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MARKING THE NORTH. THE GREEK TRADITION AND ITS INFLUENCE IN THE ROMAN PERIOD

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Antti Lampinen

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The Formation of the Greek Image of 'Northern' Religions: A Diachronic Account

Antti Lampinen

1. Introduction

This chapter seeks to provide a diachronic perspective on the development of the Greek way of imagining northern peoples' religious cultures and attitudes. The interactions between the Greek tradition and the Latin one will form a specific focus. Primarily, the discussion will deal with sources ranging from the Classical Period to the second century CE, the era of the Second Sophistic in the Greek culture of the Roman empire. The fascinating sources of Late Antiquity and the Byzantine Middle Ages are, for the purposes of this chapter, largely left out, as they would deserve a dedicated study of their own. I will also range on a few occasions beyond the Greek-language sources. In the Imperial Era, the influence of the Greek ideological and literary currents was felt in the wider society of the Roman empire: indeed, as we shall see, it was not limited only to Latin literature, either. While the focus will be on giving a synoptic overview of the shaping of the tradition, some less-studied texts are investigated at more depth.

This chapter defines 'the North' and 'northern' in ways outlined in the volume's 'Introduction'. The associative power of the Greek set of ideas about the continental Eurasian expanse made it a flexible and endlessly adaptable toolkit, but there was clearly a distinction between this pool of ideas and those that represented the peoples of the eastern and southern reaches of the inhabited world.[1] The other difficult concept in my title is 'religion', which would deserve the scare quotes every bit as much, if not more, than 'northern' does.[2] Though in many ways anachronistic in the case of ancient societies, it may nonetheless be the best concept we have as we try to approach the highly interlinked field of meanings that Greeks and Romans constructed when thinking about foreign peoples' ritual life, beliefs about the supernatural, and their engagement with divinities. This latter could include the northerners' relations with both their own gods and those of the Mediterranean societies. In some cases, texts that address the associated ideas about morality and what me might call 'religiosity' can also offer valuable evidence of the more hazily perceived qualities of northerners; these could perhaps be approached by applying ideas about ancient 'common sense geography' to the field of ancient perceptions of religious ethnography.[3]

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[1] See the 'Introduction' to this volume. On ideas about the peoples of the east and south, see e.g. Isaac 2004, 257–380; Shaw 2014; Dueck 2016; Lampinen & Forsén (eds.) 2024; Giusti 2024; cf. Bowersock 2005. An interesting episode of apparent 'from South through North' connectivity ('Indians' having entered the realm through Germania) reported in Mela 3.44–45 and Plin. *HN* 2.170 is discussed by Podossinov 2014b.

[2] On how to define ancient 'religion', see e.g. Barton & Boyarin 2016, 1–38; see also Kotrosits' chapter above, e.g. p. 154–155.

[3] On 'common sense geography' – not extremely demotic or 'naïve', but not theoretical-synthetic either – see Dan 2014b.

Although this chapter discusses a sample of texts that seem to exemplify the various developments over time – and in some cases may even have driven the changes – I cannot claim comprehensiveness. What the ancient texts reveal is the way in which the Greco-Roman 'iconosphere' about northern peoples' religions developed through time. By 'iconosphere' I mean nothing more than the different assemblages of culturally shared ideas that in any historical context enjoyed wide enough currency so as to enable to construction of meaningful images.[4] Many interesting texts cannot be devoted as much attention to in this chapter as they would deserve, while occasionally I have wanted to foreground less-known sources that so far have been only lightly discussed in research literature. Out of the previous studies, I would particularly like to highlight Sven Rausch's *Bilder des Nordens*, which concludes with his 'new image of the North' around the traditionally-understood end point of the Hellenistic period.[5] I tend to see this period of intense elaboration of the Classical elements as a formative stage for some of our best-known sources into northern religious ethnographies. The representation of Scythian and Thracian religions has been mostly dealt with in articles, while Andreas Hofeneder's three-volume sourcebook on the representation of 'Celtic' religions is an extremely useful resource.[6]

It is to be expected that the diachronic frame of discussion will show a large variety of usages being deployed in pursuit of a vast range of aims. While on many occasions the descriptions of northerners' religions or attitudes to things considered 'sacred' are clearly connected with Greek and Roman notions of proper human-divine relations, in other passages we are operating within a discourse that is much more closely related to the conventions and patterns of ethnographical knowledge-ordering. Miracle-writing and describing the *thaumata* of the northern world also held its fascination, and comes to the fore in certain sources time after time. Depending on the context it could be given either idealising or darker inflections; the northern human sacrifices and general cruelty in ritual life are examples of the latter. Writing about the religions of barbarians operated on several levels, and it could be authenticated through a mixture of mythical aetiologies, historical *exempla*, artful arrangement of the material, and several interacting theoretical frameworks.

2. Early ideas: Archaic and Classical eras

It has generally been pointed out that the period of the Persian Wars may well have fundamentally changed the Greek way of speaking and writing about non-Greek groups.[7] Remarks about northerners' religiosity can be found even before that formative period, but these are for the most part comparable to the nearly universal alignments of mythical geographies and wonders at the edges of the world (*eschata*).[8] In Homeric texts, the

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[4] On the historical study of images in the context of ancient religion, see Rauhala 2013.

[5] Rausch 2013; see also Janson 2018, which reaches well beyond the Classical and Hellenistic eras, as well as Molina Moreno 2001.

[6] On Scythian's religious and moral stance in the Greek sources, Motta 1999; Guldager Bilde 2005; Rusyaeva 2007; Ivantchik 2011; Gerschkovych & Romashko 2013; Braund 2016; Sandin 2018; on Thracians, Archibald 1999; Dan 2014a; Jordanova 2014; Georgieva 2015; Rabadjiev 2015; Liapis 2021; on Celts, Hofeneder 2005, 2008 and 2011; also the contributions in Cain & Rieckhoff (eds.) 2002.

[7] E.g. Hall 1989, esp. 56–100; Harrison 2000; Rhodes 2007. For a different view, see Kim 2013.

[8] On the earliest stage of Greek ethnography, see Romm 1992, 46–54, 71–74, 179–184; Archibald 1998, 94–96;

northern world is not characterised fully either through its peoples or its nature, but some glimpses into groups such as the Abioi, 'the most just of men', can be distinguished; this caused a split in the later tradition, as Scythians could be both 'most just' and wholly savage.[9] Already at this early stage, blessed peoples from the northern lands were a useful external confirmation for the exceptionalism and normativity of Greek moral and religious systems. We do not need to subscribe to François Hartog's idea about the 'mirror of Herodotus' in its rigid form to still concur that with Herodotus' Thracians and Scythians, just like with his Egyptians, a complex play of signification and debate on cultural standards was being conveyed.[10]

From Aristeas, Pindar and other Archaic or Early Classical references it comes clear that among the idealised groups of northerners, Hyperboreans were the most widely recognised.[11] Closer to the Greek world, the Thracians of the Northern Aegean coasts and the groups most commonly denoted as 'Scythian' around the North Pontic area were two macro-categories of northerners who loomed large in the Archaic and Classical *imaginaire* of the North. David Braund has noted a distinct tendency to think about the coasts of the Euxine in 'Thracian' terms, overall.[12] But what is also important to note is the haziness of these groupings and the frequent interchangeability of the population groups' names – a feature that went to be a permanent characteristic of the 'septentriographic' tradition. To give an example, Stephanus of Byzantium's sixth-century-CE *Ethnica* relays the information that Didymus (presumably Didymus Chalcenterus of Alexandria, and in that case of late Hellenistic and early Augustan date) had considered the above-mentioned Abioi – otherwise understood as a group close to Scythians, though very Homeric in their associations as 'most just northerners' – to be Thracians.[13] This interchangeability also allowed for certain common ethnographical themes and motifs to be passed from one group to another under the broader umbrella of 'northerners'.

In the Classical era, then, Greek religious septentriography was largely articulated in relation to Thracians and Scythians, and many – if not most – of the themes that became important and 'commonly known' in the later tradition first crop up in connection with

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Dougherty 2001; Skinner 2012; Rausch 2013, 14–60; Sims-Williams 2017; Gagné 2021, esp. 203–265; Murray 2022.

[9] Hom. *Il.* 13.5–6; cf. Str. 7.2.3 citing Posidonius: F 277a (E-K) citing Eratosthenes through Apollodorus of Athens (*BNJ* 244 F 157a *ap.* Str. 7.3.6), and 7.2.9 citing Ephorus. Taking his cue from *Il.* 13.6, Ephorus seems to have admitted a large range of different modes of life to Scythians: some were cannibal savages, others justice-loving lactovegetarians: Eph. *BNJ* 70 F 42 *ap.* Str. 7.3.9. See Ivantchik 1999b; Motta 1999; on Ephorus, see Parmeggiani 2023, Harland 2024.

[10] Hartog 1988; cf. also Ward 2006.

[11] On Hyperboreans, see Rehm 1912; Boyancé 1934; Robbins 1982; Romm 1989; Lazova 1996; Dillery 1998; Raviola 2001; Bridgman 2005; Verger 2006; Sandin 2009, 2014 and 2018; Rausch 2013, 49–56, 77–80; Zhmud' 2016; Webb 2018; Voisin 2020; Zecchini 2020; Gagné 2020 and 2021. On the idealisation of groups on the edges, see more generally Romm 1992, 50–52, 60–61, 70–81, 125–127, 162–167; in the case of the North, Riese 1875; Marco Simón 2000; also the contributions in Gonzales & Schettino (eds.) 2014.

[12] Braund 2021; see also Tsetskhladze 2014; West 2019; Harland 2020 and 2021.

[13] Steph. Byz. *s.v.* Ἄβιοι; see also Reece 2001; on the interplay of utopia and geography in Late Hellenism, Geus 2000. Alexandrian scholars were fond of obscure variants of mythistorical episodes, so Didymus' attribution may be an intriguing variant of either Classical or Hellenistic date. In any case Thrace was by now better-associated with indigenous wisdom traditions than Scythia. According to Stephanus' entry, the Abioi were later mentioned by Alexander Polyhistor and the otherwise poorly known Diophantus – said to have written *Pontic Histories*, and testified to by Agatharch. *De m. rubr.* 64 (Dioph. *BNJ* 805 T 1) as an acknowledged authority on the north, along with Demetrius of Callatis (on whose *On Europe and Asia,* Zecchini 1990, 218–220).

these two macrogroups. Some ethnographical techniques that were to prove popular, such as lists of 'most worshipped gods' among foreign societies, feature in the Herodotean descriptions of both Thracians and Scythians.[14] The longstanding presence of Scythians in the broader Thracian area, as well as some cultural similarities (at least from the Greek point of view) made it easy for motifs to be transferred from one group to the other.[15] Both groups were also imagined as exhibiting ostentatiously non-Greek, cruel ritual behaviour, characterised by human sacrifice and ritual killings. While Herodotus' famous description of the Scythian headhunting and drinking from skull-cups does not necessarily need to imply any religious signification – and indeed he is explicit in explaining that the motivation behind these practices is entirely dependent on the Scythian notions of honour – the following sections describe the ritual slaying of false diviners, which does seem to have a bearing on notions of religiosity.

> Whenever the king of the Scythians falls ill, he sends for the three most reputable diviners, who prophesy in the aforesaid way; and they generally tell him that such and such a man (naming whoever it may be of the people) has sworn falsely by the king's hearth; for when the Scythians will swear their mightiest oath, it is by the king's hearth that they are accustomed to swear. [...] When the accused denies it, the king sends for twice as many diviners: and if they too, consulting their art, prove him guilty of perjury, then he is instantly beheaded, and his goods are divided among the first diviners; but if the later diviners acquit him, then other diviners come, and yet again others. If the greater number of them acquit the man, it is decreed that the first diviners themselves be put to death. And this is how they die. Men yoke oxen to a wagon laden with sticks and tie the diviners up in these, fettering their legs and binding their hands behind them and gagging them; then they set fire to the sticks and drive the oxen away, stampeding them. [...] They burn their diviners for other reasons, too, in the way described, calling them false prophets.[16]
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> All of these peoples have distinctive customs. It is the practice of the Tauri to sacrifice to the Maiden shipwrecked sailors and Greeks captured on seaborne raids. Their method is to first perform rites over their victim, and then to strike the over the head with a club. Some say that they then push the body over the cliff on which the shrine stands, while sticking the head on a stake; others, while agreeing about what happens to the head, claim that the body is interred rather than being pushed from the cliff. The Tauri say that the power to whom they offer these sacrifices is Iphigenia, the daughter of Agamemnon. Should they capture men who are their enemies, then the action each Taurian takes is to cut off his enemy's head and carry it back to his dwelling, where he will stick it on a long wooden pole, and so station it that it towers high above the house – usually over the smoke-vent. They claim that these heads are set up to stand sentinel over the whole house.[17]

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[14] Thracians in Hdt. 5.7; cf. 4.33, 9.119; Scythians in Hdt. 4.50, 59.

[15] On the Scythian presence and rule in the Thracian area, see e.g. Shapiro 1983; Archibald 1994; Irimia 2001; Lazarenko 2015; Stolyarik & Kleeberg 2023. On cultural similarities, Braund 2015 and 2023, also Batty 2007, 107–186; the imagery about the northerners may also have been influenced by the somewhat similar Thraco-Celtic continuum and intermingling especially in the kingdom of Tylis, for which see Falileyev 2005; some of the contributions in Sîrbu & Vaida (eds.) 2006 and in Vagalinski (ed.) 2010; Boteva 2010; moreover Dimitrov 2010; Lazarov 2010; Kaul 2011; Bouzek 2015; Talmaţchi & Cealera 2020; Kazakevych 2022.

[16] Hdt. 4.68–69. Translation after A. D. Godley.

[17] Hdt. 4.103. Translation after T. Holland.

In the broadly coaeval sophistic text *Dissoi Logoi*, however, even the Scythian headhunting is given a religious reasoning within a section of ethnographic exemplars about different peoples' customs.[18]

> To the Thracians that women get tattooed is a form of cosmetics, whereas to the other peoples tattoos are a punishment for those who do wrong. The Scythians deem it beautiful that he who has killed a man, after flaying his head, carries his scalp about on the forehead of his horse, and after gilding and silvering the skull, that he drinks from it and makes libations to the gods. Among the Hellenes one would not wish even to enter the same house as a person who has performed such actions. The Massagetae devour their parents after having chopped them up, and to them being buried inside their children seems a marvellous burial, whereas in Hellas if one did these things he would die in misery, banished from there as perpetrator of shameful and terrible actions.[19]

Thracians and Scythians were also the first northerners presented as avaricious and hybristic sackers of temples – for which they were sometimes imagined as suffering a supernatural punishment.[20] In Thucydides, the greedy and impious sack of Mycalessus by Thracians points to a similar expectation of cruelty, inhumanity and violence.[21] If any single group of northern barbarians can be said to have been foundational to the Greek conception of barbarian religion, the Thracians are a very good candidate. In terms of mythological pedigrees, Thracians were perceived in the Classical Athens as having strong links to Ares, in particular, and this ancestry could well have coloured the overall set of expectations directed at their behaviour: to be sure, they had a reputation for warlikeness.[22] The descent from Ares seemed to explain the 'commonly-known' warlike ways of the Thracians, while their rudimentary civilisational level made them susceptible to clever deceptions, such as that by Zalmoxis in Herodotus' telling.[23] Notably, Herodotus had sourced this story about the origin of Thracian afterlife-beliefs from the Greek colonisers of the Hellespont and Pontic coasts – it is thus affected by what have been called 'middle ground' knowledge forming processes and interpretations between the Greeks and the local groups.[24]

The northerners' beliefs were important as tools for thinking among the Greeks, and religious ethnographies often act as condensations of foreign peoples' supposed characteristics. An example of this is the Herodotean repeated emphasis on the poverty and ignorance of the Thracians, which made them easily dazzled by the fruits of Ionian

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[18] On the passage, see Molinelli 2024, 53, 56, 120, pointing out its similarity with and probable dependence from Hdt. 4.64–66 (cf. Pl. *Euthd.* 299e). On the context among Herodotus' contemporaries, see Gardiner-Garden 1988. Archaeological evidence has been able to uncover some support for this detail: Rolle 1989, 83.

