Maritime Resistance and Island Identity in *Asterix in Corsica*: A Blue Humanities Perspective

SIGY GHOSH

Abstract: This article analyzes *Asterix in Corsica (Astérix en Corse)* through the lens of the Blue Humanities, framing the Mediterranean as a dynamic site of identity, resistance, and ecological meaning. The comic's depiction of Corsican defiance against Roman imperialism and its close ties to the island's rugged, coastal landscape underscores how terrain itself becomes a site of cultural and political resistance. Through satirical caricature, *Asterix in Corsica* critiques extractive imperial logic, contrasting Roman control with Corsican traditions rooted in autonomy and environmental harmony. The comic's maritime setting evokes broader themes of sustainability and decolonial resilience, placing it in conversation with works like Alexandre Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo* and Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. I argue that *Asterix in Corsica* offers more than comedic entertainment. This reading positions the comic as a critical text that interrogates ecological degradation, cultural sovereignty, and anti-capitalist resistance within the context of French and Francophone maritime literature.

Keywords: Maritime resistance, Corsican identity, Blue Humanities, environmental satire, Island autonomy, comic studies

> *Tell Caesar that, no matter what his ambitions, he will never rule us.*
> (Goscinny and Uderzo 45)

This brief declaration from the Corsican chief Boneywasawarriorwayayix in *Asterix in Corsica* distills the defiance that runs through the comic's portrayal of the Mediterranean. From the rocky maquis to the scent of lobster and rosemary in the wind, the comic frames the Mediterranean not as a backdrop but as a living force. Goscinny and Uderzo's satirical take on Roman imperialism folds maritime landscapes into cultural identity, parodying empires while honoring the fierce independence of Corsican life.

We begin from two premises. First, the sea in *Asterix in Corsica* is more than geography: it is an active agent in the narrative, shaping movement, encounters, and political autonomy. Second, the comic, often dismissed as light entertainment, can be read through the critical lens of the Blue Humanities, a framework that reveals how water spaces intersect with history, ecology, and resistance. These premises bring our focus to a neglected site of analysis–the intersection of French popular culture, island identity, and environmental consciousness. Our point of entry is the island itself, both within the panels and beyond them. The narrative unfolds during the anniversary of the Gauls' victory at Gergovia, when the village of the indomitable Asterix hosts a jubilant banquet. Amid the celebrations, the Gauls raid a nearby Roman camp, liberating a Corsican prisoner Boneywasawarriorwayayix who invites Asterix and Obelix to his homeland. What follows is a satirical journey into an island defined by unhurried siestas, simmering vendettas, proud hospitality, and a collective refusal to bow to Roman order. The Romans, entrenched in coastal garrisons, have

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failed to penetrate the mountainous interior–not because of any magic potion, but because the terrain, the customs, and the people themselves resist incorporation.

Susanne Ferwerda has observed that "blue has long appealed to the colonial imaginary," serving both as a lure for imperial expansion and as a vector of extraction (qtd. in Braverman and Johnson 2). In *Asterix in Corsica*, this colonial blue is subverted: the Mediterranean becomes a space governed not by Roman garrisons but by Corsican rhythms, knowledge, and seasons. Jonathan Howard's call to "reclaim a proper relationship to the world" through an "oceanic recalibration of the human" (Howard qtd. in Walker 27) finds here an unlikely ally in a satirical *bande dessinée*. Even the most exaggerated caricatures—the extended siestas, the slow-burning tempers, the casual vendettas are anchored in an ecology that the Romans cannot penetrate, both figuratively and literally. The island's sea-facing autonomy finds echoes in other maritime narratives, notably Alexandre Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo*, where Corsican smugglers, sailors, and vendetta-bound outlaws likewise challenge centralized authority from the edges of the map. Placing these works side by side reveals a continuity of motifs—island hospitality, seaborne secrecy, ecological attunement—also, a shift in tone from Dumas's romanticism to Goscinny and Uderzo's satire. In both, however, the sea is more than a setting: it is a political and ecological agent, shaping how communities live, remember, and resist.

In this vein, *Asterix in Corsica* becomes an unlikely but potent case study in maritime resistance and sustainability. Its humour does not dilute its critique of extraction, conquest, and the flattening pressures of imperial culture. Instead, it makes those critiques accessible, embedding them in scenes of shared meals, sharp aromas, and wry asides. This essay argues that by reframing Corsican life through comic caricature, the album stages a form of "oceanic recalibration" (Howard 308) that invites readers to imagine political autonomy and ecological sustainability not as abstract ideals but as lived, everyday practices.

