

Hannibal, Pyrrhus, and the Romans: Traces of Samnite Cultural Memory in Livy?

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1 Introduction

The Samnites constituted an *ethnos* – a composite ethno-political entity, eventually organised as a confederation – made up of various groups inhabiting the central and southern Apennine region in the pre-Roman era.¹ The precise identity and number of these groups and, consequently, the full extent of the “Samnite territory” fluctuated over time, and the available sources do not permit a full reconstruction of their ethno-political evolution.² However, the Pentri, Caudini, Hirpini, and Caraceni appear to have been the four primary constituent peoples.³

Echoing trends in the study of other Italic populations, scholarship concerning the Samnites has undergone substantial development in recent decades.⁴ In the past, research focused predominantly on the relationship between the Samnites and Rome and the process of the Samnites’ incorporation into the Roman sphere. Recent studies, however, have shifted the focus to address the agency of the Samnites within the Italic context, particularly their interactions with other Italic and Italiote polities, and the formation of Samnite identity.⁵ This evolution in research direction is evident when one examines

1 Scholarship regarding the Samnites is so extensive that it is not feasible to recount it all. It is sufficient here to cite a few representative examples: Salmon (1967); La Regina (1989); Tagliamonte (1996); Bispham (2007); Bourdin (2014); Tagliamonte (2014); Scopacasa (2015); Tagliamonte (2018); Stek (2021a); La Regina (2024).

2 For the definition of the Samnites in the ancient sources and the extension of their territory, see Salmon (1967) 14–27; Cornell (1989) 31–357; Dench (1995) 207–209; Bourdin (2014); Russo (2014); Scopacasa (2015) 10–14, 19–41; Scopacasa (2018) 109–111; Tagliamonte (2018) 419–421, 424–425.

3 See e.g. Cornell (1989) 356–357; Bourdin (2014) *passim*; Bourdin (2022) 67.

4 Works such as those of Bourdin (2012) and Menozzi (2024), as well as recent companions (Farny/Bradley (2018); Maiuro/Botsford Johnson (2024)) and collected works on the Italic peoples of pre-Roman Italy (Bradley *et al.* (2007); Aberson *et al.* (2014); Stek (2021a); Dupraz/Viredaz (2025)) are useful for following the latest developments.

5 On the history of Samnite studies, see Dench (1995) 4–10; Scopacasa (2015) 1–6; Stek (2021b).

the theoretical frameworks underpinning seminal works such as those by Edward T. Salmon (1967), Gianluca Tagliamonte (1996), and Rafael Scopacasa (2015).

This shift in scholarly focus has been facilitated by the integration of literary evidence with a significantly increased body of archaeological and epigraphic remains, far more extensive than what was available to Salmon decades ago. These inscriptions and archaeological remains, indeed, are considered more effective than literary material at preserving evidence relevant to investigating the formation of Samnite identity.⁶ Conversely, literary sources offer an external perspective on the Samnites, deriving, as they do, from the Greek and Latin traditions and consistently exhibiting a Roman-oriented viewpoint. In these accounts, the Samnites are largely portrayed in a manner consistent with Graeco-Roman perceptions, often relegated to a subordinate role in the historical development of central and southern Italy, with the Romans the undisputed protagonists.⁷

Nonetheless, the extant literary sources, despite their inherent biases, possess significant potential to enrich our understanding of Samnite identity. If we recognise the possibility that these sources may retain vestiges of authentic Samnite traditions, a critical re-evaluation is warranted to identify any such traces that could illuminate Samnite self-perception and historical interpretation. It is widely acknowledged that the Samnites, like other Italic peoples, developed their own distinctive self-image and historical memory. While it is conceivable that they codified this perspective in written form, no direct evidence has survived to the present day; however, echoes or reflections of it may, indeed, persist within Greek and Roman literary sources.⁸

Building on this premise, this chapter undertakes an in-depth analysis of an episode from Livy's narrative of the Hannibalic War: the embassy of the Caudini and Hirpini to Hannibal in 215 BCE. The primary aim is to ascertain whether Livy's account might preserve valuable traces of Samnite memory. The initial section of the chapter will outline the involvement of Samnite groups in the events of the Second Punic War, thereby elucidating the broader context of the embassy and its potential contribution to our understanding of this critical juncture in Samnite history. The second part will analyse in detail the narrative's form and content, focusing on the discourse Livy attributes to the Hirpinian and Caudinian envoys. The conclusions that emerge from this

6 See the approach of Tagliamonte (2014) and Scopacasa (2018) 107–109.

7 See e.g. Salmon (1967) 3; Scopacasa (2015) 41.

8 For the ultimate survival of Italic traditions in Greek and Latin sources, see Bourdin (2012) 19–20.

analysis will then facilitate an examination of the cultural and historical milieu in which Livy's narrative was shaped. The final section will argue that Livy's testimony does, indeed, preserve a discernible piece of Samnite cultural memory.

2 The 215 BCE Hirpino-Caudinian Embassy in Context

The third century BCE was a moment of change in Roman–Samnite relations. The bitter period of wars between the two, culminating in the Battle of Sentinum (295 BCE), was over. Clashes between Romans and Samnites became less frequent and intense. Conversely, more peaceful interactions grew in significance as Samnite groups were incorporated into Rome's network of allies. This incorporation continued largely uninterrupted until the Gracchan reforms, which sowed the seeds of the Social War.⁹ Nonetheless, a few episodes serve to remind us that resistance to Roman influence persisted even in this era of integration. These included the defection of some Samnite groups during the Hannibalic War.

The reconstruction of this moment of renewed tension between Samnites and Romans rests on Livy. In his account of the Second Punic War, the appearance of the Samnite groups follows Hannibal's arrival in their territory in 217 BCE.¹⁰ At this time, Hannibal marched his army through Hirpinian lands, devastating the Latin colony of Beneventum and advancing to Telesia before entering Campania.¹¹ Despite the incursion of the Carthaginians into Samnite territory, at this point, none of the Samnite groups defected from their alliance with Rome. It was only after the catastrophic Battle of Cannae in 216 BCE that such defections began: Livy provides an extensive list of polities that then changed their allegiance to Hannibal, highlighting the immense impact of the Carthaginian victory on Rome's network of alliances. This list includes the Hirpini and the *Samnites praeter Pentros*.¹²

9 For the history of the Samnites, see the overview in Tagliamonte (2018) 421–424 and the more comprehensive analyses in Salmon (1967) 187–399; Tagliamonte (1996) 136–155; and Scopacasa (2015) 125–158.

10 For the Samnite peoples during the Hannibalic War, see Salmon (1967) 297–302; Fronda (2010) 331–333; Scopacasa (2015) 153–158. See also Lomas (2011) and Fronda (2018), examining the role of the Italic peoples in the Hannibalic War.

11 Polyb. 3.90,7–8; Liv. 22,13,1. For this episode and the archaeological analysis of the area of Telesia, see Renda (2019).

12 Liv. 22,61,10–12: *Quanto autem maior ea clades superioribus cladibus fuerit vel ea res indicio <est quod fides socio>rum, quae ad eam diem firma steterat, tum labare coepit, nulla profecto alia de re quam quod desperaverant de imperio. Defecere autem ad Poenos*

The few words with which he introduces the Samnites as players in the Hannibalic War provide insights into Livy's notion of the Samnite ethno-political landscape. While referring to the Samnites collectively, he simultaneously demonstrates an awareness of their internal structure as a polity composed of distinct groups, evidenced by his recording of the Pentri's decision not to align themselves with Hannibal. His reference to the Hirpini as a distinct group, meanwhile, reflects their perceived separate political status in his own time.¹³

Livy's account confirms that, while Samnite groups were capable of cooperating and functioning as a unified polity, each simultaneously retained its distinct political agency.¹⁴ His narrative of the events following Cannae, however, demonstrates the oversimplification inherent in treating even the Hirpini, Pentri, and so on as entirely cohesive units. Indeed, individual communities within these broader groups made independent decisions on whether to remain allied with Rome or defect to Hannibal.¹⁵ Many Hirpinian settlements, for example, including the principal centre, Compsa, surrendered to Hannibal; however, evidence suggests varying degrees of willingness to defect even among Hirpinian communities, despite Livy's collective portrayal.¹⁶ Similarly,

hi populi: Atellani, Calatini, Hirpini, Apulorum pars, Samnites praeter Pentros, Bruttii omnes, Lucani, praeter hos Uzentini, et Graecorum omnis ferme ora, Tarentini, Metapontini, Crotonienses Locrique, et Cisalpini omnes Galli ("How much greater this defeat was than earlier ones is indicated by the fact that the loyalty of the allies, which up to that day had remained unshaken, now began to waver, for no other reason, clearly, than loss of hope for the empire. The following peoples defected to the Carthaginians: the Atellani, the Calatini, the Hirpini, some of the Apulians, all the Samnites but the Pentri, all the Bruttii, and the Lucanians. Beside these there were also the Uzentini, almost all the Greeks on the coast (the peoples of Tarentum, Metapontum, Croton and Locri) and all the Cisalpine Gauls". Transl. Yardley). Despite Livy's picture of a simultaneous defection by the Italic peoples after Cannae, it is more likely that these revolts occurred at different times: Salmon (1967) 298; Rawlings (2011) 312.

- 13 This situation is first recorded here and in Strabo's account (Strabo 5,4,12) and was a consequence of Roman intervention: specifically, the foundation of a Latin colony at Beneventum (268 BCE) initiated the separation of the Hirpini from other Samnite communities, a process that became more pronounced during the Gracchan reforms. See Salmon (1967) 47–48, 288–289; Nagle (1973) 374; La Regina (1989) 425–426; Johannowsky (1991) 57; Isayev (2013) 13–14; Scopacasa (2015) 22–25, 152; Bourdin (2022) 67. On the Hirpini and their territory, see Salmon (1967) 46; Uggeri (1998); Isayev (2013) 13–20; Franciosi *et al.* (2017); Visconti/Lanzillo (2021).
- 14 Tagliamonte (1996) 134; Scopacasa (2015) 226; see also Scopacasa (2018) 116–118.
- 15 See Fronda (2010) 290–293, 331–333.
- 16 Liv. 23,1,1–4. See Fronda (2010) 331 fn. 2; Bradley (2019) 182. On the emergence of Compsa as the main Hirpinian centre after the foundation of the Latin colony at Beneventum, see e.g. Salmon (1967) 289. The most recent study of Compsa is that of Di Giovanni (2021).

not all Pentri appear to have remained loyal to Rome.¹⁷ Given the war's developments and the scope of Roman recovery operations, it can be surmised that many communities belonging to the Caudini also defected, potentially forming the core group of Samnites collectively referenced in Livy's list at 22,41,11,¹⁸ without further evidence, however, it remains impossible to fully ascertain the conduct of all Caudinian communities and other Samnite groups.