[19] *Diss. Log.* 2.13–14. Translation Molinelli 2024, 77–79.

[20] Hdt. 1.105, 4.67. See Chiasson 2001; Papathomas & Tsitsianopoulou 2022.

[21] Hdt. 1.105 on Scythians (also Chiasson 2001, 41–45), perhaps inspiring Callim. *Hymn.* 3.251–258 on a Cimmerian attack against Ephesian Artemision; Thuc. 7.29.3–5; on a later literary episode of sexual violence by Thracians: Plut. *Vit. Alex.* 12, *De mul. vir.* 24 (259e-260a); Polyaen. *Strat.* 8.40; see Asirvatham 2024.

[22] Ares as the Thracian ancestor: *Il.* 13.301; [Apollod.] *Bibl.* 2.96; Hyg. *Fab.* 45; Ant. Lib. *Met.* 11, 21.

[23] See also p. 20, 92–93, 97–98, 165.

[24] Hdt. 4.95. On 'middle ground' processes of knowledge formation, see originally White 1991; in the contex of antiquity, e.g. Woolf 2011, 111–114; Parmenter 2024, 196–205. Archibald 1998, 95 reads Archilochus' poems (e.g. F 5, 93a West) as showcasing the colonial processes in Thrace.

luxury and learning that Zalmoxis peddled.[25] A theme that frequently crops up about Thracians – namely, the role of heroic mortals and their immortalisation – was useful at least in Classical Athens for debating how an individual might retain their active agency after death, or to approach divinity.[26] This parallels the way in which the Taurian Artemis allowed them to debate the role of divine will in institutional ritual killings, and thus to debate the problem of theodicy, a topic which the Athenian tragedies also were interested in exploring.[27] Thracians had been used in relativistic arguments even before (or during) the Persian Wars, as demonstrated by Xenophanes of Colophon's fragment about every group of people imagining gods in their own likeness: the Thracians would thus imagine theirs as 'pale and red-headed'.[28]

In the Classical sources, then, Thracians were frequently given as an example of how barbarians, either through superstitiousness or their rudimentary civilisational level, were prone to misunderstanding relations between humans and gods. As the Zalmoxis story shows, they were perceived as particularly liable to manipulation by their own religious specialists.[29] The Getic belief in a rebirth or the immortality of the souls was often broadened to apply to all Thracians, and the motif itself became one of the most stimulating ideas to the Greek and Roman ethnographic imagination about not only Thracians, but of northerners in general. The idea was already explained by Herodotus via a connection to Pythagoras, the most famous Greek with broadly similar doctrines. Throughout the tradition, this belief – and its connection to the Pythagorean creed – was used to account for the proverbial 'ethnic characteristic' of Getic bravery, which kept on being repeated until the Late Antiquity and was also transferred to other warlike northern groups.[30]

In addition to the afterlife beliefs of the Getae, Herodotus also described – in a rather confusedly formulated sentence – how these same Thracians would react to thunder and lightning by shooting arrows at the sky as a threat to the god, 'believing in no other god than their own'.[31] The Thracian hostility towards other religions and divinities was expressed both in mythological and ethnographical registers, and was no doubt linked to the idea of them holding religious beliefs incommensurate with the Greek understanding of gods and men.[32] The motif of 'wrong-believing northerners' came later to be transferred from the Thracians to a whole host of other, more immediately antagonistic groups, such as the *Keltoi*.

Scythians attracted an arguably more ambiguous set of ideas than the Thracians: their rudimentary religious infrastructure and inhumane practices – seen in the passages cited above – were regularly counterbalanced or complicated by a tendency to idealise

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[25] On this sort of encounter narratives in the context of colonial pursuits, see Miniaci 2021. In Hdt. 4.46 all the peoples around the Euxine are called 'most ignorant'; see Harland 2021.

[26] Apart from the Zalmoxis story, also [Eur.] *Rhes.* 962–973.

[27] Hdt. 4.103–104 on Taurians, cf. Eur. *IT* 39–40, 52–54, 334.

[28] Xenophan. *Silli* F 16.21 *ap.* Clem. Al. *Strom.* 7.4.22.1.

[29] Cf. the Hellenistic story, found in Polyaenus, about Kosingas, a Thracian general and high priest of Hera, deceiving his superstitious troops: Polyaen. *Strat.* 7.22. Cf. still Stat. Crito *BNJ* 200 F 7 *ap. Suda s.v.* δεισιδαιμονία on the Getic (Dacian) king manipulating his superstitious subjects through magic and deception; see Russu 1972. On the image of Dacia and the Dacians, see Yavetz 1998; Fodorean 2016, 83–100; Petolescu 2022.

[30] Hdt. 4.93–6; Str. 7.3.5; Diog. Laert. 8.1; Porph. *VP* 7, 11; Iambl. *VP* 151.

[31] Hdt. 4.94; cf. *Par. Vat.* 41 with drum-banging and arrow-shooting.

[32] Cf. Hom. *Il.* 2.599–600; Dion. Scytobr. *BNJ* 32 F 8 *ap.* Diod. Sic. 3.67.3; Ascl. Trag. *BNJ* 12 F 10 *ap. Schol. in Rhes.* 916; Ov. *Met.* 5.273–293. See also above, p. 20, 96.

them as morally upright.[33] While the Thracians were often presented as 'wrong-believing' from early on, the Scythians were quite commonly used to explore the very limits of human ritual behaviour in its most primitive sense. The northern continental expanse of Scythia hosted the extremes of what the modern scholarship has called 'soft' and 'hard' primitivism.[34] To some, like the philosopher Clearchus of Soli in his *On modes of life*, the Scythians had changed from their originally normative customs to become 'the most degraded of all humans', noted for their lack of self-control.[35]

Yet figures such as Anacharsis and Scyles popularised at least from Herodotus onwards the idea of a 'wise northerner': behind the type there may be earlier exemplars such as Abaris the Hyperborean.[36] These characters interacted with the Greek doctrines and creeds – somewhat like Zalmoxis, but in a more positive and less hybristic way, though still narrated ethnocentrically. Through this, they reinforced the exceptionalist aspects of Hellenic self-perception. The strange, partly otherworldly nomadic world of the Scythians, the Pontic North, and the Taurian Chersonese with its connections to Iphigenia and ritual killings, provided further elements to the tradition.

In addition to Anacharsis, the early stage of imagining the Scythian religiosity bequeathed to the later tradition some other motifs, as well: the Scythian sword worship (part of the broader image of minimal religious infrastructure) and their ritual killings of humans would prove the most long-lasting *topoi*. 'Barbarian customs' could titillate the readers by their foreignness, and perhaps partly for this purpose the distinction between punitive and religious killing of humans is often elided, as we also saw above in Herodotus' descriptions of the killings of both enemies and false diviners. Headhunting, drinking of human blood, and (often funerary) cannibalism are also present at this early stage, and connected to the idea of human sacrifice. Finally, the idea of divine punishment against temple-robbing northerners also arose in this context by way of the androgynous Scythians who suffered from Aphrodite's vengeance.[37]

If some Scythian groups most typically embodied a harsh kind of primitiveness, the Hyperboreans had for a long time been seen as the most famous exemplars of the blessed life enjoyed by barbarians still living the 'Golden Age' of old. The first reference to the Hyperboreans, found in a Hesiodic fragment from the *Catalogue of Women*, only describes them as 'having good horses', and thus seems to tie them together with the northern world of broadly 'Scythian' nomads.[38] In Pindar, they are the favoured people of

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[33] Hom. *Il.* 13.5–6; Str. 7.3.7 (on the basis of Ephorus); see Motta 1999 on the motif of 'just Scythians'; cf. Harland 2024, 155, 157, 159–161.

[34] This dichotomy (which is not without its exceptions and slippages) goes back to Lovejoy & Boas 1935.

[35] Clearch. Sol. F 44 (Dorandi & White = 46 Wehrli) *ap.* Ath. 12.524c; see Bollansée 2008, 406; Parmenter 2024, 192–194. It has to be kept in mind that many authors of *Skythika* have left almost no securely attested fragments at all, such as Agroitas (*BNJ* 762), Mnesimachus (*BNJ* 841), Timonax (*BNJ* 842), Agathon (*BNJ* 843) and Ctesippus (*BNJ* 844).

[36] Anacharsis in Hdt. 4.46 (cf. Diog. Laert. 1.101); Scyles in 4.78–79. On the figure of Anacharsis, see Armstrong 1948; Kindstrand 1981; Ungefehr-Kortus 1996; Schubert 2010. On Abaris, Hdt. 4.36; Lycurg. *Ad Menes.* F 14.5a (Conomis) *ap.* Cosm. Hier. *Comm. in Greg. Naz. Carm.* 274 (cf. Harpocration *s.v.* Ἄβαρις*);* see Gagné 2021, 367–376 on how Lycurgus' detail situated Athens on a 'ritual map of oecumenic importance' (376), also cf. 382 on Phanodem. *BNJ* 325 F 29 *ap. Schol. vet. in Pind. Ol.* 3.28a making Hyperborea an Athenian foundation. Also Pl. *Chrm.* 158b; Heraclid. Pont. F 73–75 Wehrli (F 130–132 Schütrumpf); F 51a-c Wehrli (F 24a-c Schütrumpf). For more, Rehm 1912; Boyancé 1934; Zhmud' 2016; Pohl 2018, 40; Gagné 2021, 213, 292, 313, 341, 346, 376, 387.

[37] [Hippoc.] *Aer.* 22; Hdt. 1.105, 4.67; Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1150b 14–16.

[38] [Hes.] *Cat.* F 150 *ap. POxy.* XI 1358 fr. 2 col. 1, l. 22 (M-W).

Apollo, who spend their time in celebrations, musical performances, and pious sacrifices: their lives are characterised by the absence of the old age. In addition, Hyperborea is the source of the first olive trees planted at Olympia by Herakles himself after establishing the games there.[39] Hecataeus of Abdera, in the late fourth century BCE, elaborated the Hyperborean lifestyle further – letting 'his imagination run riot in an exuberance of detail', as James D.P. Bolton put it – while locating them on an island in the north.[40] Their long lives, just society, peaceful ways, closeness to (Greek) gods, and connection to woodlands all became powerful *topoi* in the subsequent tradition. In a development that exemplifies the free borrowing and transference of motifs, some subsequent themes, such as the connection of Hyperborean ritual life with woodlands, as well as their lack of fear towards death (already firmly associated with Thracians), seem to even have jumped from the Hyperboreans' own 'soft' primitivism to the 'hard' type, and then eagerly applied to many northern groups even during the Roman Imperial era.[41]

In thinking about the early Greek imagery of these northern groups' religious life, a few points are worth highlighting. Firstly, there is very little need to delineate strictly between the miraculous and the 'ethnographic' in this imagery: Hyperboreans, Taurians, and the various flavours of Thracians and Scythians were most of the time taken to be all equally 'real', and ancient knowledge formulated about them should not be categorised from our modern vantage point into 'mythical' and 'true'.[42] In this sense, Sven Rausch' category of 'mythical North' does not necessarily emerge from our sources in an unambiguous way that would have been understood by the ancients.[43] As we will see below, even ostensibly 'scientific' authors (or ones often regarded as such in modern scholarship) would interact with ideas about peoples who are more commonly found in the 'mythical' mode.

Secondly, it is worth underlining how crucial the Greek – especially Ionian – colonisation in the Pontic shores and the Athenian interests in the Thracian coastlines were for these knowledge-generation processes. To give an example, the presence of Apollo in the Hyperborean material may well reflect the influence of Apollo's oracular centre of Didyma, intimately linked to the polis of Miletus which had founded many colonies around the Black Sea.[44] Thus, the Apollinian connections with northerners would represent a similar mythological linking in knowledge-generation as those of Achilles and Herakles.

Herakles' role as the forefather of Scythians comes to the fore in the famous origin story that Herodotus reports. This story, which the historian says stemmed from

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[39] Pind. *Pyth.* 10.30–46 (cf. *Ol.* 3); cf. Bacchyl. 3.58–62. See Robbins 1982; Gagné 2021, 216–218; Eisenfeld 2022, 126–144.

[40] Hecat. Abd. *BNJ* 264 F 7 *ap.* Diod. Sic. 2.47.1–7; cf. Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.614. See Bolton 1962, 24; Dillery 1998, 263–269; Piquero Rodríquez 2013.

[41] Gagné 2021, 387 formulates well the 'remarkable continuity' of the idea of Hyperborea in the Greco-Roman tradition.

[42] Herodotus' surprising scepticism about the Hyperboreans' existence is an exception, but it is also worth noting that his reasoning is not based on the stories told about them, but the lack of the corresponding southerly 'Hypernotians': Hdt. 4.32, 36; see Gagné 2021, 313–315.

[43] See Rausch 2013, *passim*, but e.g. 43–55, 77–79.

[44] On the Pontic colonisation and the knowledge-creation in the region, see Hind 1984; Podossinov 1996; Povahalev 2008; Braund 2008 and 2011a; Rusyaeva 2010; Porucznik 2017b; Lancini 2019; West 2019; Harland 2020 and 2021; Chiai 2021; Donnellan 2021. On the Greek imagination concerning the Pontic, in particular, West 2003.

among the Pontic colonists (probably the Olbiopolitans) has been discussed in an earlier chapter of this volume.[45] Herodotus also reports other stories about the Scythian origins, including their own, but what the Pontic Greeks' story indicates is the way in which new northern populations and regions were tied to the pre-existing Greek worldview through the reapplication of myths. The Thracian and Pontic littorals were among the first ethnographic 'middle grounds' onto which the Greek myths and heroes began to be reapplied to fit the expanding mental geographies and encounters with outgroups.[46] Even though the idea of Achilles and Herakles as somehow 'Scythian' heroes (or vice versa, Scythians as somehow 'Achillean' or 'Heraklean' folk) stemmed from the cultural contacts taking place in the Pontic coastal colonies, some eloquent expressions of the equation have been found even in Athens, such as the portrayal of Herakles in Scythian striped trousers in several kylixes by the Brygos Painter.[47] The double role of Herakles as an ancestral figure to northerners as well as their tamer came to form an important theme especially in Hellenistic and Roman literature – but more about these later.

Herakles or Hercules was to become particularly important as an ancestor to European barbarian groups, but this role has its roots in the Classical-era imagination. The importance of Herodotus' *Skythikos logos* as a model for this should not be underestimated, but further reasons can be suggested. The ethnic stereotypes associated with northern and western peoples could rely on perceptions that made this travelling hero seem quite similar to the northerners: they, too, were commonly thought to be muscular, warlike, and daring. Often the other half of their ancestry also communicated something significant: an early example of this was the 'milk-white' Nereid Galatea as the mother of the eponymous ancestors of Illyrians and Celts, often with the crude and primitive Cyclops Polyphemus as the other parent, which we discussed in another chapter of this book. Such mythicised origins would have responded to an epistemic need among the Early Hellenistic Greeks to relate the recently all-too-unmissable barbarian invaders into their established worldview.