Geography, Governance, and the Sea as Politics

Historically, Corsica was annexed by Rome in 238 BCE, forming part of the province of *Sardinia et Corsica*. The island's rugged topography—the dense maquis, steep mountains, and fractured coastline historically made overland conquest difficult and maritime access decisive. That basic geography explains a great deal of the comic album's recurring joke–the Roman camps line the coasts, yet their banners do not fly deep in the interior; the sea delivers soldiers to the shore while the maquis denies them passage inland. In the comic, as in historical accounts, control is a problem of knowledge: the invader can reach the island's edge but cannot read or move through the island's interior with ease.

The Roman provincial administration formalised precisely this tension. During the Republic and the Empire, imperial control over islands like Corsica relied on coastal garrisons, port surveillance, and the yearly circuits of provincial magistrates. The praetor in *Astérix en Corse* encapsulates this form of short-term colonial governance: appointed for a fixed term, he "ransacks Corsica" under the pretext of levying taxes and thereby seeks to accumulate personal glory before returning to Rome (Goscinny and Uderzo 15). That seasonal, extractive logic—*take now, show spoils later*—resonates with the modern concept of imperial time as a series of compressed profit-making windows rather than a long-term investment in local infrastructure or ecology. It also clarifies why the comic's depiction of a praetor using Corsican prisoners to build a Roman road reads as both anachronistic farce and historically intelligible critique: the road is the emblem of imperial ordering, but in Corsica it remains an incomplete and absurd trench, "in progress for three years" (Goscinny and Uderzo 35), a visible sign that imperial temporalities and island rhythms do not align.

The island's maritime economy and culture have always been shaped by two linked but opposed logics: connection and concealment. From antiquity to the modern era, Corsica participated in Mediterranean networks of trade, fishing, and migration; ports like Aleria and others were nodes in trade routes that connected the island to Sardinia, the Italian coasts, and beyond. Yet those same

routes also made Corsica fertile ground for smuggling, piracy, and the sort of lateral mobility that imperial authorities found difficult to regulate. Dumas's *Monte Cristo* dramatises this same ambiguity when it treats Corsican figures as part of transregional networks of smugglers and as holders of deep, place-based codes of honour—"You know as well as anyone that Corsican bandits are not thieves, but purely and simply outlaws who have been exiled from their town or their village because of some vendetta" (Dumas 546). For authorities who measure control by ports policed and tax lists balanced, such mobility looks like anarchy; for locals, it is a pragmatic adaptation to an environment where concealment and seasonal movement are survival strategies.

That mobility feeds a parallel social technology that sits at the heart of both comic satire and historical debate: vendetta. Scholars and travel accounts through the early modern and modern periods record vendetta or blood-feud as a structuring principle in Corsican societies—an extra-judicial code of honour that regulated reputation, retribution, and inter-family balance. The vendetta is frequently cast as evidence of "backwardness" by outside observers. Edward Said has shown in *Orientalism* that such representations form part of a larger discursive pattern in which non-Western or peripheral societies are marked by "eccentricity," "backwardness," and "silent indifference," qualities that serve to naturalize their political and cultural subordination (Said 206, emphasis mine). The literatures of the Enlightenment and the nineteenth century often treat it as a pathology to be corrected by the centralising state. Yet from a different vantage point—one more sympathetic to social autonomy—the vendetta is also a durable mechanism of social accountability where state institutions are either absent, extractive, or actively predatory. In *Astérix en Corse*, vendetta is comic drama and social reality: when Boneywasawarriorwayayix's quarrel with Olla Bella is momentarily suspended to unite against the Romans ("Beating the Romans is nothing, but settling a vendetta between two clans is an amazing feat!" [Goscinny and Uderzo 47]), the scene dramatizes how local logics of honour can be reconfigured as political solidarity when the community faces an external threat.

Where the interior is sheltered and the sea provides exfiltration routes, norms that regulate reputation and deter predation are as functional as formal courts that rarely reach isolated valleys. The Mediterranean's porousness—its combination of open water and sheltered coves—renders centralized jurisdiction incomplete. As John Muthyala observes, drawing on the work of neuroscientist Michael Crawford, coastal and seafaring communities have historically evolved in sync with natural rhythms. These migratory coastal peoples "were mobile as they adapted their dwelling practices to the seasons and used seasonal resources to sustain human life; they had fewer epidemics; longer breast-feeding periods led to lower births and reduced population overflow; they were knowledgeable about the dynamics of nature, which enabled them to deal with unpredictable calamities and climate changes" (Muthyala and Gillis 512; Gillis 20). This sensory and ecological literacy finds conceptual extension in Ingersoll's "seascape epistemology," which links indigenous oceanic knowledge systems to perception itself. Ingersoll insists that "an oceanic literacy requires an oceanic sensibility" — one that involves "seeing, smelling, hearing *ke kai* [the sea]" (Ingersoll 81, 27; qtd. in Muthyala and Gillis 505). This way of knowing, fundamentally non-extractive and attuned to movement, surfaces in island narratives that foreground sensory encounters with maritime environments over institutional science.