Hannibal sought to persuade as many Italic peoples as possible to transfer their allegiance to reduce Roman military capabilities.¹⁹ The case of the Samnites demonstrates that this strategy was only partially successful. Identifying the specific factors that influenced individual communities' decisions to ally with Hannibal or remain loyal to Rome nonetheless proves challenging.²⁰ The deployment of troops under Hannibal's command may have been a significant factor: during his march from Cannae to Campania, Hannibal traversed the territories of the Caudini and the Hirpini, eschewing the lands of the Pentri. Nevertheless, this was not the sole determinant, since, as we have seen, not all Caudinian and Hirpinian communities appear to have defected. It is also possible that ambition and resentment towards Rome played a role, mirroring motivations observed in other Italic communities.²¹ This possibility is supported by the standpoint articulated by the Hirpini and Caudini in the very episode examined in this chapter.

From 215 BCE, the Romans began raiding the territories of those who had sided with Hannibal, including the Hirpini and Caudini. After recovering three Hirpinian towns (Vercellium, Vescellium, and Sicilinum),²² they launched incursions into Hirpinian and Caudinian lands from their base in Nola. In response, the Hirpini and Caudini dispatched envoys to Hannibal, expressing

17 This can be inferred from the identification of Fugifulae (which Liv. 24,20,5 states defected to Hannibal) with the Pentrian settlement of Fagifulae. On this identification, see Fronda (2010) 292, 332–333, with bibliography. Salmon (1967) 299 fn. 2 rules out this hypothesis and identifies Fugifulae with an otherwise unknown settlement of the Lucanians. It should be noted, however, that he bases his argument on Livy's assertion that the Pentri remained loyal to the Romans (Liv. 22,61,11).

18 Fronda (2010) 332–333.

19 For Hannibal's strategy during his campaign in Italy, see Brizzi (1984); Fronda (2010) 34–37; (2011); Lomas (2011) 343–345; Fronda (2018) 216–221.

20 The most comprehensive discussion of the reasons for Hannibal's failure to gain the support of all Italic communities is that of Fronda (2010) 37–52 (cf. Fronda (2018) 217–222), but see also the remarks of Lomas (2011), esp. 345–351 on the behaviour of the Italic communities.

21 See Lomas (2011) 349–350; Isayev (2013) 13–14.

22 Liv. 23,37,12. There is no other occurrence of Vercellium and Sicilinum in the surviving sources. Vescellium is cited by Plin. *HN* 3,105. See Yardley (2020) 133 fn. 149; Ceva/Scandola (2021) 589 fn. 3.

their discontent and demanding protection from the Roman attacks. Livy provides a comprehensive account of this episode, including a detailed discourse attributed to the envoys:

That same summer Marcellus made repeated forays from Nola, which he was occupying with a garrison, into the farmlands of the Hirpini and against the Samnites of Caudium, and such was the destruction he caused everywhere with fire and the sword that he revived in Samnium memories of its disasters of old. Representatives were therefore simultaneously sent immediately to Hannibal from both tribes, and they addressed the Carthaginian as follows: "Hannibal, we at first stood on our own as enemies of the Roman people for as long as our arms and resources could protect us. When we began to lose confidence in them, we allied ourselves with King Pyrrhus; and when, abandoned by him, we perforce accepted a peace treaty and stuck to it for almost fifty years, up to the time that you came into Italy. Your courage and success won us over, but no more than did your courtesy and graciousness toward our citizens, whom you returned to us after their capture – so much so that if you, our friend, were safe and sound, we had no fear not only of the Roman people but (if one may say so) even of the wrath of the gods. But now, for heaven's sake, when you are not only unscathed and victorious but also present with us, almost hearing our wives and children weeping and seeing our homes ablaze – now we have this summer sometimes suffered such devastation that it seems as if Marcus Marcellus won at Cannae, not Hannibal, and that the Romans are boasting that you, having the strength for only one blow, are now powerless with your sting spent, as it were."

Eadem aestate Marcellus ab Nola quam praesidio obtinebat crebras excursiones in agrum Hirpinum et Samnites Caudinos fecit, adeoque omnia ferro atque igni vastavit ut antiquarum cladum Samnio memoriam renovaret. Itaque extemplo legati ad Hannibalem missi simul ex utraque gente ita Poenum adlocuti sunt. "Hostes populi Romani, Hannibal, fuimus primum per nos ipsi quoad nostra arma, nostrae vires nos tutari poterant. Postquam his parum fidebamus, Pyrrho regi nos adiunximus; a quo relictis pacem necessariam accepimus fuimusque in ea per annos prope quinquaginta ad id tempus quo tu in Italiam venisti. Tua nos non magis virtus fortunaque quam unica comitas ac benignitas erga cives nostros quos captos nobis remisisti ita conciliavit tibi ut te salvo atque incolumi amico non modo populum Romanum sed ne deos quidem iratos, si fas est dici, timeamus. At Hercule non solum incolumi et victore sed praesente te, cum ploratum prope coniugum ac liberorum nostrorum exaudire et flagrantia tecta posses conspicere, ita sumus aliquotiens hac aestate devastati ut M. Marcellus, non Hanni-

bal, vicisse ad Cannas videatur glorianturque Romani te, ad unum modo ictum vigentem, velut aculeo emisso torpere."²³

Livy appears to indicate the existence of two distinct diplomatic missions or, at least, the dispatch of envoys from both the Hirpini and Caudini. While the degree of collaboration, if any, remains uncertain, the speech central to the historian's account is attributed to both delegations. This may be more than a mere simplification; it could suggest that the speech reflects the shared expectations and disappointments of both tribes. This interpretation is supported by the envoys' description of their similar contemporary circumstances and their numerous references to past struggles against the Romans, a historical experience shared by the Hirpini, Caudini, and other Samnite groups. Hannibal's arrival in Italy is presented as a crucial opportunity to resume the struggle against the Romans after years of forced peace. It thus becomes clear that the defection of the Hirpini and Caudini was not primarily motivated by a desire to align themselves with Hannibal's strategic objectives but rather by the prospect of their liberation from Roman influence.

The interweaving of past and present persists in the continuation of the speech, with a second section reiterating the themes and structural elements of the first, further glorifying the fight against the Romans through direct references to the success at the Caudine Forks and the alliance with Pyrrhus. This is followed by a renewed description of current circumstances, culminating in an open accusation directed at Hannibal:

"For a century we waged war with the Romans, helped by no general or army from without – except when, for a two year period, Pyrrhus expanded his forces with our soldiers rather than defended us with his forces. I shall not for my part boast of our successes, of the two consuls and two consular armies sent under the yoke by us and all our other successful or glorious accomplishments. As for hardships and adversities that came upon us then, of them we can speak now with less indignation than we can of what is befalling us today. Great dictators used to invade our territory with their masters of horse, the two consuls with their consular armies; they would conduct reconnaissance and post reserve troops, and then lead their men in regular order to plunder our land; but now we are the prey of one *propraetor* and a small garrison left to defend Nola! Already, not even in companies but like bandits, they are overrunning all our territory more nonchalantly than if they were roaming through the Roman farmlands. And this is why: you are not defending us, and our own young

23 Liv. 23,41,13–42,5. Transl. Yardley.

men – who would protect us if they were at home – are all serving in your forces. It would show ignorance of you and your army if I did not say that, aware as I am of all the Roman armies you have defeated and routed, it would be easy for you to crush our itinerant marauders, men wandering around in disorder, each drawn by hope, however vain, of gaining plunder. They will fall prey to a few Numidians and you will have sent us support and also taken it from Nola – but only if you judge those whom you considered worthy to have as comrades to be also not unworthy of your defence once admitted to your alliance.”

“Per annos centum cum populo Romano bellum gessimus, nullo externo adiuti nec duce nec exercitu nisi quod per biennium Pyrrhus nostro magis milite suas auxit vires quam suis viribus nos defendit. Non ego secundis rebus nostris gloriabor, duos consules ac duos consulares exercitus ab nobis sub iugum missos et si qua alia aut laeta aut gloriosa nobis evenerunt. Quae aspera adversaque tunc acciderunt, minore indignatione referre possumus quam quae hodie eveniunt. Magni dictatores cum magistris equitum, bini consules cum binis consularibus exercitibus ingrediebantur fines nostros; ante explorato et subsidiis positis et sub signis ad populandum ducebant; nunc propriae toris unus et parvi ad tuendam Nola praesidii praeda sumus; iam ne manipulatim quidem sed latronum modo percursant totis finibus nostris neglegentius quam si in Romano vagarentur agro. Causa autem haec est quod neque tu defendis et nostra iuventus, quae si domi esset tutaretur, omnis sub signis militat tuis. Nec te nec exercitum tuum norim nisi a quo tot acies Romanas fusas stratasque esse sciam, ei facile esse dicam opprimere populos nostros, vagos sine signis palatos quo quemque trahit quamvis vana praedae spes. Numidarum paucorum illi quidem praeda erunt, praesidiumque mis<eris sim>ul nobis et Nola ademeris, si modo quos ut socios haberes dignos duxisti, haud indignos iudicas quos in fidem receptos tuearis.”²⁴

Returning to the topic of their struggle against the Romans, the ambassadors assert that their peoples could long rely on their own forces and enjoy success. Simultaneously, they emphasise the Roman threat to galvanise resistance. Every detail of their narrative serves to glorify their prior conflict with Rome, starkly contrasting it with the current situation. The envoys lament that, despite Hannibal's request for troops, he has provided them with no protection against Roman raids, leaving them defenceless. While extant sources do not indicate that the alliance between Hannibal and these peoples included a

²⁴ Liv. 23,42,6–13. Transl. Yardley.

promise of protection in exchange for troops, this appears to have been the Hirpini and Caudini's expectation.