3. The Hellenistic exacerbation of the imagery: Celts

As discussed in the previous section, interactions between non-Greek groups of 'northerners' and the Greek colonies, both northern and western, had generated from the Archaic era onwards a rather large amount of information. Ranging from crude stereotypes to fairly accurate renditions of local traditions, during the subsequent centuries this archive was transmitted, reapplied and transformed whenever new groups became relevant in the Greek consciousness. 'Near' and 'far' northerners furnished ideas for debating the role of religion and wisdom in human societies, and some stories of the mythological register involved peoples from Thrace, Scythia, and even Hyperborea. But in response to a fairly sudden increase of contacts from the Hellenistic era onwards, the religions of northerners came to be described in pursuit of a set of more varied aims.[48] Some of the

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[45] On the Scythian origin stories: Hdt. 4.5–7 (Scythian story) and 4.8–10 (Greek story), see Lincoln 2014. See above, pp. 84–85, 108.

[46] For more, see Nesselrath 2005; Woolf 2011; Keyser 2011; see also fn. 24 above.

[47] Ivantchik 2005, 104–106; see also Iancu 2016; on the stories about Teutaros, the Scythian archery teacher of Herakles, see Braund 2010.

[48] This context is the 'neue Bild des Nordens' that Rausch 2013 finishes his study with: 187–202.

main motivations for the involution and diversification of the septentriographic imagery included political propaganda, the aim of describing foreign societies, and wonder-writing, but the most basic function of defining the ingroup belonging – of Greekness, and increasingly of Romanness, too – was still very intimately involved.[49] All of these aims come to the foreground in different ways in the individual contributions to this volume. In the field of religion, the northerners' supposed impiety, *hybris*, human sacrifices, and superstitiousness were all pre-existing motives that were put to work in pursuit of the above-mentioned aims.

One major group onto which these motifs were applied from the Early Hellenistic era onwards came to be known synonymously as *Keltoi*, *Galatae*, or *Galli*. In Herodotus' era, they had been a mere name among far-western peoples, while Plato and Aristotle offered a little more flesh to the bare bones of their characterisation – although nothing pertaining to their religiosity.[50] For Ephorus of Cyme, Celts still seemed 'philhellenes', though in quoting Ephorus Strabo notes that this did not conform with his contemporary evidence.[51] What had brought about the change was the Early and Mid-Hellenistic Greek reaction to the Galatian/Celtic attacks towards Delphi, and the havoc they wreaked in Northern Greece and among the coastal cities of Asia Minor in the 270s BCE and the following decades. These made Celts/Galatae an active group of enemies in the Greek worldview, giving a definite shape and newfound prominence to certain previously used septentriographic elements, while also bringing some news ones into existence. These literary and ideological commonplaces are found actively reiterated even centuries later whenever the northern peoples' religions were imagined.

Prominent among the Hellenistic motifs about northern peoples' religiosity is their hybristic and greedy impiety that causes them to have no qualms about robbing temples. Considering the upheavals caused by the Galatae in this period, it is not difficult to see how this pre-existing idea got reified and strengthened. That any attacker against Delphi would become associated with *hybris* (ὕβρις) and impiety is also demonstrated by the *exemplum* that became projected the furthest back in time, namely the war of the Orchomenians under Phlegyas, another proud and violent son of Ares – who was already well-established as the ancestor of superstitious and impious Thracians. Phlegyas was said to have torched the Apolline temple and paid for his sin in the underworld. His descendants, the Phlegyans, had a reputation for brigandage.[52]

Another theme that had a solid representation from at least the Galatian wars onwards was the difficulty that northerners had in recognising *kairos* (καιρός), or the

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[49] On political propaganda in Hellenistic septentriography, see Nachtergael 1977; Champion 1995; Strootman 2005; ethnographical agendas: Clarke 1999; Rausch 2013, 125–202, including wonder-writing: Pajón Leyra 2015; identify-formation: Champion 2004, 30–64; Burstein 2008; Harland 2024.

[50] Hdt. 2.33 (cf. Hecat. Mil. *BNJ* 1 F 54 *ap.* Steph. Byz. *s.v.* Νάρβων, F 55 *s.v.* Μασσαλία, F 56 *s.v.* Νύραξ); Pl. *Leg.* 637d-e; Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1115b, *Eth. Eud.* 1229b, *Pol.* 1269b, 1324b, 1336a.

[51] Eph. *BNJ* 70 F 131a *ap.* Str. 4.4.6. This is followed by a critical comment that Ephorus had reported 'many things about [Celts] that are not correct nowadays' (πολλὰ ἰδίως λέγει περὶ αὐτῶν οὐκ ἐοικότα τοῖς νῦν). [Scymn.] *Nik. Per.* 183–186, another appreciative assessment, seems also to depend on Ephorus; cf. Bravo 2009, 63–79. Strabo found it easy to critique his Hellenistic predecessors Timosthenes and Eratosthenes for the same reason: they were completely ignorant of Iberia, Celtica, Germania, Britannia, the Getic lands and Bastarnia: Timosth. *BNJ* 354 (*GAGW* 10) F 5 *ap.* Str. 2.1.41.

[52] On the Phlegyans and Phlegyas (or Phorbas), see *Hymn. Hom. Ap.* 278; Pherec. *BNJ* 3 F 41d *ap. Schol. in Il.* 13.302; Verg. *Aen.* 6.618; Paus. 10.4.1–2; Philostr. *Imag.* 2.19. See Prandi 1981; also Kajava 2011.

opportune moment.[53] This may partly be a result of their *hybris* and the impetuosity that was occasionally explained through climatic and humoral influences, but it also goes deeper into explaining the fundamental mistakes that many northern groups were thought to commit in understanding the lot of mortals – especially when faced with powers greater than themselves. The northerners, whose respect towards temples and cults seemed so lacking in real life, were frequently given origins from savage mythological figures, such as the Cyclopes, or they were linked in iconography with such enemies of the cosmological order as the Titans and Giants – as we discussed above.[54]

The ritual killing of humans among the northerners conformed with, and seemed to confirm, ancient ideas about archaic mentalities and the proverbial cruelty of the earlier generation of monstrous beings. In a somewhat euhemeristic fragment from the early Hellenistic historian Hegesippus of Mekyberna, when Herakles witnessed the Giants living in Thracian Pallene, called Phlegra of old, he was 'astonished by their *hybris* and misanthropy' – the latter a code for human sacrifice.[55] An essential, genealogical and indeed existential difference between Giants and humans was easily implicated: as Dio Chrysostom noted, human beings were not descended from the same stock as Giants.[56] Yet, at least since Plato if not already earlier, humans were imagined as being capable of imitating the 'Titanic nature' and exhibiting hybristic and godless behaviour.[57] Plutarch echoes the old 'Titanism' of the North when he says that if the 'Typhons' and Giants had managed to expel the gods and were now ruling over humankind, they would demand sacrifices in blood.[58] During the latter part of the 'Long Hellenistic Age', the continued association of northerners with Titans and Giants acted as a distancing element between the notional normative humanity of the Greco-Roman ingroup and the stereotypical idea of the northerner.

Not all information generated through the closer interaction between Galatae and Greek societies was wholly negative. Some stories were neutral, even when they referred to these barbarians' capabilities in the field of ritual life. A fragment from Eudoxus of Rhodes, a third-century BCE wonder-writer who is among the early witnesses to the Galatian presence in Anatolia, quoted by Claudius Aelian in the late second or early third century CE, mentions 'eastern Galatae' (i.e. those of Galatia, as opposed to Gaul) who charm birds by certain prayers and sacrifices (εὐχάς τινας εὐχονται καὶ ἱερουργίας καταθύουσιν ὀρνίθων κατακηλητικάς) whenever they need help eradicating locusts. If any person should capture one of the birds, he is punished by death, but if he is absolved, the birds will not obey the summons next time.[59] This may be comparable to later Augustan references to Celtic affinity with auguries: we may see here an originally Hellenistic motif which was used in paradoxographical and ethnographicising writing alike.[60]

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[53] As argued in Lampinen 2018.

[54] On 'Titanism' see also pp. 21, 36, 88, 96, 98–99, 107, 220–221, 223–224 in this volume.

[55] Hegesipp. *BNJ* 391 *Pallen.* F 1 *ap.* Steph. Byz. *s.v.* Παλλήνη. Thunder and lightning during Herakles' fight against these Giants had, said Hegesippus, caused the story of gigantomachy.

[56] Dio Chrys. *Or.* 13.26.

[57] Pl. *Leg.* 701b-c. See Edmonds 1999, 44.

[58] Plut. *De superst.* 13 (171d); cf. Gell. *NA* 15.21.1. See Moellering 1962, 86–87.

[59] Eudox. Rhod. *BNJ* 79 F 4 *ap.* Ael. *NA* 17.19.

[60] Livy 5.34.2–4; Cic. *Deiot.* 16; *Div.* 1.90; Artem. Eph. *BNJ* 438 F 68 *ap.* Str. 4.4.6; Just. 24.4.3 (see Moreno 2021).

Other neutral or at least non-judgemental information about the religious customs of the Celts can be found from the technical and philosophical registers of writing. Despite their ostensible differences, these two registers were in the Hellenistic era often covered by same authors, and were certainly subject to some shared principles of knowledge-ordering and deploying of ethnically-framed evidence. As an example, one can cite the second-century BCE physician, grammarian, poet, and oracular collector Nicander of Colophon, who was professionally interested in modes of divination, since he held the post of an oracular functionary at the sanctuary of Apollo Clarius.[61] Tertullian cites in his *De anima* an unnamed work by Nicander about nocturnal visions affording divinatory glimpses of the dead. The church father claims that according to the Colophonian grammarian the *Celtae* sleep near the graves of mighty individuals so as to obtain such visions.[62] The ethnonym, rare in Latin, confirms that the detail comes from a Greek source. Nicander would be among the earlier writers to have referred to the modes of divination practiced by 'Celtic' northerners, but it is unknown whether he spoke about any specific or named group of Celtic religious functionaries. Nicander's information is, unfortunately, neither localised nor personalised enough to judge whether his reference is anything beyond an ethnographicising snippet with an ethnonym that had contemporary relevance to Greeks, especially those on the coast of Asia Minor nervously contemplating their Galatian neighbours.

4. Hellenistic and Republican interactions between Greek and Roman discourses

The Galatian wars of the Greeks in the 200s and 100s BCE were taken up as an exemplar for the Romans, who had been facing off with North Italian societies with broadly similar Iron-Age characteristics already in the 300s BCE – though we do not know what the Romans called their adversaries in this early stage.[63] In the course of the Hellenistic/Republican-era Celtic wars, an emphasis emerged among both Greeks and Romans – though much stronger among the latter – on the pattern of ingroup impiety being punished by an attack by the northerners. The Hellenistic celebrations of Greek elites saving their subjects – or even more generally 'all Greeks' – from this latest barbarian threat were no doubt behind the Roman elite's similar attempts as self-fashioning.[64] Generally, the Greek side of this tradition is poorly preserved before the Late Hellenistic/Republican age, and mainly attested in sources (such as Justin's *Epitome* of Trogus' *Philippic Histories*) influenced by the Roman discourse.[65] Already present in the interwoven Middle-Republican Roman traditions, which partly sought to reproduce, reapply and appropriate the Greek narratives, were the themes of temple-robbing and the providential preservation of an ingroup's supernatural legitimacy through divine intervention and/or

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[61] Nicandr. *Alexiph.* 9; *Suda s.v.* Νίκανδρος.

[62] Tert. *De anim.* 57.

[63] See Lampinen 2019a, 147–148; also Williams 2001, 5–14, 68–99, 219–222.

[64] E.g. *SH* 958; *V Ar.* 3.58; Just. 24.5.12–14; Diog. Laert. 2.17. Some epigraphic evidence includes *SIG*[3] 495; *OGIS* 765; *IG* XI 4, 1105. In the words of Marszal 2000, 222, the Celts/Galatae had become the 'universal barbarians'.

[65] On Trogus-Justin, see Richter 1987; Alonso-Núñez 1987a; Bartlett 2014; Borgna 2018.

cultic continuity. Occasionally, battle *devotiones* or other extraordinary ritual acts were deemed useful while confronting Gallic adversaries: similar events are not met in the case of for instance Ligurian enemies.[66] It is also possible that the Romans had taken up the motif of the northerners' headhunting already in this early stage – although its attestations may also reflect the later stages of the tradition, where the Hellenistic motif had already become widespread.[67]

As with the Greeks, we might expect with the Romans, too, that evidence from the dramatic arts, particularly comedy, might demonstrate clearer signs of 'demotic colouring' and closer correspondence to everyday stereotypes than the historical literature of the age. The overall character of the early Latin plays, however, is not uncomplicatedly Roman. Rather, they show Greek stories, characters and models giving shape to episodes of Roman history. Through them, aspects of Hellenistic Greek iconosphere came to influence Roman portrayals of the Gauls – including the temple-robbing motif that had come to the foreground both in Delphi and in Asia Minor. Plautus' *Aulularia* – also the first Latin text known to have certainly used the ethnonym *Galli* – includes a reference to the role of Apollo as the guardian of treasures. Euclio, the nervous old miser who has hidden the eponymous pot of gold, overhears the talk of a few servants preparing his daughter's wedding, and immediately thinks he is being robbed of his treasure. Hurrying back to the house, he invokes the help of Apollo, imploring the god to nail down the thieves with his arrows.[68] As the word *thensaurarios* itself testifies, the Greek examples are close to the surface in Plautus' verse. Together with the recognised function of Apollo as the proven guardian against treasure-thieves, this heightens the possibility that the original reference was to the Gallic attack against Delphi.[69] The comedic effect in the Greek original – if indeed the reference stems from such – could have been heightened by an allusion to a historical incident that was usually treated in an elevated style. It is difficult to assess the effect of this on a Roman audience, though the Boian wars in the 190s BCE may have heightened the reference's epistemic relevance to the Romans.[70]

The influence of the Apolline defence of Delphi and the associated narratives of salvation was clearly high in Rome, too. The northerners' obvious impiety in targeting temples in a seeming denial of the proper relationship between humans and gods formed a long-lived set of imagery that influenced both exo- and autoethnographical writing. During the Late Hellenistic period, coinciding with the Roman Late Republic, the Greek and Roman traditions began in many cases to merge. Many elements (such as headhunting and decapitation, both solidly pre-Hellenistic motifs in themselves, with perhaps the head of Orpheus as an early inspiration) became so widespread and applied with such eagerness that their exact origins in terms of individual outgroups are difficult to assess.[71] Hellenistic

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[66] Livy 8.9–10, 10.28; Cic. *Fin.* 2.61, *Tusc.* 1.89; Macr. *Sat.* 3.9.9–11; cf. cases which bear some similarity to a *devotio* Livy 5.41.3, Plut. *Vit. Cam.* 23.3. On the Livian uses of *devotio*, Davies 2004, 48, 93, 104, 110, 128; also Koptev 2011; more generally Sacco 2011.

[67] Polyb. 2.27.10 (where the taking of the Roman commander Acilius' head may have been modelled after the Hellenistic stories that later informed Trogus: Just. 24.4.5); Pos. F 274 (E-K) *ap.* Str. 4.4.5; Livy 23.24.7; Front. *Str.* 1.6.4; Zonar. *Epit.* 9.3. With this theme, we also need to recognise that some societies of the Iron Age Europe seem indeed to have displayed severed heads: Knauer 2001; Armit 2012 and 2017; Ghezal & al. 2018.