In her analysis of Roy Jacobsen's *The Unseen*, Katie Ritson echoes that the islanders exhibit "an understanding of the conditions and possibilities of the island," resonating with the "deep ecology" of Norwegian environmental philosopher Arne Næss (Ritson 7). Their survival depends not on dominion over nature but on an "enormous amount of human energy" spent in living symbiotically with their environment—through fishing, rowing, cooking, and maintenance of shelter, in a world notably absent of fossil fuels and industrial technologies (Ritson 8). The Barrøy islanders "resist the colonial gaze that sees them as poor" by asserting a gaze of their own—one that looks out "from the island, out on the world," valuing subsistence and slowness in contrast to the extractive, high-speed "progress" of the mainland (Ritson 8). This valorization of small island life as epistemically rich and environmentally attuned, rather than backward or marginal, challenges dominant narratives of

capitalist advancement. Ritson notes how such portrayals generate "an imagination of a different kind of past, one that existed simultaneously with but outside the mainstream narrative of capitalist progress and industrialisation; it creates an open-ended space where the imagination of possible futures can be explored" (Ritson 10). Islands become sites of counter-modernity—spaces where the future may yet be shaped by the past's ecological wisdom. The seaport is a cultural hub and refuge, a place where sailors' codes—like those Dumas associated with freemasonry—govern behaviour as much as any magistrate's edict. The patchwork of allegiances that results is not necessarily "lawless" in a social sense; it is law woven out of maritime practice, oral histories, and the habits of land–sea interplay. Steve Mentz's account of "watery encounters" speaks to us through currents, coves, tides, and winds as political capital in littoral societies, and the ocean's material unpredictability as a technology of evasion as much as a resource for life (Mentz 433).

The island's historical memory is inseparable from the broader Mediterranean politics of empire and capital. Napoleon's Corsican identity, later nationalist and regional debates, and the incorporation of Corsica into a French state narrative all produce overlapping chronologies of pride, grievance, and cultural protection. These memories surface in *Astérix en Corse* as jokes about Napoleon, about elections ("the ballot boxes are already full… we throw them into the sea" [Goscinny and Uderzo 25]), and about Roman governors who perform authority for show but are ultimately emptied of efficacy.

From Green Ecologies to Blue Encounters

Blue Humanities scholarship has increasingly shifted literary and cultural studies from terracentric paradigms toward oceanic and littoral frames of reference. As John Muthyala writes, Steve Mentz—who first proposed the term in the context of early modern English maritime literature—conceives of the Blue Humanities as "a way of looking at our own terrestrial culture from an offshore perspective" and as a framework that "foregrounds the physical environment as a substantial partner in the creation of cultural meaning" (Mentz qtd. in Muthyala and Gillis 503). Mentz's evolving approach draws on the legacy of John Gillis and culminates in what he calls a "poetics of planetary water,"(Mentz 137) a conceptual model that allows us to read oceans, clouds, and polar ice not only as planetary systems, but also as aesthetic and cultural texts (Muthyala and Gillis 503). This oceanic turn, which is now reflected across a range of disciplines, reorients attention toward the sea as a material, epistemic, and imaginative space that shapes ecological understanding, sensory knowledge, and historical experience.

Mentz argues that early-modern marine science was shaped by embodied, sensory encounters at sea (decks, immersion), and that these experiential practices persist in modern maritime cultures—knowing the ocean is often a bodily, not just an abstract, intellectual process. Filippo Menozzi's concept of the "blue sublime" clarifies the sea's dual role under modern/colonial capitalism: the ocean is both an essential infrastructure for circulation and a resistant, material limit to accumulation (3). Drawing on Karl Marx's *Grundrisse*, Menozzi explains that as capitalism expands geographically, distance itself becomes "a barrier to profit," requiring costly investments in infrastructure and transportation. To overcome this issue, capital "strives on the other side to annihilate this space with time, i.e., to reduce to a minimum the time spent in motion from one place to another" (Menozzi qtd. in Marx 539). This "universalizing tendency" of capital—what David Harvey later termed "space-time compression"—relies on accelerating circulation across oceans and continents (Harvey 240), yet the materiality of the sea imposes friction, cost, and delay. In Menozzi's words, the blue sublime "provides a tangible representation of the asymptotic tendency of capital to reach a zero time of circulation," while simultaneously embodying "capitalism's contingency and perishability" (3). The ocean becomes the scene of contradiction: the drive toward expansion collides with the physical and ecological limits of the planet. Blue Humanities work has also underscored how oceans and atmospheres have been appropriated as a global commons by imperial centers, creating marine "metabolic rifts" and visible violence in fisheries, coral systems, and warming waters.

As previously mentioned, Katie Ritson advances a "view from the sea" comparative practice by reading small-island narratives as laboratories of subsistence and Anthropocene imagination. From such vantage points, islanders' daily negotiations with weather, food, travel, and care model non-extractive, place-based life that modern economies tend to ignore or romanticize.

