times in the history of Rome:

1. In the Punic War II, the Allobroges supported Hannibal by providing him with everything he needed before he crossed the Alps, Liv. 21. 31: *...commeatu copiaque rerum omnium maxime vestis est adiutus*. (The mentioned dispute over power between two brothers might point to a kind of *res novae: Tum discors erat. ... <Hannibal> arbiter regni factus... imperium maiori restituit*.)

2. Fabius Maximus Allobrogicus¹² conquered the Allobroges. We know that the final battle took place on August 8, 120 BC where the Isère meets the Rhone (Plin. *NH* 7. 166). Chronologically, these events coincided in time with in-country unrest (*res novae*) related to the policy of Gaius Gracchus.

3. Allobrogical legates were involved in the Catiline Conspiracy in 63 BC. Many authors provide details of these events.¹³ The fact that the Gauls had taken the side of the government and their participation in the conviction of conspirators are of particular importance for our discussion. In that case, they were really unreliable to *res novae (dativus incommodi)*. Scholars variously interpret this episode as both the most likely¹⁴ and

⁸ Or, “quid Allobroges in hoc contextu sibi volunt?” (Ollfors 1964, 125).

⁹ Verbatim, *new state of things, revolution, changes* (*OLD* s. v. *novus*, 10).

¹⁰ Page 1962, 493.

¹¹ Bennet’s translation in Loeb edition: “the Gaul disloyal in time of tumult” (Bennet 1960, 403).

¹² Cos. 121 BC, see Brassloff 1909.

¹³ First of all, Cic. *Cat. Or.* 3; Or. 4; Sall. *Cat.* 40–41; Plut. *Cic.* 18. 3.

¹⁴ Ollfors 1964, 127 mentions a majority (“maior pars”) of scholars who state that the poet meant this very event (“designatum esse”). A more correct statement would be that most scholiasts *took into account* this event. Orelli 1910, 725 refers the passage to Catiline’s conspiracy, but takes *novis rebus* for *ablativus*. In his sketchy review of Roman history in Horace’s works, V. Durov names the same event as mentioned here (Durov [В. С. Дуров, *Незнакомый Гораций*] 2015, 55).

the least likely¹⁵ for our fragment. There are two difficulties with the apparent obviousness of this solution (in particular, the expression *res novae* completely fits the denomination of the conspiracy). The first is logical. The Gauls, who had turned out to be unreliable accomplices of Catiline, did not destroy, but rather saved Rome when they had agreed to become double agents for Cicero.¹⁶ An inconsistency with the context, difficult to articulate, is another problem. The comic story of inconsistent actions of Gallic legates introduces irony and somewhat lowers the style, which is not so undesirable on the list of dark pages of the Roman history as it is in the context of the entire poem, dedicated to the Civil War and full of despair, unusual for Horace.

4. In 61 BC, in the towns of the Allobroges, Valentia and Solinum, people rebelled against the colonists, and Caesar mentions the suppression of this uprising.¹⁷ Other authors also refer to these events (Dio 37. 47–48; Cic. *De prov. cons.* 32; Liv. *Per.* 103).

5. At the time of Caesar's conquest of Gaul, the Allobroges were already allies of the Romans, and one can assume that they could be regarded as quite reliable ones, as they did not support Vercingetorix's rebellion (Caes. *BG* 7. 64–65).¹⁸ Some of them joined Caesar's troops. It seems that one case would suit the characteristics of *novis rebus infidelis*: during the Civil War, some Allobroges, the brothers Roucillus and Egus and their comrades, switched sides from Caesar to Pompey, reporting details of the fortifications of Dyrrachium to the latter (Caes. *BC* 3. 59–61).¹⁹

6. There are no data available on other uprisings of the Allobroges, although cases of unrest in Gaul as a whole sometimes make scholars suppose that this is about events that occurred simultaneously with or shortly before the writing of *Epode* 16. Thus, Watson apparently assumes reference is made to the uprising of 38 BC, saying that the Allobroges “had recently been in the news”.²⁰ If it were so, this detail could be

¹⁵ Mankin 1995, 248 says that this episode is *least likely*, interpreting it rather as a reference to the events of 121–120 BC.

