ONE

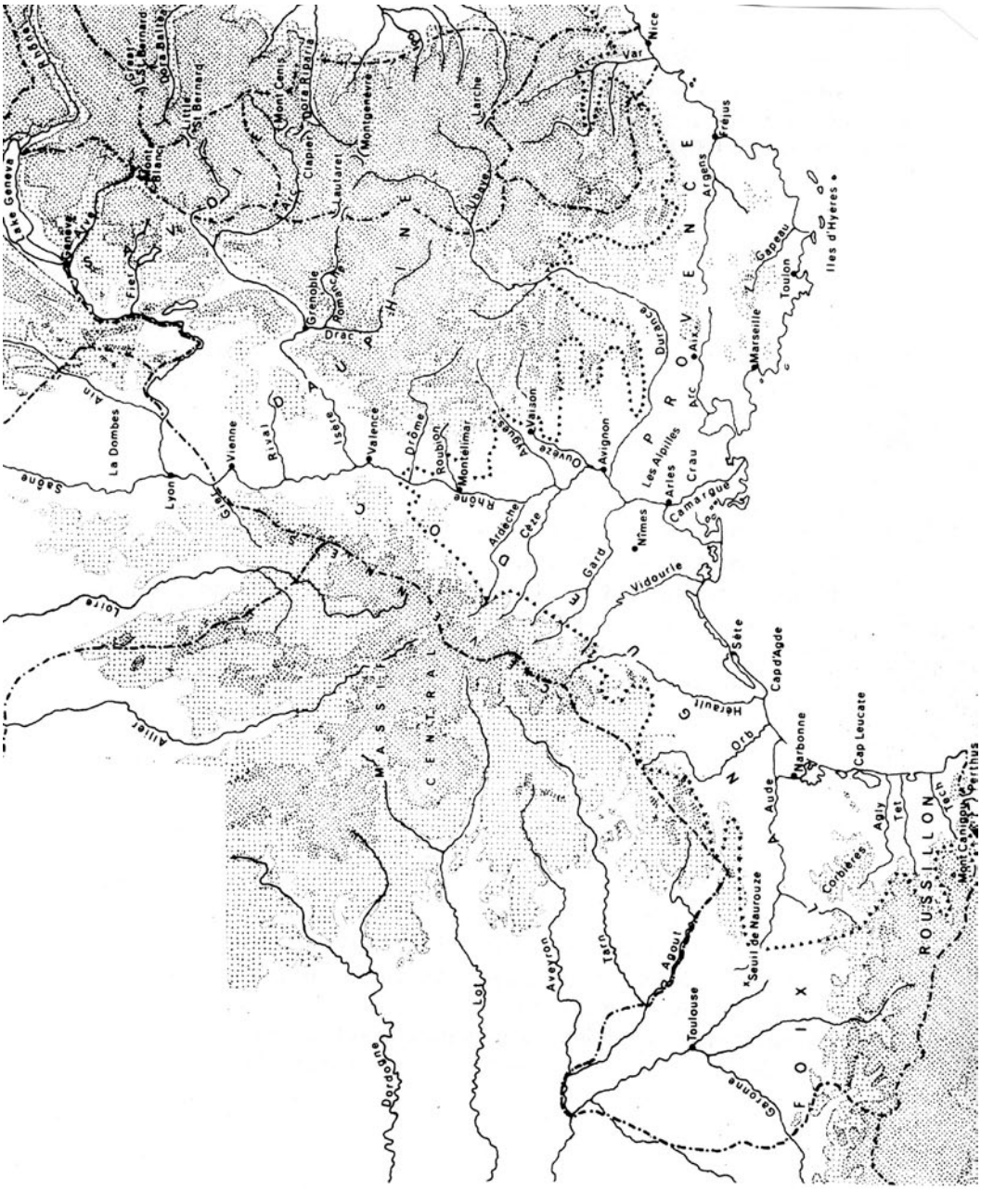
HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

ROMAN PROVENCE / "PROVINCIA NOSTRA"

