

ANNALS
of the
Association
American Geographers

VOLUME V, 1915



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The Barrier Boundary of the Mediterranean Basin
and its Northern Breaches
as Factors in History

Ellen Churchill Semple. Pp. 27-59

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E. C. SEMPLE - MEDITERRANEAN BOUNDARIES IN HISTORY

INTRODUCTION. The Mediterranean occupies the subsidence areas in the broad belt of young, folded mountains which cross Southern Europe and the neighboring parts of Africa and Asia. Moreover, it lies on the northern margin of the trade-wind tract. These two features of its geographical location are of immense import. They have given to the Mediterranean Basin the isolating boundaries of mountains and deserts. They have made it in a peculiar sense an enclosed sea. It is enclosed, not only by the land, but by barrier forms of the land. Rarely are the barriers single, moreover. Range succeeds range to a snow-capped climax of the land: beyond mountain system or precipitous escarpment lies semi-arid waste, far-stretching desert, or rugged plateau.

These barrier boundaries long exercised a dominant influence upon Mediterranean history. For ages they confined that history within the narrow limits of the basin, except where a few natural openings offered pathways to regions of contrasted climate and production beyond. These breaches in the barrier were varied in their geographical character – a river road like the Nile across the desert, a strait like Gibraltar, an isthmus like Suez, a long inter-montane trough like the Rhone Valley, or a saddle in the encircling mountains like the Postojna Gate and the low Karst Plateau. But all have focused upon themselves the historical events of wide areas. They have crowded into their narrow channels streams of trade, migration, colonization, and conquest; they have drawn these from remote sources and directed them to equally remote destinations. They have played this role of the guiding hand of Providence from the dawn of history to the World War of 1915.

The Mediterranean is enclosed on the north by a mountain rampart, measuring 2,330 miles in a straight line from the folded ranges behind Gibraltar to the massive Taurus System, where it looms above the Bay of Alexandretta. The huge oblong of the Anatolian Plateau, lying at an

average elevation of 3,000 to 4,000 feet (1,000 to 1,200 meters), bordered north and south by yet higher ranges rising abruptly from the sea, and edged by a rugged, inhospitable coast, lends to the Asia Minor Peninsula the character of a triple barrier confining the Levantine Basin of the Mediterranean on the north for a distance of 560 miles (900 kilometers). Its rigid billows of land, mounting higher and higher from west to east, merge into other highlands extending far into Asia. Any attempt, therefore, to round them on the east involves a toilsome journey over the ranges of Armenia, whose valley floors to be traversed lie nearly 6,000 feet (1,800 meters) above sea-level.

THE BOSPORUS-HELLESPONT BREACH. On the west, this barrier peninsula sinks beneath the Aegean Sea; but its folded ranges, lifting their peaks above the waves as rocky islands, soon emerge again in the broad, corrugated highlands of the Balkan Peninsula. The blunt northwest corner of Asia Minor dips so slightly that the Bosphorus and Hellespont make only a wet scratch across its surface. But that scratch is enough. It forms a clear breach in the enclosing mountain wall. Through it the Mediterranean penetrates into the Euxine Basin, but only to face other mountain obstructions encircling this great marine alcove on all but its northwest coast. The extensive subsidence between the lower Danube plain and the Crimea breaks the continuity of the folded barrier between the Balkans and the Caucasus System. The Caucasus, also, is nipped in two by the Kertch Strait, which severs the Yaila Mountains of the Crimea from the parent range, and admits the Euxine waters into the Sea of Azov. This local depression is a companion piece to the Gulf of Odessa. Only in these two inlets of shallow water does the Mediterranean penetrate beyond its normal mountain boundaries into the low, accessible plains of Eastern Europe.

Where the north wall opens its gates at the Bosphorus and Hellespont, the Mediterranean reached out and drew these coastal plains of Russia into its field of history from the seventh century before Christ till the control of the Straits passed to the intruding Turks in 1453. The elements of this history were in general peaceful: commerce and colonization. Greek trading-stations and colonies at an early date began to line the Pontic shores,¹ and to send out lumber from the well-forested Caucasus, summer wheat from the Crimean plains, hides from steppe pastures, and fish from the tunny spawning-grounds.² Ancient Athens, poor in plowland, came to depend chiefly upon Pontic wheat to supply her market,³ and the Scythian tribes of the Dnieper grassland came equally to depend upon Greek wine as the luxury of their meager fare. These are the chief

1 Bury, J. B.: *History of Greece* (New York, 1909), 90-93.

2 Strabo xi. 2, 4.

3 Herodotus iv. 17; vi. 147. Demosthenes *De Corona* par. 73, 87. Wiskermann, B.: *Die Antike Landwirtschaft Preischift* (Leipzig, 1859), 14-20. Xenophon *Hellenes* v. 4. 61. Diodorus Siculus xv. 34. Bury, J. B.: op. cit.. 196, 379, 615, 616. Curtius, Ernst: *History of Greece* (tr. by A. W. Ward, New York, 1899), V, Book VII, 137.

exchanges today between the two localities. With every threat of interruption to communication through the Bosphorus and Hellespont the price of wheat went up in Attica and Miletus, till finally Athens drew all the coastal fringe of Pontic cities and the Straits themselves into her maritime empire, and guaranteed the security of her grain trade by an unrivaled navy.¹

By reason of this marine breach in the mountain barrier the Greeks were able to weave a border of Hellenic blood and culture upon those northern Euxine shores. Owing to the successive streams of nomad hordes from Western Asia which flooded the adjoining plains, however, Mediterranean civilization left there no permanent impress. Nevertheless, Russian traders and marauders from northern Slav principalities like Kiev, Smolensk, and commercial Novgorod, took the Dnieper River route to the Black Sea and Constantinople in the ninth and tenth centuries, and carried away the elements of Byzantine art and religion to the untutored north.

THE BALKAN BARRIERS AND THE MORAVA-VARDAR FURROW. West of the Bosphorus and Hellespont the border barriers of the Mediterranean reappear, faintly at first, as the worn-down hill country of eastern Thrace. This affords an easy land road through the Maritza Valley between the Aegean and the Black Sea, and thus reinforces the marine communication through the near-by straits. The Thracian hills, however, soon rise and merge into the broad, compound barrier formed by the steep Balkan folds and the ancient crystalline mass of the Thraco-Macedonian Highlands. This old dissected mountain region, rising to heights of 9,000 feet or more in the Rhodope and Perim ranges, but sinking elsewhere to broad, undulating uplands and deep river valleys, serves to cement the young Balkan System to the multiple ranges of the Dinaric Alps. These run north and south through the western part of the Peninsula, from the head of the Adriatic to the rocky headlands of the Peloponnesus, in a forbidding succession of bold limestone ridges, which rise to jagged crests 6,500 feet (2,000 meters) above the sea. Communication between the Adriatic coast and the interior is excessively difficult. No thoroughfare is offered by the rivers Narenta and Drin, which break through the ranges in wild, impassable gorges. Travel across the country is a succession of ups and downs over gray, stony ridges and gray, barren valleys, for rarely does a saddle nick the high sky-line of the chains. Width, height, and lack of passes make the Dinaric System maintain in a pre-eminent degree the barrier nature of mountains.²

In all the 700-mile stretch of mountains between the Maritza Valley and the Gulf of Trieste there is no real breach, but only a few passes which are approached by long, often devious, routes across the highlands. The Morava and Vardar rivers, the one flowing north and the other south

¹ Bury, J. B.: *op. Cit.*, 365, 380-381.

² Based upon personal observation during a motor trip through Dalmatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Montenegro in 1912.

THE BALKAN BARRIERS AND THE MORAVA-VARDAR FURROW

from a low watershed (460 meters or 1,508 feet) in the heart of the Peninsula, together cut a valley furrow of gentle slopes across the mountains from the Danube near Belgrade to the northwest corner of the Aegean Sea. This furrow has from ancient times determined the north-and-south line of communication. The land route which it opens is easy but long, because it crosses a mountain mass over 300 miles wide. Moreover, travel on it is not assisted by river transportation. The Vardar, choked by sand in its passage across its swampy, deltaic plain to the Gulf of Salonica, and broken by rapids in its upper course, affords no water-way to the interior, while the Morava is navigable for only seventy miles from the Danube.¹

The mountains about the head of the Vardar, inhabited by robber tribes from remote times, served to discourage Macedonia's expansion northward, even under Philip and Alexander the Great. Roman dominion did not overstep this barrier till 29 B.C., or a hundred and fifteen years after the conquest of Macedonia, when the Morava Valley, under the title of Upper Moesia, was embodied in the Empire. Even then the mountain watershed remained the provincial boundary, and was never crossed by a Roman road between the two valleys.

The great Roman highway of the Peninsula ran between the capital at Constantinople and the middle Danubian frontier—between the military center and the exposed border. It left the Morava Valley at Naissus (modern Nish) and followed a diagonal furrow across the high valleys between the Balkan and Anti-Balkan mountains through Serdica (Sofia), and then by the Trajan Pass (843 meters, or 2,765 feet) reached the upper Maritza Valley. Thence it led past Philippopolis and Adrianople to Constantinople. This route took a long and devious course to avoid the great highland mass of the Peninsula, and thereby became the historic highway from Central Europe to the Byzantine bridge and Asia Minor; it was essentially a land route from west to east, rather than a transit route across the mountains from north to south.

This role fell to the Morava-Vardar groove, and was a later development so far as historical record goes; but doubtless it played its part in the prehistoric drift of the Greek peoples from the northwest southward into Macedonia, Thessaly, and Hellas. This was the route traversed by the Ostrogoths in 473 AD. in their invasion of Northern Greece.² It was the line of expansion of the Serbian kingdom under the great Stephan Dusan (1336-56), whose inland domain needed an outlet on the Aegean;³ and also the line of expansion with the same objective in the Gulf of Salonica, that was the aim of Serbia in the Balkan War of 1912.

1 Hogarth, D. G.: *The Nearer East* (London, 1905), 23, 24, 238.

2 Hodgkin, Thomas: *Italy and Her Invaders* (Oxford, 1880), III, Book IV. note, p. 31. and map, p. 32.

3 Miller, William: *The Balkans* (New York, 1907), 273.

Serbia's location in the Morava Basin has made it custodian of these main routes south and east across the Balkan Peninsula. It blocks the path between east and west. For this reason the Turkish sultans of the fifteenth century saw that they must first occupy Serbia, if they were to realize their purpose of conquering the rich fields of Hungary; and Hungary rushed to the support of Serbia when the Turkish onslaught came, in order to guard the avenue leading to its own frontier. The Turks secured the control of Serbia. They found its thoroughfare so necessary to them in their long wars with Hungary, that they kept a tighter grip upon Serbia than upon Moldavia and Wallachia, and immediately upon its conquest in 1459 made it an integral part of their empire.¹

From the early eighteenth century, when the Turks began their slow recession in the Balkan Peninsula and the Austrian power its advance, the country holding the Morava highway was again the bone of contention. Between 1718 and 1739 Austria drove a wedge of occupation up the Morava Basin nearly to Nish. From the time of Emperor Joseph II (d. 1790) the domination of Serbia has been a fundamental principle of Austrian statesmanship. The object has been twofold: to guard this open highway which gives access to the middle Danube from two directions; and to gain for the vast inland empire of Austro-Hungary an outlet to the Aegean and to the Bosphorus, the sea breach in the mountain barrier which commands both the Black Sea trade and the land route through Asia Minor to the east.

