

PLUTARCH'S TIMELESS BARBARIANS AND THE AGE OF TRAJAN

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Barbarians do not play a central role in the writings of Plutarch. His only works specifically devoted to barbarians are the *Quaestiones barbaricae*, now unfortunately lost¹, and the *Life of Artaxerxes*, which gives a vivid account of the life at the Persian court in the times of Artaxerxes II (405-359 B.C.). However, frequent reference is made to barbarians throughout Plutarch's works: some 950 passages can be collected in which barbarians are mentioned. A close study of these shows that Plutarch's presentation of barbarians is based on a number of negative characteristics which may be grouped under the following main headings:²

- 1) the most frequent one is ἀγριότης i.e. the overall savage nature of the barbarians, their ferocity, bestiality, and cruelty in its various forms (including human sacrifice), and their lack of education;
- 2) another widely represented feature is θρασύτης i.e. the over-confidence, resulting in boldness, arrogance, and other similar attitudes, for which Plutarch uses such words as θράσος, τόλμα, ὕβρις, φρόνημα, ἀσέλγεια, ὑπεροψία, ἀλαζονεία, and many others;
- 3) equally characteristic of barbarians is their immense wealth, πλοῦτος, and all that is designated by the term τρυφή, i.e. luxury, extravagance, lust, pleasure, sensualism, women, wine, etc.;
- 4) in a context of war, barbarians are also characterized by πλῆθος, i.e. their huge number, their powerful armies, etc.;
- 5) and finally, some less frequently mentioned, but still typically barbarian traits are ἀπιστία (faithlessness), ἀνανδρία (cowardice), μοχθηρία (wickedness) and δεισιδαιμονία (superstition), all of which can be grouped under the general idea of φαυλότης (vileness) stressing the natural inferiority of the barbarians.

That Plutarch considered these characteristics as typically barbarian can be also be seen in his use expressions in which the word βάρβαρος is paired with another adjective³. These 63 doublets are revealing because they display βάρβαρος in its general meaning and often refer

¹ See Catalogue of Lamprias, nr. 139.

² For this introductory section I refer the reader to my extensive study on Plutarch and the barbarians (Schmidt 1999).

to non-barbarians. So it is significant to see βάρβαρος coupled with words such as ἄγριος, ὤμος, θηριώδης, πολέμιος, θρασύτερος, ὕβριστης, ἄπιστος, φαῦλος, μοχθηρός and ἀπαίδευτος, to mention but a few.

At times Plutarch also mentions positive qualities for barbarians, such as courage, intelligence, wisdom, and others⁴. However, the overwhelming majority of descriptions stress their negative image. Evidently, this presentation of barbarians is not new. Ever since the barbarian was “invented” in the fifth century, to paraphrase the title of Edith Hall’s splendid book⁵, these or similar vices and shortcomings have been constantly associated with the barbarians. Most of them appear already in Aeschylus’ *Persians* and are found throughout the fifth and fourth centuries, especially in Herodotus and the orators. So what we have in Plutarch, as in many other post-classical authors, is nothing but a stereotyped image of barbarians inherited from the Classical period.

Equally stereotyped is the use Plutarch makes of the image of barbarians. With remarkable consistency, the negative characteristics of barbarians are used as a foil to bring out the good qualities of the Greek and Roman heroes, amongst which one finds in particular παιδεία, φιλανθρωπία, ἀρετή, σωφροσύνη, φρόνησις, δικαιοσύνη, ἀνδρεία.⁶ Again, there is nothing new here: Plutarch has simply taken over the well-known Ελληνες-βάρβαροι antithesis developed in the Classical period, except that in his works the civilized group is extended to include Romans as well as Greeks; he does not seem to make a distinction between these two groups⁷. In fact, barbarians in Plutarch are hardly more than a literary device used to bring out the virtues of the Greeks or the Romans. It does not seem to matter to which barbarians they are actually opposed, whether Persians, Parthians, Gauls, Iberians, or

³ Doublets (in general) are frequently used by Plutarch: see Teodorsson 2000; for the doublets involving βάρβαρος, see Schmidt 2000 (cf. also Schmidt 1999, 15-26).

⁴ See Schmidt 1999, 239-70.

⁵ Hall 1989.