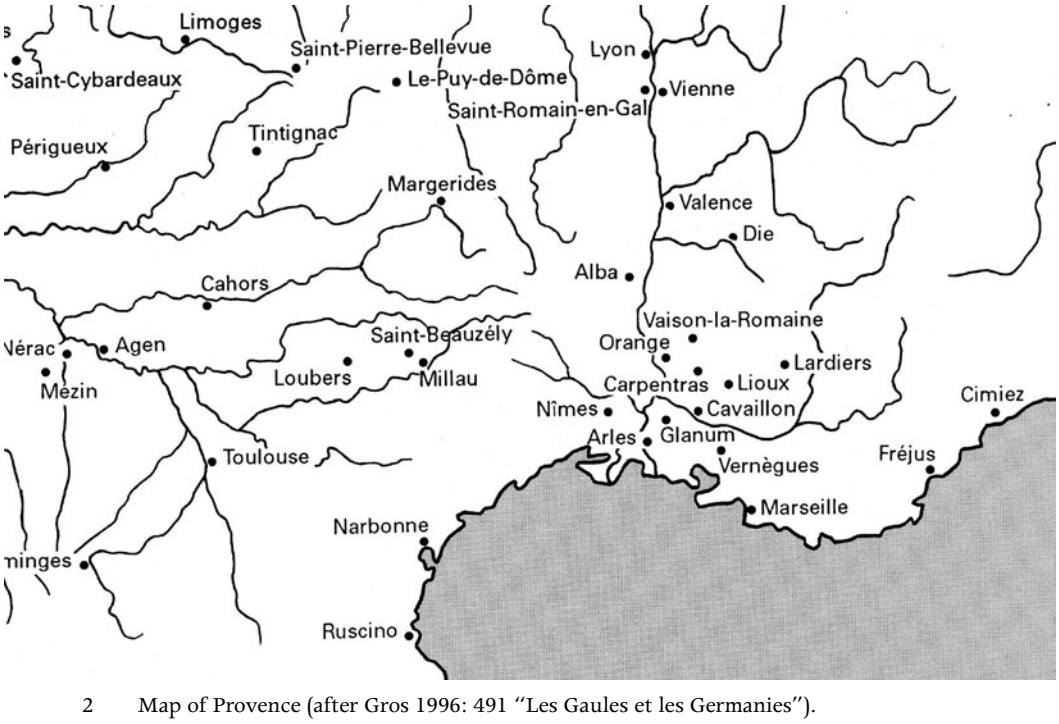
The modern name "Provence" derives from a popular Roman formula by which the territory of southeastern France was designated (Fig. 1). This nomenclature, "provincia nostra" (literally "our province") or simply "provincia" ("the province"), was in use at least as early as the governorship of Julius Caesar (58–49 BCE) and probably for some decades before. Caesar himself, when he describes the situation in 58 BCE that caused him to begin his Gallic campaigns, uses the term more than once, assuming that his audience at Rome would recognize the toponym (Caesar, *B Gall*. 1.7).

> Caesari cum id nuntiatum esset, eos per **provinciam nostram** iter facere conari, maturat ab urbe proficisci et cum maximis potest itineribus in Galliam ulteriorem contendit et ad Genuam pervenit. **Provinciae** toti quam maximum potest militum numerum imperat….
>
> When it had been announced to Caesar that they were attempting to follow a route through **our province**, he hurried to set out from the city and, by means of the best routes possible, marched to further Gaul and arrived at Geneva. From the entire **province,** he ordered a levy of the largest number of troops possible….

Not only is the area through which the Helvetians were attempting to pass referred to as "our" (*nostram*) without further detail, but Caesar treats it as the nearest and most obvious source of recruits for his army, with which he intends to oppose the proposed march of the Helvetii. From this remark alone, we must assume that – in Caesar's view at least – Provence was very much under Roman sway and apparently willing to be so (or at least to acquiesce in his massive draft of soldiers) by 58 BCE. Some confusion can arise from the fact that essentially this same territory had been referred to "officially" well before Caesar's time as



1 Map of Southern Gaul, including geography and major settlements (after Rivet 1988: fig. 2, p. 6).



2 Map of Provence (after Gros 1996: 491 "Les Gaules et les Germanies").

"Gallia Transalpina," a name only gradually modified into "Gallia Narbonensis" in the course of the first century BCE (Fig. 2).