Russia, also, since it secured its first Black Sea littoral in 1783, has made the Bosphorus the objective of its expansion. It needs an outlet to the Mediterranean that cannot be jeopardized. During the closure of the Dardanelles against Italian aggression in the spring of 1912, Greek, Norwegian, and British grain ships were penned up in the harbor of Odessa, while European cities clamored for Russian wheat. More ominous for the fate of Russia in the present conflict is the exclusion of munitions from the Black Sea ports, and her inability to market the wheat which would re-establish her national credit. Her present necessity furnishes the strongest argument for final perseverance in her aim.

PASSES OF THE JULIAN ALPS AND THE KARSK. Austria's need for a southern outlet is not so urgent. She commands another breach in the barrier boundary of the Mediterranean. Near her Italian frontier at the head of the Adriatic, the broad and corrugated highlands bordering the western side of the Balkan Peninsula contract and dip as they merge into the Karst Plateau and the Julian Alps. Farther north again towers the mighty system of the Alps, rising range beyond range, up to the high, white levels of eternal snow. The Julian Alps are a slender southeastern offshoot of the main system. They attain in the north an altitude of 9,394 feet (2,864 meters) in the three-cornered peak of Terglon, but from this they shelve off southward into a rugged limestone platform of low altitude.

¹ Miller, William: *The Balkans*, 293.

PASSES OF THE JULIAN ALPS AND THE KARSK

Presenting toward the west a steep and forbidding escarpment, crossed by narrow ridges, pock-marked by numerous funnel-shaped cavities, and guiltless of visible drainage streams, this Karst Plateau extends along the base of the Istrian Peninsula as far as the Gulf of Fiume and the eastward-flowing Kulpa River. It merges beyond into the high, folded ranges of the Great Capella Mountains, which effectively cut off their hinterland from the sea.

Northeast of the Adriatic, therefore, for a stretch of 46 miles (75 kilometers), the mountain barrier of the Mediterranean Basin is partially breached. At one point it narrows to the width of 30 miles (50 kilometers) between the low Venetian plains and the deep re-entrant valley of erosion cut back into the highland mass by the upper Save River and its head streams. Moreover, at this narrowest point the barrier sinks to the level of 2,897 feet in a limestone plateau known to the ancients as the Mons Odra, and to moderns as the Peartree Range. Two rivers, the Frigidus or Wipbach on the western slope, and the Ljubljana on the eastern, issue from limestone caverns, after the manner of streams in the Karst country, and carve out paths down the opposite sides from the low plateau above to the plains below. Here, therefore, the Alpine barrier *et largius patentem et planissimum habet ingressum*, says the historian Paulus (720-800 A.D.), who from his boyhood had known this broad and easy entrance, and had seen a barbarian horde burst through it as through an open door.¹

There were other routes across the mountain saddle, as we shall see, but this was the best, and from very ancient times it became a well-trodden path. Here concentrated the traffic of a far-reaching hinterland. The geographical reasons are plain enough. The Postojna Gate afforded the shortest and lowest transit route to the interior in the whole 1,300-mile stretch of mountains between the Bosphorus and the Rhone Valley breach. It lay between two natural thoroughfares, the level plains of Northern Italy and the wide plain of the Danube, which cannot be separated geographically or historically from the nomad-breeding steppes of Southern Russia. The Drave and Save rivers, tributaries of the Danube, drain the longitudinal valleys of the eastern Alps and open avenues of easy grade far up the eastern slope of the dividing range. Moreover, this dip in the mountain wall was located between the head of the Adriatic, an old sea-lane of maritime enterprise, and the head of navigation on the Ljubljana-Save-Danube System. For the little Ljubljana can carry a barge soon after it issues from its cavern. It springs full grown from the mountain's womb, such strength has it gathered in its underground life, fed by a whole arterial system of hidden rivers.

The historical importance of passes increases with their facility of transit; with their command of valley thoroughfares and water approaches, either navigable rivers or seas; and with the contrast between the regions of productions, both in point of climate and of industrial development,

¹ Quoted in T. Hodgkin, *op. cit.*, V. Book VI, note, p. 160.

HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE OF POSTOJNA GATE

which such passes serve to unite and whose trade they forward.¹ All four of these advantages were possessed by the Postojna Gate in a high degree. Its claim to the first two has been indicated. Through all ancient and mediaeval times it connected the civilized and industrial Mediterranean lands with a vast hinterland of barbarism, with shifting tribes of nomadic herdsmen and semi-nomadic agriculturalists. It facilitated the exchange of artistic manufactured products in bronze, pottery, linen and woolen fabric for the crudest raw materials from forest, pasture, and mine.

The contrast in climate is almost as marked. The Julian Alps and Karst Plateau are a heat divide. On their slopes the warm, temperate climate of the Mediterranean Basin meets the cold temperate climate of Central Europe. The January isotherm of 0 degree C. (32 degrees F.), which marks the dividing line, nowhere else approaches so near to the Mediterranean proper as here. It runs through Bremen, Munich, along the watershed of the Karst, then turns southeast into the heart of the Balkan Peninsula. A similar contrast of winter temperatures in an equally short space appears on the opposite side of the Caucasus windshield, along the Black Sea littoral. The Postojna Gate, which is located approximately on the forty-sixth parallel of latitude, looks down upon the olive trees and rice fields of the warm Venetian plains. Here Italy revealed her fatal gift of beauty to the barbarian hordes who pushed up the Danube highroad to the half-open gate of the Hesperian Garden.

The ancient Mons Odra route left the Adriatic at Aquileia, a Roman river port located four miles up the navigable Aquilo, accessible to the sea but somewhat protected from the chronic piracy of the Adriatic. Turning eastward, the road crossed the Sontius (modern Isonzo) and led up the fertile valley of the Frigidus (Wipbach) to the summit of the Mons Odra plateau. There the easiest path across must have run past a wild pear tree, whose white blossoms made a conspicuous landmark against the green of the surrounding forest when spring reopened traffic on the road. At any rate, the Roman road makers called the station at the summit *Ad Pirum* (Pear Tree). This name survives in the Birnbaumer Wald, the German name of the old Mons Odra plateau. From the summit (2,897 feet) the road dropped down to Nauportus (modern Ober-Ljubljana, at 970 feet) on the Ljubljana River, where navigation began on the Save-Danube System. Strabo states that the distance between Aquileia and Nauportus was variously estimated from 350 to 500 stadia, or 40 to 57 miles.²

The Romans knew of another track over the Mons Odra Range, leading up from Tergeste (Trieste) to Lacus Lugeum (Lake Zirknitz), and thence to Nauportus.³ This route had marked disadvantages. It ascended the

1 Semple, E. C.: *Influences of Geographic Environment* (New York, 1911), 546, 549.

2 Strabo iv. 6. 10; 5.2 For the modern road in detail, see Kröhn, Walter: *Beiträge zur Verkehrs-geographie von Krain* (Königsberg, 1911), 61-62.

3 Mommsen: *History of Rome* (New York, 1873), III, 215. For the modern road. see *ibid.*, 63. Canstein, P. von: *Die oestlichen Alpen* (Berlin, 1837), 235-258.

plateau by no long valley of approach like that of the Frigidus, but mounted the steep escarpment overhanging the Gulf of Trieste. Though it may have found a lower gap than the Postojna Gate, it had to traverse the plateau at its greatest width and therefore to cross the successive hill ranges that corrugate its surface. Moreover, the plateau is almost devoid of water, which everywhere seeps through the porous limestone to some impervious stratum of clay or sandstone. None remains on the surface to carve out a river valley of easy travel for the wayfarer. Therefore this route seems early to have been abandoned in favor of the Postojna Gate. Centuries later it was partially revived when Aquileia and the other ports along the low Venetian coast were silted up by the deposits of muddy Alpine torrents, and were therefore superseded by the deep mountain rimmed harbor of Trieste. This harbor was the geographical determinant which made the modern railroad follow the plateau route and grapple with the problem of mounting its bold escarpment.

This second Mons Odra route lacked early historical importance also because it did not debouch upon the fertile Venetian plains. It was therefore generally neglected by invading hordes from the Danube, whose objective was the rich cities of Cisalpine Gaul. The barbarians preferred as alternatives two routes to the north of the Julian Alps. These were approached by the valley highways of the upper Drave and Save rivers, and crossed the mountains by a high saddle between the Julian and Carnic Alps. The eastern starting-point for both was the ancient Santicum (modern Villach), located at an altitude of 1,665 feet, in a broad and lake-strewn basin at the head of navigation on the Drave. It had a situation similar to that of Nauportus. From this point one track led south over the Col di Tarvis and the difficult Predil Pass, called the "Thermopylae of Carinthia" (3,810 feet or 1,162 meters), to the head of the Sontius Valley (Isonzo), which opened a way down to the coast near Aquileia.¹ The Predil Pass was too difficult to attract a military road in ancient times, though it was the route of the invading Lombards in 568 A.D. A few miles to the west of it, through the Pontebba or Pontafel Pass (2,615 feet or 797 meters), ran the other route from the Col di Tarvis, which connected on the Italian slope with a head stream of the Tiliaventus River (Tagliamento). In the days of the Empire a Roman military road followed this route over the Alps, and connected Aquileia with the navigable course of the Drave,² but for the trader it involved a long detour from his market.

The ancient amber route from the Baltic, one of the earliest trade routes of Europe, doubtless reached the Mediterranean by all these passes, especially in its primitive stages, when it was trying all the paths to find the easiest. This is the evolutionary history of all the pioneer roads. The amber route started from the famous amber fields of the southeastern

¹ For modern road, see Baedeker: *The Eastern Alps* (Leipzig, 1888), 441-442. Krebs, Norbert: *Landerkunde der oesterreichischen Alpen* (Stuttgart, 1913), 401, 409.

² Shepherd, W. R.: *Historical Atlas* (New York, 1911), map, p. 27.