¹⁶ Thus in that crisis they were in fact *faithful* to the Senate (Mankin 1995, 248).

¹⁷ *Nuper pacati erant*, *BG* 1. 6. 3 (note that the attribute of *nondum bono animo in populum Romanum viderentur* is given from the perspective of the Helvetians).

¹⁸ Some possible explanations for their devotion to Caesar are proposed by Cook 1914, 91–93.

¹⁹ Caesar points out a psychological aspect in the conflict with the Gauls and the transition that followed, *sed freti amicitia Caesaris et stulta ac barbara arrogantia elati ...* (*BC* 3. 59. 3).

²⁰ Watson 2004, 492.

relevant for dating the *Epode*. Nevertheless, sources on the history of uprisings in Gaul clearly report that the Allobroges had not revolted in this period: in 38 BC, there were uprisings in Aquitania and on the banks of the Rhine (in particular, Dio [48. 49. 2] mentions sea battles which detail does not correspond at all to the region of the Massif Central. Besides, even though Appianus mentions this uprising [Appianus, *BC* 5. 10. 92], Dio does not think that it was on a large scale). From 31 to 28 BC, the rebels included the Treveri, the Morini (Dio 51. 20. 5) and, perhaps, the Suebi, i. e. the tribes living in quite another region of Gaul. Valerius Messala Corvinus, Horace's friend, suppressed the uprising of 28 BC, but that had taken place in Aquitania too.²¹

Thus, it is clear that this particular Gallic tribe used to cause trouble for the Romans with unending regularity. Perhaps, based on the list of the aforementioned events, commentaries show such an understanding of the verse, which can be considered as the **cumulative understanding**. Already Christoforo Landino (first ed. 1482) seemingly assumes precisely this, saying, “Allobrox: populi sunt Galliae; quorum legati Ciceroni catilinariam coniurationem patefecerunt. Sed et ipsi saepe deficiendo non parvum negocium populo romano exhibuerunt”.²² Thus, numerous conflicts in 3rd to 1st century BC look here like a kind of repeated violations of the treaty with the Romans. With this understanding in mind, there is a possible interpretation of *novis rebus as ablativus: abl. temporis*, if there is an emphasis on frequent uprisings of the Allobroges in times of internal disagreements, or *abl. instrumenti / of attendant circumstances*, with uprisings as a name of the form that their disloyalty has.

However, in this case, we come to exactly the same contradiction that was the actual start of our discussion of the whole issue, i. e. that no single complication in relations with the Allobroges was fatal or even really dangerous for Rome. At the same time, only two episodes coincide with internal conflicts, i. e. Gaius Gracchus' activity and the conspiracy of Catiline (in which, as we already know, the Allobroges had taken the side of the Republic).

In the same period as the cumulative view, for the first time the understanding was recorded that the **Allobroges denote the Gauls in general**.²³

²¹ For more details of uprisings, see Dyson 1975, 152–155.

²² Landino 1505. For a similar view, see Müller 1895, 146.

²³ As an example of this interpretation, see Drexler 1962.

There is a common opinion that Denis Lambin²⁴ “invented” this understanding. Yet it turns out that the famous commentator enlists it only among the others and considers none of them final:

Caesar Commentar. de bello Gall. lib. 3&4 scribit omneis Gallos rebus novis studere... Potest igitur fieri, ut Horatius hoc loco nomine Allobrogum, qui Ciceronis & Caesaris aetate fuerunt pacati, ceteros Gallos significet. Quamquam mihi sit verisimilius, Allobrogum nomine, Allobroges ipsos, non alios Gallos, intelligi²⁵

The reason for the appearance of this understanding lies in the very list of enemies that the Romans had. It names all of the peoples who used to threaten Rome in Italy except for one that was probably the closest to winning and completely destroying Rome, namely the Gallic invasion in 387, the siege of the Capitol and the defeat actually recognised by the Romans. These events led to a long-term fear of the Gauls in Italy, the so-called *terror Gallicus*, and this very fact makes it clear why, in the first verses of *Epode* 16, scholars used to see a reference to Gallic tribes in general.