By the second half of the first century CE, written references to "provincia nostra" seem to have become routine, even though its official Imperial title "Gallia Narbonensis" was by that time well known. The Elder Pliny makes this apparent (*HN* 3.31.4):

> Narbonensis provincia appellatur pars Galliarum quae interno mari adluitur, Bracata antea dicta, amne Varo ab Italia discreta Alpiumque vel saluberrimis Romano imperio iugis, a reliqua vero Gallia latere septentrionali montibus Cebenna et Iuribus, agrorum cultu, virorum moruque dignatione, amplitudine opum nulli provinciarum postferenda breviterque Italia verius quam provincia.
>
> The part of the Gauls which is washed by the Mediterranean is labeled the Narbonese province, previously having been called Bracata. It is separated from Italy by the river Var and by the ranges of the Alps – very positively for the Roman Empire – and from the rest of Gaul on the north side by the Cevennes and Jura mountains. In agriculture, in worthiness of men and manners, in greatness of wealth (works), it should be placed second to none of the provinces; in short [it is] Italy more than a province.

This passage has long substantiated the assumption that Provence, by the second half of the first century CE, was thoroughly Romanized, far more so than

most other provinces at the same period; at least, that would appear to be what Pliny is implying. Writing (probably) at the very end of the first century CE, the historian Tacitus gives what seems a stark description of how this process of Romanization was inflicted upon a conquered territory – in this case, Britain – and its people (Tacitus, *Agr.* 21):

> Namque ut homines dispersi ac rudes eoque in bella faciles quieti et otio per voluptates adsuescerent, hortari privatim, adiuvare publice, ut templa fora domos extruerent, laudando promptos et castigando segnes: ita honor aemulatio pro necessitate erat. Iam vero principum filios liberalibus artibus erudire … ut quo modo linguam Romanam abnuebant, eloquentiam concupiscerent. Inde etiam habitus nostri honor et frequens toga. Paulatim descensum ad delenimenta vitiorum, porticus et balinea et conviviorum elegantiam. Idque apud imperitos humanitas vocabatur, cum pars servitutis esset.
>
> And so that men scattered and rough and thus ready for war might be accustomed to peace and quiet by comforts, he would urge (them) privately, help (them) publicly, to build temples, forums, houses, by praising the quick and blaming the sluggards: and so there was rivalry for (his) praise rather than coercion. Indeed already the sons of chieftains were being educated in the liberal arts … with the result that they (who) used to reject the Roman tongue were longing for eloquence. Then also our clothing [became] an honor and the toga [was] everywhere. Little by little [there was] a slide toward the pleasures of vices: colonnades and baths and the elegance of dinner parties. And amongst the conquered this was called "civilization" although it was a part of their slavery.

Allowing for the dramatic nature of Tacitus' rhetoric, these lines must be acknowledged to constitute the starkest of presentations of the Roman aristocrat's view of the process of Romanization, even if leading to a quotable epigram in the last line. The implication can certainly be drawn from these two first century CE remarks that the Romans themselves, at least those living and working in Rome, indeed saw Romanization as a process inflicted upon native populations. Once they had been subdued by force or treaty, they were influenced by persuasion, education, and money to adopt Roman living styles, architecture, dress, city plans, education, and the Latin language, as part of an intentional program carried out by the provincial governors and their administrations. It indeed seems plausible that the results of the process described by Tacitus could produce the result asserted by Pliny – the province becoming more Italy than province – especially in a territory as physically close to Italy as southeastern France, and which had been under Roman sway for a relatively long period of time.[1]