[68] Plaut. *Aul.* 391–397.

[69] Stockert 1983, 114 *ad* 394–396 on Apollo's frequent protective role in hymns.

[70] Stockert 1983, 28; cf. the earlier bafflement of Wagner 1876, 122 *ad loc*., though recognising the Delphic rference.

[71] In addition to attributing decapitation to Celts under Posidonius' authority, Strabo also explains the head-hunting habits of the Caucasian Saraparae through their Thracian origins: Str. 11.14.14.

monarchs took up the propagandistic torch of defending Greece and its sanctuaries from these new barbarians, and ideas of divine epiphany and help were very quickly put to triumphalist use. The Hellenistic literary and iconographical narratives about impious northerners were compelling and useful enough to be eagerly adopted by the elites in the growing Roman state.

The Capitol was probably being promoted as the Roman counterpart to Delphi in narratives of the Gallic Sack by the second century BCE.[72] But even the traditions around the Capitol, the most central and symbolic point of the Roman topography could attract Greek variants. There did, for instance, exist a tradition whereby Tarpeia, the eponymous traitorous young woman, opened the way onto the Capitol for the Gauls, not the Sabines.[73] The motivation of Tarpeia in this version, quoted by Plutarch from the poet Simylus, was a romantic one, which could hark back to the novelistic, romantic, and tragic narratives of Hellenism, though Simylus himself may have been as late as Augustan, or at least not earlier than second century BCE. The story of Tarpeia and Brennus may have a parallel in the story of Cleitophon of Rhodes about how Brennus, the leader of the Galatae, obtained the romantically motivated help of a certain Demonice to enter Ephesus with his warriors, the weighty gold ornaments of whom then cause the death of the traitor.[74] A surprising amount of 'Roman' traditions of northerners and their religiosity can be approached through the influence of Hellenistic lighter literature. In the case of Simylus, Celts may have been chosen as the identity of the invaders since they were more familiar to his Greek readers than Sabines would have been.[75]

Polybius is the first writer from whom an extant ethnographical description of Gauls survives, and although his description of the North Italian Celts does not contain references to religion as such, his opinion about the universal importance of wars against Celts demonstrates the way in which the role of Romans in safeguarding even the Greeks from Celts had become a legitimating detail, implied to be the proof of Rome's virtue.[76] Similar jockeying for the legitimating glory that resulted from protecting your own region from the impious Celtic despoilers can also be found from the response of Aetolians to a Roman embassy as it was dramatised by the Augustan universal historian Pompeius Trogus.[77] The same dynamics of piety and legitimacy were also important later, in the historical context in which Posidonius of Apamea produced his much-debated 'Gallic ethnography'. The increased immediacy of epistemically circumscribing the northern societies after the Cimbric Wars (113–101 BCE) is a far from unique development in antiquity, and Roman attention had already been directed to the northern borders of Italy on several previous occasions. Along with the resurgence of the notion of the Alps as the protective wall of Italy, perhaps the most enduring conceptual heritage

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[72] Analysis of these sources is difficult since most of them are transmitted by Livy: e.g. 5.50 on the origin of the *Ludi Capitolini*. Brennus' name is an important parallel: Livy 5.48.8; Plut. *Vit. Cam.* 17, 22. The suicide of the Gallic leader is another: cf. Polyb. 2.31.2 on Aneroëstes; Just. 24.8.11 on Brennus. Thirdly, the theme of anthropomorphism in Diod. Sic. 22.9.4 *ap. Exc. de sent.* 250 and Livy 5.41.1–8.

[73] Simyl. *De Tarpeia* (*SH* 724) *ap.* Plut. *Vit. Rom.* 17.6–7; cf. *Schol. in Luc.* 1.96 (Weber). Also Müller 1963; Horsfall 1981, 303–305.

[74] Clit. Rhod. *BNJ* 293 *Ital.* F 1a *ap.* [Plut.] *Par. Min.* 15 (309b-c); cf. F 1b *ap.* Stob. *Flor.* 3.10.70. Martini 1998, 21 fn. 73.

[75] Brenk 1979, 171 (and fn. 9).

[76] Polyb. 2.35.

[77] Just. 28.2; cf. 38.4.6–15.

left by the Cimbric invasion was the *furor Cimbricus* or *Teutonicus* that we still find in Lucan and Juvenal.[78]

There is no doubt that the Cimbric Wars were a rude shock to the Romans, and cast reverberations over the whole Mediterranean sphere subject to the Republic. There is some evidence about imperial subjects of the provinces taking advantage of the religiously tinged fear (*metus*) aroused in the Romans by this northern threat. Diodorus of Siculus and Plutarch write about the embassy to Rome by Battaces, the high priest of Cybele at Pessinous in Anatolia, who according to Diodorus arrived in 102 BCE to demand acts of expiation for a purported offence against the Great Mother of Gods.[79] In Plutarch's version Battaces claimed to be able to ensure Roman victory over the invading barbarians, and the Senate voted to dedicate a shrine to Cybele.[80] Diodorus emphasises the particular charge of defilement of the goddess' temple, and the demand that purification should come from the state. It is conceivable that Roman nervousness in cases where religious lapses coincided with northern defeats was well-enough known for the priest-elite of the temple state – a priesthood known by the evocative homophonic name of *Galli*, no less – to wager they might get away with some state-funded refurbishing.[81] Diodorus describes how Battaces' rich garb and outlandish accessories immediately put off the Romans; despite this, he was able to create a mood of religious awe in the population of the city. Asked for details about his promise, he continued his attempts to evoke holy dread, and his effect upon the crowds was magnified when a tribune criticising him died three days later of a fierce fever.[82] The priest was granted a special permission regarding his royal outfit, was laden with gifts, and escorted upon his departure by a large mass of the populace. One wonders whether his gamble could have been pulled off during a time of lesser religious unease; especially as the Roman elite apparently was in this case compelled to consider the feelings of the majority.[83]

Posidonius' importance in this context of nervousness about northern peoples is clear from the wealth of quotations that he received in later authors. But as I note in my earlier chapter, he was hardly the sort of neutral observer of anthropological realities that some scholars have wanted him to be. His way of turning the inhabitants of the Alps into euhemeristically presented Hyperboreans in F 270 is an important example of this.[84] Another fragment from Posidonius shows that around this time, the literary tradition first began to feature descriptions of Celtic or Gallic religious rituals located in their own lands, as opposed to them only interacting with Greek heroes, divinities and sanctuaries.

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[78] Luc. 1.254; Juv. 15.124; in Livy 21.35.8, too; cf. Flor. 1.38 *per Alpes, id est claustra Italiae*. On the relevance of Alps due to Cimbric movements: Valgiglio 1955, 16–19; on the Alps as conceptual border in Middle Republican sources: Williams 2001, 55–57, 78, 132, 180; Lampinen 2021b. Also see Kerremans 2016.

[79] Diod. Sic. 36.13.3; Plut. *Vit. Mar.* 17.5–6. See Bowden 2012.

[80] Plut. *Vit. Mar.* 17.5. See Virgilio 1981, 123 fn. 329.

[81] For other hypotheses about Battaces' intentions, Virgilio 1981, 124. Lane 1996 on the name *Galli* – though it need not have derived from the Galatians (*ibid.* 132) in order to have had associative power in a time of crisis.

[82] Diod. Sic. 36.13.2–3; Plut. *Vit. Mar.* 17.5–6.

[83] We have a comparative episode from 421 CE, when 'during the reign of Honorius and Constantius [III]', a certain Libanius, 'an Asian by his *genos*' and famous for achieving results through magic against the barbarians, offered his services at Ravenna. In this case the empress Galla Placidia was quick to put the magician to death: Olymp. Theb. F 36 (Blockley) *ap.* Phot. *Bibl.* 80.182–183.

[84] See above, p. 90–91.

> In addition to their witlessness, they have a strange and barbaric custom that is found mostly among northern nations: when leaving the battlefield, they hang the heads of their enemies from their horses' necks, bring them home, and nail them up in their entranceways. At any rate, Posidonius says that he himself often saw this spectacle; at first, he recoiled in horror, but thereafter, as he became used to it, he was able to bear it with equanimity. They used to embalm the heads of eminent men with cedar oil and display them to visitors, and would not consider giving them back, even for their weight in gold.[85]

Such tantalising glimpses do not, however, automatically mean that Posidonius' descriptions constitute full eye-witness testimonies, even if modern research has happened to confirm some of their details. One example of this are the severed heads – or representations of these – on display in some Southern Gallic sanctuaries, such as at Roquepertuse.[86] It is also worth remembering that most of the fragments of Posidonius are preserved in Augustan or later authors. Indeed, Strabo follows fragment 274 with the explicit parenthetic note that by his time, Roman rule had put a stop to these customs, as well as Gallic practices of divination.

Some scholars have been attracted to the image of Posidonius, himself a Stoic philosopher, personally interacting with the Gallic Druids.[87] When rigorously defined, however, the Posidonian fragments do not furnish many mentions of Gallic holy men and other details of their religion. The important point to note, in a scholarly climate still largely dominated by the formidable reputation of Posidonius as an ethnographer, is that the Druids as a named group enter the literary tradition firmly in the context of the Hellenistic East. The pre-existing idea of some northern peoples' exceptional perception and wisdom coexisted with the equally prominent stereotype of their barely existent learning and general crudity, which we already saw above. During the Hellenistic era, however, references to northerners' own traditions of learning begin to emerge, with Greek accounts often showing considerable influence from the better-known and more widely-cited barbarian sages whom Alexander's conquest had brought within the scope of enquiry, such as the Indian Gymnosophists and the Median Magi.[88] The idea of the barbarian wise men was among the more important and long-lived motifs of northern ethnography that gained ground among the Hellenistic scholars. In some ways, these 'barbarian sages' were created as an outgroup mirror image to the Hellenic scholars themselves, and their epistemic appeal was no doubt connected with this.

The chronologically earliest testimony about Celtic wise men is referred to at the beginning of Diogenes Laërtius' *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, a compilatory work from the third century CE. In referring to opinions that philosophy originated among the barbarians, Diogenes mentions the Magi of the Persians, the Chaldaei of Babylonians and Assyrians, the Gymnosophists of the Indians, and the Druids and the *Semnotheoi* of Celts and Galatae. His references single out Aristotle's *On Magic* and Sotion in the Book 23 of his history of philosophy.[89] Slightly further on, Diogenes

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[85] Pos. F 274 (E-K) *ap.* Str. 4.4.5. Translation after S. Pothecary 2024.

[86] Cf. Knauer 2001; Armit 2012 and 2017; Ghezal & al. 2018.

[87] Cf. Ruggeri 2000; Freeman 2006; Martin 2011.

[88] On the Hellenistic spread of knowledge and interest regarding the East, Momigliano 1975, 139–150; Marincola 1997, 85; cf. Romm 1992, 112–119; also Harland 2024.

[89] Diog. Laert. 1.1–3; probably the source for *Suda*, *s.v.* Δρυΐδαι.

also characterises the content of Druidic teaching: like the Gymnosophists, the Druids 'philosophise' through riddling apophthegms, instructing humans to revere the gods and live virtuously.[90] All these elements had by Diogenes's own time of writing become quite commonly cited about a wide range of northerners; they thus need not have been first mentioned either by Aristotle or Sotion. In fact, both of these names point to a Hellenistic source: while Diogenes believed *On Magic* to be a genuine text by Aristotle, it is now understood to have been the work of a Hellenistic writer.[91] Sotion was an Alexandrian active during the second century BCE, credited with a work on the doctrinal successions of philosophers.[92] Such a doxographic treatise could well have tried to connect northern sages with a Greek or barbarian doctrinal group, with Herodotus' Pythagorean Thracians as a model.

For an explicit and better-documented link between Pythagoras and Celts, we must probably look at Alexander Polyhistor, a grammarian and polymath originally from Miletus, who ended up in Rome first as a slave, and stayed active in the city's intellectual spheres until a bit after 40 BCE. He is cited about Pythagoras' studies among the 'Galatai and Brahmins' by Clement and Cyril, two Christian theologians from Alexandria from the early third and fourth centuries, respectively.[93] Of all the authors who vied with Posidonius' influence during the Later Republic – and who are thus alternatives to the Rhodian for having provided material about the northern wise men to the writers of the Late Republic and the Early Empire – Polyhistor has received perhaps the least attention.[94] Apart from his *On the Pythagorean Signs*, which Clement cites, Polyhistor also wrote works on ethnographical topics, and he is known to have discussed the religion of the Thracians, who were still at this stage the primary group of northerners connected with the creed of the immortality of souls, and had – as we have seen – an established connection with Pythagoras since Herodotus.[95] Polyhistor's evidently positive attitude towards the Druids is remarked upon by Andreas Hofeneder, though he considers Polyhistor to have inherited it from his sources instead of formulating it in a context which, he feels, was not as conducive to friendly interpretations about 'Celts'.[96] Yet it is worth noting that the Late Republican context was not devoid of vaguely 'pro-barbarian' Greek scholars working in Rome, at least if Timagenes of Alexandria and his history, produced around the same time as Polyhistor's *oeuvre*, can justifiably be characterised as 'filobarbaro', as Marta Sordi suggested.[97]

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[90] Diog. Laert. 1.6.

[91] The late-third-century BCE Antisthenes of Rhodes was suggested by Momigliano 1975, 59; while Rives 2004 thought that either *On Magic* or an intermediary source between it and Diogenes had created the link between Pythagoras and the Druids.

[92] Ath. 4.162; Diog. Laert. 1.1.

[93] Alex. Polyh. *BNJ* 273 *De Pyth. Symb.* F 94 *ap.* Clem. Al. *Strom.* 1.15.71.4; Cyr. Alex. *C. Iul.* 4; cf. Hippol. *Haer.* 1.25.

[94] But cf. Brunaux 2006, 107–109, 173–188; Chadwick 1966, 61; Hatt 1984, 85; Keyser 2011, 52.

[95] Alex. Polyh. *BNJ* 273 F 103 *ap.* Macr. *Sat.* 1.18.11; on Hdt. 4.95, see above. See also Luchte 2009.

[96] Hofeneder 2005, 76.

[97] Sordi 1982; cf. Capponi 2018, 50. Whether Timagenes was 'philobarbarian' or just critical of Roman imperialism, he was for Pompeius Trogus a recent authority in tying the Massalian, Gallic, and Roman histories together. Mythological characters and cultic encounters were important to both writers in incorporating the Gauls into the broader Mediterranean narrative.

5. Developments in the Late Republican and Augustan eras

The previous section discussed the way in which Greek enquiry into northern religiosities – and trends in representing them – were adopted in the Roman discourse, and the adaptations this generated. We also saw how the Greek enquiry reacted to the Roman curiosity and alarm about certain northern groups, whilst the horizons of Hellenistic enquiry were broadened northwards by the Roman expansion. But it bears repeating that our sources to the Hellenistic Greek engagement with the realities of Roman power – as is also the case with the 'discovery' of northern sages among the Gauls – are most commonly channelled through very late Republican or Augustan-era writers. One example of this is the way in which Posidonius' fragments are cited in Augustan-era or even later sources. Their transmitting authors wrote after Caesar and other Late Republican writers had already used religion to a great effect in their descriptions of Gauls, and the topic of Druids had become fashionable. This means that we should remain open to the notion that no single contributor to the septentriographic tradition wielded an outsized influence over it, but that a number of writers responded not only to the heightening of interest towards northerners' religious life, but also to their contemporaries' 'commonly-known' knowledge about the same. The rise in the popularity of the topic of 'wise northerners' should also be understood as a phenomenon of this period, though – as we saw above – with roots in the mid-Hellenistic learned writing.