Susanne Ferwerda reframes the blue turn by insisting that "blue" itself is colonial and anti-colonial at once: a pigment mined, a dye cultivated on stolen land, a naval uniform making the empire visible—yet also a palette of refusal and re-signification. "Thinking with blue," she argues, means confronting the colonial materialities of rocks, textiles, and seas and making space for "blue resistance." (11,15, emphasis mine) Together these conceptual frameworks encourage us to read *Astérix en Corse* as a comic that intuitively stages blue politics: it satirizes imperial logistics and celebrates island ecologies without dissolving their frictions.

The Mediterranean as Barrier and Conduit

From the moment Boneywasawarriorwayayix is freed from the Roman garrison, the comic insists on linking Corsican identity to the sea. His navigational method is neither Roman mapwork nor imperial itinerary, but the slow, sensory reading of his environment: "judging by the sun" and naming the "delicate, subtle aroma" of thyme, almond, fig, chestnut, tarragon, rosemary, lavender, and, from the shore, "the marvellous scent of lobster, sea urchin and shrimp" (Goscinny and Uderzo 20–21). In this list, marine and terrestrial worlds merge, creating what Mentz calls a "watery encounter" in which ecological knowledge is inseparable from cultural survival (433). The sea is not empty blue; it is a lived archive, carrying the scents and tastes that anchor Corsican autonomy. For the Romans, this same water is a logistical corridor. Coastal garrisons dot the island ("there are camps all around the shores of the island" [Goscinny and Uderzo 21]), projecting an imperial presence designed to encircle and contain. As Ferwerda notes, maritime control has long been central to colonial authority, turning "blue spaces into extractive frontiers" (30). Yet in *Asterix*, Roman control stops at the shoreline: "It's when they try getting into the maquis in the interior the Romans have problems" (21). The maquis becomes an inland counterpart to the sea — thick, ungridded, and unreadable to outsiders. The geography itself enforces a politics of resistance.

This tension between Roman encirclement and Corsican mobility aligns with Jonathan Howard's critique of the "stand your ground" subject, a figure rooted in terrestrial metaphors of mastery (309). In the Corsican context, political life is instead inflected by maritime logics. The most striking example is the island's method of electing a chief: "The ballot boxes are already full… we throw them into the sea without opening them, and then the strongest man wins" (Goscinny and Uderzo 25). On the surface, it is just about corruption; underneath, it is a literal casting away of imported governance into the water. The sea becomes the arbiter, absorbing and neutralising the bureaucratic apparatus of the empire.

The comic's humour sharpens this political undercurrent. When Obelix compares Romans to oysters as "the little ones are often best" (Goscinny and Uderzo 10)—the metaphor reverses the colonial gaze. Rather than being consumers of imperial goods, the Corsicans (and their Gaulish guests) "consume" the imperial presence, turning soldiers into a local delicacy. Ferwerda's observation that blue has long appealed to the "colonial imaginary" (29) is inverted: here, the blue waters host a form of culinary-political satire in which the coloniser becomes harvest. Asterix and Obelix travel as guests, neither masters of the route nor bearers of authority. Their mobility depends on Corsican knowledge of currents, bays, and cliffs. That relationality echoes Ritson's "view from the sea": island mobility is never just speed; it is care, timing, and seasonality. Maritime space thus becomes a social contract rather than a smooth surface for imperial transit.

This inversion has deep roots in Mediterranean literature. In *The Count of Monte Cristo*, Dumas depicts Corsica as part of a smuggling and vendetta network that consistently frustrates state control. Sailors speak of "smugglers and pirates from Corsica, Sardinia or Africa" (Dumas 403), their move-

ments criss-crossing the same imperial sea that in Asterix delivers hapless garrisons to coastal posts. In both works, seaborne mobility is less about open exploration than about selective access—knowing which coves to enter, which channels to avoid, and how to vanish into a seascape opaque to the outsider.

Corsican Autonomy Beyond Satire: Dumas and Verne

The defiance that runs through Asterix in Corsica is not an isolated satirical invention. Alexandre Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo* offers a nineteenth-century prose parallel in which Corsica appears as a maritime node in a wider network of resistance. When Edmond Dantès hears of "smugglers and pirates from Corsica, Sardinia or Africa" (Dumas 403), the tone is neither purely scathing nor romantic. These sailors are positioned in a liminal moral space—"not thieves, but purely and simply outlaws… because of some vendetta" (Dumas 546). The vendetta, in *Asterix*, is not random lawlessness but a codified practice embedded in community honour, a tradition that transcends individual grievance.