⁶ For a convenient list see Nikolaidis 1986, 244.

⁷ On this point, Plutarch’s presentation of barbarians seems to agree rather with the idea of a conciliatory attitude of Plutarch towards the Romans (as defended e.g. by Jones 1971, Boulogne 1994, Sirinelli 2000) and not with

others, and indeed most of the characteristics mentioned before apply equally to all barbarians, or so to speak to a “universal” barbarian. The barbarians in Plutarch thus leave an impression of “timelessness”, an idea which holds true for Plutarch’s moral world in general.⁸

Furthermore, Plutarch’s eyes are constantly turned towards the past, especially the Greek past, and the barbarians are frequently used as means to glorify this Greek past, the great victories of the Persians wars, the wonderful achievements of fifth- and fourth-century heroes such as Themistocles, Aristides, Lysander, Timoleon or Alexander. Plutarch is also a great defender of the idea of the unity of the Greek world as opposed to that of barbarians⁹. This leads Plutarch to some strong nationalistic statements, for instance when he applauds the idea that the Greek language should never be at the service of barbarians¹⁰ or that it is laudable (and even just!) to make war against the barbarians¹¹. But such statements seem to be rather anachronistic in Plutarch’s days. They do not at all account for the fact that times had changed and that the idea of a war of the united Greeks against barbarians was totally disconnected from the reality. So, in a time when Trajan was fighting his Dacian and Parthian Wars, the “timelessness” of Plutarch’s barbarians may seem utterly anachronistic.

The aim of this paper is to investigate this issue of “timelessness” by comparing Plutarch’s presentation of barbarians to that of other contemporary writers, Greek and Roman. The present survey will be limited to writers whose works fall (more or less strictly, as we shall see) into the reign of Trajan, although Plutarch himself of course wrote a large part of his works before this period¹². This paper will necessarily be a general survey rather than a detailed discussion.

the view that Plutarch’s writings were a form of resistance against the Roman domination (see e.g. Swain 1996, Duff 1999).

⁸ See Pelling 1995, 208-13; Pelling 2000, 58-60; see also his article in the present volume.

⁹ For references to the numerous relevant passages, see Schmidt 1999, 133-37 and 236-37.

¹⁰ *Them.* 6.4; *De def. or.* 412A.

¹¹ See e.g. *Them.* 6.5; *Arist.* 16.3; *Cim.* 18.1; *Ages.* 16.6; *Pomp.* 70.2-7; *Phoc.* 17.7.

GREEK WRITERS

Among the Greek authors of that time, it seems obvious to start with Dio of Prusa, Plutarch's almost exact contemporary. In comparison to Plutarch, it should immediately be noted that Dio makes far less use of barbarians in his works. This is certainly due to the nature of their respective *oeuvre*: Dio was not, of course, relating the military campaigns of men like Alexander, Caesar, Marius, Crassus, Antony, and Lysander, who were all directly involved in battles with barbarians, nor did he write a life of a barbarian, like Plutarch's *Artaxerxes*¹³. However, when compared to the *Moralia*, which have more or less the same moral-philosophical concerns, Dio's works are comparable to Plutarch's in their use of barbarians. Significantly, most examples about barbarians are found in speeches "where philosophical content is married with a sophistic posture", in Ewen Bowie's words¹⁴, and especially in the *Fourth Oration on Kingship*, which features Alexander, to whom Plutarch also devoted much attention - not only in the *Life*, but also in the two speeches on *De Alexandri fortuna aut virtute*.

If one considers simply the occurrences of the word βάρβαρος (which are so revealing of Plutarch's conception), the results are less telling in the case of Dio. Among 68 occurrences there are only two doublets, which are nevertheless interesting, since one is βαρβαρικῶς καὶ οὐκ ἄνευ ὕβρεως (36.8.1) and the other ἄγροικον καὶ βαρβαρικόν (36.24). The other 24 instances of βάρβαρος express the standard polarity Ἕλληνες καὶ βάρβαροι: this expression had become such a fossilized one that it was almost devoid of any meaning¹⁵.

However, in general, Dio gives as stereotyped an image of barbarians as Plutarch. Dio's barbarians are mainly used as paradigms of πλοῦτος (for which there are at least 7

¹² A convenient overview of the authors of that time may be found in Fein 1994; see also Bowie's article in the present volume.