THE ANCIENT TRADE IN AMBER

Baltic, especially those of the Samland, and led up the Vistula or Oder River to the Moravian Gate, a broad geological gap between the Carpathian and Sudetes mountains, which was once a passage of the Eocene Sea. The route led thence down the March River to the Danube, thence across the spreading spurs of the eastern Alps to the Save Valley, the shrunken barrier of the Julian Alps, and the Mons Odra Pass.¹ According to Pliny, amber was brought by the Germans to Pannonia (Carinthia and Carniola), and purchased from them by the Veneti living on the north Adriatic coast. He mentions the amber necklaces worn by the women of this region, not only as an ornament, but as a protection against sore throat.²

So regularly did the Baltic amber emerge here upon the horizon of Mediterranean commerce that the myth of Phaeton's sisters, transformed into poplar trees and weeping tears that turned into amber, associated the precious commodity with the mouth of the Po River,³ showing that the trade must have reached back into exceedingly ancient times. Herodotus reports its supposed origin at the mouth of a stream flowing into the northern sea,⁴ the Eridanus, a name which later came to be identified with the Po. He also clearly indicates a route of communication from the far northern land of the Hyperboreans, which emerged at the head of the Adriatic and passed down this sea to Epirus.⁵ The offerings to Apollo's shrine at Delos which he describes as taking this long journey were probably forwarded down the Adriatic by the trading ships of Corcyra and Epidamnus, which nearly three centuries before had been colonized by Corinth for the purpose of exploiting the commerce of this basin. The inland trade from the head of the Adriatic was appropriated at an early date by the Etruscans, and pushed with an assiduity which suggests that besides amber, other valuable northern products, like gold and tin from mines in the Archean rocks of the Bohemian massif, may have reached the Mediterranean by the Postojna Gate route.

According to a tradition reported by Pliny, the Argonauts sailed up the Danube and Save to the head of navigation on the Ljubljana, and there built a settlement which they called Nauportus, because from there they carried their ship "Argo" across the mountains on men's shoulders to the Adriatic.⁶ The feat is not impossible, in view of the elevation of Nauportus (970 feet), only 2,000 feet below the pass; the probable presence here of stalwart mountain packers, such as are found in all pass regions of the world; the desire of such poverty-stricken mountain tribes to make money by this service and by levying tolls on the traffic over their mountain trails; and especially in view of the small vessels of this legendary period.

1 Mommsen: op. Cit. I, Book I, 177, 196, 266.

2 Pliny *Historia Naturalis* xxxvi, 2. 11.

3 Diodorus Siculus v. 22 (Paris, 1855). Pliny op. Cit. Iii. 30.

4 Herodotus iii. 15.

5 Herodotus iv. 33.

6 Pliny op. Cit. Iii. 22.

The Homeric Greeks had boats of only twenty oars. The large penteconter of fifty oars hardly came into use before the eighth century B.C., and it appears in the later Homeric poems as a masterpiece of sea-craft.¹ When one considers that the Bolivian Indian carries 150 pounds of rubber over the Andean watershed,² and that the tea-packer of Western China shoulders a burden of 300 pounds for the arduous ascent of the Central Asiatic Plateau,³ a twenty-oared boat carried on "the shoulders of men" across the Postojna Gate seems an easy undertaking for a group of mountain porters. It may be the first historical mention of the watershed "portage" or "carry," which is a regular feature of primitive inland navigation the world over. The portage is a commonplace of the Indian canoe routes in the Western Hemisphere, in the pioneer exploration and fur trade of Canada, the United States, Russia, and Siberia. Isthmian portages were familiar to the Greeks from very ancient times on the Isthmus of Corinth, in Eastern Crete, and probably on the narrow Dalmatian islands.⁴

In the case of Pliny's story, what probably happened was that some enterprising Greek inland traders may have found their way up the Danube to the Ljubljana, made their "carry" to the Isonzo River and Adriatic, and after long years their bold exploit was embodied into the tradition of the Argonautic expedition. Such was the process of accretion by which the *Odyssey* grew. The use of this portage path for boats may have given rise to the persistent impression among the ancients that there was river connection between the heads of the Adriatic and the Danube.⁵

Strabo emphasizes the value of the Mons Odra route for forwarding military supplies to the Roman armies engaged in war with the Dacians on the lower Danube. But this was only part of the traffic. Merchandise in large quantities was carried by wagon from Aquileia to Nauportus, and thence by boat to Segestica (Sisek), an important distributing point at the confluence of the Save and Kulpa rivers. There was an active trade between Italy and the barbarians of the upper Danube. The exchanges were the usual ones between two regions of different climates and contrasted economic development. The barbarians sent over the pass cattle, hides, slaves captured in their incessant border wars, gold from the Alpine mines, resin, pitch, and other forest products. They received in return the oil and wine of Italy, fine fabrics of Mediterranean make, glass, and pottery.⁶ The flourishing emporium for all this trade was the fortified town of Aquileia, at the head of the Adriatic.

1 Bury, J. B.: op. cit., 109.

2 Church, Col. George E.: "The Acre Territory and the Caoutchouc Region of SouthWestern Amazonia," *Geoar. Joum.*, XXIII. 596-613.

3 Huc, M.: *Journey through the Chinese Empire* (New York. 1871), 39-40.

4 Rudolphi, Dr. H.: "Trageplaetze und Schlepwege oder Portagen," *Deutsche Rundschau far Geographie*, XXXIV. 66.

5 Pliny op. cit. 22. Apolonius Rh. iv. 283. Strabo iv. 4. 9. Aristotle *Historia Animalia* 13. Supported also by Hipparchus and Theopompus.

6 Strabo iv. 6. 9. 12; v. 1. 8; vii. 5. 2.

THE JULIAN ALPS IN ROMAN STRATEGY

The location of Aquileia was not altogether a fortunate one, however. Here on the eastern land frontier of Cisalpine Gaul lay the weak spot in the Alpine frontier of Italy. Here, therefore, at the eastern extremity of the big province lay the local capital, Aquileia, in a position of opportunity, but also of danger. The city was founded in 181 B.C., soon after the Roman conquest of the region, as a fortress against intrusive Celtic peoples, who were already beginning to threaten this vulnerable frontier. Their first detachment came in 186 B.C., quietly enough, though they could muster 12,000 fighting men, Livy tells us.¹ They were bent upon peaceable settlement, so they arrived with “all their property which they had brought with them or driven before them.” The road which they took across the forested mountains was previously unknown to the Romans, but it lay at the very head of the Adriatic.² They emerged from this unknown pass upon the Venetian plain, and set to work building their villages in the vicinity of the later Aquileia. But they were ordered out by the Roman proconsul, and had to obey.

The Senate, finding the Alps in this region not the “almost impassable barrier” that they had supposed them to be, established Aquileia as a Latin colony to protect the border. The new settlement was a peculiarly remote outpost of the military frontier. The nearest Roman colonies, which marked the line of continuous settlement and of assured civil government in the young province of Cisalpine Gaul, were Bononia, Mutina, Parma, and Placentia. All were located at the northern foot of the Apennines along the new Via Aemilia, and all had been built within the four previous decades. Then only two years after the founding of Mutina, Aquileia was established over a hundred and fifty miles away, an ethnic island, dropped down in a sea of Veneti allies. A sudden protrusion of the frontier like this means that the expansion is necessitated by danger or suggested by opportunity. The situation evidently required peculiar inducements, for the 3,000 militia colonists who were assigned to Aquileia received extraordinary allotments of land, 50 *jugera*, or 32 acres, to every foot soldier and 150 *jugera*, or 96 acres, to every horseman.³ This was eight or ten times the usual allowance.

The border cantonment was established none too soon. In 179 B.C. came another Gallic band of 3,000, pushing across the Alps and asking for land. More serious seemed the threat of Philip of Macedon to lead a horde of his mountain barbarians into Italy by this convenient northeast frontier. So the Romans, preparing for all emergencies, conquered the Peninsula of Istria in 177 B.C. to extend their scientific mountain boundary, to secure their sea communication with Aquileia, and to suppress Illyrian piracy in the upper Adriatic.⁴ The appearance of the migrating Cimbri

1 Livy *Historia* xxxix. 22. 45.

2 Mommsen: *op cit.*, II, 232-233.

3 Livy *op. Cit.* xxxix. 34.

4 Heitland, W.E.: *The Roman Republic* (Cambridge, 1909), II, 141-142.

at the approaches to the eastern Alps in 113 B.C. summoned the Roman army to the heights near Aquileia in order to protect the passes, but the barbarians withdrew, only to find their way by the upper Danube and the Burgundian Gate to the Rhone Valley approach to the Mediterranean.¹

The policy of the Romans on this northeast frontier was quiescent and defensive. The Postojna Gate was the back door of Italy; the Danube Valley, on which it opened, was a back street of the continent. Italy and the Tiber Valley fronted on the western Mediterranean. This was the result of the eastward curve of the Apennines, which threw the large populous plains and valleys on the sunset side of the peninsula, and centered their interests on the western sea. Therefore Rome's inland expansion first sought the Rhone Valley breach to the north, though the Postojna Gate route had been known to the Etruscans, the most ancient commercial expansionists of Italy. Genuine expansion beyond this mountain boundary began in the time of Augustus with an effort to police this frontier, a common first forward step. Depredations of the mountain tribes behind Istria upon Tergeste and Aquileia in 35 B.C. necessitated the conquest of all the highland hinterland.² In 10 B.C., the process had to be repeated in order to teach the predatory tribes of the Julian Alps respect for property, and especially to open up the Postojna Gate route for merchandise and armies bound for the new Danubian provinces. Ere long a Roman road crossed the Mons Odra to the colony of Aemona, where Ljubljana now stands. Siscia on the lower Save became an important garrison town.

During the *Voelkerwanderung* the danger of invasion was always imminent. The towns of Venetia were the first to glut the barbarians' greed for massacre and rapine, because the Danube avenue, immemorial highway for the packs of human wolves from the Russian and Asiatic steppes, led straight to the mountain door of the Venetian plains. The first historic invader to cross the Postojna Gate and spread his tents upon the banks of the Sontius was the emperor Theodosius the Great. In 388 A.D. and again in 394 A.D., he advanced from Constantinople up the Danube to interfere in the turbulent affairs of decadent Rome. Siscia on the lower Save, Aemona, and Aquileia saw his formidable army, and the battle of the Frigidus River below the Postojna Gate determined the conquest of the Roman Empire of the West by the Roman Empire of the East.³

The Visigoths, who participated in the campaign of Theodosius, learned how easy was the road to Italy and how weak were the defenders. Under their leader Alaric in 402 to 403 they invaded Italy. Taking the route through Pannonia to the Julian Alps, they pushed aside the guardians of the pass and descended rapidly to the siege of ill-fated Aquileia. Alaric overwhelmed Venetia and the neighboring Peninsula of Istria; but, defeated by the Roman general Stilicho at Verona and Pollentia, he

1 Mommsen: op. cit., III, 215-216, 221.

2 Bury, J. B.: *History of the Roman Empire* (New York, 1909), 95-98.

3 Hodgkin, T.: op. cit., I, Book I, 159-169.

ALARIC, ATPILA, AND THEODORIC INVADE ITALY

retired from Northern Italy, checked but not broken. The Romans found him an enemy to be conciliated, for they appointed him *magister militae* or commander of the Roman armies throughout Illyricum, which included Pannonia and Dahnatia. Thus they utilized his barbarian forces as a border defense on a weak and exposed frontier, as nations have been wont to employ their nomadic or semi-nomadic neighbors in all times and all parts of the earth.¹ Alaric now held a strategic position. He fixed his camp at Aemona, where the Postojna Gate road reached the Save River. From that base he demanded the pay due himself and his men for their services, and when he failed to get it from the disorganized government, he again invaded Italy in 408. Once more the Postojna Gate led him over to the siege of Aquileia and the other Venetian towns,² and the ancient Etruscan route from the mouth of the Po over the Apennines guided his forces to Rome. After the siege and sack of the capital, Alaric demanded territory for his Visigoths in Venetia, Dalmatia, Pannonia, and Noricum, and the office of *magister militae* for himself, so that he might again command the important line of communication between Italy and the Danube.³ His sudden death put an end to this demand, but his victorious followers moved westward out of Italy into Southern Gaul, where they received an allotment of land.