In Dumas's account, Corsican autonomy is grounded in the same maritime conditions that frustrate Roman control in Asterix. The mountains and maquis of the interior serve as strongholds, but it is the sea that makes these enclaves porous in the right ways—allowing for escape, alliance, and the movement of goods or information outside the reach of central authority. The Mediterranean is not a moat to be defended but a living, shifting network of connections. This recalls Mentz's assertion that the sea's "interplay of watery encounters and scientific thinking" produces political as well as ecological alternatives to terrestrial governance (433). In both works, imperial presence is portrayed as bureaucratically overextended. In *Monte Cristo*, maritime control manifests in the rigidity of quarantine: suspected ships face "six days in quarantine" if linked to forbidden ports (Dumas 401), a clumsy attempt to regulate the sea as if it were land. In *Asterix*, the Roman equivalent is the praetor's obsessive watch over Corsican ports (Goscinny and Uderzo 17–18), a control that collapses the moment sailors and islanders cooperate to evade it. Ferwerda's observation that the colonial desire to make blue spaces "legible" to empire falters when faced with "transoceanic connections" (34) applies equally to the nineteenth-century and ancient settings—the Corsican seascape resists the grid.

The vendetta motif also links Dumas and Asterix. In Monte Cristo, Bertuccio's vow—"From this moment on, I declare a vendetta against you… your last hour will have come" (Dumas 617) extends the feud beyond the boundaries of any one island, making it a mobile form of justice. Gaetano's reminder that "no distance is too great for a Corsican when he has sworn revenge" (617) literalises what the comic satirises when two Corsican clans are persuaded to "shake hands" in the middle of a joint defence against Rome (Goscinny and Uderzo 46). In both cases, vendetta is portable, sustained by the freedom of maritime movement, and resistant to imperial court systems.

Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* offers yet another reframing of maritime autonomy, though here the scale shifts from island sovereignty to an outright rejection of terrestrial civilisation. Captain Nemo's Nautilus is, in a sense, an amplified Corsican village — a self-contained world, sustained by the sea, deliberately avoiding imperial oversight. Nemo's critique of terrestrial greed echoes the Corsicans' implicit refusal of Roman extraction: the Mediterranean's resources are taken on the submarine's terms, with its own technologies and rhythms, much as Corsican subsistence in *Asterix* depends on local ecological knowledge rather than imported methods. Menozzi's "blue sublime" captures this resonance — both Nemo and the Corsicans occupy a space where the ocean is the ultimate limit to capital's reach (3).

Nevertheless, the tonal registers diverge. Whereas Nemo is melancholic, Dumas's Corsicans are romantically fierce, and *Asterix's* islanders are lethargically proud, prone to siestas and long, circuitous vendetta tales. The humour in *Asterix* allows for sharper inversions: Romans become oysters to be consumed (Goscinny and Uderzo 10), election results become deadweight for the sea (Goscinny and Uderzo 25), and the pace of governance slows to the rhythm of local tides. What unites all three is a shared understanding that maritime space is not simply a backdrop but an active political actor, shaping—and often undermining imperial power.

Ecological Sustainability, Smell, Taste, and Maritime Knowledge

If *Astérix en Corse* stages Corsica as a fortress of habit and smell, the album's most sustained rhetorical strategy is the sensory catalogue. The moment when the prisoner guides Asterix and Obelix toward his homeland— "Such a delicate, subtle aroma, calling to mind thyme and almond trees, fig trees, chestnut trees…and then again, the faintest hint of pines, a touch of tarragon, a suggestion of rosemary and lavender… Ah my friends, that aroma…" (Goscinny and Uderzo 20) maps an interdependence between land and sea that defies the Romans' resource-extractive logic.

For the praetor, the island is a ledger of plunder; for the Corsicans, it is a living archive. In the words of Steve Mentz, "After the wave has broken, we feel differently. Experience describes the abundant physicality of immersion, the uncategorizable sensation of all that water and all that power surging around and with you. It spills beyond knowledge because experience is always excessive; there's always something left over, that grain of sand up your nose or the salt water that's right now still in your ear and won't drain until sometime after happy hour. Things that matter keep moving." (442) The island's coastline is ligned with Roman camps, but the maquis—dense, aromatic shrubland remains untouched because it cannot be read or moved through without local expertise (21). As Boney explains, "It's when they try getting into the maquis in the interior the Romans have problems" (Goscinny and Uderzo 21). Susanne Ferwerda's point that blue spaces are often transformed into "extractive frontiers" under colonialism (30) is inverted here: the Romans try to appropriate the island into their supply and taxation systems, but the physical environment itself resists being reduced to a resource grid.