The end of the previous section also sought to point out how, after Polybius and Posidonius, several new generations of educated Greeks were intimately involved in processes that were making the Roman literary elite better acquainted with the theoretical foundation for characterising northerners and their morality. The Later Roman Republic, with its introduction of Greek textual registers and models to serve as vehicles of Roman self-reflection – and the increasing engagement by Greek writers with the Roman tradition – witnessed a significant intensification in the use of northern groups for the purposes of the Roman ingroup's ethnographical gaze at themselves. From the Roman authors' side, Caesar's ethnographies of Gauls and Germans in his *Commentaries of the Gallic War* constituted a hugely influential input into the septentriographic tradition.[98]

Indeed, if a single crucial period for the ancient invention of 'northern religiosity' were to be highlighted, during which the already-existing elements became interwoven into an epistemically plausible, emotionally loaded, and ethnographically articulated image, it would certainly the last century of the Roman Republic and the Augustan era. The writers of the Augustan empire continued to elaborate on material that was often widely known among their audiences through ethnicised commonplaces. To give but one example, the references to Celtic customs in Parthenius' *Narrationes amatoriae* bring together a range of details that these northerners were already known for: they feast, decapitate their victims, but also exhibit a particular, rather harsh sense of justice.[99]

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[98] On this, see e.g. Pallavisini 1972; Gardner 1983; Barlow 1998; Schadee 2008; Krebs 2011 and 2018; Allen-Hornblower 2014; Creer 2019 and 2023; Moore 2024.

[99] Parth. *Narr.* 8 on Herippe; see more Lampinen 2014b. Cf. *Par. Vat.* 44 on Galatae consulting their women about waging war, and in the case of defeat decapitating the women who counselled for it. On *Narr.* 30 on princess Keltine, see pp. 99–101 in this volume.

We have seen already in an earlier chapter how in the Late Republican and Augustan stage, Herculean aetiologies for different northern groups (which in Herodotus' time had applied particularly to the Scythians, as we saw) became very common facilitators of origins for a whole series of Gallic groups. Some of the princesses that wooed Hercules are also described in clearly ethnicised ways as tall, haughty and taking an active role.[100] The crossing of the Alps, too, became a feat that was first accomplished by Hercules and after him the Gauls.[101] In this, the previous emphasis on the mountain range as the 'wall of Italy' was no doubt one factor, but it was surely reinforced by Augustus' pacification and 'conquest' of the Alpine region. We see several authors reflecting this contemporary penchant for Herculean aetiologies.[102]

With the Augustan sources condensing so many layers of information into their ethnographies while remaining in constant negotiation with their contemporary knowledge base, it would be an oversimplification to assume that the Romans of Late Republic were merely passive receivers of information. On the contrary, many of the subjects dealt with by the Greek writers were strongly connected to contemporary Roman concerns about northerners, as we have already seen above. In terms of the 'Gallic sages', especially the Druids, sections of the Roman elite were by Cicero's and Caesar's era familiar enough with the Greek schools of philosophy for the adoption of the relatively recent notions about philosophers or priests among the northerners to take place easily. The role of religion and its potential for manipulating politics was a hot topic during the Late Republic, and thus ritual experts among Gauls were only one ethnic exemplar among many that could have piqued their interest.[103]

The usefulness and attraction of these passages to their contemporary audiences did not depend primarily on their correspondence with Gallic realities on the ground, but was rather underpinned by the shared Greco-Roman knowledge base. For the Greek writers, the provinces of the west remained a secondary area for information-gathering: much more consequential were the intellectual centres – among them, increasingly, Rome. Very important was also Alexandria, where the first surviving references to Druids may well have been produced, as we saw above. Even such ostensibly first-hand descriptions as those in Book 6 of Caesar's *Commentaries of the Gallic War* – where the Druids are described as holding the superstitious Gauls in the palm of their hands, supervising burnt sacrifices of humans, and inculcating in Gauls a belief in the immortality of souls in order to make them brave warriors – were hardly unaffected by audience expectations and literary and authority-building agendas. Caesar's only reference by name to a Greek author is a good example of this: by name-dropping Eratosthenes, Caesar himself alerts us to an important alternative Hellenistic source about Gaul whom Romans of the

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100 In addition to Parth. *Narr.* 30, cf. Diod. Sic. 5.24.1–3 on Herakles' son Galates from a proud and beautiful Celtic princess (cf. Tim. *BNJ* 566 F 69 *ap. EtMag s.v.* Γαλατία); Timag. *BNJ* 88 F 2 *ap*. Amm. Marc. 15.9.6. See also Porucznik in this volume.

101 Just. 24.4.4; Timag. *BNJ* 88 F 14 *ap.* Amm. Marc. 15.10.9; cf. Diod. Sic. 4.19.3–4.

102 Parth. F 52 (Lightfoot 1999) *ap.* Steph. Byz. *s.v.* Νέμαυσος: πόλις Γαλλίας, ἀπὸ Νεμαύσου Ἡρακλείδου; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 14.1.4–5. Cf. Zonar. *Lex. s.v.* Κελτοί· ἔθνος, ἀπὸ Κελτοῦ, υἱοῦ Ἡρακλέος; on both Keltos and Iber as eponyms see Eustath. *Comm. in Dionys. Per.* 281: Κελτὸς γὰρ καὶ Ἴβηρ, παῖδες Ἡρακλέος ἀπὸ βαρβάρου γυναικὸς, ἐξ ὧν τὰ ἔθνη οἱ Κελτοὶ καὶ οἱ Ἴβηρες.

103 Cf. Cic. *Div.* 1.90–91, combining Caesarian elements (see *BGall.* 6.14) with Greek ideas. See Schultz 2014; also Lampinen 2021a, 222–226; Beltrão 2024; more generally on Cicero's source value see Hofeneder 2007. On Caesar's representation of the Druids, see Marco Simón 2014; Creer 2023, and as a synthetic overview, Aldhouse-Green 2010.

Late Republic could have used.[104] Eratosthenes as a geographer was probably the best source for the much-needed information about the size and shape of the Gallic area.[105] Caesar may have used either his influential *Geography*, or another work called *Galatica* sometimes attributed to an 'Eratosthenes Junior', a 'historian' (according to Stephanus of Byzantium) who may not even have existed, being just be a reduplication of his more famous namesake.[106] It is quite conceivable that Caesar prepared for his Gallic campaign by going through a Greek monograph dedicated to the history of the *Galatai*.[107]

But whether Caesar had read Eratosthenes' *Geography* or the *Galatica*, or in fact had personally consulted neither and just added the reference to the Greek as a legitimating gesture for his 'dominion-through-knowledge' scheme, his description of the Gauls broached a topic covered by many previous writers. It was also one that he, too, was expected to treat, and with which his audience had quite a bit of familiarity. The Germans and Britons, however – groups which, despite Pytheas' accounts, barely existed in Caesar's audience's worldview beforehand – constituted a wholly different case.[108] Some elements attributed by Caesar to either Gauls or Germans seem strikingly similar to the Herodotean descriptions of Thracians or Scythians. These include the doctrine of rebirth making these northerners very brave, the manipulation of religious sentiments by ritual actors (like Zalmoxis in Herodotus), as well as stick divination.[109] Yet another modified element may be the influential description of the 'wicker man' as a Druidic method of burnt sacrifices, which could well have been inspired by Herodotus' image of the Scythians punishing false diviners (of which see above).[110] Although in his description the Druids are the proponents and facilitators of these sacrifices, Caesar's implication may be that it is these manipulative religious experts who should instead be within the burning effigy. The negative aspects of Gallic religion, in Caesar's case, needed to be blamed wholly on the Druids, and the image of the Druids themselves was distanced from the more neutral Hellenistic Greek notions, such as the rather influential one of Timagenes of Alexandria.[111] The connection created between Pythagoras' and the Druids' doctrines of rebirth was not, on the other hand, a Caesarian creation. As I suggested

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104 Caes. *BGall.* 6.24.2. See Pallavisini 1972; Harmand 1973; Pitcher 2017.

105 Cf. Polverini 2008; Bianchetti 2016.

106 Eratosthenes 'Junior' *BNJ* 745 T 1 *ap.* Steph. Byz. *s.v.* Κυρήνη, though there is no reason why the fragments *BNJ* 745 F 1–6 (all cited by Stephanus of Byzantium from the '*Galatica* of Eratosthenes') could not refer to the better-known Eratosthenes of Cyrene; cf. *Suda s.v.* Ἐρατοσθένης. See Geus 2002, 16–17, 333–335.

107 Despite Nachtergael 1977, 55 there is no indication that Eratosthenes' *Galatica* dealt with more westerly Galatians outside Thrace and Asia Minor. Strabo, certainly, chides Eratosthenes for ignorance on the west and the north of Europe, though this obviously stems from Strabo's own post-Caesarian hindsight: Str. 2.4.2. Cf. Dilke 1988, 196.

108 On the British (a category that tended to include the inhabitants of Ireland) before and after Caesar, see Killeen 1976; Chevallier 1984; Magnani 1993; Freeman 2001; Cunliffe 2001; Wilkes 2007; Soderber 2013; McPhail 2014; Bianchetti 2014 and 2015; Wilson 2017; Moore 2019; as well as the contributions of Bianchetti and Gieseke in this volume. More specifically on the Caesarian and early-conquest-era creation of the imagery of Britain and the British, see Stewart 1995; Krebs 2018; also see Günnewig 1998 on the perceptions of the British and the *Germani*.

109 Among Ariovistus' Germans, Caes. *BGall.* 1.53.5–7; cf. Hdt. 4.67 among Scythians.

110 As noted by Racine 2016, 197, there were many degrees of 'knowing' Herodotus among Latin writers, 'not all of which implied reading the *Histories*'.

111 Strabo's view on Druids (4.4.4) is largely an amalgam of Caesar's and Timagenes' elements: cf. Roller 2018, 197 *ad loc.*

above, this probably took place around the same time or slightly later, but firmly in the Greek sphere of doxographic writing, probably based on the well-established tradition about Pythagoras' influence on Zalmoxis and the Thracian belief in metempsychosis.

A short time after Caesar, a fragment from the *Collection of Customs* of Nicolaus of Damascus shows how Caesar's Gallic ethnographies may have reinforced the deployment of ethnically framed customs in Greek literature. Nicolaus refers to the north-eastern Pontic (possibly Circassian) group of Cercetae, who bar any criminals from entering their sanctuaries, which is comparable to the Druids of Caesar, who shut out of their sacrifices any Gauls who have committed crimes. Such an idea was common-sense to the Greco-Roman audiences. Nicolaus also provided another 'ethnic custom' for the Cercetae by referring to their way of punishing those who have made a navigational error. This could be seen as a way of incorporating the traditional perception about the piratical habits of North Pontic peoples.[112] When writing on Celts, Nicolaus found use for the old Ephorean motifs of their friendliness towards strangers and carrying swords everywhere – making them into a sort of hard-primitive Phaeacians – the way they seemed to Diodorus Siculus, too.[113] The old, already Classical motif of northern fearlessness when encountering dangers was also put to use by Nicolaus.[114] Whereas Caesar had applied to the Germans the 'soft-primitivist' trope of them leaving their houses always unlocked, Nicolaus refers (in the same fragment) to this custom among the Celts. This testifies to the haziness in distinguishing (and a lack of needing to do so) between Celts and Germans, especially among Greek writers of the Augustan and Tiberian eras.[115] Another example of this is the way in which Strabo's Tiberian-era *Geography* – while aware of Caesar's highlight on Germanic distinctiveness – nonetheless describes the Celts and the Germans of the Rhenish region as alike (*emphereis*, ἐμφερεῖς) and akin (*syngeneis*, συγγενεῖς) to each other. Strabo acknowledges that his account deals with an earlier mode of existence of the 'race which is nowadays called both Gallic and Galatian', before they were enslaved by the Romans, but he is also clear about how in order to reconstruct this lifestyle he will use information about the Germans, who still preserved the original way of life.[116] For Strabo, Rhine effectively divides the northerners' past from their present; it is seen as dividing a country and a populace that is essentially similar, whatever Caesar might have claimed.

For Diodorus Siculus, who worked with very much the same post-Caesarean basic information about northern groups and their religions as Nicolaus and Strabo did after him, mythological scenes and moralising narratives formed the basic structure for

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[112] Nic. Dam. *BNJ* 90 F 103g *ap.* Stob. *Flor.* 4.2.25. Cf. Herodotus' reference to Tauric raiding, above p. 160; also Str. 11.2.12.

[113] Nic. Dam. *BNJ* 90 F 103e *ap.* Stob. *Flor.* 4.2.25; cf. Diod. Sic. 5.28.4–5. On Ephorus' opinion, see p. 86 fn. 46, 166 above.

[114] Nic. Dam. *BNJ* 90 F 80 *ap.* Ath. 6.249a; F 109 *ap.* Stob. *Flor.* 3.7.39. For more on Nicolaus' ethnographies, see Curnis 2006.

[115] Caes. *BGall.* 6.23; cf. Diod. Sic. 5.4.32; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 14.1.2; Str. 4.4.2; and still later (though possibly based on earlier sources) in Arr. *Anab.* 1.3.1–2; App. *BCiv.* 1.4.29; Cass. Dio 39.49.1–2, 44.42.4. See Zecchini 1979, 65–66 on these writers rejecting the Caesarian division of Germans and Celts along the Rhine; cf. Steinacher 2021, 31, 43–45; and Johnston 2019 on Cassius Dio. In the case of individuals, a similar haziness could reign between Greek and Latin ethnic nomenclature: an early procurator of Gaul, Licinus, was said by Cassius Dio (54.21.3: ὁ δὲ δὴ Λίκινος τὸ μὲν ἀρχαῖον Γαλάτης ἦν) to have been a 'Galates', but is called a German by *Schol. vet. in Juv. ad* 1.109 (Wessner) 11–12: *ex Germania puer captus*.

[116] Str. 4.4.2.

a rich tapestry weaving ethnographical material into a universal history.[117] Diodorus' Gallic ethnography is essentially a tapestry of elements ranging from Aristotle to his contemporary Late Republican commonplaces. Diodorus occasionally mixes ruminations on cultural difference with rhetorical condemnations of ritual killing, but he also resembles Cicero in the way he proceeds from the moralisingly wielded historical *exemplum* of the Delphic attack to more vaguely localised references to the atrocity of human sacrifice.[118] Much like Diodorus, Strabo uses moral judgements as an important linchpin in his universalist narrative frame: his work could be argued to have attempted to marry technical knowledge to ethical values, constituting a moral geography of sorts.[119] Human sacrifice is an efficient and symbolically loaded element which helped these universalist authors to define the limits of their ethnographies.