The departure of the Visigoths from the territory of Illyricum had left a vacant border. This meant that the gate of the Julian Alps was thrown open as if in invitation to other rude visitants. East of the previous Visigothic settlements in Pannonia lay the great empire of the Huns, who for a century had been pushing up the Danube Valley. Checked by the German tribes of Northern Gaul in his efforts to conquer that region, Attila, king of the Huns, turned toward the weaker prey of Italy. In 452 he led his savage hordes by the undefended road of the Julian Alps straight to the walls of Aquileia. Having sacked and destroyed that city, he laid waste the Venetian plains,⁴ whose refugees sought an asylum in the coastal lagoons and marshy islands to the west, and there gave rise to the terror-haunted beginnings of Venice. Attila withdrew to his home beyond the Danube, but the destruction which he wrought in the Po Valley had not been repaired before the Ostrogoths under Theodoric, in 488, moved westward from their capital, near the present city of Belgrade, up the valleys of the Save and Drave to the Julian Alps. They dropped down the valley of the Frigidus and pitched their camp by the Isonzo.⁵ Here, on this chronic battlefield, they defeated the Roman army of the emperor Odovacar.

1 Semple, E. C.: op. cit., 233-235.

2 Hodgkin, T.: op. cit. I, Book I, 250-251, 257-258, 280-282, 317.

3 Gibbon: *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London, 1908), III, 250-257, 275-276, 287, 312-213.

4 Hodgkin, T.: op. cit., II, Book II. 164-170.

5 Ibid., III, Book IV, 202-211.

Eighty years elapsed before the teeming hive of the Danube plain threw out another swarm. The next to mount the Julian barrier were the Lombards, in 568. In the course of long migrations they had drifted from the mouth of the Elbe River southward to Pannonia, and after a temporary halt they moved up the Save Valley through Aemona to the Postojna Gate and Venice.¹ This seems their probable route, though according to one authority they reached the Venetian plains by the higher and more difficult Predil Pass from the upper Drave Valley to the head of the Isonzo.² It is quite possible that the large and motley horde, encumbered by wagons, their families, flocks, and herds, found it necessary to use both routes in order to make a sudden descent upon the Venetian plains. From this base they ravaged all Italy, and eventually gave their name to the plains west of the Adige and north of the Po.

The easy approach up the long inland slope of the Julian Alps, the march across the low passes, and the swift descent down the steep seaward slope of the ranges was a historical event that must easily repeat itself. This was apparent to the new Lombard conqueror. Hence he opened a new chapter in the history of Northeastern Italy. He erected all the Venetian plain between the Mincio River, the Po, the Carnic Alps on the north and the Julian on the east, into the border Duchy of Friuli, with Forum Julii as its capital. To its Duke he entrusted the hazardous and responsible task of guarding the mountain passes leading to the Danube. The Duke stipulated for the noblest, most valorous Lombard clans to form his soldiery and the finest brood mares to sustain his border cavalry.³ Thus was established here a typical frontier principality of defense, after the order of the German *Mark*. A hundred years later its chief was called a *Markgraf*; and from this time for five hundred years, so long as the human cauldron on the Danube seethed and boiled and overflowed, there was always a *Mark* of fluctuating boundaries and varying name that rested upon the Julian Alps.

This Lombard frontier state took its name from its capital, Forum Julii (modern Cividale), originally a market built by Julius Caesar in the foothills of the Julian Alps. It was a typical pass town, located on the northeast margin of the Venetian plains where it could command the trade which the Postojna Gate, Predil, and Pontebba passes brought over from Pannonia and Noricum. As a base for guarding these passes, the site offered better facilities than Aquileia, which never recovered from the Hun's attack and retained only ecclesiastical importance. The frontiers of the Duchy probably reached north to the summit of the Carnic Alps, east to the crest of the Julian Range and the Karst, south to the Adriatic coast, and west to the Tagliamento River. It therefore had natural or scientific boundaries on its exposed sides. On the north its Bavarian

1 Villare, Pasquale: *Barbarian Invasions of Italy* (London, 1902), II, 279.

2 Hodgkin, T.: op. Cit., V, Book VI, 158-169.

3 Ibid., 160-161; VI, Book VII, 38-44.

THE JULIAN ALPS IN THE EIGHTH AND NINTH CENTURIES

neighbors were giving evidence of aggression. Slovenians, an advance guard of the great southern Slav migration, occupied the eastern slopes of the Julian Alps. They were a small detachment of herdsmen and farmers, who in reality served as a border outpost of defense against the dreaded Avars and other intrusive peoples of Mongolian stock occupying the middle Danube plains.

The mere presence of these nomadic hordes in the near-by pasture lands was a threat. In about 610 the Avars swept across the Julian or Carnic passes from the Save and Drave. They spread desolation among the Lombard cities of the Duchy of Friuli, much as the Lombards had done a few decades before among the Roman cities of this fertile but exposed province. After the raid they retired, only to return again in 663, this time by the Postojna Gate. In the chronic battlefield of the Frigidus Valley they defeated the Duke of Friuli, ravaged the Duchy, and again withdrew.¹ The Slav neighbors on the eastern slopes of the Julian Alps were probably impoverished by the Avar raids; for a few years after (688-700) they resorted to systematic cattle-stealing—the ancestral occupation of barbarian mountaineers — crossed the border and despoiled the herds in the Friulian pastures. Punitive expeditions to stop these depredations only served to incite the warlike spirit of the Slovenians. They invaded the Duchy by the Predil Pass, and defeated the Duke's forces in the valley approach below.² These Slovenians, however, gradually became assimilated, through constant intercourse, to the higher civilization of the Duchy of Friuli. Their territory, which received the Slav name of *Krajena* or *Krain*, or “frontier,”³ occupied the mountain country between the Kulpa River on the south and the Karawanken Alps hemming in the Save Valley on the north. It was conquered by the Duke of Bavaria in 772, and in 788 was embodied in the Frankish Empire by Charlemagne, who thus secured the strategic portion of the old Roman Pannonia for the defense of his wide dominion, and erected it into the *Mark* or March of Friuli.

During the ninth century, the Karling kings of Italy paid much attention to strengthening this weak frontier. They extended the March of Friuli west to the Adige River and reinforced it by the addition of the March of Istria, thus giving it command of the whole stretch of the Julian Alps and Karst highland down to the present Gulf of Fiume. Beyond the crest, on the eastern slope, they had an additional defense in the *Krain*, or March of Carniola, which formed a frontier state of the east Frankish Kingdom or German Empire.

During the ninth century these three Marches served as outposts against the migrant Avars. At the end of this period they faced a new enemy from the Danubian plains. These were the Magyars or Hungarians.

1 *Ibid.*, VI, Book VII, 50-54, 286-287.

2 *Ibid.*, 328-331.

3 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, art. “Carniola.”

For a long time they had been moving along the broad highway of migration across Southern Europe, pressing on the rear of the Slavs and Avars, till they occupied all the present territory of Hungary except the narrow arm of land stretching through Croatia to the Adriatic. The exposed duchies of the German Empire threw out a series of defensive vassal states, endowed with unusual privileges and unusual responsibilities, as buffers and bulwarks against the enemy. It was a political process of thickening the hide of the Empire, so to speak. It was a process as natural as that of protective coloring in plants and animals, and it is one that has been developed on exposed boundaries the world over, and the ages through.¹

These German border states established to ward off Hungarian aggression were the March of Moravia, the March of Austria, the March of Carinthia, the March of Styria, and the March of Carniola. Behind the last lay the Italian March of Friuli, which was also of Teutonic origin. The *Markgraf*, or ruler of a March, had the legal status of the older counts, but he controlled a much larger territory and enjoyed far greater independence, as his dangerous frontier location demanded. He exercised justice, maintained a standing army, and had the right to call out militia from his population; but in return for this enlarged authority he assumed the grave responsibility of defending the border state.²

The proximity of Italy tempted the first inroads of the Hungarians. In 899 or 900 they descended from the mountain rim of Friuli, “the most harmful door left open by nature to chastise the faults of Italy,” and ravaged as far west as Pavia.³ They came again in 921, and yet again in 924 at the request of King Berengar, who was on friendly terms with the Hungarian chief, but was threatened by his rebellious Lombard vassals. These facts suggest steady intercourse, probably commercial, between the Italian cities and the barbarians, by way of the Julian Alps and the Karst passes. The desolating raids became almost annual, spreading farther and farther – to Apulia in 922, to Rome in 926, and to Capua in 937. They emerged upon the horizon of Italy somewhere in the Friulian or Venetian plains, *per ignotas vias*, the chronicler says;⁴ but they had no connection with the numerous Hungarian incursions along the upper Danube Valley into Bavaria, Swabia, and Alsace. These facts seem to justify the assumption that they came by the old eastern passes, especially since the northern passes had long been guarded by the Bavarians. When the German king, Otto the Great, became overlord of Italy in 952, he transferred Friuli, now called the March of Verona, and the March of Istria to the Duke of Bavaria, who at the same time ruled over Carinthia and the March of Carniola.

1 Semple, E. C.: op. cit., 233-34.

2 Waits, G.: *Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte* (Kiel, 1876), VII, 84-94.

3 Thayer, William R.: *Short History of Venice* (New York, 1905), 32.

4 Marquart, J.: *Osteuropäische und ostasiatische Streifzüge circa 840-940* (Leipzig, 1903), 156-158.

THE MARCH OF CARNIOLA

Thus he effectively closed the way to Italy against the raids of the Hungarians.¹ A little later, in 976, Carinthia was erected into a duchy, ruling over the vassal Marches of Friuli, Istria, and Carniola, and served, like Bavaria twenty years before, as a sort of chief of the border police.

These frontier provinces were transferred so often and so arbitrarily by the politician emperors of the Middle Ages in payment for votes in the imperial elections that any geographical law in the combinations became obscured. However, one or two principles emerge out of the chaotic changes. The March of Carniola, because of its location across the sunny path to Italy, retained longest (till 1254 or later) the March constitution and privileges which at once facilitated and repaid the task of defending the frontier. There seems to have been a recognition of the fact that this border state on the eastern slope of the Julian Alps was only a part of a geographical whole; therefore a recurrent tendency is revealed to combine it with Istria and Friuli,² and thus to round out the geographical whole comprised in all the wide frontier zone of defense.

The growing Republic of Venice during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries gradually absorbed most of the coastal belt of the Istrian Peninsula. This brought a turning-point in the history of Carniola. The March acquired nearly all the territory that was left of the old March of Istria, and for the first time (ca. 1250) it had a small littoral of its own on the Gulf of Trieste and the Gulf of Fiume. Moreover, it extended to the lowlands of the Isonzo, though not to the river. In other words, the March of Carniola was astride of the Julian Alps and the Karst Plateau, with a foot resting on the Adriatic shore. This location gave it an entirely new significance and value. It was no longer merely a strategic border state, but a border state with a sea front, and as such it became an object to the inland states.