The comic compounds the declaration with gastronomic humor that carries political consequences. Consider the recurring oyster jokes—Obelix and company chat about oysters, and Obelix remarks, "the little ones are often best" (Goscinny and Uderzo 10, 11, 43). On the surface this is food humor, but read against Menozzi's "blue sublime," the joke becomes an inversion of extractive value logic. Menozzi argues that capitalist imperatives transform oceans into freighted conduits for accumulation while transcending their material limits; *Astérix* flips accumulation into consumption, rendering the invader itself as edible product. In a world where capital would count soldiers as units for imperial projection, the comic reduces some Romans to the scale of molluscs: small, edible, and subject to local appetite (Menozzi's point is that the sea resists being only a channel of value; here the sea digests value into food—literal and symbolic). Visual emphasis on plates, utensils, and close-ups of faces transforms political domination into a table choreography: conquerors sit on the menu. The humor works as rhetorical reversal—what empire takes, local practice eats and thereby reclaims.

Food thus overlaps with sovereignty. The feast scenes operate like civic rituals. When the Gauls return from Corsica and host their banquet under the stars, the last lines remind readers that "each of their journeys enriches the travellers' experience, since they adopt some of the more pleasant customs of the countries they have visited" (Goscinny and Uderzo 48). The exchange is not cultural flattening but reciprocal accretion: island practices are absorbed and spread, carrying ecological knowledge across seas rather than being extracted as commodities.

The road-building episode provides a contrasting visual argument. The centurion's plan to use Corsican prisoners to build the Roman road between Aleria and Mariana, "in progress for three years" (Goscinny and Uderzo 35), is drawn as an absurd procession of stones and poles—a bureaucratic absurdity that the comic frames both as imperial hubris and as comical futility. The visual gag of workers toiling while the maquis remains impenetrable off-panel gestures at the mismatch between imperial designs—straight roads, measured distances, and Corsican reality—rugged slopes, hidden passes, and wind-vectored time. Menozzi's critique of capital's attempt to annihilate space by time resonates here: the road as a linear ambition stuck in the island's looping temporalities. Crucially, these infrastructures do not merely fail because of military incompetence; they fail because they misrecognize the sea and shore as nodes of alternative knowledge. The Romans secure ports but not commerce; they can register ships but not the seasonal codes that render coastline

passages legible to locals. Ritson's argument that a "view from the sea" centers subsistence rhythms rather than state time is visible in the comic's scenes where Massilia–Corsica ferries are manned by "cool customers" who navigate without attracting Roman suspicion (Goscinny and Uderzo 18).

These crossing-crew panels are small studies in maritime epistemology: a gesture, a nod, a hidden sign—these are forms of non-institutional recognition that secure travel and confound surveillance. The sensory-political reading extends to the repeated motif of the siesta. There are multiple moments when a Roman incursion is thwarted or delayed by Corsican naps or by the inhabitants' leisurely refusal to respond with imperial speed: "after my siesta" (Goscinny and Uderzo 12) and other variants underline that sleeping is a political act. Once again the reader is compelled to interpret comic sleep as temporal sovereignty. Menozzi's Marxist reading of capital's compulsion to annihilate space by accelerating time clarifies the stakes: the island's siestas and ritualized vendetta delays resist this tempo, revealing time itself as a contested ecological and political resource.

Maritime Autonomy and the Satire of Governance

The Roman administrator in the album (a venal praetor) is archetypal: eager to offload risk downward, to extract value, and to abscond at the first sign of accountability. His schemes mirror a Mediterranean history of enclosure—the taking of commons, the policing of movement, the monetizing of routes. In the comic, the enclosure is comic-opera fragile—forts whose gates fall, ships that sink under their own cargo of plunder—but the critique lands: imperial governance is logistics-first, ecology-last. Camp life is standardized, odorless, tasteless; the interior is thick with flavors, dialects, and memory. The island's refusal to be measured into neat supply lines is less "laziness" than refusal of enclosure.

If the Corsican seascape underpins ecological self-sufficiency, it also shapes how power is understood and performed. When Carferrix explains, with complete seriousness, that "the ballot boxes are already full… we throw them into the sea without opening them, and then the strongest man wins" (Goscinny and Uderzo 25), the laughter is immediate—yet the act replays, in miniature, the larger refusal to allow Roman political forms to take root. The sea swallows the apparatus of representative governance before it can be used, restoring authority to a system rooted in local strength and consensus. Dumas in *Monte Cristo* offers a more romantic, but equally pointed, reflection of this insular detachment from mainland law. His Corsican sailors speak with a matter-of-fact acceptance of vendetta as an organising principle, insisting that "it's not their fault if they're bandits… as if revenge wasn't in a Corsican's nature" (Dumas 403). This mirrors the tone in *Asterix*, where the vendetta between Boneywasawarriorwayayix and Olla Bella is suspended only for the practical purpose of fighting the Romans—"Beating the Romans is nothing, but settling a vendetta between two clans is an amazing feat!" (Goscinny and Uderzo 47). In both cases, the framework of governance operates laterally, between families and clans, not vertically through an imperial centre.