The archaeological record in Provence, as it has become clearer to us in the last fifty years or so, suggests that Pliny has, to some degree, overstated his case, that in fact Romanization did not work solely as a one-way process of

influence proceeding from Rome to province; nor could it be defined solely as the efforts of the local populace to accept and adopt the Roman way of life and culture, and how the central Roman administration made that happen. In studies focusing directly on Provence and its environs during Roman times, and indeed on Roman France more generally, it is becoming increasingly clear that Romanization – while unquestionably a general policy of Roman provincial administration – has to be assessed from a broader point of view. Archaeological evidence now permits us to see that Pliny's analysis of the "provincia" as more Italian than local is in part a literary *topos,* a conventional viewpoint with preconceived implications. An important insight has been gained with the realization that material culture suggests that the conquered locals of Provence, and undoubtedly of all other provinces as well, learned how to change and adjust in many areas of their lives, but maintained significant elements of their own background and civilization even as they accommodated Roman cultural priorities. To put it another way, the Provençal Romans always retained elements of their own culture in areas such as food production, farming, and animal raising (as has been shown by recent studies) and did the same in their adaptations and subtle variations on Roman forms of pottery, sculpture, and other artistic endeavors.[2] One focus of this book is to consider in what ways the architecture of Roman Provence may reflect this ongoing dialogue between Rome itself and the builders in one of its oldest and closest provinces, through the centuries.[3]

The geographical picture we receive from all sources is essentially the same. Caesar's term "provincia nostra" designates the geographical region which extended along the curve of the Mediterranean coastline from the river Var, which enters the sea on the eastern edge of France between Nice and Antibes, all the way west and southward to the slopes of the Pyrenees. The territory is divided by the Rhône River, which flows into the Mediterranean from a vast estuary between Arles and Marseille. The Alps provided the northeastern boundary, running from Geneva to the Var; in its western half the province spread north as far as the Cevennes Mountains, and west to Toulouse. Thus the province not only included modern-day Provence, but also incorporated Languedoc, Roussillon, and Foix to the west, as well as Savoie and Dauphiné on the north. This area is geographically distinct from the rest of France. For instance, both climate and vegetation change from continental to Mediterranean along the valley of the Rhône River between Lyon and Vienne, as they do around Toulouse in the west. Gallia Transalpina/Narbonensis, which opens onto the Mediterranean sea, has a climate, temperature, and rainfall much closer to that of Italy or Greece than that of central or northern France. The vegetation is mostly that of the so-called olive belt. As agriculture developed in Provence, its major produce was entirely Mediterranean in type: olives and olive oil, grapes and wine, and herbs of many varieties. Throughout antiquity the area was also an important supplier

of salt, gold, and tin; fish products were abundant and were frequently salted and exported. This area must always have seemed familiar, even home-like, to other Mediterranean peoples and hence incursions by first the Greeks, then the Romans offer no surprise. The native inhabitants were themselves acculturated to a Mediterranean geography and mode of life.[4]

To begin this inquiry, it is necessary to take a glance at the influences that created the culture of "provincia nostra" before the Roman military first entered the territory officially in 154 BCE (Polybius 33.8–10; Livy, *Per.* 47).[5] The (Celtic) tribes of the southern French littoral had established trading contact with both the Etruscans and the Carthaginians prior to the seventh century BCE. However, the establishment by the Phocaean Greeks in 600 BCE of Massalia was the most important development in the region prior to Roman entry in 154 BCE. While this Hellenic incursion was not the first contact the indigenous Celtic tribes of the southern French littoral had had with foreigners – local finds of pottery associated with both the Etruscans and the Carthaginians earlier in the seventh century suggest that trade with both those great sea powers was already well established – it was the most important prior to Romanization.[6]

Massalia was clearly intended to be a seaport, and seaborne trade became its principal source of wealth and power. We have little evidence of the Greek city itself. Caesar (*BC* 2.1) describes it as surrounded by water on three sides and thus difficult to besiege; the extent of its walls has been confirmed by excavations in the vicinity of the Bourse, which revealed the foundations of one of its gates, but otherwise the Greek city is known to us only in fragments of topography.[7] Its economic importance is attested in the literary and historical record (see for instance Diodorus' famous remark about the Massiliote wine trade, 5.26.3) and evidence for trade in olive oil, metalwork, pottery (both local and Greek import), tin, iron, grain, and slaves has been cited.[8] What is clear is that Massalia grew rapidly and became a major player in the trading economy of the Mediterranean. The city's growth led inevitably to contact with and expansion among the native peoples of the regions around her; by the fourth century BCE there is fair evidence for a distinctive amalgam of local Celtic-Ligurian and Massaliote Greek cultures in the territory surrounding the lower Rhône River, revealed in particular in remains such as the pre-Roman wall and towers at Nîmes, and by small finds both along the coastline running east from Marseille, and in the interior regions around L'Étang de Berre as well as at remarkable Hellenized Celtic hill forts at St.-Blaise, Entremont, and elsewhere.[9] Subsequent evidence for this interweaving of Hellenic traditions in architecture and urban planning with both native and then Roman elements is apparent in Provence at the city-sanctuary site of Glanum, although the amalgamation came about well after the fourth century BCE. Glanum had been a native shrine and town for centuries before it seems to have been overtaken by Massalia in the second