Yet with the Caesarian conquest and the Augustan consolidation of Roman rule over the Gallic region, the plausibility of locating primitive religious practices or outlandish moral codes into the area was becoming slowly attenuated, though not impossible. For Strabo, the Gallic reverence towards their own holy places is entirely in keeping with the overall image shared by most Late-Republican and Early-Imperial Greek writers: they are devoted to religious matters, even if misdirected in predictable ways due to their 'northern' character.[120] Among these authors, Celts' or Galatians' interactions with Greek and Roman sanctuaries all take place before the chronological horizon of Roman conquest, and the ethnographicising gestures surrounding their morality and religiosity tend to be found within descriptions of their own cults and ritual life. The past frequently offered more thrilling ethnic practices than the contemporary situation. This is why Strabo devotes attention to ritual killings among the Gauls as well as the connection between these and the Druids, though he also identifies both characteristics as a thing of the past.[121] The cultural transition from 'ethnic customs' to the lifeways of Roman provincial subjects was thus reflected in Strabo's take on northern religion. Even so, the usefulness and the distinguishing power of the past for Strabo in emphasising and maintaining the variety of the Empire's peoples – the valorisation of multiplicity, even as the Roman rule was obliterating many differences in practice – is something that prefigures the way in which the northerners' qualities, religiosity included, were essentialised during the High Empire.

6. Northern religions in the Early to Mid-Imperial literature

Post-Augustan literature offers many examples of the continuation, rearrangement, and involution of the themes inherited from the preceding stages of religious septentriography. The Greco-Roman ethnographic imagination found a wide set of uses for the inherited details of northerners' religious life and beliefs, from rhetorical arguments to the triumphalist celebration of the variety of the barbarian customs. In this section, I will take

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[117] On Diodorus' project, see Ambaglio 1995; Sulimani 2011; Saïd 2014; Muntz 2017; on his Gallic excursus, see Perl 1978.

[118] E.g. Diod. Sic. 5.31.3 (cf. Str. 4.4.5, 7.2.2), 5.32.5–6 (cf. Cic. *Font.* 30).

[119] See Biraschi 2005, 85.

[120] E.g. Str. 4.1.13 (considered Pos. F 273 E-K), 4.4.5–6. See Almagor 2005.

[121] Str. 4.4.5. See Clavel-Lévêque 1974.

a look at the (principally) Greek literature produced during the first one and half centuries of the Roman empire; in the next section, the focus will be turned more specifically to the highly classicising movement of the Second Sophistic, and the way in which the Greek intellectuals of the era reworked the inherited elements from the earlier tradition.

Many of the earlier details had by this time entered the pool of proverbial doxic knowledge, and only needed to be passingly mentioned to act as efficient tools of communication.[122] Elements which come across particularly prominently from our sources during this period include the forest or grove as the foremost locus for 'northern religion'; this is particularly common in the Latin sources.[123] Human sacrifice emerged as the most objectionable marker of such customs, with associations of 'magic' or *deisidaimonia*/*superstitio*. In Plutarch's view, ignorance about the gods (τῆς περὶ θεῶν ἀμαθίας καὶ ἀγνοίας) is divided into two types depending on what sort of personality it infests: in hardened, stubborn souls if leads to atheism, but in soft and moist souls it produces 'superstition' (δεισιδαιμονία).[124] Moistness, importantly, was a humoral trait particularly often used in Early and High Imperial explanations of northerners' character.[125] Based on this type of logic, Gauls, Britons and Thracians were easily portrayed as fanatics, handily manipulated by their own religious experts as well as by spurious omens. At the same time – as we will see in the next section – doxographical writing frequently projected the 'seeds' of universal truths and wisdom into the deep past, detecting them even among the northern barbarians. Listings of 'wise barbarians' came to include mentions of Gallic, Thracian, or Getic groups.[126]

The Greco-Roman repertoire of images in the Early and High Imperial era included a flexible set of 'hard' and 'soft' primitive elements, stories in the mythistorical register, and ethnonym-tagged customs that became elaborated through processes of generic involution.[127] As before, these motifs allowed a range of literary and rhetorical operations to be undertaken by authors debating the limits of human morality, civilisation, and historical agency. One significant development during the first Imperial century was that older elements – first formulated through the Greek and Roman encounters with Galatae and Gauls, or occasionally inherited from the Classical Greek imagery of Thrace and Scythia – were transferred to new groups of northerners.[128] A good example of such a widely applied theme was the detail of northern belief in rebirth or immortality (a hazy distinction for many ancient audiences), and the way this was used to explain the bravery of this or that group of northerners. Germans were a common recipient of

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[122] On 'doxic knowledge', Barton 1994, 119; recently, the 'proverbial aspects' of communication about foreign groups has been studied e.g. by Dueck 2016 and 2021; we might even propose a sort of 'common sense ethnography' along the lines of Dan 2014b and the other contributions in Geus & Thiering (eds.) 2014, though occasionally closer to their idea of 'intuitive', 'concrete' or unscientific knowledge. Ethnonyms triggering ideas about well-known northern groups could be used in insults, such as in a mocking papyrus fragment from Egypt, lampooning an underperforming and greedy magistrate as a 'Sarmatian': Ast 2023.

[123] See Lampinen 2024c on Lucan and Tacitus.

[124] Plut. *De superst.* 1 (64e) speaking about the types. See Rauhala 2013, 287–289, 294–297.

[125] The roots go as far as in [Hippoc.] *Aer.* 6, 19. Closer to Plutarch's time, cf. Vitr. *De arch.* 6.1.3, 7; Sen. *Ira* 2.19.1–2, 4.15.1; Ptol. *Tetr.* 2.2; Adamant. *Phgn.* 2.31. See Lund 1988, 26; also cf. Langum 2018; Kaufman 2021. See the 'Introduction', p. 34.

[126] See below p. 186.

[127] On involution as a way the literary genres created *nova ex veteribus*: see Barton 1994, 91–93, 107, 173–174.

[128] See e.g. Cracco Ruggini 1987, 193; more fully Lampinen 2012; Steinacher 2021.

this explanatory gloss in this period.[129] Instead of 'ethnographical' writing we are seeing 'ethnographicising' gestures, which evoked the doxic knowledge that was already shared by the audience.

It is also true that details probably based on actual information about Thracian, Germanic and British religious customs do crop up in Imperial-era literature, and genuinely local divine names are included in Greek and Roman descriptions.[130] Such names were, after all, fairly commonly seen in local epigraphic cultures. It might be useful to remember, however, that 'anthropological realities' on the ground were not particularly relevant either for the epistemic validation or the use of the received literary imagery. These were predominantly governed by ongoing ingroup communication, and its dynamics of recognisability, exoticism, distancing and familiarisation. Areas outside the empire, especially Ireland and the further reaches of Germania, were still prone to be used as platforms for set-piece descriptions of primitivism or as moralising mirrors in the debate about cultural values. Strabo's description of funerary cannibalism among the inhabitants of Ireland or *Ierne* is typical. In this case, the Herodotean Issedones seems to have been one likely model: Strabo explains that since the Scythians, the archetypal northern barbarians of old, were known to engage in this practice and since certain western barbarian groups (the Celts and the Iberians) had been known to have recourse to it when compelled, it followed that the most northwestern inhabitants of the known world could hardly be strangers to such inhumanity.[131] Even with such extreme customs and rituals that were explicitly said to differ from those holding sway at the centre of the world, most of the time the barbarians were granted a degree of internal logic in their behaviour. Occasionally, such as in the fourth-century CE *Chronicle of Events after Dexippus* by the non-Christian sophist Eunapius of Sardis, the author's own religious identity made them appreciate the barbarians' religious sentiments with a particular emphasis.[132] Rituals and beliefs – always potent topics for discussing the nature and limits of human existence – were a formidable tool for the Imperial-era writers.

Certain details that seem obvious to us as stereotypical characteristics of northerners' religion are in fact first attested only at this stage of the tradition. The islands of the Ocean emerge as a potent localisation for pronouncedly foreign northern rituals in writers such as the first-century BCE geographer Artemidorus of Ephesus – used later by Strabo, who trusted his reputation for eye-witness accounts of the western coasts of Europe – while later Plutarch projects miraculous stories resembling Platonic end myths to the islands of the Ocean.[133] This seems to continue the trend, already visible in the

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[129] Some of the steps in the tradition of northerners' happiness to face death include Caes. *BGall.* 6.14 (applying this to the Gauls: cf. Mela 3.19, but also Mela 2.2 on the Getae, as was traditional); Diod. Sic. 5.28.5–6; Val. Max. 2.6.11; Luc. 1.447–462; Plin. *HN* 4.89–90; App. *Celt.* 4 (on Germans); Iambl. *VP* 173; Agath. *Hist.* 1.praef.3.

[130] These include the Teutates, Esus and Taranis in Luc. 1.444–446; Tuisto and Mannus in Tac. *Germ.* 2 (see Lund 1991, 1976–1981); Andraste in Cass. Dio 62.6.1.

[131] Str. 4.5.4; cf. Hdt. 4.26. On Ireland, see Killeen 1976; Tierney 1976; Freeman 2001; Bianchetti 2002; Soderberg 2013; Moore 2019; also Gieseke in this volume, 199–205, 208–213. Diod. Sic. 5.32.2–4 mentions cannibalism, but does not distinguish it as endocannibalism, as Strabo does (Killeen 1976, 210).

[132] Eunap. *Chron.* F 48.2 (Blockley) *ap. Exc. de sent.* 53, with Goths motivated by 'noble and guileless intent' in preserving their non-Christian holy objects.

[133] Artem. Eph. *BNJ* 438 F 36 *ap.* Str. 4.4.6 (see Häussler 2014, 50); Mela 3.48 (see Hofeneder 2008, 272–274); cf. Dionys. Per. 570–572. A possible inspiration for the *Gallizenae* in Mela may be found from the shape-shifting Neuri of Herodotus' Scythia (Hdt. 4.105). Demeter is connected with the sacred isle of Ierne (Ireland)

Classical era – and of course being now used in a rather Classicising way – of using the edges of the earth as a canvas onto which to reflect contemporary philosophical debates. Among the themes that fell somewhat out of relevance over time was decapitation, which had its heyday in the Augustan era. At least on the Latin side, the most paradigmatic display of northern religion in the era of Lucan, Pliny and Tacitus was the image of a bloody altar in deep woods, used for cruel rituals: the broader connection between forests and Gallic religion (sometimes with its Druids explicitly mentioned) emerges at this stage.[134] This development may reflect the Early-Imperial nervousness about secretive religious practices (often branded as 'magic' and often insinuated to include the ritual killing of humans) among subaltern groups of many kinds. Northerners were not exempt from these accusations, which were made more plausible by the old and very established associations of human sacrifice with northern barbarians. Indeed, the image of human sacrifice binds much of the Early Imperial writing on northern religions together.

Ideas about the importance of human sacrifice (or ritual killing) among the northerners even percolated to other literary cultures outside the Greek and Latin ones. It may be instructive to look more closely at one example from the Syriac tradition. Among the anti-astrological parts of Eusebius of Caesarea's *Praeparatio Evangelica* is a lengthy passage reputedly taken from *The Book of the Laws of Countries* (*Liber legum regionum*), attributed to an Edessene monotheist theologian and philosopher Bardesanes (or Bardaiṣan in his native Syriac), who was active in the late second and early third century.[135] It is unclear whether this work was identical with a text called *Dialogus de fato* of which we know of; other works by Bardaiṣan included dialogues against the heresiarchs Marcion and Valentinus, hymns, and an *Account on India*.[136] In addition to Eusebius, excerpts from the *Book of the Laws of the Countries* are also preserved in Latin in the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones*, but most importantly it also survives in the Syriac original.[137]

Though it has been transmitted under Bardaiṣan's name, *The Book of the Laws of the Countries* may in fact been written by his discipline called Philip; it features Bardaiṣan as a Socratic interlocutor, addressing a discipline called Awida.[138] The text has, however, been generally thought to reflect the interests and arguments of Bardaiṣan, who envisioned a careful balance of fate, free will, and physical nature controlling human lives.[139] In order to buttress his own position, Bardaiṣan had to argue against extreme forms of determinism – whether astrological or cultural. What is common to Claudius Ptolemy – as discussed in the 'Introduction' to this volume – and Bardaiṣan alike is that they both use well-established 'ethnic customs' of different peoples of the world in order

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in the Late-Imperial *Arg. Orph.* 1181–1190. See Killeen 1976, 209.

134 As in Mela 3.19; Luc. 1.453–454, 3.399–405, Plin. *HN* 30.13; Tac. *Ann.* 1.60–61, 14.30. On the bloody altars as a clear dramatisation: Pagán 1999, 308–309. Lampinen 2024c discusses the Roman fear of the untamed northern woods at this stage.

135 Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 6.10 (Bard. Ed. *BNJ* 719 F 3). On Bardaiṣan, see Drijvers 1966; Hegedus 2003; Denzey 2005; Ramelli 2009a; *ead.* 2009b, 150–159.

136 Bard. Ed. *BNJ* 719 T 2 *ap.* Euseb. *Hist. eccl.* 4.30; T 4 *ap.* Mos. Khor. *HA* 2.66; F 1 *ap.* Stob. *Flor.* 1.3.56.

137 [Clem.] *Recogn.* 9.23.5–24.1. The Syriac text (MS. B.M. Add. 14.658 fol. 129a–141a) was first edited by Cureton 1855, 1–34; in an amended form in *PS* II by Nau 1907, 492–657; then Drijvers 1964. Nau's numbering is still followed.

138 Drijvers 1966, 75; Denzey 2005, 159. Epiph. *Pan.* 2.56.1 names the interlocutor as Awida, an astronomer.

139 Hegedus 2003, esp. 339–341; Denzey 2005, 160, 166, 173–180; Ramelli 2009a, 54–90; Rigolio 2019, 5; Maas 2025, 138–141.

to substantiate their broader theories about the structure of the world, the position of humans in it, and the greater forces influencing them on both individual and collective levels. Such use cannot be considered 'ethnographical' in the sense that the author sought to convey new information to the audience; instead, much like in rhetoric, an ethnic custom had to be already known (at least in its proverbial form) to the readers or listeners for its mention to be able to carry its weight in the argument.[140] Yet Bardaiṣan's Edessene viewpoint makes his ethnic material of great interest as a source into what was known about the northern and western peoples in the Syriac cultural sphere during the High Empire.[141] Bardaiṣan's interest in ethnography has been noted, but the contents that ended up in the treatise attributed to him were wholly topical, especially in what it comes to the western parts of the world: Edessa was better connected for enquiries towards the East.[142]

Bardaiṣan's lengthy fragment 3 (as delineated in *BNJ* 719) addresses a disciple's question about astrological determinism, seeking to disprove or moderate this type of predictive knowledge. After listing a series of customs with clear underpinnings in morality and value judgments – beginning from the eastern extremity of the world, with Seres, and proceeding westwards through Indians, Bactrians, Persians, Geloi, Armenians, and Ḥatrans – Bardaiṣan briefly comments on Greeks and Romans, and then contrasts the Greek acceptance of homosexuality with the strong condemnation it elicits among the 'peoples from the Euphrates all the way to the Ocean towards the east'.[143] Next, the Syriac version pivots towards the north and discusses Germans, Britons and Amazons before moving back to the Middle East with Chaldaeans. The geographical progress among the northern ethnicised exemplars is not as straightforwardly linear as is the case with the easterners: Parthians are mentioned again between Britons and Amazons. The Syriac version, moreover, includes more ethnonyms (though only among the eastern groups) and orders its material in a way that differs from Eusebius' version.