¹³ One should not forget, however, that Dio also wrote a work on the Getae, which is now unfortunately lost.

¹⁴ Bowie 1991, 195.

examples)¹⁶ and τρυφή (9 examples)¹⁷, to which may be added a few mentions of their πλῆθος, ἀπιστία, and πλεονεξία¹⁸. Cruelty, quite surprisingly, is less frequently stressed, but their ferocity is mentioned once and their lack of education comes up at least three times¹⁹. The Great King, as the king par excellence, also plays an important role in philosophical debates and especially in the four Kingship orations²⁰. There are also a few positive examples, mainly related to Cyrus and Anacharsis²¹, but the overall picture is clearly negative and comes close to that of Plutarch.

Likewise, Dio makes the same rhetorical use of the barbarians as a foil, although with less insistence than Plutarch. Some of these comparisons are fairly harmless, for instance when he contrasts the gracefulness of Greeks and barbarian songs (36.43) or their conception of beauty (21.16-17), or when the Scythians are said to be incapable of setting up a market in the Greek fashion (36.5). Other comparisons, however, clearly show Dio's contempt for the barbarians, especially in relation to the Persian Wars, when their πλῆθος is said to be useless against the παιδεία of the Greeks (13.23-25), or when Miltiades is celebrated for humbling the φρόνημα of the Persians (73.6). Greek victories are celebrated more than once by Dio²². Occasionally, this contrast leads to some strong statements. The Nicomedians and the Niceans, for instance, are said to fight like Greeks against barbarians, or, as Dio adds, like human beings against wild beasts: indeed a very strong association (38.46). Elsewhere, he recalls Agamemnon's words that it was a disgrace for the Greeks to have given Helen in marriage to barbarians (11.62).

¹⁵ This rate (almost 1:3), however, is much higher than in Plutarch, who uses the expression 20 times out of 565 occurrences of the word βάρβαρος (1:28).

¹⁶ Wealth: 4.10; 4.16; 12.9-10; 33.23; 47.14; 79.5; 80.12.

¹⁷ Lustful life and related themes: 2.48; 3.72; 4.5-6; 4.113; 21.4-6; 21.16-17; 33.26; 62.5; 77.29.

¹⁸ Large numbers: 13.23-25; 17.14; 31.18; faithlessness: 74.14; greediness: 17.14.

¹⁹ Ferocity: 36.4; lack of education: 12.59; 36.19; 53.6-8.

²⁰ E.g. 3.35; 4.45; 4.66-67; 6.35; 14.8.

²¹ See 2.77; 13.32; 15.22; 25.5; 32.41-45; 49.7.

²² E.g. 19.14; 31.19; 32.69.

It should be stressed once more that Dio makes much less use of barbarians than Plutarch. His examples are far less numerous and more conventional. However, the overall picture and the technique of contrast are strictly speaking the same as that of Plutarch.

Another writer which may be included in this survey, although his exact dates are not known, is the novelist Chariton of Aphrodisias²³. In his *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, as in most of the other Greek novels, the barbarians play an important role, as has long been recognized²⁴. The emphasis laid by Alexander Scobie on the figure of Dionysios, the wealthy Milesian to whom the heroine Callirhoe is sold, is puzzling. It is certainly true that he is presented as a loyal servant of the Great King (1.12.6; 2.1.5), that he is immensely rich, a characteristic of barbarians (1.13.1) and that he may have some bad character traits: he is μεγαλοπρεπής (2.3.3), βαρύθυμος (2.7.2) and shows ζηλοτυπία (3.7.6; 3.9.4). But he is clearly presented as a Ελλην (2.5.1), he stands for such distinctive Greek virtues as παιδεία, φιλάνθρωπία, εὐσέβεια, ἀρετή, δικαιοσύνη, and σωφροσύνη²⁵, and during the trial which takes place before the Great King (books 5 and 6), he is clearly “the Greek” as opposed to “the barbarian” Mithridates²⁶.

In short, we find in Chariton’s novel the traditional negative concept of barbarians with no attempt at justification. It is admitted as an unquestioned fact that barbarians are cruel, in some cases immensely rich, jealous, arrogant, scheming and, of course, servile. There are examples for each of these characteristics in Chariton’s novel²⁷, but they are not particularly stressed because they are considered as self-evident.