century BCE, yet it maintained a certain independence although many Hellenic elements were introduced into its architecture and urban form at that time. It was given an extensive Romanization beginning in the time of Augustus, and sorting out the various layers and periods remains a fascinating puzzle, to which we will return.[10]

By 154 BCE, the Massaliotes were unable to control their Ligurian neighbors, whose piratical raids had long made the entire coastline of southeastern France perilous. Massalia had been a constant ally of Rome throughout the Punic Wars, especially during the second when Massaliotes supplied both essential information about Hannibal's movements and naval assistance as needed, so its call for help brought a strong military response. Roman ships had been patrolling the region since 182 BCE (Livy 40.17.8 and 40.18.4–8), but now the Senate sent an army under the consul Q. Opimius that crushed the Ligurian tribes of the Oxii and Deciates, and turned over most of their territory to Massalia.[11] Peace held in the area from 153 to 125 BCE, until the Saluvii attacked Massalia. A consular army commanded by M. Fulvius Flaccus was sent to intervene. Although he would subsequently celebrate a triumph over the Saluvii (among others), Flaccus' victory did not pacify the territory and a second consular army, commanded by C. Sextius Calvinus, had to be sent in 124. Calvinus battled the Vocontii as well as the Saluvii, drove them from the coastline back into the interior, and established a large, permanent garrison at a location he named "Aquae Sextiae" later to be known as "Aquae Sextiae Salluviorum" (Aix-en-Provence). Initially, at least, Aquae Sextiae served to monitor and control developments and movements into and out of the substantial Celto-Ligurian hill fort at Entremont, just north of Aquae Sextiae. This fort (*oppidum*?), though it is not specifically named by any source, is assumed to have been the "city" of the Saluvii. The establishment of Aquae Sextiae gave the Romans their first permanent foothold inside the territory, making this one of the most important moments in the Roman conquest and domination of the *provincia*.[12]

Rome was now deeply involved in southeastern France. When the leaders of the defeated Saluvii fled north and joined the powerful tribe of the Allobroges, another army, commanded by Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus (cos. 122 BCE), was sent, either in his consular year or the next.[13] The Romans inflicted a significant defeat on the Allobroges at Vindalium (near modern Avignon), but the war continued into the next year, with Q. Fabius Maximus sent from Rome to take over supreme command of the army, while Ahenobarbus stayed on in Provence as proconsul. A second major battle on 8 August 121 BCE (Pliny, *HN* 7.166) took place near the confluence of the Isère and the Rhône rivers (Strabo 4.2.3). Although outnumbered, the Romans were able to drive the Allobroges back across the river, during which one of the two bridges in use collapsed, drowning large numbers of the fugitives (Orosius 5.14), and leading directly to the capture of their chieftain, Bituitus, by Ahenobarbus who sent him to Rome as a traitor