The envoys' speech is modelled as a *crescendo*, building to the final accusation against Hannibal, whom they portray as solely responsible for the current situation. Hannibal himself then appears in Livy's narrative immediately after the Hirpinian and Caudinian ambassadors finish their outburst. Livy refrains from describing the scene; Hannibal's reaction is conveyed only through his words in *oratio obliqua*:

In reply Hannibal said that the Hirpini and Samnites were doing everything at once: telling him of their losses, asking for military aid, and complaining of being undefended and neglected; but what they should have done was first tell him, then ask for the aid, and only if the request went nowhere finally complain that their appeal for help had been in vain. He would not lead his army into the land of the Hirpini and Samnites, he said, for fear of being a burden on them himself, but he would lead it into the closest areas belonging to allies of the Roman people. By pillaging these he would both replenish his men and also, by generating fear, keep the enemy away from his allies. As for the war with Rome, if the battle of Trasimene was more celebrated than the Trebia, and Cannae more celebrated than Trasimene, he was also going to eclipse the memory of Cannae with an even greater and more brilliant victory. With this answer and splendid gifts he sent off his envoys; and leaving a small garrison on Mount Tifata he himself set out with the rest of the army and proceeded toward Nola.

*Ad ea Hannibal respondit omnia simul facere Hirpinos Samnitesque, et indicare clades suas, et petere praesidium, et queri indefensos se neglectosque; indicandum autem primum fuisse, dein petendum praesidium, postremo ni impetraretur, tum denique querendum frustra opem imploratam. Exercitum sese non in agrum Hirpinum Samnitemve, ne et ipse oneri esset, sed in proxima loca sociorum populi Romani adducturum. iis populandis et militem suum repleturum se et metu procul ab his summoturum hostes. Quod ad bellum Romanum attineret, si Trasumenni quam Trebiae, si Cannarum quam Trasumenni pugna nobilior esset, Cannarum se quoque memoriam obscuram maiore et clariore victoria facturum. Cum hoc responso muneribusque amplis legatos dimisit; ipse praesidio modico relicto in Tifatis profectus cetero exercitu ire Nola pergit.*²⁵

25 Liv. 23,43,1–5. Transl. Yardley.

Hannibal observes diplomatic etiquette, giving the envoys magnificent gifts; however, his words betray his disconcertment at his allies' demeanour, offering an ironic reply and predicting an even greater victory than that at Cannae but revealing a discernible lack of strength. Unable to provide the requested assistance, he promises to alter his route to avoid traversing the territories of the Hirpini and Caudini (here referred to simply as Samnites). While intended to avoid exacerbating the situation for his allies, this concession effectively acknowledges the legitimacy of their grievances.

If we set aside the likely fictional elements, Livy's account of the Hirpino-Caudinian embassy to Hannibal provides a compelling source for understanding the circumstances faced in 215 BCE by the Samnite groups that had broken away from their alliance with Rome. It also sheds light on Hannibal's relationship with his allies, highlighting the growing rift caused by their conflicting interests. The Hirpini and Caudini were not committed to fighting Hannibal's war; rather, they were intent on freeing themselves from Roman influence. This is underscored by the envoys' portrayal of their peoples' involvement in the ongoing conflict as the final phase of their enduring struggle against the Romans. Hannibal, meanwhile, was uninterested in supporting the Hirpini and the Caudini in their quest for autonomy, viewing them, instead, as valuable allies in his larger war effort. Indeed, he did not hesitate to demand their soldiers, leaving them vulnerable to Roman attacks.

The tensions identifiable between Hannibal and the communities of the Hirpini and Caudini exemplify a relatively recent notion in scholarship: the multipolarity of the Italian vista during the Second Punic War.²⁶ Between 218 and 204 BCE, Italy served as a theatre for conflicts that extended beyond the primary struggle between Rome and Carthage, functioning as a complex geopolitical game board that involved not only Rome and Hannibal but also numerous local communities, each pursuing their own distinct interests.

As Rome's diminished strength became apparent after Hannibal's early victories, its influence over many Italic peoples correspondingly waned. Rome could no longer contain the ambitions and enmities of these communities, which subsequently erupted. A considerable number of Rome's allies defected to Hannibal; however, their shift in allegiance did not necessarily indicate support for the Carthaginian cause, nor a desire for integration into a Carthaginian sphere of influence. For many Italic peoples, defection was, instead, a means of pursuing their own hegemonic ambitions over neighbouring regions, reopening long-standing conflicts with adjacent states, and fuelling strife among elite groups.

26 Fronda (2010); Fronda/Gauthier (2017); Fronda (2018); see also Lomas (2011) 351.

3 A Closer Look at Livy's Account: Perspective, Historical Interpretation, and Chronological Issues

The value of Livy's account extends beyond its contribution to our understanding of the historical events that unfolded in 215 BCE. It also raises significant historical and historiographical issues, necessitating a closer examination of the narrative itself.

Livy focuses on the confrontation between Hannibal and the envoys of the Hirpini and Caudini, the only characters that appear in the narrative: the other protagonists of the historical scenario, the Romans, remain in the background and are only mentioned in the envoys' speech. The narrative is structured as a dialogue between the envoys and Hannibal. Hannibal's well-organised, balanced speech, structured in three parts according to rhetorical convention, contrasts significantly with that of the envoys.²⁷ The latter appears divided into two sections, with the second reiterating and amplifying the arguments of the first. Metaphorically, the speech takes the form of an ascending spiral, culminating in a final tirade against Hannibal. While both of its sections cover broadly the same content, their divergent arrangement and varying inclusion of details contribute significantly to their impression as a confused account.

Rhetoric, however, constitutes just one facet of the diplomatic exchange between the envoys and the Carthaginian general, and a comprehensive evaluation must also encompass the actions and tones of those involved. In an attempt to assert his superiority, Hannibal responds with irony, almost mocking his allies and their request, but the stark contrast between his passive-aggressive words and his largely ineffectual actions reveals his apparent weakness. Raffaele Fimiani's conclusions about Livy's portrayal of Hannibal in book 23, particularly in this episode, are especially apt: "Lo stesso Annibale è qui irricognoscibile: pigro, molle, già sfatto; tutt'ad un tratto saziato, pare, delle sue vittorie e non più né feroce né grande [...] Dà agli Irpini e Sanniti venuti a domandare soccorso una risposta che vorrebbe essere smargiassa, ma è fiacca."²⁸

The Hirpinian and Caudinian ambassadors adopt an accusatory tone, blaming Hannibal for taking their soldiers and leaving them unprotected. By

27 See Jal (2001) 73 fn. *a*.

28 Fimiani (1939) 6. Some sympathy for Hannibal can be found in Paul Jal's assessment: "Il est piquant de voir Hannibal donner ici aux délégués hirpins et sannites une leçon de rhétorique (plan d'un discours en trois parts)". See Jal (2001) 73 fn. *a*. On the figure of Hannibal in Livy, see Mader (1993); Adler (2011) 106–107; Campanile (2024). Interesting remarks can also be found in Bernard's (2000) study of Livy's portrayals and in Foulkes (1999).

downplaying the size and status of the Roman forces plundering their lands, they implicitly accuse Hannibal of weakness and incompetence. The envoys' demeanour is hardly that of someone seeking an ally's help in a desperate situation; rather, it is the stance of those who know that their alliance with Hannibal and their renewed fight against the Romans are doomed to fail.

The parallel between the experience with Pyrrhus and that with Hannibal amplifies this perception. In the envoys' speech, Pyrrhus is said to have taken military forces from the Hirpini and Caudini to fight his own war (*Pyrrhus nostro magis milite suas auxit vires quam suis viribus nos defendit*);²⁹ the very same is said about Hannibal, whom the envoys indicate as solely responsible for the current situation: *causa autem haec est quod neque tu defendis et nostra iuventus, quae si domi esset tutaretur, omnis sub signis militat tuis*.³⁰ This explicitly extends their negative assessment of their experience with Pyrrhus to that with Hannibal. Furthermore, the perfectly overlapping interpretations of their relationships with both figures suggest an *ex-post* perspective shaping these evaluations.

In contrast to the negative portrayal of Hannibal, the Hirpini and Caudini are depicted positively. In the envoys' words, they present themselves as brave warriors committed to a fierce struggle against Rome: they refer to several successes, all apparently achieved while relying solely on their own forces. After the initial period of their wars with Rome, they sought support, first from Pyrrhus and later from Hannibal. Both, however, proved to be unreliable allies, betraying the Hirpini and Caudini's expectations.

Two distinctive elements emerge clearly from Livy's account of this embassy to Hannibal. Firstly, the text conveys an interpretation of relations with Hannibal that was evidently shaped after the conclusion of the Hirpini and Caudini's uprising against the Romans during the Second Punic War. Secondly, it represents a particularly favourable portrayal of these Samnite groups.

In addressing Hannibal, the Hirpini and Caudini present themselves as fierce opponents of the Romans, recounting their conflictual relationship with them. This serves as a device legitimising their pedigree as enemies of Rome, with the mentioning of numerous episodes reinforcing its effect. Since the speech is attributed to both delegations,³¹ it seems to refer to a shared historical experience. It would be a worthwhile endeavour to assess the role actually played by these groups in the events mentioned, but regrettably, this

29 Liv. 23,42,6.

30 Liv. 23,42,11.

31 See above, section 2.

is not possible, as the extant sources make only occasional and random references to individual groups, predominantly employing the generic designation “Samnites”.³²

Nevertheless, reassessing how the struggle with the Romans is described by the envoys remains a subject of interest. The conflict as a whole is depicted as a war to the death that is still ongoing: the first reference in the envoys’ discourse does not indicate when it began, which suggests that it has persisted forever.³³ This characterisation emphasises the legitimising function of the topic. Its chronological vagueness also contrasts sharply with the account that follows, in which the envoys present a detailed description of the development of their relations with the Romans, which, albeit not entirely coherent in all details, provides a certain periodisation by referring to clear chronological benchmarks.