Ferwerda's observation that "blue analysis accounts for the fact that the colour blue has built empires, taken lives, and altered environments" (4) reminds us that the same waters used by Rome to bring soldiers and taxes are, in Corsican hands, a space for dispersing power. *Asterix's* coastal world works in constant inversion: the ports that Romans try to police become escape points, the sea lanes meant for garrisons carry smugglers and allies, and even the Roman road "in progress for three years" (Goscinny and Uderzo 35) becomes an absurd monument to the slowness of conquest. The conqueror becomes part of the island's marine economy, reduced to a consumable resource whose abundance is controlled by local appetite. It is the same comic logic that makes the Roman centurion's covert plan to abandon his garrison (Goscinny and Uderzo 35) both farcical and revealing—imperial permanence is a performance that collapses as soon as local conditions refuse to cooperate.

In *Asterix*, governance is not just mocked; it is actively reimagined through maritime sensibility. The most decisive political act in the story—the joint attack on Aleria emerges from an alliance born of necessity, not obligation. The vendetta is set aside not because a higher authority demands it, but because defending the coastline takes precedence. This is the same pragmatic flexibility Dumas

gives his Corsican characters, whose allegiances shift according to the demands of survival and honour, carried as easily across the Mediterranean as any cargo. In the Corsican frame, authority is tidal—negotiated in the moment, shifting with circumstance, and always shaped by the enduring presence of the sea.

Vendetta, Memory, and Mobility

If the sea is the Corsicans' shield, it is also their archive. In *Asterix in Corsica*, Boneywasawarriorwayayix's account of praetors who "ransack" the island under the guise of tax collection (Goscinny and Uderzo 15) is not a passing complaint; it is part of a continuous, inherited memory of wrongs. The vendetta—much like the maquis, grows out of this memory, enduring precisely because it is mobile. It can lie dormant for a season, re-emerge with a chance encounter, and even cross the Mediterranean when necessary.

In Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo*, this mobility is explicit. When Bertuccio swears vengeance against Villefort, "your last hour will have come" (Dumas 617), these words carry a maritime confidence: no distance, no port, no border will stop the oath from being fulfilled. Gaetano explains it plainly—"no distance is too great for a Corsican when he has sworn revenge on his enemy" (Dumas 617). The Mediterranean is not a barrier but an extension of the feud, a fluid terrain where the pursuit can move as easily as a fishing boat or smuggling vessel.

If imperial governance relies on fixed borders, recorded titles, and centralised courts, the Corsican vendetta thrives in a geography that refuses such fixity. The feud is stored in memory, not in legal documents, and its resolution can happen on a mountain slope or a harbour pier. Even in *Asterix*, when the Gauls mediate between Boneywasawarriorwayayix and Olla Bella (Goscinny and Uderzo 46), the significance is not that peace has been declared, but that two competing currents of loyalty have momentarily converged to meet the demands of a shared tide: the defence of the island from Roman intrusion. The same sea that carries imperial fleets also provides the means to evade them. In the comic, coastal raids, ship sabotage, and smuggled movements between ports create a maritime opacity that Roman authority cannot penetrate (Menozzi 3). The centurions may line the shoreline with camps, but as Boney notes, "it's when they try getting into the maquis…(that) the Romans have problems" (Goscinny and Uderzo 21, my insertion). In Dumas' world, the same opacity frustrates customs officers, who must rely on quarantine protocols and port inspections—bureaucratic tools ill-suited to a fluid, shifting theatre of movement.

The vendetta, then, is more than a plot device; it is a cultural technology of survival. Its endurance depends on an environment that enables retreat, concealment, and re-emergence. The Corsican landscape, with its inaccessible interior and its sea-laced edges, keeps the cycle alive by giving it both place and passage. In this sense, *Asterix in Corsica's* humour and Dumas' melodrama converge at a shared truth: the Mediterranean is as much a keeper of memory as it is a stage for action.

Roman centurions in Asterix already fear the maquis; the possibility that feuds can follow them across the shoreline compounds their unease. Menozzi's "space of contradictions" (2) aptly describes this ambivalence: the same sea that carries imperial orders also ferries acts of defiance. With the promise that "such pointless feuds will never exist in Corsica again" (Goscinny and Uderzo 48), the irony is double-edged. The vendetta may be suspended, but the very rhythms of island life—siestas, seasonal gatherings, the scent of thyme and sea urchin drifting on the wind, ensure that memory lingers. And as the final banquet reminds us, each journey across the Mediterranean enriches its travellers not only with new customs but with new stories to fold back into the island's living archive.