Bardaiṣan's Syriac version tells that in the lands of the Germans handsome boys 'serve men as wives', with even wedding feasts held for them: much like in the Classical *Dissoi Logoi*, a comment follows about how this is not considered shameful among them, because to behave in this way accords with a law they have.[144] Most importantly, the text explains, it would be impossible that 'all those in Gaul' (the ethnogeographic switch is telling and one more proof of the easy elision between Germans and Gauls) who engage in this practice have the sort of horoscope that would indicate homosexuality, with both Venus and Mercury in the house of Saturn.[145] Eusebius' paraphrase of this section is briefer, and uses *Galloi* and *Gallia* throughout; perhaps significantly, Eusebius spiced up his translation by choosing two words which are regularly associated with northerners

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[140] Bardaiṣan (or Philip) foregrounds the utilitarian function of the listing of ethnic customs, though one can detect a desire 'to show off his teacher's knowledge of other cultures' laws, religions, and traditions' (Denzey 2005, 159; cf. 177–179).

[141] See Kolb & Speidel 2016, 156.

[142] Drijvers 1966, 173; see now the excellent study of Andrade 2020. Also relevant is Goldenberg 1998 on the Jewish tradition of 'Scythian barbarians', and the way it interacted with the Greco-Roman tradition.

[143] *LLR* 34 Nau 591 (Drijvers 1964, 23–63); *BNJ* 719 F 3 *ap.* Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 6.10.12–26.

[144] Bardaiṣan's sexual ethnography of Germans has been likened to something out of Petronius by Bowersock 1994, 48, but not in seriousness. Closer parallels are Diod. Sic. 5.32.7 and Ath. 13.603a.

[145] *LLR* 37 Nau 592 (Drijvers 1964, 50–51). The same planetary pairing is later found in [Caes. Naz.] *Dial.* 2 *respons.* 110 (*PG* 38 c. 985), who uses the term 'western Gauls' to distinguish Gauls from the Galatians, or possibly from the *Galloi* of Kybele; the ethnonym Langobardi dates Pseudo-Caesarius no earlier than the sixth century.

in the Imperial writing: *atheōs* (ἀθέως, 'godlessly') and *hybrizomenous* (ὑβριζομένους, 'flaunting decency').[146] In Britain, many men have one wife in common – an old Caesarian motif – and among the Amazons, the whole nation is without husbands and instead migrates 'like animals' every year in order to have a feast and sex with males outside their borders; as was part of the literary tradition on Amazons, they are said to expose the male children and only bring up the female ones.[147] The Syriac *LLR* adds that despite the similarity of horoscopes for all the children born to the Amazons (they are conceived at the same time, and are born close to each other), it is the gender which determines who will live and who dies.[148]

Overall, the *Liber Legum Regionum* shows how Greek learned speculation and common stereotypes alike had percolated into the Syriac-speaking circles. The astrological explanation models, for instance, work very similarly to how they are handled by Claudius Ptolemy (see the 'Introduction'). At one point, Bardaiṣan makes a macroscopic astro-ethnographic observation when he points out that Mercury and Venus are powerless along the outskirts of the whole world and hence no mercantile, poetic, artistic, or luxury-oriented professions are met among the peoples living in these areas: here, the clockwise circle of ethnonyms tracks a trajectory from Saracens to Numidians, Outer Germany, inland Sarmatia, Pontus, Caucasian Albania, and onwards.[149] This is a more theoretically sophisticated explanation for the old perception about northern peoples being 'most ignorant'.[150] The edge-of-the-world primitivism is thus explained and, like Ptolemy, Bardaiṣan can go on using the old stereotypes of planetary characteristics to track the civilisational stereotypes about the northerners. Another series of ethnic customs is used to demonstrate the foolishness of the astrologers' notion that entire peoples could have their modes of death and burial depend upon a single collective horoscope. In the case of Germans, Bardaiṣan says, 'most' (according to Eusebius) or 'all' (in the Syriac *LLR*) of them die by strangulation (except those who fall in war, adds the Syriac *LLR*) – even though it cannot be that all of them have Mars and Saturn interacting with the Moon and the hour of their birth.[151]

This reference to the Germanic ways of dying sounds like it might stem from the Imperial-era idea of northerners sacrificing human beings, possibly prisoners – and indeed it has been read as such in previous scholarship collecting testimonia to 'Celtic religions'.[152] A connection to general perceptions about European barbarians does seem justified, and behind the literary detail itself there may be some actual knowledge of ritual (or punitive) strangulation as it was practiced in North European societies.[153] What we do not know is exactly along what route of transmission the detail reached Bardaiṣan's

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[146] Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 6.10.27. According to the translation from Syriac by Drijvers 1964, 49, Bardaiṣan calls the Germans/Gauls 'guilty of this infamy', and later being 'shamefully used'; in the Pseudo-Clementine *Recogn.* 9.23.5 *turpiter succumbunt*.

[147] On Amazons and their localisation, see the chapter by Porucznik in this volume.

[148] Britons: *LLR* 36 Nau 594 (Drijvers 1964, 49) and Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 6.10.28; cf. Caes. *BGall.* 5.14. Amazons: *LLR* 38 Nau 594–595 (Drijvers 1964, 49–51) and Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 6.10.29. Hegedus 2003, 340 incorrectly translates the British practice as 'monogamy'.

[149] *LLR* 39 Nau 595–596 (Drijvers 1964, 51–53); *BNJ* 719 F 3 *ap.* Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 6.10.31.

[150] See p. 7 fn. 33, 161 fn. 25 above.

[151] *LLR* 39 Nau 596 (Drijvers 1964, 53); Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 6.10.34.

[152] See Zwicker 1934, 82–83; Hofeneder 2011, 159–162.

[153] On which e.g. Todd 2004, 110.

circle. Recapitulating his exemplars, Bardaiṣan again rattles through the list of ethnic customs showing how nativity does not compel any nation to behave the way they do, but instead their 'laws': Greeks cannot be compelled by their horoscopes to stop practicing gymnastic exercises naked, nor Romans to cease from ruling, nor Gauls to lay off their effeminacy, nor the many barbarous nations to take up civilised pursuits.[154] 'The new people of us Christians', on the other hand – an expression extant only in Syriac, with Eusebius eager to distance Bardaiṣan from Christianity – has brought change upon the customs of all nations, and 'our brothers who live in Gaul do not marry with men', and similarly among other nations the old customs have been abandoned.[155]

The influence of *nomos*, Bardaiṣan argues, is more powerful than that of the stars, but can be changed according to the human will. It therefore follows that the strong form of astrological fatalism about the effect of the stars on ethnic traits cannot hold.[156] Essentially, the hegemony of the ethnic *topoi* greatly aids Bardaiṣan in his demonstration of the inadequacy of 'Chaldaean' fatalistic arguments (something which prompted Eusebius to quote him at such length); since he could label whole population groups according to their 'generally known' practices under the rubric of 'laws', he was able to use this perceived consistency to undermine the idea of planetary influences. The irony of arguing against blanket 'fates' for the peoples of the world while nonetheless grounding the whole argument in stereotypical ethnic practices, presented as necessarily applying to entire groups, seems not to have occurred to the Bardaiṣanite author. This points to the power of such arguments; the peoples of the world *did* engage in such and such practices *en bloc*, for surely they were known to do so. The ways in which Bardaiṣan's audience had learnt to imagine foreign groups behaving carry the crucial burden of proof; the plurality itself of ethnic customs around the world is used to stage an epistemically convincing argument.[157] In consequence, 'nomic' essentialism trumps astrological determinism, at least for the early-third-century Edessene school of monotheist thinkers.

In these texts, we witness time and time again one typical characteristic of the Greco-Roman ethnographic gaze: the lack of exceptions. A barbarian custom is presented as an indelible ethnic signifier attributed to the entire outgroup, with very little nuance allowed. New political developments, such as Trajan's conquest of Dacia or the attack of the Costoboci into Greece during the rule of Marcus Aurelius, did occasionally result in new emphases in some of our surviving sources. The latter 'northerner crisis', for instance, was probably what inspired Pausanias to discuss the much-earlier Galatian attack of the 270s BCE so extensively in his *Periegesis*.[158] The attacks of Heruli and other Goths (often called 'Scythians' in our sources) against Greece between the 250s and 270s were another period when historical *exempla* were reactivated: we can now get a better idea about how these events were narrated thanks to palimpsest discoveries of new fragments from the Athenian historian and contemporary observer Herennius Dexippus.[159] But even in these cases the epistemic contours of the time favoured the reapplication of already-existing

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154 Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 6.10.35.

155 *LLR* 45–46 Nau 607–608 (Drijvers 1964, 59–61); Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 6.10.45–46.

156 Cf. Euseb. *Praep. evang.*6.10.34–35.

157 The *argumentum ex varietate* in heresiography (seen as 'Christian ethnography'), Berzon 2016, 7–8, 21–22, 48, 127–128, 206–217.

158 See Paus. 1.4.1–5, 10.19.4–23.13. On the attack of the Costoboci, see Brown 2011, 80–82.

159 Martin & Grusková 2014 and 2022; Mallan & Davenport 2015; Potter 2020. See also Brown 2011.

themes, ethnonyms, and *exempla*. The northerners had become almost changeless, and their moral and religious characteristics remained remarkably stable until Late Antiquity. This, of course, is typical to many ethnically essentialising knowledge regimes, and as is the case even nowadays, was reinforced by everyday utterances of proverbial (doxic) knowledge about outgroups.[160]

7. Writers of the Second Sophistic and Christian church fathers

Ideas and impressions about the religious customs and rituals of northern groups were broadly recognised at least among the literate classes of the High Imperial Era. I would like to conclude this chapter by having a look at the fortunes of the imagery of northern religion in the era of the Second Sophistic – an umbrella term for a set of preoccupations shaping Greek elite culture and identities from the late first century onwards.[161] By now, the imagery of northern religion had reached a strong degree of proverbiality in the Greco-Roman ethnographic imagination, and with it, become a part of the cultural *koine*. This is evident from the ways in which it was used within the stylistic and cultural parameters of the Second Sophistic, its individual elements equally at home in the rhetorical register, doxography, and technical writing. What these otherwise heterogeneous communication acts have in common is their way of treating the received archive of northern religious ethnography through a distinct set of audience expectations, proverbial assumptions, and knowledge-ordering gestures. Unlike in historiography or geography, their register seldom allowed for a formal ethnographic excursus. For the writers of these texts, such as in the didactic *Dialexeis* of Maximus of Tyre or the ethnic details often included in the dialogues of Lucian, the religious customs of the northerners were, for the most part, vehicles for thinking about human diversity and the distinctiveness of population groups in an empire of many peoples.[162]

Dio Cocceianus of Prusa, commonly known as Dio Chrysostom (*ca.* 40–*ca*. 115 CE), one of the most influential figures in the early development of the set of values, ideas and emphases that came to define the Second Sophistic, was also a speaker and moralist with a distinct interest in ethnic characteristics.[163] He can thus serve as a good starting point for this discussion. Like many orators and teachers under the rubric of 'Second Sophistic', Dio was also involved in local and provincial politics, imperial patronage networks, and the writing of extended prose texts (in his case, a vanished *Getica*).[164] In terms of identities, and despite his own Roman citizenship, Chrysostom maintains the separateness and primacy of Hellenic culture in comparison with the Roman one, even if he tends – like Cicero and others before him – to merge these two into a common polarity whenever barbarians are introduced as a third pole.[165]

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[160] On the social psychology of prejudice and its relationship to religiosity, see Johnson & al. 2012.

[161] For Second Sophistic generally, see e.g. Bowie 1970 and 2004; Anderson 1993; Den Dulk & Langford 2014

[162] Max. Tyr. *Dialex.* 2.8; 38.3; Lucian *Herc.* 1; *Tox*. 38 (see Braund 2004); *Scyth.* 4 (see Rostad 2019).

[163] Especially Greek identity: Schmidt 2010; Jackson 2017; more generally on Greek identity and ethnicity during the Second Sophistic, see Kemezis 2014; Dench 2017.

[164] Terrei 2000; Desideri 2024.

[165] Moles 2005, 128, 131.

By Chrysostom's time Druids were becoming *the* group of northern philosophers – indeed, the one detail an average educated Greek was likely to know about Gallic religious life in addition to the presence of human sacrifice in the recent past. In an oration known as *Recusatio magistratus*, trying to wriggle out of the onerous duty of Prusa's archonship, Dio gives examples of how even the barbarian peoples have thought it suitable to have philosophers as advisers to their kings. Although he mentions the Magi, Egyptian priests, Indian Brahmins and Celtic Druids as all being devoted to divination and cultivating wisdom (καὶ τούτους περὶ μαντικὴν ὄντας καὶ τὴν ἄλλην σοφίαν), the collective function of the list in the speech is not much different from the catalogues of 'wise barbarians' or Cicero's listings of peoples practicing divination.[166] Dio emphasises the political power of all these classes of wise men and their sway over kings – leading him to highlight precisely the same aspect of these groups that was so loathsome to Pliny the Elder in his discussion of the Persian magocracy and the rule of Druids in Britain.[167] This may be partly incidental and dependent upon Dio's rhetorical needs, but the neutral use of the ethnic exemplar does stand out as an illustration of the Greek tradition's comparative lack of attention towards issues of domination and manipulation potentially at stake.

Dio's own interest and plans may have foregrounded the theme of philosophers as rulers: he had to take leave of his native Prusa partly because he had his eyes set on a higher price – the demise of Domitian and Nerva's adoption of Trajan had opened new and more stable alleys for advancement as a rhetorically trained philosopher in Rome.[168] Finally, we cannot discount the possibility that similar emphases being bandied about in Dio's own chronological context – particularly in Pliny and Tacitus – could be at least circumstantially related to the theme of 'rule by wise men'. For Dio, the same ethnographicising stock elements may have been suggested by several different considerations – principal among which was his need to avoid getting stuck in Prusa and gaining the attention of the newly elevated Trajan. His subsequent '*On rulership*' is a good example of the Herculean *exemplum* in praising a military emperor: Dio narrates at length the famous choice of the future hero between two female personifications, in his interpretation named as *Basileia* and *Tyrannia*.[169] Herakles, devoting his life to vanquishing tyrants wherever he met them, was thus the saviour of the world and of humankind. In closing his speech Dio reminds Trajan that even in their own time the emperor could rely on the providential help of Herakles.[170]

Earlier in this chapter, we discussed how in the Classical Era, Herakles and Achilles had been used to explain and conceptualise northern peoples – originally in the direction of the Black Sea, in particular. Another survival of the heroic and Homeric connections of the North Pontic coast can be found in Dio Chrysostom's speech *Borysthenitic*us, which participates in the general resurgence of interest towards Scythian themes in the second century CE.[171] Dio's credentials during Trajan's reign may have been strengthened by his earlier travels (probably in 95 CE) to the North Pontic coast, particularly the city of Olbia,

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166 Dio Chrys. *Or*. 49.7; cf. Cic. *Div.* 1.90–92.

167 Plin. *HN* 30.2, 13.

168 On Dio's career and plans, Moles 2005, esp. 124–125.

169 Dio Chrys. *Or.* 1.61–84; cf. Pliny the Younger's *Paneg.* (= *Pan. Lat.* 1(1).14.5).

170 Dio Chrys. *Or.* 1.84. Trajan appears to have minted coins with Herculean themes: *RIC* III 695, 581, 702; *CIL* 6.2074,67. Hekster 2005, 205 about Trajan's carefully cultivated associations with Hercules.