Despite its characterisation in this speech, the war did have a beginning coinciding with the onset of hostilities between the Samnites and Romans. The initial phase of warfare extended until the conclusion of the Samnite alliance with Pyrrhus, which took place on the Epirote king’s arrival in Italy in 280 BCE and serves as the first chronological benchmark in the account.³⁴ It coincided with the most arduous phase of Roman self-assertion in the region, encompassing the Samnite Wars (343–290 BCE) and the subsequent years.³⁵

32 See Dench (1995) 207. The passage under scrutiny illustrates the stance adopted by Greek and Roman authors: Livy consistently distinguishes between the Hirpini and Caudini, reflecting a well-established contemporary view that the Hirpini were no longer to be considered Samnites (see section 2 above). The Caudini, however, are inconsistently described: initially designated as *Samnites Caudinos*, they are later referred to simply as *Samnites* and their territory as *agrum ... Samnitumve* (Liv. 23,41,13, 23,43,1 and 3). Furthermore, it is pertinent to note that Livy’s narrative of the Hannibalic War provides the earliest explicit attestations of both the Hirpini and Caudini as political actors (Liv. 23,1,1, 23,41,13). Earlier, briefer mentions are mostly geographical in scope (Polyb. 3,91,3 and 9; Cic. *Off.* 3,8; *Leg.* 3,8). See, for the Hirpini, Saldutti/Visconti 2021.

33 Liv. 23,42,2.

34 Liv. 23,42,3.

35 The key source for the Samnite Wars is Livy (books 7 to 10). On his testimony, see the discussion in Tagliamonte (1996) 136–147 and the seminal work by Cornell (2004). Grossmann (2009) updates the standard account of the Samnite Wars given in Salmon (1967) 187–279. For a shorter but useful account, see Scopacasa (2015) 129–146. For the period before 280 BCE, the traditional chronology is followed in the text; on this chronology, see Cassola (1982). See also the tentative adjustments proposed by Marta Sordi, which have not, however, been accepted by the scientific community (Sordi (1965); (1966); (1969); (1999)). Among the few scholars who have taken into account Sordi’s reconstruction are Firpo (1994) and Tagliamonte (1996) 139–141.

Overall, this early period of warfare is described as the most glorious part of the Samnites' long conflict with the Romans, as the Samnite groups fought using exclusively their own forces.³⁶ The ambassadors refer to several successes and cite one in particular: the triumph at the Caudine Forks (321 BCE), where two consuls, T. Veturius Calvinus and Sp. Postumius Albinus, and their armies were forced to pass "under the yoke" (*duos consules ac duos consulares exercitus ab nobis sub iugum missos*).³⁷ They allude to Roman incursions and Samnite military success in this period, contrasting them with the present circumstances, which they deem far more dire.³⁸ The explicit or implicit references to episodes from this initial phase do not, however, develop into a comprehensive account of their relations with the Romans. Instead, the prevailing image is one of proud and successful resistance, a clear product of the pro-Samnite perspective underpinning the entire narrative.

The years of the Pyrrhic War represent a critical juncture in Roman–Samnite relations as depicted by the Hirpinian and Caudinian envoys, as their alliance with the Epirote king marked the end of an era of conflicts fought without outside assistance. The subsequent failure of their attempt to capitalise on Pyrrhus' presence then initiated a period of *pax necessaria* that endured until Hannibal's arrival in Italy.³⁹

The account offers an idea of how the Samnite envoys interpreted the contact with Pyrrhus. Firstly, it contextualises their alliance with him within their broader conflictual relations with the Romans. This aligns with historical understanding surrounding the alliance's conclusion, as evidence hints at ongoing Samnite revolts against Rome when Pyrrhus was invited to Italy.⁴⁰ The alliance with Pyrrhus, per Livy's account, was an attempt to secure outside aid to continue their resistance against the Romans. Thus, in the envoys' speech, the collaboration with Pyrrhus is presented as either the initiation of a new Samnite War or, at least, a fresh phase in the Samnites' prolonged conflict with Rome.⁴¹ It is worth noting that this perspective is almost completely

36 Note the recurrence of words with roots that bear the meaning of "glory": *glorienturque* (Liv. 23,42,5), *gloriabor* (23,42,7), and *gloriosa* (23,42,7).

37 Liv. 23,42,7. On the Caudine Forks and the key source for this episode (Liv. 9,2,2–6,4), see Grossmann (2009) 70–71; Domainko (2018) 119–174; Engerbeaud (2019) 107–110, 411–440. On the memory of this episode in Latin literature, see Lentzsch (2019) 171–208.

38 Liv. 23,42,9. The *magni dictatores* mentioned in the text were L. Papirius Cursor and Q. Fabius Maximus Rullianus. See Ceva/Scandola (2021) 581 fn. 5.

39 Liv. 23,42,2–3 and 6.

40 Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 19,6,2; 20,1,5.

41 In assessing the involvement of the Samnites in the Pyrrhic War, Salmon (1967) 284 claims the following: "They at once raised the standards of revolt, and for the next twelve

absent from standard sources on the period.⁴² These sources and, consequently, modern scholarship tend to centre on the interactions between Tarentum, Pyrrhus, and the Romans, thereby overshadowing the role of the Samnites (and other Italic peoples who joined the Epirote king) in their narratives.⁴³

According to the envoys in their address to Hannibal, the collaboration with Pyrrhus lasted for two years. The consequences of this alliance thus materialised in 280–278 BCE, with several documented instances of collaboration between the parties involved. In 280 BCE, a contingent of Samnite troops was dispatched to Pyrrhus, who was engaged in combat with the Romans at Heraklea. Despite arriving after the battle's conclusion,⁴⁴ the Samnites benefited from Pyrrhus' dispositions in the aftermath of his victory, being granted territory previously occupied by the Romans.⁴⁵ The following year, a contingent of Samnites, definitely including Frentani but possibly also soldiers from other Samnite groups, participated in the Battle of Ausculum alongside Pyrrhus.⁴⁶

Pyrrhus' crossing to Sicily in 278 BCE marked a significant break in his collaboration with the Samnites, yet it did not signify the end of their inter-

years, down to and including the year 272, they were fighting Rome in what was to all intents and purposes a Fourth Samnite War. Curiously enough, although a longer struggle than the First or the Third War or than the pre-Caudine phase of the Second, it is not known to history as a Samnite War. It became merged with and recorded as the Pyrrhic War, in which the chief and most dreaded adversary of Rome, the *caput belli* to use the Roman jargon, was for the first time an enemy from overseas, Pyrrhus of Epirus". See also Lomas (1993) 48.

42 A remarkable exception is Oros. 3,8,1: *Iam hinc statim a Romanis adversum Samnitas, gentem opibus armisque validam, pro Campanis et Sidicinis bella suscepta sunt. Samniticum bellum ancipiti statu gestum Pyrrhus vel maximus Romani nominis hostis excepit* ("Immediately after this, the Romans, on behalf of the Campanians and Sidicinians, began a war against the Samnites, a people mighty in arms and rich in resources. The conduct of the Samnite War, which so far had been waged with indecisive results, was taken over by Pyrrhus, the bitterest enemy of the Roman people". Transl. Raymond). An echo may appear in Liv. 31,31,10.

43 On the interactions between the Samnites and Pyrrhus, see Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 19,6,2, 19,9–10, 19,16,3; 20,1,3, 20,1,5, 20,3,8; Front. *Strat.* 2,3,2; Just. *Epit.* 18,1,1; 23,3,5; App. *Samn.* 10,11; Plut. *Pyrrh.* 13,5–6, 17,4–5, 23,5, 24,4–25,1; Salmon (1967) 280–192; Tagliamonte (1996) 147–148. See also the contributions regarding the relations between Pyrrhus and the Italic peoples in Lévêque (1957) 303–450, 509–550; Lomas (1993) 47–52; Nedu (2014); Wolny (2022); López Sánchez (2025). For an overview of the sources concerning Pyrrhus' campaign in Italy, see Corbier (2009). On Pyrrhus' portrayal and his relations with the Italic communities, see Schettino (2009) and Wolny (2019).

44 Plut. *Pyrrh.* 4–5.

45 App. *Samn.* 10,11.

46 Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 20,1,3; 20,1,5; 20,3,8.

actions. Roman operations in Samnium intensified after 278 BCE, signalling continued Samnite resistance. Unable to withstand these Roman assaults, the Samnites and Tarentines appealed to Pyrrhus for renewed assistance. Upon Pyrrhus' return to Italy in 276 or 275 BCE, however, only a minority of Samnites rejoined him in his final engagements in the peninsula. According to Plutarch, the Samnites were exhausted from the relentless Roman assaults and harboured lingering animosity towards Pyrrhus due to his military expedition to Sicily.⁴⁷

As far as we can see in the sources, Samnite groups did not pursue a unified policy but rather acted individually in their dealings with Pyrrhus, much as they would later do during the Hannibalic War. For the present analysis, Plutarch's account is particularly illuminating, revealing that Pyrrhus' withdrawal from Italy in 278 BCE led to a deterioration in his relations with the Samnites. This assessment is further reflected in the envoys' narrative of their interactions with the king, which focuses solely on the collaboration in 280–278 BCE, omitting any mention of subsequent contact.

According to the envoys' account, after the failure of the alliance with Pyrrhus, a period of *pax necessaria* ("necessary" or "forced peace")⁴⁸ endured until Hannibal entered Italy. This period led to a strengthening of Roman influence in the region and an intensification of interactions between Romans and Samnites.⁴⁹ Sources reflect a subsequent era of flourishing: reporting on Hannibal's entering the territory of the Samnites, Polybius notes the region's prosperity thanks to the fertility of its soil and its being "not upset by war in a long time" (πολλῶν χρόνων ἀπολέμητον).⁵⁰ Despite fostering prosperity, however, such a prolonged period of peace could not receive a positive evaluation in the envoys' speech, as it inherently signified the cessation of their armed struggle against the Romans.