The idea learnt in school days that the Gauls were an ethnic group unreliable because of a commitment to *res novae*,²⁶ primarily due to their depiction by Caesar (*BG* 2. 1. 3; 3. 10. 3; 4. 5. 1; 7. 59. 2) and also by other authors (Cic. *Pro Font.* 46; *De prov.* 32; Liv. 21. 52. 7), seems to endorse this interpretation.

Why, then, could Horace choose the Allobroges as representatives of Gallic peoples? Along with metrical requirements,²⁷ two circumstances can be pointed out. First, the Allobroges had long been on the political map of ancient Europe, representing a large community from Hannibal’s times to those of Stephen of Byzantium.²⁸ Besides, according to Cicero’s speech *Pro Fonteio* (69 BC), they were one of the most powerful tribes in Gaul as of the 60s BC.

Anders Ollfors, who has analysed in detail all possible interpretations of the expression under discussion, finally combined two understandings (cumulative and generalization), concluding that Horace meant exactly *a series of episodes* in which the Allobroges appear, and “Allobroges

²⁴ E. g., Mankin 1995, 248.

²⁵ Lambinus 1580, 327.

²⁶ In this case, *novis rebus* is *abl. causae*.

²⁷ Interestingly, Horace only uses *Galli* to denote the Galatians (*Epod.* 9. 18) and priests of Cybele (*Serm.* 1. 2. 121). Additionally, we have found adj. *Gallicus* (*Carm.* 1. 8. 6; 3. 16. 35) and circumlocution *Rhodani potor* (*Carm.* 2. 20. 20).

²⁸ Ollfors 1964, 128.

igitur *serie rerum actarum* Romanis notissimi erant eoque aptissimi ad *personam omnium Gallorum* in enumeratione hostium capitalium populi Romani sustinendam”.²⁹

Still such *pars pro toto* denomination requires parallel examples. Ollfors actually refers to a number of cases in which Horace denotes a whole ethnos or locality with a name of a smaller nationality: *Carm.* 1. 18. 9; 2. 9. 23; 2. 19. 20; 3. 6. 14; 3. 26. 10.

However, none of the cases looks similar enough to the case we are discussing. For instance, the poet mentions peoples of Thrace (Sithones, *Carm.* 1. 18. 9; 3. 26. 10, and Bistones, *Carm.* 2. 19. 20) in connection with the cult of Dionysus or the severe climate of Thrace. But it is all the same to us whom of the Thracians the author names in these context,³⁰ while the beginning of *Epode* 16 enlists historical events, and there such a *pars pro toto* designation does not seem reasonable enough. The two other cases cited by Ollfors are even less similar: these are the legendary Geloni as a designation for the Parthians (*Carm.* 2. 9. 23) and the Ethiopians as a designation for the Egyptians (*Carm.* 3. 6. 14),³¹ as here the respective first nation is not a part of the second.

Continuing with my own observations on the text of Horace’s *Epodes*, I would point out that it seems reasonable to look for possible parallels in the text of these 17 iambic poems specifically. No such cases have been found; on the contrary, in *Epode* 7, similar in both subject and mood, Horace names the Britons and Parthians in the most common way (verses 7 and 9).

Let us consider the meaning of the adjective *infidelis*. Unlike the cognate *perfidus*, ‘that deliberately breaks faith’ (*OLD*), *infidelis*, along with *infidus*, has a translation of *not keeping faith, disloyal, not to be relied on* (*OLD*), i. e. it can imply uncertainty. In other words, if you rely on such allies, be prepared for possible complications.

The only parallel usage of the same adjective by Horace (*o rebus meis non infideles arbitrae, Nox et Diana* in *Epod.* 5. 49–51), although negative, nevertheless shows that the combination with *dat. commodi / incommodi* is quite possible.³²

Considering this, it may still seem tempting to see in this a reference to an involvement of the Allobroges in the Catiline Conspiracy. It is

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 130.

