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978-1-108-07576-3 - An Enquiry into the Ancient Routes between Italy and Gaul:  
With an Examination of the Theory of Hannibal's Passage of the Alps by the Little  
St Bernard

Robert Ellis

Excerpt

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## AN ENQUIRY, &amp;c.

## CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION—EXAMINATION OF THE STRONG POINT OF THE BERNARDINE  
THEORY—PROOF THAT THE PLAINS AT THE FOOT OF HANNIBAL'S  
ALPS WERE OCCUPIED BY THE TAURINI.

It is not my intention, in this present work, to go again over the same ground as I occupied in my Treatise on Hannibal's Passage of the Alps, with the exception of such points as I noticed there in my last chapter, but without doing them justice. Of the agreement of the route of the Mont Cenis with the description of Polybius entirely, and with that of Livy in all trustworthy points, I shall therefore say as little as possible; as it will be my aim to prove now, by another line of argument, that Hannibal crossed the Little Mont Cenis. The course which I shall pursue is this. I shall first try to narrow the question by disposing of the theory of the Little St. Bernard, while that of the Great St. Bernard will follow. And here I shall have to consider the work on the credit of which the former theory mainly rests in England, the Dissertation of Messrs. Wickham and Cramer. My citations and references will be taken from the second edition of that work, published nine years after the first, and which may thus be expected

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to contain the matured arguments and opinions of its writers, and to exhibit the manner in which they consider that their case may be best supported. To this dissertation have been lately added two ingenious volumes on the 'Alps of Hannibal' by my old antagonist, Mr. Law.

My first chapter will be mainly devoted to the proof of one point; namely, that Hannibal traversed a pass leading through the country of the Taurini. If this point be clearly proved, as I trust will be done, it is decisive against the Bernardine theory; and no further arguments would be required on the subject, although I have thought it as well to devote another chapter to its consideration. The fact that Hannibal traversed a pass leading through the country of the Taurini being thus settled, the only question which remains to be determined is, by which of the two passes, the Mont Genève or the Mont Cenis, did he cross the Alps? Before entering upon this question, I shall have to prepare the way by two chapters on the Cottian Land and other points of geography, proving my map, as I may say, before I advance farther. I shall then consider the Cottian pass of Artemidorus, and shew the probable identity, merely from the consideration of distance, both of this pass and that of Hannibal, with the Mont Cenis, and not with the Mont Genève. I next come to the pass of Pompey, which, like that of Hannibal, would have been a Cottian pass; so that, of the two Cottian passes, the Mont Cenis and the Mont Genève, one would have been crossed by Pompey and the other by Hannibal; the shorter and more convenient route of the two, the Mont Genève, being necessarily that of Pompey. This completes the proof that Hannibal

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## BERNARDINE THEORY.

3

crossed the Mont Cenis. My two concluding chapters relate to other ancient routes. In one I examine the routes of Cæsar and Plancus, and in the other endeavour to identify two routes, given in the Peutingerian Table, through the Cottian Alps.

I commence my argument by examining the *strong* point of the Bernardine theory.

What is supposed to be this strong point is derived from the following passage in Polybius (III. 56):

“Finally, having accomplished his whole march from New Carthage in five months, and his passage of the Alps in fifteen days, Hannibal descended boldly into the plains of the Po and the Insubrian country (*κατήρε τολμηρῶς εἰς τὰ περὶ τὸν Πάδον πεδία, καὶ τὸ τῶν Ἰσόμβρων ἔθνος*).

It is inferred from these words that the Insubres occupied the plains at the foot of Hannibal's Alps, and that Hannibal must therefore have crossed the Little (or Great) St. Bernard, and not either of the Cottian passes, the Mont Genève or Mont Cenis, which would require that the plains at the foot of Hannibal's Alps should be occupied by the Taurini.