Carniola was momentarily acquired between 1269 and 1276 by King Ottocar of Bohemia and Moravia, who had managed to get into his own hands all the old belt of March lands stretching from the Julian Alps to the head of the Vistula and Oder rivers in the Moravian Gates. Since he had shortly before founded the city of Koenigsberg on the coast of East Prussia,³ his long-strung possessions comprised most of the old amber route. Ottocar was forced by the emperor Rudolph of Hapsburg to renounce his recent acquisitions, all of which except Carinthia and Carniola went to found the fortunes of the House of Hapsburg. Later we find another Bohemian king endeavoring to secure for Bohemia those important territories as a passway to Italy.⁴ His plans were frustrated by the growing power of Austria, which also felt a vital need of stretching its frontier to Italy and the sea, and which in 1335 acquired Carniola.

1 Huber, Alfons: *Geschichte Oestreiche* (Gotham 1885), I, 136.

2 *Ibid.*, 218-220.

3 Freeman, E.A.: *Historical Geography of Europe* (London, 1882), 319.

4 Coxe, William: *History of the House of Austria* (London, 1847), II, 105-106.

This marchland of Carniola, which had originated on the eastern slope of the Julian Alps as an outpost of successive Italian powers, now faced about westward. It became Austria's exposed frontier toward expanding Venice, and gave to inland Austria its first narrow foothold upon the sea. While its eastern border never changed, thus evidencing the equilibrium between pressure and counter pressure of nations in the Danube Valley during the later Middle Ages, on the west Carniola gradually acquired the valley of the Isonzo River and the base of the Istrian Peninsula. Thus it comprised all the weak highland barrier which it served to defend. Its western frontier toward Italy constantly fluctuated; but throughout its subsequent history from 1335 till 1807 it managed to keep some strip of seaboard on the Adriatic, at Trieste or Aquileia or on the littoral between, besides a coastal *piéd de terre* on the Gulf of Fiume. This it accomplished despite the century-long efforts of the Venetian Republic to exclude Austria from the Adriatic, and to get closer access to the trade routes leading over the Postojna Gate and Pontebba passes. By these routes Venice fed her products into backward Austria. During the Middle Ages 40,000 pack horses came yearly from the north down to Istria to take back Venetian salt to the Austrian Empire.¹

When the fall of Constantinople let loose another flood of barbarians into the flat Danube plains, Carniola again became the fighting marchland. Under the hot blast of Turkish attack Hungary shriveled up like a dead leaf. Its frontier rolled back within forty or fifty miles of the old Austrian Marches. Across this narrow buffer territory poured the Turks into Carniola, in 1463, 1472, 1473, 1493, 1521, and again in 1559.² Ljubljana saw the Mongol cavalry around its walls.³ Once more the migrants of the Danubian plains stormed this half-open door of Italy. Once more the geographical location of Carniola made her the mountain warden of Venetian Italy until, in 1683, the Turkish advance spent itself and gave place to a century-long retreat.

During the Napoleonic Wars these lines of easy communication between Austria and Italy were the scenes of marching and counter-marching. Napoleon, in 1787, erected a new Illyrian state out of Carinthia, Carniola, Goerz, Istria, the coast of Dalmatia, and Croatia, to be "a guard set before the gates of Vienna," he said.⁴ With true geographical insight he was reviving the old March of the Julian Alps and the Karst Plateau with somewhat extended boundaries.

In his great Austrian campaign of 1797, from his base at Treviso, north of Venice, Napoleon met the same military problem, determined by

1 Thayer, William R.: op. cit., 93.

2 Abbot: *Austria, Its Rise and Fall* (New York, 1902), 70, 71, 75, 83, 146, 147. Huber, Alfons: op. cit. (Gotha, 1892), IV, 13.

3 Leger, Louis: *History of Austro-Hungary* (London, 1889), 154-258.

4 Seton-Watson, R. W.: *The South Slav Question, and the Hapsburg Monarchy* (London, 1911), 26.

THE JULIAN ALPS IN MODERN WARFARE

geographic conditions, as that now facing the Italian army of invasion in 1915. His method of solution was the same. He sent Jourbert with an army by the Adige Valley into the Tyrol, and Messena by the Pontebba Pass and the Col di Tarvis into Carinthia, to intercept Austrian reinforcements coming either from Germany or from Vienna. He himself attacked the Austrian army under the archduke Charles on the Tagliamento River, drove them back across the Isonzo, took Gradisca, Monfalcone, Trieste, and Fiume, and made his temporary headquarters at Goerz, an old stronghold at the outlet of the Wipbach Valley. From there he sent Bernadotte to pursue the archduke Charles, who had retired from Goerz across the Postojna Gate upon Ljubljana, and to occupy Carniola. Napoleon sent another force on the trail of a second Austrian army, which was withdrawing up the Isonzo Valley to the Predil Pass in the hope of securing the Col di Tarvis and the road through Carinthia to Vienna. It was crushed, however, by Massena's army, which was waiting for it above, and the pursuing army, which Napoleon accompanied. The commander made his successive headquarters at Goerz, Caporetto, Tarvis, and Klagenfurt in Carinthia, where he reunited the three divisions of his army for the advance upon Vienna.¹

In the Franco-Austrian War of 1809, Austrian forces under Archduke John invaded French Italy by the Pontebba – Col di Tarvis route and defeated the opposing army at Sacile, just west of the Tagliamento.² But subsequent reverses in Italy and discouraging news of the progress of the war in Austria forced the archduke John to retreat by Pontebba Pass and Col di Tarvis into Carinthia, which, together with Carniola, was soon after abandoned to the pursuing French. Napoleon in his congratulatory address to the army of Italy enumerated the scenes of their victories, names familiar to history, the upper Tagliamento Valley, Tarvis, Fort Malborghetto, Goerz, the Save, and the Drave.³

The Italian armies of King Victor Emanuel are compelled by geographic conditions to follow in the footsteps of Napoleon and his generals. One has advanced by the Adige Valley north into the Trentino or southern Tyrol; another has moved northeast across the Pontebba Pass, to sever the Trentino's communication with Vienna through the longitudinal valley of the Pusterthal and to protect the Venetian plains from a flank attack; a third army has marched east across the Isonzo, taken the border defenses at various points along the left bank of the river, and now is planning to invest the strong fortress of Goerz, while another division has occupied Monfalcone on the advance to Trieste. The rapidity of the several movements, however, as compared with those of a century ago, is much slower. It is retarded by the vastly increased difficulty of forcing

1 Fournier, August: *Napoleon the First* (tr. from the French, New York, 1904), 97-98. Hazlitt, William: *Life of Napoleon* (London, 1830), II, 23-26.

2 *Cambridge Modern History* (New York and London, 1906), IX, 355.

3 Hugo. A.: *Geschichte des Kaisers Napoleon* (tr. from the French, Stuttgart, 1834), I, 415-417, 429.

mountain passes which are defended by modern fortresses, by masked artillery stations tunneled into mountain walls with only an external orifice for the cannon's month, by long-range guns in commanding positions, and by wire entanglements. These military equipments of defense have restored much of the pristine barrier nature of mountain boundaries which was theirs before the construction of roads and the clearing of forests. The present campaign in the Julian Alps may therefore prove these highlands to be the "almost impassable barrier" to hostile invasion which they were considered to be over two thousand years ago by the Roman Senate. Such is the power of human inventions to modify the effect of geographic conditions.

The accessible nature of the Julian Alps and the Karst Plateau under normal conditions is evidenced also by the distribution of population in these highlands, and by its ethnic elements. Nowhere else in the whole semicircle of the Alps does the density of population exceed one hundred to the square mile (forty to the square kilometer) across the summit of the mountains, except along the thickly settled littoral of the French and Italian Riviera, where the Maritime Alps sink down to the Mediterranean. Moreover, there the density decreases to half this number a few miles back from the coast, whereas it is maintained across the Karst Plateau in a broad belt from Goerz to Ljubljana, extending south to Fiume.¹

Ethnology also reveals the breach-like character of the Julian Alps. Throughout the Venetian plains today, as far west as the Mincio River, the inhabitants are distinguished by a tall stature, rare among pure Italians. There is no doubt the underlying stock of the ancient Venetians, generally considered as a lowland offshoot of the tall Illyrian race, which is found today in Bosnia, Montenegro, and Albania, and which has given some additional inches to the later Slav immigrants.² As the Julian Alps were no barrier to the tall Illyrians, neither were they to the Slovenians, the subbranch of the Slav people, who, in the seventh century, pushed up the Save Valley from the east, and today cover the intervening territory down to the Isonzo. At one point they lap over the frontier into Italian territory, but the old district of Aquileia and the Istrian littoral within the Austrian border are still Italian,³ and still hope to be incorporated in the modern Kingdom of Italy. All this region up to the summit of the Julian Alps forms part of *Italia irredenda*. Its recovery will give the peninsular kingdom a scientific frontier and deprive Austria of her present advantage in offensive and defensive warfare on this border.

THE RHONE VALLEY BREACH. Different from the low Karst saddle and the marine passage of the Bosphorus and Hellespont is the third breach in the mountain barrier, formed by the Rhone-Saône-Doubs groove.

1 Diercke: *Schul-Atlas* (Brunswick, 1909), 89, 128. Krebs, Norbert: *Landerkunde der oester-reichischen Alpen*, 413.

2 Ripley, W. Z.: *Races of Europe* (New York, 1910), 255-268.

3 Diercke: op. cit., "Ethnographical Map." 124.

THE RHONE VALLEY BREACH

Like the other two, it connects with the Mediterranean Basin a region of strongly contrasted climatic conditions and, during ancient and mediaeval times, of contrasted economic and industrial development. Remote from the early eastern centers of urban life and progress in the Aegean and the Levantine basins, this Rhone breach came much later upon the historical stage than did the Bosphorus-Hellespont. It assumed an important role only after the Roman Republic had transferred the big dramatic events of Mediterranean history to the western basin by encircling that basin with a rim of Roman lands. To compensate for this tardy appearance, it has played a peculiarly important part in the history, not only of the Mediterranean, but of all Northwestern Europe. It made Gaul, and later France, one great transit land. Through it Roman civilization penetrated into Gaul, and spread from the radiating passes at the head of the Rhone-Saône Valley west and north over all that province into Britain, and finally eastward over the Rhine into Germany. The location of the Alpine barrier and the Rhone breach combined to retard the dissemination of Roman culture into Germany, and at length admitted it only in a Gallicized form. During the decline of the Roman Empire, the Rhone breach became in turn the passway for German tribes migrating south. The local population there today reveals in its fairer coloring and tall stature the ethnic infusion of the blonde giants of the north. Linked geographically with the north, the valley became linked ethnically as well with the Teutonic peoples who had drifted along the shelving coastal plains of Germany and France.