³⁰ For one passage (*Carm.* 1. 18. 9), such an interpretation is disputable, as the context may refer to Sithones in particular, see Nisbet – Hubbard 1970, 233.

³¹ On this passage, see below.

³² With *infidus* also *Luc.* 4. 698 f.

possible to perceive some ambiguity (that inevitably arises when the poet mentions failed conspirators) as an iambic hyperbole instead of irony, which does not fit the poem. Long before his final conclusion in footnote 15, Ollfors proposes a similar understanding as follows:

Horatius ergo in iambo suo 16, 6 *per amplificationem rhetoricam* Allobrogibus infidelitatem quasi absurdam attribuit, quippe qui non modo naturaliter infidi sunt, sed *infideles eis qui ipsi infidi rei publicae* sunt.

Such an exaggeration seems quite suitable for the book of *Epodes*,³³ if the author, instead of mentioning the Gauls, reported the highest disloyalty of the Allobroges in the case *when they had betrayed traitors* and shown themselves unreliable *even* for the conspiracy.

There is some exaggeration concerning the scale of the danger of the episodic part of Allobroges legates. Still, there is another example of such imprecision in Horace's works: the context of *Carmen* 3. 6 is quite similar, though the general tone is almost the opposite: one more time speaking of the Civil War, the poet states (vv. 13–14):

Paene occupatam seditionibus
Delevit Urbem Dacus et Aethiops...

Here, in a much later poem and in a poetically revised form, we see mention of proverbial northern and southern peoples, whose involvement in historical events, as the reader understands quite well, is far more marginal.³⁴

Thus, the proposed translation may be: *...nor the Allobroges unreliable for the new ventures*, with the Allobroges legates' involvement in Catiline's conspiracy meant.

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³³ An iambic exaggeration as a satirical technique is not frequent, but can still be found in *Epodes*, e. g. 12. 1; 4. 8.

³⁴ The following verse contains the mention of Antony's fleet as an explanation of the Ethiopian threat. Dacian inroads were a stock topic of conversation in the 30s BC (*Serm.* 2. 6. 53), but still could not reach Italy. Nisbet – Rudd 2004, 104 call this exaggeration an "evident" one.

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This paper is a discussion of the first verses of Horace's *Epode* 16, which lists the key enemies of the Romans, including the Allobroges tribe, described as *novis rebus infidelis*. The proposal is to interpret the latter as a reference to the involvement of Allobroge legates in the conspiracy of Catiline, whose supporters had just been unmasked with the help of the Gauls who had come down on the side of the Republic. The inconsistency (in style and logic) that appears in the *Epode* can be explained by Horace's commitment to exaggeration, because the Gauls had proved to be unreliable *even for the conspiracy* (we propose to interpret *novis rebus* as *dat. incommodi*). The paper also includes two remarks on the statements found in some commentaries. First, Denis Lambin neither proposes the idea of the denomination of *the Gauls overall* in this fragment, nor does he support it. Second, there are no data on the uprising of the Allobroges in the 40s to 30s BC, which excludes the passage in question from those relevant for dating of the *Epodes*.

В статье приводятся соображения по поводу начала 16-го эпода Горация, где в перечень принципиальных врагов Римского народа включено племя аллоброгов, причем с характеристикой *novis rebus infidelis*. Последнее предлагается понимать как отсылку к участию послов аллоброгов в заговоре Катилины, сторонники которого были обличены как раз при помощи галлов, перешедших на сторону республики. Возникающую при это непоследовательность стилистического и логического плана можно объяснить стремлением Горация к преувеличению – в этом случае галлы показали себя ненадежными *даже для заговора* (слова *novis rebus* предлагается понимать как *dat. incommodi*). В статье также делаются два частных уточнения утверждений, замеченных в научной литературе: идея обозначения в данном пассаже *галлов вообще* лишь упоминается Дени Ламбенем среди прочих интерпретаций и не разделяется им; также не существует данных о восстании именно аллоброгов в 40–30 гг. до н. э., что исключает важность рассматриваемого пассажа для датировки сборника эподов.

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