Against this inference and conclusion I shall endeavour to prove four points:

1. If the Insubres occupied the plains at the foot of Hannibal's Alps, the Bernardine theory falls to the ground.

2. The words relied on are not sufficient to prove that those plains were occupied by the Insubres.

3. The words refer to Hannibal's march to the Ticinus, where he was encountered by Scipio.

4. The plains of the Taurini are twice placed by Polybius at the foot of Hannibal's Alps, and the same opinion was universally held by the ancients;

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so that Hannibal must of necessity have crossed the Cottian Alps.

These points I shall now take in their order.

1. The plains at the foot of the Bernardine Alps were occupied by the Libui, and not by the Insubres. This fact, well known to all who are acquainted with ancient geography, is noticed by Livy (xxi. 38), when he says that the passes of the Little and Great St. Bernard would have brought Hannibal down, “non in Taurinos, sed per Salassos montanos ad Libuos Gallos.” Ptolemy, again, who gives Ivrea to the Salassi, assigns to the Libui the towns of Vercelli on the Sesia, and Lomello on the Agogna, while he gives to the Insubres those of Milan, Como, Novara (founded by the Vertacomacori), and Pavia (founded by the Lævi and Marici). Polybius gives them Milan and Acerræ.<sup>1</sup> The boundary between the Insubres and the Libui would consequently have been the Agogna, while to the west we may consider, with Cluverius, that the Libui were divided from the Taurini by the Orco, which joins the Po near Chivasso. The territory of the Libui, with whom the Lævi are usually associated, would thus have lain between the Orco and the Agogna, the Alps and the Po, and have been intersected by the Dora Baltea and the Sesia. If, then, the Insubres lived at the foot of Hannibal's Alps, Hannibal did not cross the Little or Great St. Bernard.

This simple argument Messrs Wickham and Cramer try to meet in two ways inconsistent with each

<sup>1</sup> The eastern boundary of the Insubres is fixed by Polybius (ii. 32) at the Clusius (*Chièse*). In this direction they seem afterwards to have lost territory to the Cenomani, who were usually allies of the Romans in their wars against the Boii and Insubres. See Spruner's *Ancient Atlas*.

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other. By one, the Libui are shifted into the country of the Taurini, and the Insubres moved up to the Orco: by the other, the Libui are allowed to remain in their proper place, but converted into Insubres.

In the first case, Messrs. W. and C. rely on a passage in Polybius (II. 17), where he speaks of the Gauls expelling the Etruscans from the plains of the Po, and settling there themselves. Here Messrs. W. and C. observe (p. 37):

“Polybius mentions the Laei and Lebecii (Lævi and Libui of the Romans) as being settled near the sources of the Po, after whom come the Insubres, that is, at the spot where the river, instead of running from S. to N., turns to the eastward, which is at Chivasso.”

I need do no more than quote these words, as it must be unnecessary for me to prove to any one that the Libui and Lævi never expelled the Etruscans from the plains of Turin, and took possession of them. What is to become of the Taurini? I will merely point out how inconsistent Messrs. W. and C. are in making the Libui and Lævi extend no further to the east than Chivasso in p. 37, and in assigning to the same Libui and Lævi, in p. 32, the towns of Vercelli, Lomello, and Pavia.

The argument by which the Libui are made Insubres is derived from Ptolemy:

“The Libui are reckoned” (*i. e.* included) “by Ptolemy under the Insubres” (p. 147).

This rests upon Ptolemy's words (III. 1): *Λιβυκῶν ὑπὸ τοῦ Ἰνσουβριου.* Mere citation is again quite sufficient for me; for no one can expect me to try to prove that *ὑπό* signifies here “lying under or contiguous to,” and has nothing to do with inclusion

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or subordination. But I may point out how partially Messrs. W. and C. apply their erroneous interpretation of *ἰπρό*. In the same place (ed. Tauchnitz, p. 146) where the Libui are placed by Ptolemy 'under' the Insubres, the Taurini are placed 'under' the Salassi, and the Salassi 'under' the Insubres. If then the Libui were Insubres, so also were the Salassi and Taurini. And, indeed, Messrs. W. and C. tell us in a note (p. 120) that Ptolemy ranks the Salassi under the Insubres as well as the Libicii; but of the Taurini being Insubrian also we never hear anything.