171 Cf. Kindstrand 1981, 3, also 24.

where he according to the *Borysthenitic*us had journeyed in order to collect material for his *Getica*.[172] The speech itself is devoid of direct references to northerners' religiosity, but it constitutes a memorable exploration of the borders and markers of Hellenicity, delivered back in the cultural heartlands of the Asia Minor littoral. The Scythians hover behind the text as an oppressive real-life presence, against whom the Olbiopolitans are on the guard militarily, but with which they have clearly begun mixing in cultural terms. This opens up for Dio the option of furnishing a vivid and captivating description of such a mixed society, all tailored to the knowledge-base of his audience back in Prusa.[173] In an explicit nod towards Herodotus' Scythian Melanchlaeni ('Black-Cloaks'), Dio's Borysthenites (his preferred, classical name for the Olbiopolitans) wear black cloaks as well as trousers – that perennial symbol of the barbarian – and carry swords all the time.[174]

The rhetorically trained writers of the second and third centuries – among them the influential lineage started by Dio and his pupils – were very familiar with a set of *exempla* which were sometimes historical, but often also had clear links with the ethnographical tradition. Many of the Latin writers were still engaging with the ethnographic material generated in the formative period of the Late Republic, while on the Greek side Herodotus was a constant presence as a model. Moralising use of details about barbarian cults or rituals is frequent, and the distinctive and sometimes shocking rituals of the barbarians could be used to communicate thoroughly Hellenic values. The ancient habit of spicing up set-pieces with ethnic curiosities from the provinces or further afield yet – as seen, for instance, in Lucian's dialogues *Scythian*, *Toxaris*, and *Herakles* – produced texts that have understandably attracted the interest of scholars of Iron Age European religion. Yet these communication acts are much more firmly grounded in ingroup dynamics of shared cultural imagery than has often been recognised.[175] The ethnic phenomena were 'saved' in the tradition because they had their uses.

I would argue that the continued relevance of many of the details about northern religion was not strongly dependent upon their correspondence with 'facts on the ground', but from any given detail being well enough known and distinctive enough to serve as a literary device. There is also plentiful evidence for involution and innovation, which modulated the era's traditionalism in treating barbarian religious life.[176] For instance, some Imperial-era elaborations based on Lucan's ethnographicising name-dropping of Gallic divinities are preserved in *scholia* and commentaries: the anonymous scholiasts to his epic offered *interpretationes* of the divine names as well as gruesome technical details of human sacrifice.[177] We do not know exactly the route through which these details

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[172] Dio Chrys. *Or.* 36.1; Philostr. *VS* 487 (Dio Chrys. *BNJ* 707 *Get.* T 2a = T 2 *FGrH*). See Moles 2005, 125–126, 128. This would mean that Dio's *Getica* was likely inspired by Domitian's engagement with Dacia (85–88 CE; see Strobel 1989), not Trajan's, but cf. also Desideri 2024. It may be that the idea of composing a *Getica* for Domitian was part of Dio's earlier plan for advancement in Rome.

[173] See Bäbler 2002, esp. 321–325; cf. *ead.* 2005, 147 on Dio aiming at a larger public.

[174] Dio Chrys. *Or* 36.7–8; cf. Hdt. 4.107. See Bäbler 2002 and *ead.* 2005, esp. 146–147; and West (S.) 2007 on Herodotus.

[175] Although see, very usefully, Rostad 2019.

[176] Schmidt 2002 offers an interesting comparative overview of the traditionalist tendencies; cf. Nikolaidis 1986.

[177] *Adnot. super Luc.* 1.445–446 (possibly based on Lact. *Div. inst.* 1.21.3); *Comm. Bern. in Luc.* 1.445 (with perhaps some influence from Tert. *Apol.* 9.5; August. *De civ. D.* 7.19). On *interpretatio*, see e.g. Webster 1995a and 1995b; Dillery 1998; Ando 2005 and *id.* 2012; Rives 2011; Marco Simón 2017; Bernardo Stempel 2023.

reached the surviving Early Medieval form of the *scholia*, but it should highlight the need to stay alert about the criss-crossing of ethnically framed details about outgroup religions between literary and paratextual genres.[178]

During the High Empire, it was particularly the universalising tendencies of the Stoic tradition that brought emphasis on the idea of the 'seeds of wisdom' dispersed among many different peoples – especially those barbarians who were deemed as suitably ancient. These 'wise men' were located among several northern groups (as opposed to Hdt. 4.46, where Anacharsis is called the only one Pontic peoples ever produced).[179] Their doctrines were sometimes presented as distinct to their doctrinal lineage and propagated by them among the broader population; other times their supposed doctrines seem more like derivatives from the innate qualities of barbarian *gentes*. Listing, name-tagging, and the elision between doctrinal and ethnic categories are all techniques that linked technical literature, rhetoric, doxographical and philosophical writing when barbarian religions were being described. Out of the traditional set of northerners, the Getae and Galatae were both featured in such listings, often with remarkably positive assessments.[180] This perhaps reflects the way in which active feelings of threat from these groups were falling into dormancy, especially in the Greek sphere. Hyperboreans, too, have an afterlife in these listings, which suits the shift towards soft primitivism in the iconosphere of 'barbarian wisdom'. This tendency also directed some of the doxographical writers of the era back to Hellenistic sources, such as Alexander Polyhistor – an important influence for the *topos* of 'Pythagorean Druids', as we saw.[181] Other northerners such as Germans or Britons seem to have been too incongruous to be included in these lists, and are never found in them.

Christian writers, too, took up many traditional elements from the ethnographical archive of northern religion. This is in no way surprising: the Second Sophistic and the rhetorical *paideia* (παιδεία) were at the heart of the doctrinal persuasion strategies for many High and Late Imperial monotheistic writers, just as they had formed an important pool of ethnicised evidence for earlier doxographers. Indeed, one of the greatest sources for continuity in the way the northerners' religious customs and attitudes were imagined was the rhetorical training of the Greek and Roman elite. Used to thinking about population groups as essentialisingly defined entities with changing names that masked their underlining changelessness,[182] it was no wonder that writers well versed in the *exempla* of the past and the traditional sets of 'barbarian customs' went on to use the best-known and often pre-Roman – because most distinctive and 'ethnic' – rituals of the northerners in their communication.

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[178] Werner 1994 demonstrates the interconnected nature of the two sets of *Adnotationes* and *Commenta Bernensia* to Lucan, but cannot cast light upon the possible source for the relevant additions. Liccardo 2024 is now an excellent guide to the Late Antique lists of peoples' names.

[179] E.g. Diog. Laert. 1.1; Corn. *Theol. Graec.* 17 mention Celts; Origen *C. Cels.* 1.16 mentions Odrysians, Hyperboreans, Galactophagi, Gauls and Getae as 'most wise and ancient *ethne*'; Clem. Al. *Strom.* 1.15.66.1 with Orpheus as 'Odrysian or Thracian', as well as mentioning Getae; 1.15.71.4 refers to 'Druids of the Galatai' and 'philosophers of the Celts'.

[180] References to the 'just Scythians' of the earlier tradition seem to tail off somewhat; cf. Aesch. F 328 *ap.* Str. 7.3.7; cf. 7.2.9 on Ephorus. See Motta 1999.

[181] At this stage, innovations to the theme include the reversal of the pedigree of wisdom, with Pythagoras consulting the Galatae and Brahmins: Alex. Polyh. *BNJ* 273 *De Pythag. symb.* F 94 *ap.* Clem. Al. *Strom.* 1.15.70.1: ἀκηκοέναι τε πρὸς τούτοις Γαλατῶν καὶ Βραχμάνων τὸν Πυθαγόραν βούλεται.

[182] See p. 39–40 in the 'Introduction' to this volume.

Before the late 300s CE very few political or military events were strong enough to necessitate a refashioning of the status quo in the images about northerners and their religiosity. Thus, we see human sacrifice, belief in rebirth, forested locations, and other similarly proverbial *topoi* being eagerly repeated throughout the whole period. The richness of the inherited iconosphere made it into a flexible epistemic tool with immediate purchase in the ethnographic imagination of the learned classes – and in some cases, even the broader societal strata – still in the second and third centuries. Undoubtedly this baggage did influence the worldviews of the Greco-Roman elites. The empire was to meet various new groups of northern peoples over the Late Antique centuries, but many of them were never thought about as new; instead, they were labelled with the time-honoured ethnonyms and assimilated into the flexible and well-primed pool of ideas about northerners.[183]

8. Conclusions

This chapter has offered a review of the literary and ideological tradition that shaped the way in which Greeks and Romans – as well as some other groups, such as Syriac-speakers – thought about northern peoples' relationship with matters of religion. I have preferred not to construct a strong interpretative dichotomy between 'ethnographical' and 'literary' forms of knowledge-ordering, nor one that would try to distinguish in strict terms between 'mythological' and 'historical' groups and events. It seems most representative of the dynamics within the tradition to allow for a degree of haziness, associativeness, and slippage between the different registers and modes of discourse. To fully sum up the whole length of the tradition studied, with developments spanning so many centuries, would prolong this chapter even further, so I will rather offer here a set of general observations about some broader tendencies.

Diachronic changes can be detected in how different modalities of understanding the northern religiosity came into vogue or faded out. Unlike in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* and many other sources from the Classical era, for instance, religious relativism seldom entered the picture in the Latin writers of the Imperial Era. In this later context, the human sacrifices and implausible beliefs of the northerners were not the result of the universal gods (in various guises) changing their standards among the barbarians, but of the barbarians misunderstanding the principles of religion, or being misled by their religious specialists.[184] If there is any particular 'axial age' for the intensification and instrumentalisation of the imagery entertained about northern religiosities, it can probably be fixed onto the Hellenistic shock reaction to the sudden irruption of Celts/Galatae into the Greek scene. From the late third century BCE onwards, Romans, too, began to see the

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[183] For some aspects of the Late-Antique stage of the tradition, see e.g. Goldenberg 1998; Clark 1999; Heather 1999; Gillett 2009; Humphries 2010 on giving a Biblical flavour to Goths; Kominko 2016 on the teratological aspects; Barnes 2023 on applying the originally Herodotean idea of Scythian 'sword of Ares' to Attila's Huns; Liccardo 2024 on the handling of inherited ethnonyms.

[184] Although some classicising Greek texts still included relativistic arguments: see Anacharsis in Plut. *Sept. sap.* 5 (150d-e); see Kindstrand 1981, 44–48, 154. Cf. the very sophistic-sounding Sext. Emp. *Pyrrh.* 3.220, though it should be noted that none of his ethnicised examples in 3.221–231 (apart from a brief mention of some Thracians eating dogs: cf. Satyr. *Vit. Eur.* 4.12 in *POxy.* IX 1176 fr. 39 col. 20–21) comes from a traditionally 'northern' group.

propagandistic benefits of galatomachic posturing. The 'functionalisation' of the imagery comes across particularly clearly from the deeply moralising way that both the negative and the positive aspects of northerners' religiosities were narrated. The intellectual curiosity of middle-to-late Hellenistic doxographical writers towards the idea of 'barbarian wisdom' among the northerners was yet another facet of this functionalisation, relying as it did on projection and mirroring as the Greek and Roman scholars contemplated the northern sages. These tendencies were to prove long-lived, though further developments are also in evidence during the later Imperial centuries.

I have tried to show in this chapter how throughout the Greco-Roman tradition the northerners' rituals or religious beliefs were frequently deployed as illustrative shorthands for their stereotypically imagined behaviour or essentialisingly presented character.[185] Religion clearly was one efficient way of 'marking' the northerners. The expectations of ancient audiences – conditioned by the widespread, culturally shared repetition of ethnically tagged details – were often reinforced by exemplars of religious behaviour or beliefs, even though these were cherry-picked to dovetail with the existing knowledge-pool. Both literary and broader epistemic aspects are intimately involved in such speech acts, but earlier literary episodes and models were often significant for how these shorthands were presented. Correspondence with actual 'facts on the ground' was sometimes a factor, but seldom decisive for the continued use of an element. It is probably impossible to discern in most cases whether the literary tropes drew most of their strength from being 'good to think with', from being mandated by literary convention, or from conforming with observable conditions in the real world. The literary and genuinely 'belief-based' use of the stereotypes cannot be always disentangled from one another. But even if a stereotype came to be commonly used as a literary *topos* does not mean that it had become ideologically empty. Since the elite worldview in Greco-Roman antiquity was to a significant degree shaped by conventional tropes both in written registers and in spoken rhetoric, the tradition-bound ways of marking the North would frequently have steered real-life decision-making.[186]

This chapter – and this collected volume as a whole – has sought to showcase the broad variety of uses that the northern iconosphere could be put into: legitimation, moralising commentary, curiosity-piquing marvel-writing, mythistorical and aetiological scenarios, historical causation, and technical writing. Another aspect that bears repeating is the variety of functional deployment for the ethnically framed details about northerners' religions. They could either be presented in a distinct excursus or used in ways that were textually more subtle. In historical narratives, for example, they were frequently used to explain northerners' behaviour. The explanatory power of aetiologies was particularly strong, and this type of stories often straddled the mythistorical and the contemporary, seeking to localise the origins, characteristics, actions, and intergroup relationships of the northern peoples.

But to add one rather less-discussed aspect to the above-mentioned ones in terms of functionalisation of the northern imagery, it also seems to me that some ethnically

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[185] Lact. *Div. inst.* 1.21.4 states explicitly that cruel barbarian cults were to be expected, since their religion had to match their characters.

[186] Caesar's treatment of his northern enemies is one example: Roymans 2019, esp. 456–458. The interplay between inherited tropes and real-life experience about northerners is well debated, in the case of Dexippus' third-century CE *Scythica*, by Potter 2020, 360–366.

framed details about northern peoples' religious capabilities had a prominent comforting function for the Greek and Roman ingroups. Religiously tinged narratives of salvation were, perhaps understandably, highly ethnocentric. If the northerners could be seen as prone to fundamentally misunderstanding the proper relationship between gods and humans, even their most impious depredations would eventually be overcome through the maintaining of correct religious attitudes and rituals by the suffering ingroup. A good example of these depictions and their striving for emotional comfort and relief is the way in which the iconography of the Hellenistic royal propaganda preferred to show the Galatae. The northern readiness to die – commonly rationalised through their supposed belief in rebirth or transmigration of souls – was often illustrated by their suicides at the moment of defeat.

These emotional tales of salvation from the northerners' impious attacks could understandably gain different emphases due to societal, cultural and ideological specificities. In the Greek sphere, for instance, tales of personal or impersonal epiphany of many divinities abounded, while in the Roman tradition the *pietas* of the Romans tended to be focused on the human actors, and supernatural aid took the form of prophetic warnings or rhetorical nods towards the action of Fate. Finally, the emotive use of stereotypes is complicated not only by the rhetorical expediency of imperial propaganda, but even more pervasively by the template-creation and knowledge-ordering practices used by the writers ranging from highly literary authors to those working in more technical registers. Due to the need to provide ancient audiences with vivid, captivating and memorable scenes, emotional charge is also tangible in the retellings of famous episodes featuring barbarian rituals or impious behaviour.

So in addition to all the other intellectual, ideological, literary and knowledge-generative aims that shaped the ways northern religions were portrayed in the Greek tradition, it may also have brought a measure of existential comfort to the ingroup to contemplate the barbarians' fundamental – indeed, essential – lack of understanding the divine. Their superstitiousness, *hybris*, and wrong beliefs could be harnessed against them, while the ingroup's setbacks must have derived from a temporary lapse in correct human-divine relations. The barbarian lack of piety could thus be a source of hope for Greeks and Romans. What is more, the moral and religious characteristics of the northerners were explained through theoretical frameworks that made it easy to assume that these outgroups could not overcome their decisive handicap in understanding the human-divine balance. I would suggest that it is this epistemic comfort that links the supposedly indelible, essentialist weakness of the northern barbarians' understanding of proper religiosity, and the emotional charge of the ancient ingroup perceptions.

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