(Valerius Maximus 8.6.3; Livy, *Per.* 61). At some point after the second battle, Ahenobarbus made a tour of (some at least) of Provence riding on an elephant, which caused a good deal of comment (Suetonius, *Nero* 2). Except for the continued garrisoning of Aquae Sextiae, the Romans seem to have turned direct control of the entire area east of the Rhône back over to Massalia. The territory west of the Rhône seems to have caused them far more concern, so much so that Ahenobarbus' next (and final) act in Provence was the construction of a new road: the Via Domitia. This was the first road the Romans built in Gaul; it provided a long route from the Rhône to the Pyrenees following more or less the route of the prehistoric Via Heraclea. Inscribed milestones found along the route show clearly that its real intent was to protect the passage between the Roman territories on the Rhône and Spain, thus making it a fortified boundary (*limes*). A number of towns seem to have begun as forts along this road. This list includes Ugernum (Beaucaire), Nemausus (Nîmes), Narbo Martius (Narbonne) and Tolosa (Toulouse). Narbo was a particularly significant foundation (118 BCE) as it was Rome's first overseas colony peopled by Roman citizens. The construction of roads and colonies marked an expansion and consolidation of Roman power in the region,[14] but total conquest was still years in the future.

Although sources are few and details obscure, sometime around 120 BCE a substantial southward migration of Germanic peoples, known as Cimbri and Teutones in the ancient sources, from northern Europe appears to have begun. By 113 they had reached Noricum, approximately the region of modern Austria and Slovenia, which was a Roman ally. To protect Noricum and to stave off any threat of an invasion of Italy, the Roman Senate sent a consular army under Cn. Papirius Carbo against them. The battle at Noreia in that year was a humiliating defeat for the Romans, who were only saved from annihilation by a thunderstorm (Strabo 5.1.8; Appian, *Celtica* 13; Livy, *Per.* 63). The defeat in 113 opened a period of revolt against Rome in Gaul on both sides of the Alps. By 107 BCE Tolosa fell to native rebels. The city was recaptured by Q. Servilius Caepio in 106, but the overall situation would continue to deteriorate. That same year, a new threat from the Cimbri materialized in eastern Provence. The consul Cn. Mallius Maximus and Q. Servilius Caepio moved to counter them, but when Caepio refused to join or cooperate with Mallius, the Cimbri took advantage of the Roman disarray and attacked the two armies near Arausio (Orange), inflicting the worst defeat a Roman army had sustained since Hannibal's victory at Cannae. The date of the disaster – 6 October – was listed as a *dies ater* (black day) in the Roman calendar ever afterward (Livy, *Per.* 67; Dio 27, fr. 91; Orosius 5.16.1–7; Plutarch, *Sertorius* 3).[15] Had the Germanic tribes chosen this moment to move into eastern Provence, and perhaps even into Italy, the Romans might have been hard-pressed indeed to stop their advance. But they chose instead to turn westward, toward modern Languedoc and southwestern France, seizing land as they went (Livy, *Per.* 67; Appian, *BC* 1.29). In the interim, the Romans

found a new general for Gaul – C. Marius – and gave him a free hand in rebuilding the army and his corps of officers. It was not until 102 BCE that Marius moved against the Germanic tribes. At this time they had moved eastward and threatened to invade Italy. Marius permitted them to march past his camp on the Rhône River, and then followed them to the vicinity of Aquae Sextiae (Aix). A skirmish rapidly escalated into a battle which the Romans won with wholesale slaughter of Germans (Livy, *Per.* 68; Plutarch, *Marius* 21.2; Frontinus, *Strat.* 2.4.6). The battle of Aquae Sextiae reestablished Roman military sway over southern France and confirmed that the territory was gradually becoming a provincial entity within the Roman Empire.[16]

When Gallia Transalpina was formally incorporated as a province is unclear. Names of various officials who might have been governors occur in our sources as early as the mid 90s BCE, but no absolute evidence that they were official governors of an incorporated province survives; they may simply have been in military control of parts of the territory with no civil responsibilities. By the late 70s BCE (most likely 74–72), M. Fonteius had been appointed as governor of "the province," so it is probable that an official and legal organization of the Roman territory had been established by then. Fonteius was accused of enriching himself through the brokering of road-building contracts and charging excess tax on wine imported into Provence from Italy; he was defended on these charges by no less an advocate than Cicero, and was acquitted despite strong evidence of misdoing.