Instead, determined to reinforce their depiction of their peoples as fierce enemies of Rome, the envoys emphasise that their hostility has not been suppressed during the years of peace and resurfaced when Hannibal crossed the

47 Plut. *Pyrrh.* 25.1: Τῶν δὲ Σαυνιτῶν τὰ τε πράγματα διέφθαρτο, καὶ τοῦ φρονήματος ὑφεῖντο, κεκρατημένοι μάχαις πολλαῖς ὑπὸ τῶν Ῥωμαίων. ἐνῆν δέ τι καὶ πρὸς τὸν Πύρρον ὀργῆς διὰ τὸν εἰς Σικελίαν πλοῦν· ὅθεν οὐ πολλοὶ τούτων αὐτῷ συνῆλθον ("But the power of the Samnites had been shattered, and their spirits were broken, in consequence of many defeats at the hands of the Romans. They also cherished considerable resentment against Pyrrhus because of his expedition to Sicily; hence not many of them came to join him". Transl. Perrin).

48 Liv. 23.42.3.

49 See Nagle (1973) 374; Dench (1995) 16.

50 Polyb. 3.90.7.

Alps.⁵¹ This is clearly an embellishment designed to bolster the envoys' position and secure Hannibal's favour, given that the Hirpini and Caudini only joined his side after his decisive triumph at Cannae.⁵²

Regardless of historical accuracy, the envoys' account portrays Hannibal's arrival in Italy in 218 BCE as the end of the period of forced peace. According to their statements, this peace commenced nearly fifty years earlier, implying a date shortly after 268 BCE;⁵³ however, this timeframe appears inconsistent with another chronological detail in their account. The envoys previously claimed that the *pax necessaria* began when the alliance with Pyrrhus ended, seemingly in 278 BCE. This leaves a gap of more than ten years.

To find an episode that aligns with the envoys' fifty-year peace, we must first note that a moment shortly after 268 BC does not correspond to any known juncture in the relationship between the Samnites and the Romans. The revolts ongoing during the Samnites' appeal to Pyrrhus definitively ended with the Roman victory in 272 BCE.⁵⁴ Although it might be tempting to identify this year as the designated beginning of the period outlined by the envoys,⁵⁵ it demonstrably does not correspond with their envisioned chronology.

It is pertinent, however, that subsequent to the Roman victory in 272 BCE, sporadic rebellions nonetheless persisted. One, in particular, demands our attention: the revolt of the Samnite Lollius. In 269 BCE, Lollius captured a fortress and initiated raids on the surrounding territory. The Roman consuls intervened expeditiously, quickly securing an advantage with the assistance of deserters and notwithstanding the resistance of the Caraceni, who are presumed to have supported Lollius.⁵⁶ Despite recent attempts to downplay this episode as an exploit undertaken by a bandit, with no political significance,⁵⁷ it is generally accepted as part of the turbulent relationship between the Romans and Samnites.⁵⁸ Admittedly, Lollius' insurrection, while chronologically proximate, does not perfectly align with the envoys' timeframe for the *pax necessaria*. It suggests, however, that anti-Roman resistance endured even during the period of supposed peace; consequently, one might hypothe-

51 Liv. 23,42,3.

52 See above, section 2, as well as Salmon (1967) 295; Rawlings (1996) 83.

53 Liv. 23,42,3.

54 *Fasti Triumphales* frs. XVI–XVII (Pais); Salmon (1967) 284.

55 See Jal (2001) 71 fn. a.

56 Zon. 8,7. Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 20,17 also likely concerns the episode of Lollius: see Vanotti (2001) 16; Morelli (2024) 3–5.

57 Morelli (2024).

58 See Salmon (1967) 288; La Regina (1989) 359; Tagliamonte (1996) 149; Vanotti (2001) 16.

sise that the inception of the *pax necessaria*, as articulated by the ambassadors, could relate to an otherwise unrecorded uprising against Roman dominance that ultimately proved unsuccessful. Nevertheless, given the scarcity of primary sources detailing Samnite–Roman interactions post-272 BCE, this remains a provisional hypothesis.

Another detail in the envoys' speech raises an apparent chronological issue: they claim to have fought the Romans for a century (*per annos centum*) without external aid, apart from their brief alliance with Pyrrhus.⁵⁹ However, a philological point advises against our attempting to precisely frame this alleged "century of war" within the envoys' account or the broader evidence of Samnite–Roman relations. The term *centum* only appears in the manuscript tradition after the thirteenth century,⁶⁰ which calls into question the veracity of this "century of war" in a passage that otherwise refers to an extended struggle against the Romans and could lack any precise chronological specification.

The discourse attributed to the envoys of the Hirpini and Caudini is replete with historical references. When chronologically reconstructed, these individual pieces of information delineate a clear narrative of Samnite–Roman relations, culminating in the Hannibalic War. The account commences with the earliest phase of hostilities, during which the Samnites mounted a tenacious resistance, achieving considerable successes despite the severity of Roman incursions. This period was succeeded by a short-lived alliance with Pyrrhus, characterised as the initial unsuccessful endeavour to secure foreign military assistance. Disillusioned and fatigued, certain Samnite factions sustained the struggle for a time, although their insurrections left only subtle, indirect indications within the historical record. Subsequently, the Samnites as a whole were compelled to enter a nearly fifty-year period of enforced peace. Hannibal's arrival revitalised aspirations of recovering their previous, celebrated success, but the alliance with the Carthaginian general, much like that with Pyrrhus, proved ephemeral.

Overall, the most striking feature of this account is the perspective. It narrates an ample section of Samnite–Roman relations from an unprecedentedly Samnite standpoint. There are two reasons to define what emerges from this speech as a "Samnite history" and not just a "Hirpino-Caudinian" one: as mentioned previously, it is impossible to isolate the involvement of these specific groups in the events reported. On the contrary, other Samnite components were clearly involved; in fact, any other Samnite group could have recalled the same past. When the envoys use the pronoun "we", they are referring not

59 Liv. 23,42,6.

60 See Weissenborn (1881) 362 *ad loc.*

to “we, Hirpini and Caudini” but to “we, Samnites”. They appeal to a shared historical memory and experience that belongs not just to their individual groups but to their entire *ethnos*, with its foundation in the concept of enmity towards the Romans.

When addressing Hannibal, Livy’s envoys refer to their current insurrection as part of the enduring struggle of their own and other Samnite groups against the Romans and meticulously connect their present circumstances to this shared historical memory. By moving fluidly between the present and the past, they create a significant, though subtle, shift in the narrative.

4 Between Facts, Fiction, and Political Discourse

Livy’s account of the Hirpinian and Caudinian embassy to Hannibal, while a fascinating narrative that places the Samnites in an unexpected light as protagonists, sits in the grey area between history and fiction characteristic of ancient historical works.

Livy provides a reliable account of the situation of the Hirpini and Caudini in 215 BCE. It is crucial to emphasise, indeed, that he is considered a reliable source for the entire period of the Second Punic War (corresponding to books 21–30 of his *Ab Urbe condita libri*), with modern historiography defending the quality and historicity of his information concerning this phase of Roman history and distinguishing it from that regarding earlier periods (books 1–10), the reliability of which is sometimes questioned.⁶¹ The reason for this greater trustworthiness lies in Livy’s reliance on historical works based on accounts written at a time relatively close to the events described.⁶² The vivid memory of recent episodes would have prevented the writing of accounts that were divorced from, or contrary to, actual events.

On the other hand, the credibility of the specific words attributed to the Samnite envoys (and, indirectly, to Hannibal) is far more contentious. It is widely acknowledged that speeches reported in ancient historical works

61 Concerning the reliability of Livy’s narrative, see Walsh (1961) 281–282; Fronda (2010) 10–11. See also the remarks by Damon (2007) and Lendon (2009) about the reliability of Roman historians. On scholarly doubts about the historical account in Livy’s first decade, see Cornell (2004); Fronda (2010) 10–11.

62 On Livy’s sources for the third decade, see Soltau (1897) *passim*; Walsh (1961) 110–137; Klotz (1964) *passim*; Levene (2010) 127–163; Briscoe/Hornblower (2020) 8–13.

pose a complex problem.⁶³ They are never literal reproductions of what was actually said but are, instead, fictional constructs by the relevant works' authors.⁶⁴ they adhere not to the criterion of historical accuracy but to that of plausibility.⁶⁵ Such speeches serve to characterise figures, dramatise the narrative, make the account more engaging for the reader, and, significantly, provide a space for criticisms of Roman policy or reflection on ideas prevalent in the public discourse of the author's time.⁶⁶

This complex interplay between historical accuracy and literary license makes it challenging to determine whether the Samnite envoys' speech is a complete creation of Livy's or whether he found it in some form in his sources and, if the latter, where. For proponents of the "rhetorical turn" in historiography, who privilege the literary dimension of historical works, this inquiry might appear moot.⁶⁷ These individuals contend that the *Ab Urbe condita libri*, as a literary product, stands as a creative work in its own right, inviting scrutiny of Livy's authorial persona, stylistic decisions, and interpretative lens regarding the events and characters he describes. Every aspect, from the overarching narrative structure to specific lexical choices, is a deliberate result of Livy's agency.

Yet this recognition does not invalidate the equally pertinent question of the provenance of materials that Livy used to shape his narrative. To analyse this specific episode, it is crucial to pinpoint the origin of the content included in the envoys' address to Hannibal. We must understand whether Livy constructed this discourse – especially the portrayal of Samnite–Roman relations – by applying his own interpretative lens, reflecting contemporary public discussions, or drawing content from his historical sources.

Livy frames the speech of the Samnite envoys masterfully within his narrative. He heightens the pitiful impact of the account of Roman operations

63 For an overview of speeches in Greek and Latin historiography, see Marincola (2007); Pausch (2010); Adler (2011). On speeches in Livy, see Walsh (1961) 219–244; Jal (2001) XLVI–LVI; Briscoe/Hornblower (2020) 50–56.

64 Damon (2009) 440; Lendon (2009) 42 fn. 1, 44; Adler (2011) 8; Briscoe/Hornblower (2020) 50.

65 Damon (2009) 440; Adler (2011) 10.

66 For speeches as narrative devices, see Jal (2001) XLVIII–XLIX; Laird (2009) 206. For speeches as spaces for critique, see Marincola (2007) 119–120 and Adler (2011), the latter of which provides the most extensive study of speeches attributed to enemies of the Romans.