The comic sprinkles in references to Napoleon, electoral rituals, omens, and verbal taboos. These literary devices keep the narrative anchored in French memory politics: the blue of Napoleonic legend collides with Corsica's own chronologies; the machinery of ballots looks absurd against mountain paths and sea breeze; prophecy and prohibitions mock the predictive hubris of modern management. Here Ferwerda's thesis about blue's colonial and anticolonial valences is illuminating:

the blue of imperial uniforms and European modernity is not the same blue as the sea's brine or the lapis of cave-walls; those blues are contested signs. The album repeatedly gives the last word to the island's blue—olfactory, tactile, and unregimented—over the state's blue.

Satire, Stereotype, and Ethical Reflexivity

One of the challenges in reading *Asterix in Corsica* through the lens of the Blue Humanities is negotiating its reliance on caricature. The comic amplifies Corsican stereotypes—laziness, stubborn pride, obsession with cheese and chestnuts—to the point of absurdity. Yet, as Homi Bhabha suggests, the stereotype is not a static or singular representation. Rather, it is "a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition," revealing the stereotype's ambivalence and its deeper function within colonial discourse (Bhabha 66).

In *Asterix*, the excess of stereotypes becomes a form of agency, allowing Corsican characters to manipulate Roman perceptions for their own ends. For example, the recurring joke about the Corsican *siesta* is not simply a comment on idleness. It functions strategically, frustrating the pace of imperial administration. When the Romans attempt to expedite a plot against the Corsican chief, they are thwarted not by armed resistance but by the locals' refusal to be hurried. This is what James C. Scott would call—"the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups: foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance" and other everyday acts that resist domination without triggering open confrontation (Scott 29). Ethically, the comic navigates a fine line between homage and exoticisation. While it risks reinforcing reductive images of Corsican culture, it also situates these traits within a broader critique of imperialism. The humour works precisely because the Romans—symbols of centralised, bureaucratic authority—are consistently outwitted by those they deem backward. In this reversal, *Asterix in Corsica* invites readers to question the metrics by which "civilisation" is measured.

However, this reading of *Asterix in Corsica* as successfully subverting imperial stereotypes through strategic mimicry must grapple with recent critiques from within Blue Humanities scholarship itself. Ghosal and Ghosal argue that postcolonial approaches to resistance, including Bhabha's concepts of mimicry and subversion, may inadvertently reproduce "the rigid frameworks of dialecticality" they seek to dismantle, keeping analysis trapped within colonial binaries rather than genuinely transcending them (Ghosal and Ghosal 203). From this perspective, celebrating the Corsicans' ability to outwit Romans through stereotypical behaviors might simply invert the civilized/barbaric binary without fundamentally challenging the imperial logic that created these categories in the first place.

Conclusion

The Corsica in *Asterix* is a place of contradictions: fiercely proud yet comically indolent, locked in vendettas yet ready to unite against an outside threat, surrounded by an open sea yet closed to imperial control. The humour of Goscinny and Uderzo's satire allows these contradictions to coexist without resolution, mirroring the way island cultures resist being folded neatly into the narratives of those who arrive from elsewhere. By the time Asterix and Obelix sail back from Corsica, the Romans have been thrashed, the vendetta has been "settled," and the final banquet overflows with laughter, music, and roasted wild boar. Yet something lingers from the island: the smell of rosemary and pine over saltwater, the memory of ballot boxes hurled into the sea, the way a feud can dissolve just long enough to face a common enemy.

In *Monte Cristo*, Dumas lets his Corsican characters vanish into the folds of the Mediterranean, their grudges and alliances as unpredictable as the sea itself. *Asterix* plays those same qualities for laughs, but the joke works because it rests on recognisable truths: that insular resistance is not a momentary flare-up but a rhythm, a habit, a way of reading the horizon.

When two rival clans set aside a vendetta to join forces against the Romans, the comic not only stages a rare moment of unity but also suggests that ecological and political survival may depend on such temporary alliances. The comic's last panel does not linger on the fight, but rather on the banquet "under the stars," where travel is measured not in miles but in customs adopted, tastes acquired (Goscinny and Uderzo 48). The Mediterranean in *Asterix in Corsica* remains unsettled. It is at once a Roman lake and a Corsican moat, a trade route and a refuge, a stage for imperial posturing and a pantry for those who know how to fish it. The Mediterranean here emerges as what Mentz calls a space of "watery encounters" and what Menozzi terms "the blue sublime"—a fluid zone that resists singular ownership (Mentz 42; Menozzi 6). The Corsicans inhabit this liminality intuitively. They smell it on the wind, incorporate it into their cooking, and, when necessary, throw the evidence of democracy into it without a second thought. It is a sea that refuses to belong to anyone entirely.

Perhaps in the Mediterranean, freedom has always been a maritime affair, measured as much in the scents carried on the wind as in the treaties signed on land. Future scholarship in the Blue Humanities might explore more French comics, graphic novels, and other media–or even French archival maritime histories to further bridge scholarly "blue" thought with francophone maritime literature.

University of Delhi, India

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