

Caesar, the *Geographoi* and Lewis and Clark: The Use of Animals in Describing New Lands

Using Caesar's famous description of the Hercynian Forest as a starting point, this illustrated paper will study a generally overlooked tendency among ancient ethnographers and geographers. The ancients commonly filled their reports of strange lands with descriptions of the fauna to be found there. They often, but not always, emphasized animals that seemed exotic, describing them by referencing animals indigenous to Greece or Rome.

Caesar's description of the Hercynian Forest is so uncharacteristic that some have questioned its authenticity, seeing it as a later insertion (e.g. Hyde, 1918), but it was probably part of the original work (Begle, 1900; Aili, 1995). We will begin with Caesar's story of the *alces* or elk. Such an animal was not found in Italy and thus he compares it to a goat ("*Harum est consimilis capris figura,*" 6.27). His description of the aurochs, the wild ox of Europe, says that they are slightly smaller than an elephant, a foreign animal to be sure, but one well known to the Romans. He also says that have the general shape of an ox, a domesticated animal (6.28). Errors in the account will be addressed — elk do, in fact, have knee joints (Rife, 1935; Pease, 1939) — and some explanations will be offered from them, with a plea for not judging the authors too harshly (Kitchell, 2015).

This tendency to use local and known animals to describe exotic animals of other countries will be shown to have quite ancient roots. Examples will be shown from authors such as Herodotus, Ctesias, Agatharcides, Strabo, and works from the *Geographi Graeci Minores*.

Comparison will then be made with the reports sent back east from the Lewis and Clark expedition. They too encountered unknown animals, including the moose ("moos deer", and they too used known animals as points of comparison. A prairie dog, for example, was called a "barking squirrel" and a lynx a "tiger cat."

The paper will conclude with some thoughts on why using animals to describe new lands was so pervasive and how its purpose seems to have changed depending on the culture doing the exploring. From Hanno's gorillas to Aelian's pangolin and from Caesar's elk to that of Lewis and Clark, animals presented variously a tribute to the marvels of nature, proof of power or empire (Allen-Hornblower, 2014) and, above all, a chance to travel vicariously.

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