In addition to the fragments of his defense of Fonteius, Cicero has left us some very interesting clues regarding the state of affairs in Provence. He creates an impression of tension between the steady progress of Romanization counterpoised with the need for troops to maintain order throughout the region (Cicero, *Font.* 11.13–14). Cicero's references to various locations (*Font.* 3 [4], 9 [19, 20], 12 [26, 27], 13 [29] 16 [36], 21 [46]) also correspond quite well to the topography of Roman Gallia Transalpina (or Narbonensis) as we know it from later sources.[17] During Fonteius' governorship, the province appears to have come under the influence and (to some extent) control of Gn. Pompeius (Pompey the Great) and his lieutenants, who were deeply involved in their own war against Sertorius in Spain and were demanding support of every kind from the nearest source possible: southern France. This Fonteius was obliged to provide until his departure from the province (probably in 72), which was followed in 71 by Pompey's completion of his Spanish campaigns and return to Rome. Whether Fonteius was a political ally of Pompey's or not, he had no choice but to do Pompey's bidding while he governed Provence.

Between the departures of Fonteius and Pompey and the first year of the governorship of Caesar (58), there is clear evidence of social and political unrest in the province, undoubtedly exacerbated by the political turmoil in Rome, and this is reflected in the convoluted connection between the Allobroges and

Lucius Sergius Catilina in the year of Cicero's consulship (63). Catiline, working through intermediaries, tried to convince two envoys from the Allobroges whom he met in Rome to support him by helping raise a revolt in Gaul. The groundwork for this may have been laid by P. Clodius Pulcher, who had received money from Catiline and gone to Gaul to build support for the revolt. In the event, Catiline's ambassadors failed, and the Allobrogean envoys reported the attempt at subversion and were voted substantial rewards for their virtuous and patriotic behavior (Cicero, *Cat*. III.2 [4–6] and 9 [22]; *Cat*. IV.3 [5]).[18] Despite the positive reputation won by these Allobroges at Rome – indeed Cicero says of them that they were the one tribe in Gaul "*quae bellum populo Romano facere posse et non nolle videatur*" = "which might seem able to make war on the Roman people and does not want to" (*Cat*. III.9.22) – within two years, by 61 BCE, this same tribe had begun a major revolt in the province, the reasons for which are nowhere made clear. A consular army was commissioned by the Senate to suppress the Allobroges. The commanders very effectively devastated the territory of the rebellious tribe and ended the revolt, but they failed to capture its leader, Catugnatus (Cicero, *De Prov. Cons*. 13 [32]; Livy, *Per*. 103; the most comprehensive ancient account is that of Cassius Dio 37.47–8). This proved to be the last revolt against the Romans in the province prior to Julius Caesar's Gallic campaigns.

During the near-decade of Caesar's governorship of Gaul the people of *provincia nostra* offered apparently unwavering support to the Roman commander. Nothing more is heard of the rebel Catugnatus among the Allobroges, nor of any other kind of internal disturbance or resistance. Even in 53–52 BCE, when Caesar faced his most serious challenge from Vercingetorix's huge rebellion, the Gallic firebrand never succeeded in gaining support from any of the tribes in the province itself. Indeed he had to send some of his forces to attack the Allobroges, the Helvii, and the Volcae Arcomici, all of whom were actively fighting for Caesar (Caesar, *B Gall*. 7.7 and 64–5; *B Civ*. 3.59).

With the end of the Gallic campaigns, Caesar enjoyed solid support from all parts of "*provincia nostra*." By the beginning of 49 BCE, as he was contemplating a challenge to Rome itself, Caesar records that he had three legions, under the command of C. Fabius, who had spent their winter "*Narbone circumque ea loca* " = "in Narbo and those areas around" (Caesar, *BC* 1.37). To cover his western flank, and to allow quick access to Italy, Caesar shifted these legions to strategic points, all of which later became important Roman veteran colonies.[19] Although the entire province seems to have been on Caesar's side, his Senate-appointed successor as governor of Gaul, L. Domitius, tried to impede Caesar's invasion of Italy, then attempted to block his consolidation of power among the legions scattered around the Western provinces. Domitius was received by the city of Massalia, put in command of it, and had its gates closed to Caesar (*BC* 1.34–6; Velleius Paterculus 2.50; Cassius Dio 41.19). But the city was isolated,