The Libui are thus clearly distinguished from the Insubres in the preceding citations from Ptolemy and Polybius. The *Lævi* and Libui, mentioned by Livy (xxxiii. 37) in the year 196 B.C., could not, again, have been Insubrian, for their territory was ravaged by the allies of the Insubres, the Boii; and it is reasonable to suppose that the Libui were included among the Barbarians who are mentioned by Polybius (iii. 60) as submitting to Hannibal after the fall of Turin.

I have now but to add Mr. Law's solution of the difficulty (vol. i. p. 305), which I shall pass without comment:

"Who can resist the probability, that minor tribes who had first settled in that plain, and were probably still its occupants in name, had become subordinate to their more powerful neighbour? Is it any stretch of imagination, to believe that Insubrian chieftains and an Insubrian force should be on the banks of the Doria to welcome the approach of their illustrious ally?"

2. The second point which I have to prove is:

That the words, "he descended boldly (from the foot of the Alps) into the plains of the Po and the

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Insubrian country," are insufficient to prove that the Insubres lay at the foot of the Alps of Hannibal.

In the first place it may be urged, that "the plains of the Po and the Insubrian country" do not necessarily mean nothing more than "the Insubrian country" only. *Τὰ περὶ τὸν Πάδον πεδία καὶ τὸ τῶν Ἰσόμβρων ἔθνος*, must not be assumed as = ἡ τῶν Ἰσόμβρων χώρα. Hannibal may, as far as these words of Polybius are concerned, have been in the plains of the Po before he reached the Insubrian country; and in point of fact, as will be hereafter shewn, the country of the Insubres was the last, not the first part of the plains which Hannibal reached on this march. It was not his starting-point in the plains, but his goal, and is mentioned on that account.

But again: even if Polybius had written, as he has not, *κατῆρε πολμηρῶς εἰς τὴν τῶν Ἰσόμβρων χώραν*, yet this would not prove the Insubrian hypothesis. Appian writes of Cæsar (*Bell. Civ. II. 32*): *τὰ ὄρη τὰ Ἀλπεῖα διελθὼν σὺν πεντακισχιλίοις πείροις καὶ ἵππεύσι τριακοσίοις, κατέβαινε ἐπὶ Ῥαβέννης*. Does this descent upon Ravenna prove beyond controversy that Ravenna lies at the foot of the Alps? Or what inconsistency would there be in saying: "Hannibal, having crossed the Cottian Alps, descended boldly to the Milanese?" especially when we remember that the Milanese, the country of his promised allies, the Insubres, was his mark from the time he started from Carthage, and might naturally be named for that reason, just as Appian names Ravenna in Cæsar's case.

I may also mention that the words, *κατῆρε πολμηρῶς*, would be more applicable to a march where there was hostility to be expected, than to a peaceful halt in a friendly country.

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## 3. The third point for demonstration is :

The words, *κατῆρε τολμηρῶς κ. τ. λ.*, refer to Hannibal's march to the Ticinus, where he was encountered by Scipio.