67 Wiseman (1979) and Woodman (1988) inaugurated the so-called rhetorical turn in Roman historiography. Nuanced views on their approach appear in Feldherr (2009) 6–8; Laird (2009); Marincola (2009); Poulsen (2021) 2–3. Critical views can be found in Damon (2007) 439–440 and Lendon (2009).

against the Samnites in 215 BCE by noting that the situation was so dire that it “revived in Samnium the memory of its ancient disasters” (*ut antiquarum cladum Samnio memoriam renovaret*).⁶⁸ The reference is to the Samnite Wars, here presented from a Roman perspective as a moment of great suffering and defeat for the Samnites. This expression appears to foreshadow multiple references to the Samnite past in the ensuing ambassadorial discourse.

However, the speech presents a distinctly Samnite perspective, with the ongoing conflict against the Romans serving as a *fil rouge* and positioning the Samnites as victims of Roman aggression. This image could have been created by simply reversing the prevalent Roman viewpoint: Livy may thus have deliberately reinterpreted his knowledge of Roman–Samnite relations from a pro-Samnite stance, as it is reasonable to assume that the Samnites viewed their struggle as a valid act of resistance. His inclusion of the Caudine Forks is the most predictable detail, given its prominent place in Roman memory.⁶⁹

The hypothesis of a simple reversal of perspective would be more compelling, however, if the speech portrayed the Samnites generically – as mere enemies of the Romans, with specific references limited to one or two universally recognised Samnite triumphs. This explanation becomes less convincing when we consider the richness of historical detail found within the Hirpino-Caudinian discourse. This speech outlines Samnite–Roman relations over more than a century, providing a clear periodisation that identifies and characterises each phase with benchmarks and assessments understandable primarily from a Samnite viewpoint and not part of the common cultural knowledge of Livy’s era. For instance, the contextualisation of the alliance with Pyrrhus and the framing of the *pax necessaria* allude to situations that left little trace in the general historical tradition.

In light of these considerations, it is difficult to see the speech of the envoys to Hannibal as the result simply of Livy’s own elaboration. Instead, we might explore the possibility that Livy reproduced an account already circulating within the public discourse of the Augustan period. At that time, the entire Italian peninsula was unified under Roman rule; indeed, the Augustan period marked the completion of Italy’s unification, a process that began in earnest after the Social War.⁷⁰ This conflict, the final step in Rome’s ascent as Italy’s

68 Liv. 23,41,14.

69 See Collins-Elliott (2014) 204–205.

70 On the Social War as the pivotal step toward Italy’s unification under Rome, see Salmon (1962) 107; Mouritsen (2006) 23–25; Keaveney (2007) 24, 189–193; Gruen (2017) 562–565; Mouritsen (2019) 303.

hegemon, was also the last time the Italic peoples attempted to resist her.⁷¹ Despite losing the war, the Italic communities gained Roman citizenship, effectively becoming part of the Roman people. This initiated a process of political and cultural assimilation: Italic peoples ceased to exist as distinct political and cultural entities, being integrated, instead, into the Roman state. Their historical struggle against Roman power became a thing of the past, and any further opposition lost its footing.⁷² Augustus' cultural policy actively glorified this unification, promoting an image of Italy as a diverse land inhabited by various peoples, all bound by allegiance to Rome.⁷³

In the political and cultural climate of Livy's time, there was no space for anti-Roman sentiments or desires for independence, such as those articulated by the Hirpino-Caudinian envoys to Hannibal. The Samnites, despite their long tradition of resistance, had, like the rest, relinquished their independence and distinct identity to be integrated into the newly unified Italy.⁷⁴ A significant indicator of this process was the abandonment of the sanctuary at Pietrabbondante, which had served for a long time as the religious heart of the Samnite *ethnos*.⁷⁵ Concurrently, the Augustan period fostered a new image of the Samnites as a mountain people, dwelling in small settlements.⁷⁶ While this likely mirrored their contemporary political insignificance, it also effec-

71 The reference works on the Social War are the monographs of Keaveney (2007), Kendall (2013), and Dart (2014). An introduction to the conflict is provided by Bispham (2016) and Santangelo (2018).

72 Wallace-Hadrill (2008) 81. See also Smith (2020) 12. Galsterer (2006) 304–406 and Collins-Elliott (2014) 207–208 note that the Italic individuals in the Senate in the Augustan age displayed no inclination to refer to their provenance. Nonetheless, it has been observed that the assimilation of the Italians was never fully realised: see Horsfall (1997) and (2001) for references to the literary dimension; for a broader approach, see Giardina (1994) and (1997). Carlà-Uhink (2019) 12–13 employs the concept of layered identity in the case of the Italians following their integration into the Roman domain. See also Roselaar (2012) 8–14.

73 On Italy in Augustan ideology, see Poccetti (2016); Chillet (2017); Marcone (2017). For a critical reassessment of studies concerning the concept of Italy in the Augustan age, see Smith (2020).

74 Collins-Elliott (2014) offers a systematic analysis of the incorporation of the Samnites into the new political context. On the Samnites in the Augustan age, see also Mahé-Simon (2008).

75 See Collins-Elliott (2014) 200–203; Menozzi (2024) 264. On the role of this sanctuary for the Samnites, see Scopacasa (2015) 190–191; La Regina (2024) 264. On Pietrabbondante, see also below, section 5.

76 Strabo 5.4.11; Eychenne (2009); Collins-Elliott (2014) 205–206.

tively consigned to the past the memory of the significant threat the Samnites had once posed to Rome.⁷⁷

The dissolution of the Samnites as a political entity and the emergence of a unified Italy under Roman dominion fundamentally preclude the possibility that a tradition extolling Samnite resistance to Roman power, as evinced in the passage under consideration here, could have either circulated in Livy's time or been an original creation by the author himself. This strongly suggests that Livy must have encountered the content of the Samnite envoys' speech in earlier sources and subsequently redeveloped it.

In the difficult search for these sources, three annalists emerge as potential candidates: L. Coelius Antipater (*FRHist* 15), Q. Claudius Quadrigarius (*FRHist* 24), and Valerius Antias (*FRHist* 25). Coelius Antipater is, indeed, regarded as one of the principal sources for Livy's books 21–30;⁷⁸ however, his is not among the names proposed as possible sources for the account of the Hirpino-Caudinian embassy to Hannibal, with those scholars who have considered this issue preferring Claudius Quadrigarius and Valerius Antias.⁷⁹ Active in the early first century BCE, these authors were knowledgeable about Italic affairs and are generally regarded as primary sources for Livy's depiction of events in Campania during the Hannibalic War.⁸⁰ This demonstrated interest in Italic matters has led to their consideration as potential sources for the episode under analysis.

Regardless of the ultimate, undeterminable identity of Livy's source for this episode, the most striking aspect is that his account appears to draw on the work of authors active in the first half of the first century BCE. This period, encompassing the Social War and its aftermath, was characterised by a distinct political and cultural climate from that of Livy's own time, with tensions between the Romans and the Italic peoples still running high. The annalists identified as possible sources for Livy had direct insight into these political

77 Collins-Elliott (2014) 206: "No longer a living tradition, these Samnites were a non-entity in the present and a treacherous enemy in the past".

78 L. Coelius Antipater, active in the second half of the second century BCE, was the author of a monograph on the Second Punic War. For an overview of his work, see *FRHist* 15 I 256–263. On the use of Coelius Antipater by Livy, see Soltau (1897) 70–84; Walsh (1961) 124–133; Briscoe/Hornblower (2020) 11.

79 Q. Claudius Quadrigarius has been suggested as a possible source for the episode in question by Soltau (1897) 23. Klotz (1964) 157–158 prefers Valerius Antias. Claudius Quadrigarius composed a history of Rome in 24 books, which was notably detailed about the period from the Second Punic War to 70 BCE (see *FRHist* 24 I 288–292). Valerius Antias was contemporaneous with Claudius Quadrigarius and composed *Annals* in at least 75 books, covering the period up to 78 BCE (see *FRHist* 25 I 293–304).

80 See Soltau (1897) 75.

realities: even if not directly involved in the Social War, they were certainly immersed in a political discourse that highlighted the intense opposition between the rebelling Italic communities and Rome. This exposure suggests that they could have conveyed themes and perspectives akin to those presented in the Hirpino-Caudinian embassy's speech to Hannibal.⁸¹

Moreover, the discernible attitude and specific content of the Hirpino-Caudinian speech exhibit a strong resonance with the sentiments held by certain Italic insurgents, particularly those of the Samnites who participated in the Social War.

The debate over the causes of the Social War offers a primary insight into such sentiments. While the contentious issue of Roman citizenship was undeniably a central factor, it is increasingly understood not to have been the sole catalyst. Instead, the conflict arose from a complicated interplay of economic and social conditions that fuelled a desire for independence from Roman hegemony among some communities.⁸²

The Italic insurgents, in a powerful act of self-determination, organised themselves into a political entity, likely a confederation, and actively promoted a policy of self-definition centred around an emerging pan-Italic sentiment.⁸³ This commitment is vividly illustrated by their renaming of their cap-

81 See the remarks on the survival of echoes from the time of the Social War in accounts of Roman expansion in Italy in Salmon (1967) 7; Lomas (2011) 339.

82 The prevailing view holds that the Italic insurgents were motivated by their quest for citizenship (Brunt (1965); De Sanctis (1976); Salmon (1982) 128; Gabba (1994) 118; Keaveney (2007) 3–13; Kendall (2013); Dart (2014); Bispham (2024)). While some scholars have acknowledged the long-standing aspirations for independence of certain Italic groups (Salmon (1962) 113–118; Brunt (1965) 97–98, 101; Sherwin-White (1973); Dart (2014) 17–19; Bispham (2016) 77–86), this aspect has been most thoroughly developed by Henrik Mouritsen in his monograph and several papers (Mouritsen (1998); (2006); (2019)). Mouritsen's position has gained some traction (Pobjoy (2000); Carlà-Uhink (2017) 365–366; (2019)), though it has also faced criticism (Keaveney (2007) VII–XVI; Kendall (2013) 8–28; Dart (2014) 19–20). In any case, it is undisputed that Italic ambitions of independence are attested by Diodorus Siculus (37,22) and Strabo (5,4,2). The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (4,13, 4,16) and Ovid (*Am.* 3,15,8–10) are also cited as further evidence of the Italic peoples' desire for independence (Mouritsen (1998) 9–10, 134–137; Pobjoy (2000) 197–198), but see Dart (2014) 35–39 for caveats. For Eutropius (5,3,1), see Dart (2014) 39–40, who builds on Arena (2012).