Thus the Rhone Valley breach performed the great historical service of uniting the maturer civilization of the warm Mediterranean lands with the growing civilizations around the colder thalassic basins of the English Channel, the North Sea, and the Baltic. These northern seas, in turn, distributed to all their shores the germs of culture brought up from the south. Through the instrumentality of Flemish, Dutch, German, Hanseatic, and English traders they raised the *niveau* of civilization in these retarded northern lands. The similar seed of Greek culture, planted early and thickly on the southern shores of Russia, found no such favorable conditions for transplanting to the Russian north. Many were destroyed by the nomadic invaders from Western Asia before they had well taken root on the Scythian coast. The few that were disseminated northward to the chill plains of Central Russia lost their vitality. Far from the vivifying contact with the sea, impoverished by the lack of fresh accessions, they did not breed true to their type, but languished in dwarfed and flowerless form on the monotonous steppes. The ultimate environment of the Bosphorus breach is found in the Valdai Hills, the Volga plains, and the Caspian desert, as that of the Rhone breach is found in the shores of the northern seas.

While the Bosphorus-Hellespont breach dates back only to Quarternary times, the Rhone groove has an old geological pedigree. It is not a mere

river valley of erosion, though erosion has carved out some of its minor physiographic features; but it traces back its ancestry to a long marine inlet or strait which in Eocene and Miocene times penetrated northward through a narrow belt of depression between the young folded ranges of the Alps and Jura on the east and the steep escarpment of the old Cevennes Plateau on the west. This sea-arm filled the present valleys of the Rhone, Saéne, and Doubs, and south of the granitic Vosges massif it connected with another inland sea, which in the early Tertiary period occupied the entire Vienna Basin. The slow elevation of the later Miocene closed the strait at its northern end, but left traces of its geological past in the broad gap between the Jura and the southern face of the Vosges, while the Rhone-Saéne depression was converted into a long, pouch-like inlet of the sea. Finally, in the Pliocene, the Rhone-Saéne emerged as it is today, a great river flowing through a narrow plain, fed by the big streams that drain the western slopes of the Alps and Jura, and the short torrents which at close intervals scar the long front of the Cevennes escarpment.¹

The Rhone System opens a navigable highway straight north from the Mediterranean for 340 miles (550 kilometers), half-way across the base of the Gallo-Iberian peninsula. At its northern end lies the chief hydrographic center of Western Europe. Here it connects with a group of navigable rivers which radiate from its low encircling watershed, and open out natural routes of communication to the Bay of Biscay, the English Channel, the North Sea, and even the Black Sea through the near-by head streams of the Danube River. Scarcely a tidal wave of invasion that swept the western shores of the Black Sea failed to spread up the Danube Valley also and to reach in its ultimate wash that old geological gap between the Vosges and the Jura.

This is the famous Pass of Belfort, known in ancient and mediaeval times as “The Burgundian Gate,” a broad gap about 18 miles wide (30 kilometers) lying only 1,138 feet (347 meters) above sea-level. It unites the Rhone groove with the long, fertile rift-valley of the northward-flowing Rhine. Together these formed the chief historical highway of ancient and mediaeval times between the Mediterranean and the North Sea. Migrant hordes, with their wagons and cattle, moving westward from the upper Danube Valley or southward along the Rhine trough from the chill Baltic plains, converged upon this open gateway leading to the sunny shores and rich cities of the Roman Mediterranean. They beat out tracks which were later transformed into Roman roads. Centuries later a canal from l’Isle, the head of navigation on the Doubs, connected that river with the Ill at Muelhausen and the Rhine at Basel.

Meantime a long chain of cities, united by commercial interests, had grown up along the Rhone, Saéne, Doubs, Rhine, and the network of channels in the Rhine Delta to expedite the trade between two contrasted

¹ Chamberlin and Salisbury: *Geology* (New York, 1906), III, 277, 319.

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regions of production. The North Sea lands, located on the far outskirts of the ancient civilized world, retarded in their economic and cultural development by geographic remoteness and relatively harsh climatic conditions, commanded nevertheless the abundant raw materials of new, unexploited countries. As growing civilization and trade pricked the desire for luxuries, these raw materials enabled them to make a steady demand for the varied products of that subtropical and industrial Mediterranean world. Therefore Holland and Flanders, lying at the outlets of this Rhine-Rhone highway, were the first states of Northern Europe to feel the concentrated effects of Mediterranean culture, and to produce on these northern shores a replica of Mediterranean Venice, Pisa, and Genoa. In their splendid art, the rich fabrics of their looms, their brocades and tapestries, fine silverwork, printing, and map-making, we trace the Mediterranean lineage of their models.

Geographical companion pieces to the Burgundian Gate are found in the series of low passways which penetrate the hill country filling the older and broader geological gap between the Archean massif of the Vosges and that of the Cevennes Plateau. The long, sluggish Saéne, which is navigable up to this hill country in the so-called Monts Faucilles, affords easy access to these watershed passes. They, in turn, have from the earliest times offered a wide choice of routes for intercourse between the Saéne and the diverging rivers of France which drain outward to the North Sea and the Atlantic. Early migration, conquest, and trade sought them out and used them all. The easiest tracks beaten out by migrant barbarians traversing these uplands or the ones offering the shortest connection with tin-bearing Britain were later followed by Roman roads. Yet later most of them were utilized for water carriage by the system of canals projected by Sully in the sixteenth century. All combined to cement together the various parts of France.

The Saéne connects with the Moselle near the great French fortress of Epernal by a broad, open pass, 1,135 feet (or 346 meters) high, between the Vosges and the Monts Faucilles. So low is the barrier that it has never presented an appreciable obstacle to communication between northern Burgundy and southern Lorraine. Here today one finds the same provincial accent, the same peculiarity of geographical names ending in *-ey*, the same type of rural house, and the same character of inhabitants on both sides of the low watershed.¹ Thirty miles to the west an easy pass route between the Mont de Fourches and the Plateau de Langres connects the Saéne with the Meuse Valley; and yet another crosses the Plateau of Langres at 1,550 feet (473 meters), where canal and railroad now link the Saéne with the Marne. This was the route of the chief Roman road leading northward to the Lower Rhine. It crossed the summit at the ancient town of Andematunnum (Langres), but turning thence across the upland to the Moselle at Tullum (Toul), it followed

¹ Vidal de la Blache: *Géographie de la France* (Paris, 1903), 234-242.

the valley of this river past modern Metz and Trier, and then continued north to the Rhine at Colonia Agrippina, the modern Cologne.

The Roman road to the Seine, which was probably the main route of the tin trade, was important because of this trade and also because the Seine offered the best navigation of all the northern rivers except the Rhine. The road left the Saéne or Arar at the Aeduan town of Cabillonum (Chalons-sur-Saéne), turned west past modern Chagny, and mounted the plateau rim now known as the Cote d'Or to the ancient }Eduan fortress of Bibracte, later to the nearby Roman town of Augustodunum (Autun). Thence it turned northwest, avoiding the granite massif of the Morvan Plateau, and followed the Yonne Valley across the Auxois plain down to the southern elbow of the Seine. The modern route from the Saéne to the Auxois upland leaves the valley at Dijon and turns up the gorge of the Ouche, which is now traced by highway, the Burgundian Canal, and railroad. But the old road goes back beyond the memory of man. It was the route taken by Caesar in 58 B.C., when he turned aside from his pursuit of the retreating Helvetians to seek the big Aeduan town of Bibracte, eighteen miles away, where he hoped to find provisions for his soldiers.¹ Limestone buttresses running out from the base of Mont de Rome-Chateau, which overlooks the route, preserve for us today ruins of bygone habitations or forts, and testify to the importance of this ancient thoroughfare.²

Thus the upper Saéne and Doubs command a semicircle of trans-montane connections. Midway between these headwater passes and the Mediterranean is the confluence of the Saéne and Rhone. Here lay the ancient city of Lugdunum (Lyons), which for centuries was the heart of Roman Gaul. It commanded not only the whole length of the RhoneSaéne breach, but also the east course of the Rhone, which opens a narrow and difficult route between the J um and Savoy Alps to Lake Geneva and the lake plateau of Switzerland. This is the passage which the migrating Helvetians attempted to force in 58 B.C., and which Caesar defended.³ The swift and often turbulent current of this mountain course of the Rhone, its difficult navigation, and its gorge-like valley afforded a fairly good barrier boundary to the young Roman *provincia*, whose limits had shortly before been pushed northward to the Rhone and Lake Geneva.

This history of the Rhone Valley begins with the founding of the Greek colony of Massilia (Marseilles) in about 600 B.C. The site of the settlement was well chosen. Like many ports designed to exploit the commerce of big river systems, it was located, not at the mouth of the stream, but off to one side, where the constant deposition of deltaic mud could not silt up its harbor and spring floods threaten it with inundation. Such a location Massilia found where the hills of Provence run out as headlands

¹ Caesar *De Bella Gallico* i. 23.

² Vidal de la Blache: op. Cit., 240.

³ Caesar op. cit. i. 2-10.

THE RHONE RIVER AND DELTA

into the sea east of the Rhone mouth. These afforded an acropolis for the city and a deep port, protected on the north by the long, bold promontory of the l'Estagne from the destructive blasts of the mistral. Small inshore islets to guard the approaches to the harbor, sunny hillsides for vineyards and olive orchards, and the near-by river for inland commerce added all the other elements considered desirable for a Greek colony.¹ The region yielded poor wheat crops, however, so the colonists were compelled to "trust more to the resources of the sea than of the land, and avail themselves, in preference, of their excellent position for commerce," as Strabo tells us.²

The southern approach to the Rhone Valley breach was made either by sea or by land. The shallow waters of the Gulf of Lyons, the weak tides of the Mediterranean, and the heavy burden of silt transported by the swift-flowing Rhone and Durance, all combined to build up a large deltaic plain, through which wind the tortuous courses of the Rhone distributaries. Like the outlets of the Nile, these varied in number from two to five at different periods and shifted their location.³ Access to them was difficult. The flat, alluvial shore was often difficult to discern in bad weather, as it lacked the bold sea-marks on which the Mediterranean sailor was wont to rely. The debouchment channels were constantly obstructed by the mud deposits at their mouths. As early as 101 B.C. Caius Marius, who probably took his troops by sea from some northern Roman port for the campaign against the Cimbri, found it necessary to construct a navigable channel through the lagoons and half-silted distributaries from the eastern outlet of the Rhone to a point above the delta, where the road crossed the river.⁴ These *fossae Mariana*e he gave to the people of Massilia in return for their aid against the invaders. The city made revenue out of the canal by levying a toll on all boats using it.⁵ But the silting process in time impaired its usefulness, and threatened once more to block the entrance. Further obstacles to navigation were found in the powerful current of the Rhone, and the *mistral*, called by the ancients "the black north," which swept down the valley.