The elucidation of this point will require a complete examination of the narrative of Polybius. Now this narrative, up to the date of the battle of the Ticinus, is devoted to the operations of two armies ; of the army of the Carthaginians under Hannibal, and of the army of the Romans under Scipio. Hannibal is first described as starting from Carthagera, and crossing the Ebro and the Pyrenees ; and Scipio then (c. 41) as sailing from Pisa to the Massiliotic mouth of the Rhone, and as hearing of Hannibal's passage of the Pyrenees. He next hears (*ib.*) of Hannibal's arrival on the Rhone (nearly four days' march from its mouth), and sends out a body of horse in that direction. Hannibal now passes the Rhone, and, having heard of the landing of the Romans, detaches a body of five hundred Numidian horse to observe their movements (c. 44). In c. 45 the two bodies of cavalry meet ; the Romans have the advantage ; and both detachments return to their main armies. Having brought his elephants, which had been left behind, over the Rhone, Hannibal next starts up that river (c. 47) ; and Scipio, coming to where Hannibal had crossed the Rhone, and finding him gone to pass the Alps, sent his brother into Spain, and returned himself into Italy, so as to get before Hannibal to the passage of the Alps : τὸν μὲν ἀδελφὸν ἐξέπεμπεν ἐπὶ τὰς ἐν Ἰβηρίᾳ πράξεις· αὐτὸς δὲ, πάλιν ὑποστρέψας εἰς Ἰταλίαν ἐποιεῖτο τὸν πλοῦν, σπεύδων καταταχῆσαι τοὺς ὑπεναντίους διὰ Τυρρῆνιας πρὸς τὴν τῶν Ἀλπεων ὑπερβολήν (c. 49). This intention of Scipio's to gain the Alpine



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## MOVEMENTS COMPARED.

9

pass from the Italian side, before Hannibal could get there, should be borne in mind. He was, however, as we shall see, unable to carry it out completely, for he had advanced no farther than the Ticinus when he was met by Hannibal, who had arrived at the commencement of the Italian plain a considerable time before.

The following would be the nearly synchronistic movements of the two generals, from the time of their action on the Rhone up to the date of the battle of the Ticinus.

{Hannibal marches to the 'Island'.

{Scipio returns to the coast.

{Hannibal marches to the Gallic foot of the Alps.

{Scipio sails back to Pisa.

{Hannibal crosses the Alps.

{Scipio crosses the Apennines.

{Hannibal descends into the plains of the Po from the Alps.

{Scipio descends into the plains of the Po from the Apennines.

{Hannibal arrives on the Ticinus (the country of the Insubres), and is there opposed by Scipio.

No one, I think, will dispute any of these points. Whatever pass of the Alps Hannibal may have crossed, yet it must at least be universally acknowledged, that when he marched down to the Ticinus after the siege of Turin to meet the Romans, he then descended boldly to the country of the Insubres; and if his arrival at that country is mentioned by an historian as coinciding in point of time with his being opposed by Scipio, there ought not to remain any doubt that it was Hannibal's march to the Ticinus which is described as his descent to the Insubrian country.

Now this, it will be seen, is what is done by

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[More information](#)

Polybius. After mentioning (c. 49) Scipio's voyage back to Pisa, and his intention of gaining the pass of the Alps from the Italian side before Hannibal could get there, he says nothing more of the Roman general till c. 56. From c. 49 to the beginning of c. 56 Hannibal's march from the passage of the Rhone, across the Alps, to the commencement of the Italian plain, is described at length, and the 56th chapter then runs on thus to its end:

Finally (Hannibal), having accomplished his whole march from New Carthage in five months,

and his passage of the Alps in fifteen days,

descended boldly into the plains of the Po *and the country of the Insubres*:

having saved of his Libyan forces 12000 men, and of his Iberians 8000; but of his cavalry not more than 6000 in all, as he himself states on the column at Lacinium containing the account of his numbers.

*And at the same time (κατὰ δὲ τοὺς αὐτοὺς καιροὺς), as I said previously, Publius (Scipio) having left his forces (on the Rhone) with his brother Cnæus, and having exhorted him to attend to the affairs of Spain, and to make war vigorously upon Hasdrubal, sailed himself with a few men to Pisa. And having marched through Etruria, and having received from the prætors the troops which were making war on the Boii and holding their country, he came to the plains of the Po, and, having encamped, he opposed the enemy (the Carthaginians), being bent upon joining battle with them.*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Καταστρατοπεδεύσας ἐπέιχε τοῖς πολεμίοις, σπεύδων συμβαλεῖν εἰς μάχην. For the force of ἐπέχω in tactics, see the account of the battle of Cynossema in Thucydides (VIII. 105) with Arnold's note, Herodotus' description of the battle of Plataea (IX. 31, 59), and Arrian's of the battle