83 On the Italic confederation, see Keaveney (2007) 121–123; Dart (2009); Santangelo (2018) 236–237; Cappelletti (2020) 56–66. For the pan-Italic character of the confederation's self-representation policies, see Dench (1995) 212–216; Pobjoy (2000) 191, 198–205; Bradley (2007); Keaveney (2007) 27–32; Dart (2014) 11, 15; Scopacasa (2015) 286; (2018) 122. On factors promoting pan-Italic sentiment, see Patterson (2012).

ital, Corfinium, to Italia.⁸⁴ Further underscoring this ideological stance was the widespread use of *Italia* or *Viteliú* (the Oscan name for Italia) and the personification of Italia on their coinage.⁸⁵

Interpreting this pan-Italic framework as evidence of complete unity among the rebellious communities nonetheless warrants caution:⁸⁶ such a perception might be unduly influenced by hindsight, especially given the later unification of Italy. Indeed, the extent to which each Italic community fully embraced this nascent pan-Italic identity remains difficult to ascertain. Crucially, however, distinct “ethnic” voices permeated the insurgents’ political discourse,⁸⁷ serving as a vital reminder that despite its united front, the Italic coalition was a mosaic of individual policies and interests.⁸⁸ Group agendas could align but did not always perfectly overlap with the Italic state’s broader objectives.

The political motivations and discourse of the Italic insurgents were more nuanced than is commonly assumed, reflecting diverse interests among the participating groups. The Samnites, in particular, demonstrated distinct political characteristics and self-representation compared to other Italic peoples. Their self-representation policy strongly emphasised an ethnic dimension, as evidenced by the coinage of C. Papius Mutilus, a prominent Pentrian and military commander within both the Samnite and overall Italic confederations.⁸⁹

Mutilus’ coins, including both those from the Italic confederation and his independent issues, notably featured references to the Samnite world along-

84 Strabo 5,4,2; Cappelletti (2020) 56–57. For an archaeological overview of Corfinium at the time of the Social War, see Somma (2024).

85 Campana (1987) still stands as the most comprehensive catalogue of the Italic insurgents’ coinage, updated in Campana (2023). For an overview of the topic, see Briquel (1997) 153–176; Keaveney (2007) 122–125; Briquel (2010); Dart (2014) 113–116; Cappelletti (2020) 67–74. The deliberate choice of Oscan over Latin as the confederation’s official language carried strong political meaning, asserting a clear separation from Rome and reflecting the predominantly Oscan-speaking makeup of the confederation. See Adams (2003) 116; Scopacasa (2015) 281; Santangelo (2018) 238–239. On the prevalence of Oscan groups, see Salmon (1962) 115–116; Patterson (2012) 224.

86 Keaveney (2007) 35; Dart (2014) 116.

87 Dench (1995) 176.

88 Galsterer (2006) 298–299, who remarks that the members of the Italic confederation were moved by “vielen uns unbekannten Variablen”; Mouritsen (2006) 32 fn. 21; Bradley (2019). See also Carlà-Uhink (2017) 368.

89 On C. Papius Mutilus, see Salmon (1967) 336. C. Papius Mutilus’ coins are series 4, 5, 6a–c, 9b, 10, and 11 of Campana’s (1987) classification. Tataranni (2005) provides the most in-depth analysis of these issues.

side evidence of broader pan-Italic ideology.⁹⁰ The most prominent symbol was the bull fighting the Roman wolf: the bull, indeed, was the Samnite totemic animal, linked to the group's *ver sacrum* origin myth and their reputation as a warlike people.⁹¹ One series also bore the Oscan legend *Safinim* (Samnium).⁹² While this "local symbolism" might suggest regional circulation,⁹³ it more importantly highlights the significant influence of the Samnites in Italic political discourse – marked by proud references to ethnic symbols – and their leading role in the confederation.⁹⁴

Another feature of Samnite political discourse during the Social War, though less overtly apparent in our sources, was the strategic use of their

90 Campana (1987) 98; Briquel (1997) 182, 185; Tataranni (2005) 292–296. See also Poccetti (2004) 318.

91 For discussions of the Samnite totemic bull, see Dench (1995) 213–214; Briquel (1999) 46–51; Poccetti (2004) 319; Tataranni (2005) 5–11; Briquel (2010) 89–96. On the *ver sacrum* myth, see Dench (1995) 178–186; Briquel (1999) 42–46; Scopacasa (2015) 30–41. On the Samnites' image as a warlike people, see Tagliamonte (1996) 15–16; Briquel (1999) 51–56; Scopacasa (2007) 92–94; (2010) 120; (2015) 41–48. For the connection between the bull and *Vitellū* and its link to pan-Italic ideology, see Poccetti (2004) 319–320; Tataranni (2005) 4–6, 10–11; Briquel (2010); Cappelletti (2020) 70–74; Bourdin (2022) 73–74.

92 Campana's (1987) series 11. For toponyms as indicators of ethnic affiliation, see Scopacasa (2018) 107. The significance of the Oscan language in shaping Samnite ethnic identity is explored by Tagliamonte (2014). It has been contended that *Safinim* on Social War coinage possessed a geographically limited scope, referring exclusively to the territory of the Pentri (Dench (1995) 200–210; Bourdin (2022) 73–74; but see the more cautious stance in Scopacasa (2015) 37–38). While the Pentri's prominence within the Samnite *ethnos* during this conflict is acknowledged (Tagliamonte (1996) 6–7), there is insufficient evidence to assert that they remained the only group self-identifying as Samnites (as Dench (1995) 210 and Bourdin (2022) 73–74 assert). Rather, the Samnite political discourse of the second to first centuries BCE seems to have promoted broader unity among Samnite groups (see in this paragraph and below, section 5). Earlier attestations of the *Safin-* root derive from epigraphic evidence (e.g. *ImIt*, Praetuttii / Interamnium Praetuttiorum 1–3). For discussion of these documents, see Tagliamonte (1996) 8–9 and Scopacasa (2015) 33–35.

93 This is a possibility when compared to what is assumed for the rest of the insurgents' coinage. Those series featuring the legends in Oscan are presumed to be intended for the Oscan-speaking region, while those in Latin are considered to be for the rest of the rebellious areas. See Dench (1995) 214; Keaveney (2007) 123–124; Dart (2014) 113–115.

94 The minting of some issues at Bovianum, the Pentri's main centre and a site that gained importance later in the war, further underscores the prominent role of the Samnites. See Campana (1987) 111; Tataranni (2005) 294; Briquel (2010) 90 fn. 24. For Bovianum's role, see App. *B. Civ.* 1.55; Keaveney (2007) 156. Despite the uncertainty in precisely dating Mutlus' coins and determining their chronological relation to other Italic series, they could reflect developments throughout the Social War, including a potential progressive separation of Samnite policy or the dissolution of the insurgent front, leaving the Samnites as key resisters. See Campana (1987) 113; Tataranni (2005) 296–297; Dart (2014) 114.

historical memory, particularly regarding their previous struggles against the Romans during the Samnite Wars.⁹⁵ Like the use of ethnic symbols, this served to foster cohesion among insurgent Samnite groups and bolster support for the ongoing conflict. The hypothesis that remembrance of past conflicts with the Romans likely held a significant place in first-century BCE political discourse among the Samnites is supported by two key aspects: firstly, the Samnites are renowned for their strong historical memory;⁹⁶ and secondly, their enduring animosity towards the Romans has been identified as a crucial factor in their tenacious resistance during the Social War.⁹⁷ Moreover, it is noteworthy that some Samnite leaders of this period belonged to the same prominent families as those who had participated in the earlier Samnite Wars.⁹⁸ It is difficult to conceive that this ancestral connection played no part in Samnite ideology: indeed, it could have contributed profoundly to the drawing of parallels between the Samnite Wars and the current conflict, thereby allowing the presentation of the latter as a new, critical phase in the long-running rivalry with the Romans.

The Samnite political discourse was coupled with a political agency that clearly aimed at a war to the death against the Romans. The Samnites thus emerged as Rome's most tenacious opponents, seemingly having little interest in enfranchisement; rather, their objective was independence from Roman influence by any means necessary. This commitment became powerfully evident in 89 BCE when, despite the *lex Plautia Papiria's* offer of citizenship to Italic peoples who laid down their arms, the Samnites continued hostilities.⁹⁹ Their persistent resistance extended beyond the official end of the conflict the following year, compelling the Romans to intervene again in the 80s BCE.¹⁰⁰

Samnite resistance only ceased after the Samnite forces' decisive defeat by Sulla at the Battle of the Colline Gate in 82 BCE. The record of this final struggle preserves crucial testimony to the Samnite stance. Pontius Telesinus, the Caudinian Samnite leader, famously invoked the destruction of Rome before the battle, declaring that "the City had to be razed and destroyed, adding that the wolves who robbed Italics of their freedom would never become extinct

95 Brunt (1965) 97; Keaveney (2007) 26.

96 Salmon (1967) 316; Keaveney (2007) 26; Scopacasa (2015) 234–235; (2019) 66.

97 Salmon (1962) 115; Brunt (1965) 96–97; Gabba (1994) 118.

98 Salmon (1967) 225 fn. 2; Keaveney (2007) 26.

99 On these events, see Keaveney (2007) 151–161; Kendall (2013) 397–416; Dart (2014) 189–198.

100 On Roman intervention in the 80s BCE, see Kendall (2013) 547–631; Dart (2014) 199–208.

unless the wood in which they were accustomed to take refuge were cut down".¹⁰¹

During the Social War, the Samnites undertook a great, desperate effort to break free from Roman hegemony. This intense military conflict was paralleled by a deliberate and sophisticated political discourse, meticulously crafted to foster cohesion among the diverse Samnite groups engaged in the war. At the heart of this ideological construction lay the exaltation of ethnic symbols and persistent references to their long-standing resistance against Rome.¹⁰²

Livy's depiction of the Hirpino-Caudinian embassy to Hannibal, along with the detailed elaboration of the Samnite past contained within the envoys' speech, perfectly aligns with this political narrative. As we have seen, Livy's source, active in the immediate aftermath of the Social War, likely possessed a strong understanding of the Italic ideological discourse, including that of the Samnites. These converging factors lead us to hypothesise that this source infused their account of the Hirpino-Caudinian embassy with themes and a tone drawn from contemporary Samnite political thought, an account Livy then incorporated into his work. By doing so, this earlier author projected first-century BCE Samnite ideological tenets onto historical events, thereby imbuing the entire narrative with a distinctly pro-Samnite bias that exalted resistance to Roman dominance.