Ancient traffic on the Rhone seems to have been considerable, despite the difficulties of navigation. The Massilians were not the only ones engaged in this river commerce. When Hannibal in 218 B.C. crossed the Rhone on his march from Spain to Italy, he was able to buy numerous dugout canoes and boats from the natives, who used them in their extensive sea traffic.⁶ Massilia was the distributing center for the tin which found its way southward across Gaul from Britain⁷ and probably also from mines in the Vilaine Valley of Southeastern Brittany, where ancient workings have been found.⁸ Diodorus Siculus states that the tin of

1 Vidal de la Blache: op. Cit., 341, 344, 345.

2 Strabo iv. 1. 5.

3 Strabo iv. 1. 8.

4 Heitland, W. E.: op. cit., II, 372.

5 Strabo iv. 1. 8.

6 Polybius *Histories* iii. 42.

7 Strabo 2. 9.

8 Vidal de la Blache: op. Cit., 20-21.

Cornwall was collected for export on a small inshore islet of the British coast, a typical maritime market place. There it was purchased by merchants who took it over to Gaul, and transported it on horses, a thirty days' journey across the country, to the mouth of the Rhone.¹ The Massiliots set up mercantile factories in the Gallic towns to forward the British tin to the coast, together with the raw products of the interior. In exchange, they supplied the back country with fish, salt, olive oil, wine, bronze utensils, and pottery,² some of which undoubtedly found their way to that indented Cornwall peninsula first known to the ancients as the Cassiterides Islands.³ Through the Rhone Valley breach the cruder elements of Hellenic civilization thus trickled into Northern Europe, while the Greek language, alphabet, and economic methods were disseminated among the neighboring Gauls of the long Massiliot littoral.

The Rhone Valley breach is approached also by two land routes, one from Italy and one from Spain, which respectively turn the mountain barrier where the Maritime Alps and the eastern Pyrenees run out into the Mediterranean. These narrow passways between mountain and sea have always opened lines both of trade and of attack. Hence Massilia fringed them with her subsidiary colonies.⁴ She lined the Gulf of Lyons from Emporiae and Rhoda (modern Rosas) on the Spanish coast of the Pyrenees, around to Olbia (Eoube) and the Iles d'Hyeros on the east; farther on, Antipolis or Antibes, Nicaea or Nice, and Portus Monoeci or Monaco, strung along the rocky seaboard of the Maritime Alps, opposed the depredations of the mountaineers and maintained the connections of Massilia with its ally Rome.⁵

These routes became important also to the Romans after their acquisition of Spain from Carthage in 201 B.C. Hence their first systematic campaigns against the Alpine tribes and their conquest of the Rhone Valley were both inaugurated by attacks on the mountaineers flanking this route, the valiant Salluvii of the Maritime Alps and their Ligurian neighbors of the western Apennines. Like all highland tribes, they took advantage of their strategic location to maintain a system of pillage by land and sea, to block Roman traffic with Massilia and Spain, and even to obstruct the passage of Roman armies. The geographical relief of the country fought for them. It enabled them to maintain a guerilla warfare in intensity and duration out of all proportion to their numerical strength, after the manner of primitive mountain people the world over. In 125 B.C., after a conflict of eighty years, all that the Romans could force from the barbarians was a coastal strip, averaging a little over a mile in width, for purposes of a highway.⁶ The ceded strip was transferred to the Massiliots,

1 Diodorus Siculus v. 22.

2 Curtius, Ernst: op. cit., I, 482.

3 Strabo 5. 11.

4 Grote: *History of Greece* (London, 1854), III, 538.

5 Strabo iv. 1. 5.

6 Strabo iv. 6. 3.

ROMAN CONQUEST OF THE RHONE VALLEY

who undertook to construct and maintain the coast road, since it united their settlements. Beginning at Genoa, where it connected with the Via Aurelia, the road ran west across the roots of the Alps between mountain and sea as far as the modern Frejus (Forum Julii). There it left the coast, which runs out southward into a blunt peninsula, and turning up the valley of the Argeus River, continued westward along a longitudinal groove between parallel hill ranges. Where it emerged upon the alluvial plain of the Rhone, just north of Massilia, the Romans built the garrison town of Aquae Sextiae (Aix) to guard the road.¹ This Massiliot highway was later replaced by the Via Julia Augusta in the early days of the Empire. Centuries afterward, in 1807, it was revived by Napoleon in the famous Cornice Road, which he built to connect France with his short-lived Kingdom of Italy. Thus geography turned back to the history of the imperial Caesars for a page to insert in the history of the great French Emperor.

From the military base at Aquae Sextiae, which commanded land and sea connection with Italy, began the Roman conquest of the Rhone Valley in 125 B.C. First the Salluvii between the Durance River and the sea were subdued, then their northern neighbors, the Vocontii, and finally in 122 B.C. the powerful Celtic tribes of the Allobroges, who inhabited the rich valley of the Isara (Isere) and the country north to Lake Lemanus (Geneva). The powerful Averni of the Cevennes Plateau, who had lent assistance to Allobroges, were forced to cede to Rome all the short southeastern slope of their highlands to the Rhone and the Mediterranean as far west as Tolosa (Toulouse) on the Garonne River,² a territory comprised in the later French province of Languedoc. Thus practically all the Rhone Valley, north to the Saène confluence and to Lake Geneva, was comprised in the Roman province, except the coastal strip tributary to its ally Massilia. The geographic reasons are clear. The valleys of the Durance and Isère opened avenues of approach to the only two practical passes over the western Alps, the Mons Matrana. or Mont Genevre at an altitude of 6,080 feet (1,853 meters), and the Little St. Bernard at 7,075 feet (2,157 meters). The latter was the unguarded door, hardly feasible for an army, which probably admitted Hannibal's forces into Italy, though it collected a frightful toll of life from his men and animals. Hence Hannibal's line of march, by the Pyrenean coast road, the valleys of the Rhone and Isere, and the Little St. Bernard Pass, determined with some accuracy the limits of early Roman expansion into Gaul.

On this point the first Roman road-building across the Rhone is instructive. From Arelate (Arles) at the head of the delta, where the passage of the river was easiest and where therefore the Massiliot road had its terminus, the Romans ran the Via Domitia westward around the Gulf of Lyons, through Narbo (Narbonne), capital of the new province,

1 Strabo iv. 1. 5.

2 Mommsen: *op. Cit.*, III, 205-7.

and thence southward over the last spur of the Pyrenees into Spain. Here the massive form of the Pyrenees, stripping off its surplus folds before plunging into the sea, thrusts out an arm to the Mediterranean. This arm is the Alberes range, a single bold ridge deeply notched by the Col du Pertus (951 feet or 290 meters), which opens a low passway between the maritime plains of Roussillon in France and those of Ampurdan in Spain.¹ The sea-front of the Pyrenees forms a series of mountain headlands towering high above the fretting waves. It was enough to daunt the Roman road builders, for it taxed the skill of the modern engineers, who by means of tunnels and galleries put through the coast railway here in 1880. The ancient gate of the Pyrenees lay, therefore, 7 miles back from the sea. Massilia had seen danger in this open door, and therefore planted along its southern approach several outpost colonies as bulwarks against Iberian invasion. Rome had seen it too, when the Carthaginians began to establish a new empire in Spain, and therefore in 225 B.C. exacted from the Carthaginian governor a pledge that he would make the Ebro River the northern limit of his conquests in Spain.² But when Hannibal was ready to invade Italy, he crossed the Pyrenees by the Col du Pertus,³ traversed Southern Gaul, and was already over the Rhone before the Roman army under Publius Scipio had landed in Massilia. From this time on through ancient and mediaeval history the Col du Pertus was a passway for migration and conquest.

It is significant of the purely Mediterranean outlook of the Roman Republic that it began its inland expansion up the Rhone Valley breach only under the spur of necessity. The century-long rivalry with Carthage kept it facing seaward, and forced it out of its peninsular isolation into wide maritime contact and dominion. Its great historical events were staged on the coasts. The hinterlands of the three surrounding continents as yet counted for nothing. Conquest of the lower Rhone Valley, the initial step of their inland expansion, was begun only after the annexation of Carthage in 146 B.C. had made the western Mediterranean basin a Roman lake, and after the Adriatic, the Ionian, and Aegean seas with their bordering lands had likewise been incorporated in the empire of the Republic. Moreover, the *Provincia Romana* of Gaul, located between the western Alps, the Cevennes escarpment, and the Pyrenees, was Mediterranean in its climate, its natural products, and also to some extent in its civilization, owing to the strong Hellenizing influences which for nearly five centuries had been emanating from Massilia. The province was organized and annexed in 121 B.C. Further expansion beyond the climatic limit defined by the Rhone elbow at the Saône confluence had to wait till 58 B.C., or over sixty years.

Meantime the *provincia* was having the typical experiences of a border district on an exposed frontier. While other Roman provinces like Sicily

¹ Vidal de la Blache: op. Cit, 355-356.

² Heitland: op. cit, H, 223.

³ Polybius op. cit. iii. 9; xi. 23, 24.

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and Spain suffered from local revolts against an oppressive government, this one alone suffered from foreign incursions. Therein it anticipated by some five hundred years the similar historical events of Pannonia and the Julian Alps, growing out of similar geographic conditions. It became in effect a Marchland, after the order of the later German *Mark*; and it duplicated the history. First a border district of defense, it passed suddenly to a more brilliant role as a base for conquest and expansion. Often a geographical handicap may be converted into a geographical opportunity. It is a matter of tipping the scales.

Rome secured her end of the Rhone Valley breach not a moment too soon. Immediately she began to encounter here a persistent stream of Germanic expansion, which selected this easy path to the sunny Mediterranean lands. Hither, in 109 B.C., came the Cimbri, who four years earlier had been ordered off from that half—open door of the Julian Alps. The door was wide open here, so they defeated the Roman army somewhere in the Rhone Valley. They returned in 105 B.C., hurled aside the Roman army stationed at Arausio (Orange) on the lower Rhone to obstruct their course, and passed on victorious by the near-by Pyrenean gate into Spain. They wandered in Spain and Gaul for two or three years, but were soon back, nosing like hungry dogs about the doors of Italy.¹ This time (102 B.C.) the Cimbri found a way to the Po Valley by the Brenner Pass (4,470 feet, 1,362 meters) over the Central Alps; but their allies, the Teutons and Ambrones, came down the Rhone Valley. Caius Marius, Rome's great general, four times in succession elected consul in anticipation of this danger on the Rhone, was sent to oppose them. He let the barbarians trek past his camp on the lower Isère, where he had taken his stand to head them off from the western Alpine passes; but near *Aquae Sextiae* (Aix), at the entrance to the Massiliot coast road to Italy, he stopped their advance by a crushing defeat in 101 B.C.

