

Military Elites, Romans or Barbarians?

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-1. Ethnographical traditions: Greek ethnography since Herodotus knew Celts and Scyths as the two *ethne* (ἔθνη) living in the northern part of the inhabited world. *Ethne* was understood as greater groups of peoples. Other parts of the world were inhabited by Thracians or Persians, Ethiopians, Libyans, and *Maurusioi*. Modern research tended to overemphasize the north-western parts of the so-called *barbaricum*. As late as in the second half of the first cent. BCE Caesar introduced a third umbrella term – *Germani*. The latter proved to be rather short living and was not used any more during the third cent. CE, only the territorial category *Germania* had some afterlife. The concept of Scyths was used frequently up to the high middle Ages. Huns, Avars and Hungarians were classified or even named as Scyths. The Geographus Ravennatus around 700 defined Scandinavia as an *Antiqua Scythia* to explain the origin of the Scythic Goths, Gepids, and Danes. Three centuries later, Adam of Bremen entitled the Baltic Sea *mare Scythicum*. Doing similar research for the label “Celts” could be challenging.

-2. Who is the barbarian? Have there been major differences between a Roman province and the so-called *barbaricum* concerning the better part of the population? Gaul or Britain, Armenia or Moesia, Spain or Syria had become Roman provinces. What was labelled *Germania* and *Scythia* did not. Peoples coming from these regions were barbarians, peoples inside the imperial borders friends and allies. At the same time *foederati* and other groups associated to the Romans were defined as part of the empire (*orbis terrarum* and *orbis romanus* were designated to equal). As a matter of fact a “barbarisation” of Roman territories could happen rather quickly (e.g. the Aremorica after 410 or the reappearance of ethnic labels known from the Tropaeum Alpium, coincidental totally new labels are in use). Local elites sometimes used ethnic labels to build up a political, economic and military framework when Roman supraregional organisation for whatever reason disappeared or weakened. Tensions between central Roman elites and local interests were important reasons for the problems of the empire since the third cent. Furthermore it can be shown that banditry (*bagaudae*) and barbarism appear as a quite similar phenomenon in the sources (e.g. in Gaul and Spain in the first decades of the 5th cent.). So there is a wide range of possible alternatives to a Roman order and the same is true for the Roman structures themselves. Future research will have to differentiate the seemingly clear borders of late antique societies, the concept of invading barbarians and ethnic identity as a non Roman criterion.

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