5 Traces of Samnite Cultural Memory

Livy's historical account is of exceptional significance because it preserves a genuine, albeit filtered, "Samnite voice", which is rarely attested in the surviv-

101 Vell. Pat. 2,27: *delendamque Urbem, adiiciens numquam defuturos raptos Italicae libertatis lupos, nisi silva in quam refugere solerent*. Transl. Woodman. On Telesinus' belonging to the Caudini, cf. e.g. Tagliamonte (1996) 155. Although Brunt (1965) 96–97 and Mouritsen (1998) 10 regard this episode as an invention stemming from Sulla's memoirs, the majority of scholars do not dispute its authenticity: see the comments of Salmon (1982) 119; Tataranni (2005) 299; Keaveney (2007) 34–35; Kendall (2013) 24–25 fn. 32; Bispham (2016) 81.

102 See Tataranni (2005) 300, who notes the existence of "un'effettiva coesione e consequenzialità di temi nella propaganda anti-romana promossa dai Sanniti tra il 90 e l'82 a.C."; she adds that the Samnite political discourse in the years of the Social War "ebbe il suo fulcro ideologico costante nell'esaltazione di quella *virtus* guerriera che da sempre i Sanniti consideravano una componente fondamentale della propria identità etnica e culturale". On the use of ethnic symbols to stimulate cohesion, see Dench (1995) 178; Tagliamonte (1996) 133; Scopacasa (2015) 164.

ing ancient literary sources. As we have seen, it transmits a fragment of Samnite political discourse from the years of the Social War, demonstrating the conscious use of the past for ideological reasons. Furthermore, it reveals how the Samnites interpreted much of their historical experience of the fourth and third centuries BCE.

This page of “Samnite history” can be understood as a piece of Samnite cultural memory. This category, as defined by Jan Assmann, involves a community’s forming an image of its past around potent symbols and significant figures so as to define its identity and cultivate a sense of belonging.¹⁰³ For the Samnites, the unifying element in this historical image was their persistent opposition to the Romans: they self-identified as fierce adversaries of Rome, filtering their own history through this interpretive lens. The selection and interpretation of events that made up their cultural memory were explicitly guided by this enduring resistance.

Cultural memory is a fundamental factor in defining ethnicity,¹⁰⁴ and Livy’s testimony offers valuable insights for further considerations regarding Samnite ethnic identity. A primary consideration is how “Samnite history”, as presented in Livy’s account, contributes to our understanding of the nature of this identity. As previously discussed, historical evidence does not allow us to discern how far each individual Samnite group was involved in the episodes that made up this element of their cultural memory;¹⁰⁵ however, the documented political autonomy of Samnite groups supports the hypothesis that the events referenced did not necessarily involve all of them.

Further evidence points to the same interpretation: the embassy to Hannibal primarily featured the Hirpini and Caudini. Yet this event can be considered the final episode of the segment of Samnite cultural memory found in Livy, a narrative that was likely circulating during the Social War, when the Samnites presented themselves as a cohesive political force. This suggests that the experiences of specific groups, such as the Hirpini and Caudini, may have been combined to shape the account of the Samnite past. This larger narrative can thus be understood as a “patchwork” of episodes drawn from the diverse historical experiences of various Samnite groups, carefully selected for their relevance in constructing an overarching narrative of resistance to Rome.

The required shift between the particular historical experiences of individual groups and the broader cultural memory of the *ethnos* can be interpreted as an indication of the nested nature of Samnite identity. It is assumed,

103 Assmann (1997).

104 Lomas *et al.* (2013) 2; Tagliamonte (2014) 225–229; Scopacasa (2018) 120.

105 See above, section 3.

indeed, that each group constituted a community with its own distinct identity while simultaneously sharing membership in the wider Samnite *ethnos*.¹⁰⁶ Consequently, these groups' identities comprised two coexisting and mutually influencing layers, which fostered a sense of belonging to both their specific community and the larger ethnic collective. The cultural memory transmitted by Livy thus appears to illustrate the dynamic interplay between individual group histories and the collective ethnic consciousness.

A second crucial aspect to consider involves the contextualisation of Samnite cultural memory, as recorded by Livy, within the broader development of Samnite identity.¹⁰⁷ This segment of memory appears to have been an integral component of the insurgent Samnite community's political discourse during the Social War. The exaltation of resistance to Rome was a primary mechanism for fostering ethnic belonging, alongside potent symbols such as the bull and the Oscan name for Samnium, *Safinim*. This first-century BCE political discourse reflects a broader policy that gained prominence in the latter half of the second century BCE, characterised by an increasing promotion of ethnic symbols.¹⁰⁸ The most notable manifestation of this policy was the monumentalisation of the sanctuary at Pietrabbondante, the Samnite religious centre, through the construction of Temple B in accordance with the late Hellenistic canon.¹⁰⁹

Although indications of Samnite ethnicity can be found as early as the fifth century BCE, direct evidence remains limited and fragmented until the second

106 This idea has been widely disseminated (e.g. Tagliamonte (1996) 132–135; (2018) 419–420; Scopacasa (2018) 117–118), but Scopacasa (2014) was the first to apply the category of nested identity in the Samnite case.

107 Regarding ethnicity as an evolving construct, see Lomas *et al.* (2013) 3. Recent studies have notably emphasised the importance of contextualising evidence related to Samnite identity. This approach has successfully prevented the imposition on Samnite ethnicity of a static interpretation, simultaneously illuminating its articulation (e.g. Dench (1995); Tagliamonte (1996); Bourdin (2014); Tagliamonte (2014); Scopacasa (2015)).

108 See Keaveney (2007) 25–26, who includes Samnite politics among the manifestations of Italic local patriotism that emerged in the second century BCE.

109 For the monumentalisation of this site, see Dench (1995) 137–140; Tagliamonte (1996) 188–193; Scopacasa (2015) 200–209; La Regina (2024) 271–273, with literature. On the role of Pietrabbondante as the religious centre of the Samnites, see section 4. On the relevance of sanctuaries, especially Pietrabbondante, in defining Samnite ethnic identity, see Collins-Elliott (2014) 200–203; Scopacasa (2014) 70–72; Scopacasa (2015) 200–209. Additionally, the appearance of *Safinim* in the epigraphic record from Pietrabbondante (*ImIt*, Pentri / Teruntum 8) can be seen as reflecting these ethnically-oriented policies. On this toponym, refer to section 4 above.

century BCE.¹¹⁰ This scarcity necessitates prudence in interpreting second-century BCE policies as a definitive “revival” of ethnic sentiment,¹¹¹ as such an impression might stem more from the nature of the available sources than from actual fact. Nonetheless, the specific historical circumstances of the second to first centuries BCE, marked by increasing Roman pressure following the Gracchan reforms, undeniably created fertile ground for policies aimed at consolidating Samnite unity, in part by invoking their enduring opposition to Rome.¹¹²

Its circulation in the second to first centuries BCE does not imply that the Samnite cultural memory found in Livy necessarily originated during that period: manifestations of ethnicity often emerge well before their earliest attestation in surviving sources.¹¹³ It is indisputable that the unifying theme of Samnite cultural memory, enmity towards Rome, was hardly a new concept by the second to first centuries BCE. Indeed, the notion that Samnites constructed their history around their resistance to Rome is a widely accepted view in scholarship, often treated as a self-evident fact due to its logical plausibility.¹¹⁴ It is certainly reasonable to believe that opposition to Rome’s aggressive policies acted as a unifying factor for the Samnites.

The cohesive force of the struggle against Rome must have emerged from the very inception of this conflict. It is thus no surprise that the Samnite Wars are believed to have profoundly influenced the cultural memory of the Samnite *ethnos*:¹¹⁵ these wars likely played a crucial role in establishing a shared sense of ethnicity among the various Samnite groups. Occurring in close temporal proximity to the earliest documented expressions of Samnite ethnicity, the Samnite Wars contributed to and may have accelerated the formation of a shared ethnic identity among the groups that collectively forged the cultural and political unity known as the Samnite *ethnos*.

In this light, a cultural memory centred on resistance to the Romans likely emerged early, perhaps during the Samnite Wars themselves. While it is impossible to trace its precise manifestations throughout the subsequent cen-

110 Bourdin (2014) 209; Tagliamonte (2014) 222–225; Bourdin (2022) 70; La Regina (2024) 237. See also Briquel (1999) 41; Scopacasa (2015) 34 fn. 75, 35.

111 See, in this sense, Bourdin (2014) 209; Scopacasa (2015) 209, 297–298.

112 See Keaveney (2007); Scopacasa (2015) 235, 266–270.

113 See the case of the myths celebrating the origin of the Samnites and their links with other Italic groups: these are attested in the context of the Social War, but Dench (1995) 53–61 argues that they were created several centuries earlier at the time of the Samnite Wars. See also Bourdin (2012) 232–235 and Carlà-Uhink (2017) 123–124, who follow Dench’s hypothesis.

114 Tagliamonte (2014) 229; Scopacasa (2015) 235; (2019) 69.

115 Tagliamonte (2014) 229; Scopacasa (2019) 69.

turies of gradual incorporation into the Roman world, the Samnites' self-image as Roman adversaries appears to have persisted, perhaps in a latent form. Its enduring effectiveness was powerfully re-demonstrated during the Social War, where it was actively deployed within Samnite political discourse. This memory could only have effectively supported contemporary political objectives because Samnite self-perception as an enemy of Rome had survived within this people's collective consciousness.

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