

Larissa Bonfante, ed., *The Barbarians of Ancient Europe: Realities and Interactions* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Pp. xxiv, 395, ill. 110, pl. 25, maps 15. ISBN: 978-0-521-19404-4. \$90.00.

The word “barbarian” entered literature in the fifth century BC; whether it was originally an ethnym or a descriptive term remains uncertain. Nevertheless, since its first usage by Classical Greeks it has continued to be one of the most persistent pejorative terms in human history, a way of distinguishing one’s own group and its superior virtues from others who are by necessity inferior, and indeed even dangerous. Recent history shows no abatement of these ancient attitudes. Since barbarians are those who do everything the wrong way—they speak strangely, dress strangely, and have the wrong religion and social customs—any study of them has always been problematic, for the prejudices override the data. It is usually impossible to look at barbarians except as wrong-headed inferiors.

Yet this volume examines the European “barbarians” of the last several centuries BC on their own merits and is thus a significant breakthrough in the study of the topic. The results of a conference held at the University of Richmond in 2003, it presents a dozen papers on various aspects of European culture of the Greek and early Roman periods. The papers are presented from the barbarian side, not the traditional Mediterranean-centric view. As editor Larissa Bonfante points out in her opening article (1–36), barbarians were only of interest to Greeks and Romans when they impacted their world, and although one remains dependent on the classical sources for much of the data, the evidence can be examined in a new light and supplemented by the increasingly extensive archaeological material. The Greeks and Romans tended to identify barbarians by a number of limited criteria: their language and dress (Herodotos 2.158, Vergil, *Aeneid* 8.722–3), their inappropriate customs (strange women, drinking beer instead of wine, and particularly human sacrifice), and absurdly generic classifications (everyone in the north was a Kelt or Skythian, everyone in the south an Aithiopian).

Paul T. Keyser (37–70) explores the magic of the west (an attitude lasting at least until California gold rush days) in defining barbarians: the west was not only the land of the dead but one of great wealth, where the locals were marvellously tough, and became idealized in the Greek mind. Askold I. Ivantchik (71–106) provides recent data on one of the best-known European barbarian customs, the funeral rites of the Skythian rulers, concluding that Herodotos’ information is astonishingly reliable and that the historian must have had an excellent informant. Connected with this topic is Renate Rolle’s examination (107–31) of Skythian royal residences, an issue often ignored because the Skythians were considered nomads. Hill fortresses in the Ukraine suggest centralized trade emporia and royal seats, especially at Bel’sk (near Poltava), active in the seventh and sixth centuries BC, and perhaps the Gelonos of Herodotos (4.108), the northern extent of the Greek trading network. Barry Cunliffe (190–210) tackles the term “Keltic”, something constantly changing and variable in the classical sources, originating (in the Greek mind) from merchants in the west in the sixth century BC, but altering as

population movements brought Keltic groups across Italy and into Anatolia. Peter S. Wells (211–32) takes a look at the Germans, concluding that the major ancient sources (especially Tacitus' *Germania*) are more illustrative of Roman attitudes than ethnography and pointing out that it is difficult to reconcile archaeological and literary data.

One of the more fascinating essays in the volume is that by Larissa Bonfante on the Etruscans (233–81), emphasizing their role as the means by which Mediterranean culture went north. They sent their material culture, especially writing and monumental sculpture, north to the Hallstatt region, and received in return northern products like amber. Supplementing this is Otto-Hermann Frey's article (282–312) on situla art: the figured scenes in bronze repoussé that appear on central European wine containers and which both provide an important visual repertory and demonstrate a certain cultural communality in the pre-Roman north, from northern Italy through the Alps and east into Slovenia. At this time (600–400 BC), there was a society remarkably reminiscent of the Homeric aristocracy, and again there are Etruscan influences. John Marincola (347–57) discusses a persistent question: why were the Romans not considered barbarians? He concludes that it is not really answerable, but is nevertheless an interesting problem that evolves with time. The unique attitude toward the Romans by the Greeks may reflect the result of the assimilation of the Greek intellectual elite into Roman culture as well as the fact that the Romans themselves were seen as victims of barbarian aggression with the Keltic invasion of the fourth century BC.

Other essays round out this collection: Ivan Marazov (132–89) on the Triballoi, a Thracian people who were well known to classical Greeks; Nancy Thomson de Grummond (313–46) on the “talking head” myth (the barbarian tales of the severed head (or the dead body that continues to be animate, most familiar in classical sources in the stories of Orpheus, and, to some extent, Pentheus); and Walter Stevenson (358–69) on wine production among the Goths, not a normal barbarian trait but perhaps connected with the intensive Gothic adaptation of Mediterranean ways, as they were the first to translate the Bible into a central European language.

The collection concludes with a brief summary by Barry Cunliffe (370–4) and a note by Anne E. Farkas (375–80) on the 1859 Delacroix painting (now in the National Gallery, London), “Ovid among the Scythians,” a fine demonstration of the perceived collision between civilization and barbarism as seen in the world of nineteenth century colonialism. There is a small color plate of the painting: one would have wished for a larger one as it is difficult to comprehend. Nevertheless the volume is lavishly illustrated with over two dozen fascinating color plates and many figures and maps. This is an amazing collection of essays and an astonishing illumination of what was happening in Central Europe during the years of Greek civilization. The word “barbarian” will never lose its detrimental quality, but at least, thanks to this volume, one is better informed as to what was really happening.

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