The real points of danger for Rome lay in that semicircle of passes crossing the watershed of the upper Saône and Doubs. The country between the Saône and the Rhine was held by the Sequani, who thus commanded the Burgundian Gate; that between the Saône and the plateau course of the Loire and Seine systems was occupied by the Aedui, who thus controlled the western passes. Rivalry existed between the tribes, because each claimed exclusive right to the Saône and especially to the tolls levied on passing vessels.² The Romans, stretching their sphere of influence to this strategic locality where lay the keys to the Rhone Valley door, made an alliance with the Edui, and enabled them to exclude the Sequani from the profitable Saône commerce. The Sequani, in turn, invited in Ariovistus and his German horde who dwelt just across the Rhine, and in 62 B.C. by their assistance defeated the Aedui. The bars of the Burgundian Gate were down. The Germans kept pouring into

1 Heitland: op. cit. II. 363-366, 372-373.

2 Strabo iv. 3. 2.

Gaul and settling in the Sequani land. Ariovistus had a German province there by 58 B.C., when Caesar, adopting an aggressive policy, moved up the Saéne Valley to prevent the Helvetian invasion. This accomplished, he prepared to attack the Germans, who showed no inclination to withdraw from their newly acquired territory. He advanced up the Doubs Valley and seized the Sequanian fortified town of Vesontio, which occupied a strong location within a circular loop of the Doubs and which survives today as the great fortress of Besancon. From this town as a military base he attacked the Germans near the Rhine and drove them across the river out of Gaul. That autumn the army of Caesar went into winter quarters in the Sequanian territory.¹ Rome held the Burgundian Gate.

Thus began the conquest of Gaul. The significance of the movement for the Romans lay in the complete control of the Rhone Valley breach and its inland approaches; in the protrusion of the frontier far beyond the danger line found in that semicircle of watershed passes; and in the inland extension of Roman trade routes. For the world at large it meant the advance of historical events beyond the narrow rim of the Mediterranean Basin to the contrasted Atlantic lands of Europe.

The conquests of Caesar checked for a time the streams of barbarian invasion. The decline of the Empire saw them surging on again. The Germans repeated the history of Ariovistus and his hordes. They settled first in the elbow of the Rhine, like the Allemani and the Burgundi, then moved across the river and through the Burgundian Gate into the Doubs and Saéne valleys. Others followed the course of the Cimbri, moved westward by the Belgian plain to the Meuse and then up its valley to the Saéne passes. In the fifth and early sixth century the Burgundians occupied all the old Sequanian and much of the Aeduan territory; in fact all the basin of the Saéne and middle Rhone. There, strong in their strategic location, their mountain barrier, and their geographic unity, they maintained themselves as an independent kingdom for nearly a hundred years, till in 534 they were conquered by the Franks.²

The expansion of the Frankish tribes from their base in the northern plains of Gaul is instructive from the geographical standpoint. They swung around to the west of the Cevennes Plateau and in 511, by the conquest of nearly all Aquitaine from the West Goths, they pushed their boundary up the Garonne Valley to the Gap of Carcassonne; sweeping also down the Rhone Valley, they forced their frontier toward the Mediterranean as far as Orange, where the Cimbri had defeated the Romans. But they were still shut out from the Mediterranean. That old coastal belt between the Maritime Alps and the Pyrenees, which expanding Rome had first detached from Celtic Gaul, was still detached from this young Frankish Gaul. Provence, that earliest *provincia romana* of the Mediterranean seaboard and the Durance Valley, formed an arm of that East Gothic kingdom of Theodoric. The rest of the coastal strip between

¹ Caesar op. cit. i. 31-54.

² Hodgkin, T.: op. cit., III, 357-358, 592.

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the Rhone Delta and the Pyrenees, called Septimania or Gothia, formed a similar arm, which the Spanish kingdom of the West Goths thrust out to grasp hands as it were across the turbid current of the Rhone with its brother nation and overlord of the Italian peninsula. Thus these twin Gothic kingdoms were geographically the exact successors of Rome in 100 B.C. when it had united Italy and Spain.¹ The coastal strip of Mediterranean Gaul was the link between.

The link was too frail to resist the seaward expansion of the Frankish kingdom. It gave way in Provence, which was annexed to the dominion of Clovis in 536. Those interlacing head streams along the granitic highlands of the Vosges and Cevennes, knitting together the river valleys of France, rounded out to its logical limits the territory of that first great imperial expansionist of the North Germans. Septimania, held by the eastern Pyrenean passes, remained part of the Spanish kingdom of the West Goths till 719, when it became part of the Spanish caliphate of the Saracens, and so continued with a few intermissions till 797. Again the Pyrenean Gap and the Rhone Valley were historically linked. During the Saracen conquest of Spain, Christian refugees fled across the eastern Pyrenees to the protection of this trans-montane province of Septimania, and spread their Catalan Spanish speech as far as the Courbières Range, on whose last low shelf stands Narbonne above the alluvial flats of the Aude River. Their respite was short; their asylum wall too low. In a few years reconnoitering bands of Saracens sought out the eastern passes of the Pyrenees. Then came a great Saracen army in 719, and captured and fortified Narbonne as a base for future campaigns; Narbonne, which the Romans had built to command the Gap of Carcassonne and the coast road to the Rhone.² Defeated in their attempts to conquer Aquitaine, the Saracens turned toward the Rhone. They took Avignon in 730. For a few years Nimes and Arles were in their power; but even in that short period they injected new life into the Rhone Valley commerce, kept their merchantmen hovering about the coast, and made their profit as the sea traders of Arabian Yemen have known how to do ever since; in rafts and dugouts they crossed the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb to the market land of Punt and brought back Indian pearls and jewels to deck their Queen of Sheba. The out-poured flood of conquest which spread from Arabia to the Pyrenees had now spent itself. The occupation of Southern Gaul was the last weak lapping of the tide before the ebb. Narbonne was captured from the Saracens in 752 by Pepin le Bref; but it had to be retaken in 797, and finally was embodied in the domain of Charlemagne. At the same time (777-801), the Emperor advanced his frontier over the southern slope of the Pyrenees and occupied the Spanish March as an outpost against the Saracens.³ Thus be restored the old union of Northeastern Spain with

1 Freeman, E. A.: op. cit., 121-123.

2 Coppee, H.: *History of the Moors in Spain* (Boston, 1881). I, 418-422; II, 17.

3 Freeman, E. A.: op. Cit., 125.

the coastal province Septimania, and repeated the history of Massiliot Gaul.

The threefold division of the Carolingian Empire by the treaty of Verdun (843) is explicable only in the light of the Rhone Valley breach. This geographical fact is the key to what otherwise appears to be an arbitrary and erratic allotment of the territory to the three heirs. The division left to Charles the major part of what we are wont to call France, or the kingdom of the West Franks; to Louis, the kingdom of the East Franks, which might be called the big nucleus of modern Germany; to Lothair it gave Italy and “a long narrow strip of territory between the dominions of his Eastern and Western brothers,” Freeman states, and then adds in explanation: “Between these two states the policy of the ninth century instinctively put a barrier.”¹

Geography admits no place for instinct in its interpretation of history. It looks for concrete and tangible causes. In this particular case it observes that the problematical strip of Lothair’s territory comprised the whole Rhone-Saône-Doubs Valley, the Burgundian Gate with the elbow of the Rhine, the two northern passes of the hill country of the Monts Faucilles and Mont des Fourches to the Moselle and the Meuse, all the country drained by these two rivers, and the valley of the Rhine below the confluence of the Moselle at Coblenz. In other words, Lothair, to compensate himself for the small territory of Northern and Central Italy, demanded the whole stretch of that natural transit belt which crossed Europe from Marseilles northward to Cologne, Aix, and the mouths of the Rhine, the Meuse, and the Scheldt. This he held in its entirety except at two points. The West Frankish kingdom retained the Langres Pass, where the original Roman road had crossed the watershed; and it also thrust its frontier across the Saône at Chalon-sur-Saône in order to keep the important valley terminus of the ancient Aeduan and Roman highway down from Autun. But Lothair’s strip, in compensation, bent sharply west from Lyons far up on the Cevennes Plateau, in order to include the city of Roanne (Rodumna) on the Loire, the terminus of the old Roman road which ran west to Bordeaux on the Garonne estuary. Though all these ancient Roman highways had undoubtedly degenerated into mere tracks, they still sufficed to direct the commerce of the Middle Ages.

A traffic zone hardly furnishes a sound basis for a political territory, though it may yield a generous revenue. This transit strip constituting the continental part of Lothair’s kingdom proved its artificial character by its rapid dissolution.² The northern half, comprising the valleys of the Meuse, the Moselle, and the Rhine, was absorbed by the East Frankish kingdom. Out of the remaining ruins emerged once more, in 887, the independent kingdom of Burgundy, a geographical unit with natural boundaries of mountain and sea to protect its frontiers; with the Rhone-Saône-Doubs

1 Freeman. E. A.: op. cit., 140.

2 Lavis: *Histoire de France* (Paris. 1901), II, Part II, 4.

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System penetrating every part of its area, like a great artery, to unify its national life; with the control of the Burgundian Gate, the northern passes, and the Alpine coast road to Italy, to give it weight in the political councils of Western Europe. Its strategic location tended to compensate for its lack of area. It stood in the center of the balance and could throw its weight on one side or the other. Through this power it was able to maintain its independence till 1032, when it became a fief of the German Empire. Then the whole stretch of the Rhone-Rhine groove was politically united. The influence of the through commerce is indicated by the rise here of numerous free cities, Besançon, Lyons, Orange, Arles, and Marseilles, which controlled all the foci of trade till the fourteenth century, and maintained the importance of this vassal state of Burgundy. Until 1365 the mediaeval German kaiser went to Arles to be crowned king of Burgundy as he went to Rome to be crowned emperor of the Holy Roman Empire.

The later history of Burgundy recites the gradual absorption of this “middle kingdom,” as the old chronicles called it, by the modern kingdom of France. Early in the fourteenth century its voracious western neighbor began to gnaw at its western frontier, taking a bite here and there, till by 1378 it had swallowed up the southern Rhone Valley from the Mediterranean to Lyons. The northern part of Burgundy, which was more closely linked with Germany through the Burgundian Gate and the Lorraine passes, was able longer to resist French expansion. Nevertheless, in another hundred years, by 1477, it had shrunk to the free county of Burgundy or the Franche Comte, a small territory comprising the valleys of the upper Saône and Doubs, which passed to France in the conquest of Louis XIV.¹

The Rhone Valley breach opened a path of conquest for the military Franks from the north to the coast provinces of Languedoc and Provence, just as later it facilitated the expansion of the French kingdom to the Mediterranean coast and enabled it to round out its territory to its natural frontier. The breach has given to this stretch of coast a unique importance as the only littoral in the western Mediterranean that commands easy connection with a continental hinterland, and as the southern outlet of a great plexus of northern land routes.

Marseilles, which has long overshadowed its mediaeval rival Arles, is the only seaport of the Rhone Valley. It has therefore concentrated upon itself all the exports of Northwestern Europe which seek the market of Africa, the Levant, Eastern Asia, and Australia; it gathers in return the wheat of Russia, the oil seeds of India and Africa, the wines and dried fruits of the Mediterranean, the teas and spices of the Far East.² The variety of products from distant sources which pass through the harbor of Marseilles is symbolic of the peoples, tongues, and civilizations that have moved along the Rhone Valley thoroughfare since the dawn of history.

¹ Freeman, E. A.: *op. cit.*, 141, 148, 150, 194; map plates. XVIII-XXV.

² Chisholm, George G.: *Compendium of the Geography of Europe* (London, 1899), I. 429.