Two characteristics, however, are more heavily underlined because they are relevant to the story. The first one is the pursuit of women. As Chariton puts it, this is a natural characteristic of the barbarians: φύσει δέ ἐστι τὸ βάρβαρον γυναιμανές (5.2.6). Γυναιμανής, as is

²³ For a recent *status quaestionis* about his dates, see Swain 1996, 423; Reardon 1996.

²⁴ Notably by Scobie 1973; Bowie 1991; Kuch 1996.

²⁵ See especially Dionysios’ description in book 2 (e.g. 1.5; 2.1; 3.3; 4.1; 4.4; 5.1-4; 11.6).

²⁶ Alexander Scobie misconceives the identity of Dionysos, as Ewen Bowie (1991, 188, n. 14) has already noted.

²⁷ Some of them are listed in Bowie 1991, 189-91, but many more could be added.

well-known, is the word used by Homer to describe Paris²⁸, and indeed a little later Chariton says that “there are hundreds of Parises in Persia” (πολλοὶ Πάριδες ἐν Πέρσαις, 5.2.8). It may be relevant to note here that Dionysios, who is also a lover of women, is called φιλογυνής, which is certainly not meant as a compliment by Chariton, but which is much less negative than γυναιμανής. The barbarians are consistently presented as mad about women. It is most obvious in the case of Mithridates, Pharnaces and the Great King, who all fall in love with Callirhoe and intrigue to get hold of her, but γυναιμανία also applies to the Persian women themselves, as can be seen from the jealousy and the arrogance with which they meet Callirhoe (5.3.1-9), and indeed to the whole population, which becomes frenzied throughout Callirhoe’s “anabasis” towards Babylon (4.7.5-6). The attitude ascribed to the barbarians, for whom women are only an object of lust and pleasure, is contrasted once more with Dionysios’ attitude towards Callirhoe: he too is in love with her, but although he could take advantage of her as his slave, he is respectful of her and of her noble origin and does not touch her before he is her lawful husband. This stands in sharp contrast to the Great King and his numerous concubines.

In the last part of the novel, when the Persians go to war against the Egyptians, another traditional characteristic of the barbarians comes up, namely that of πλῆθος and δύναμις. This is used in the traditional way to contrast the virtues by which the Greeks defeat the vast numbers of barbarians. So, in one case, this brings out their εὐγένεια and their ἀρετή (7.3.8), and when the barbarians attack with καταφρονήσει μετ’ ἀλαζονείας, the Greek reply with φρονήματι μετ’ εὐβουλίας (7.3.9). And significantly, after the final defeat of the Persians, the barbarians fall into pitiful lamentations, while Dionysios, though he too is on the side of the defeated and has himself lost Callirhoe forever, shows φρόνησις and παιδεία (8.5.10).

To sum, throughout Chariton’s novel there is a clear contrast between Greek virtues and barbarian vices, sometimes explicitly mentioned, but most of the time tacitly implied. Just as

²⁸ Homer, *Il.* 3.39; 13.769.

for Dio of Prusa, Chariton's concept of barbarians and the literary use he makes of that concept thus exactly match Plutarch's presentation.

One also finds discussions of barbarians among the representatives of other literary genres, such as Epictetus in philosophy, pseudo-Apollonius of Tyana in epistolography, and Favorinus in rhetoric. Too little of their work remains, however, to be useful for our study. All the relevant passages have been collected by Ewen Bowie²⁹. It appears that Epictetus is not at all concerned with the question of barbarians, while Favorinus, himself a Gaul, rather stresses the fact that as a barbarian it is possible to acquire Greek culture. It is regrettable, however, that no historian is to be found among contemporary Greek authors. Arrian's works, unfortunately, come too late to be included in this study, although his (political) career started already under Trajan. His portrayal of barbarians would certainly be of interest and would probably reveal a more sober and objective assessment than what we have seen in the authors discussed above, although, as far as can be judged from a superficial examination, much of it is still very conventional and stereotyped.³⁰

ROMAN WRITERS

Among the Latin writers of that time, on the contrary, historiography is powerfully represented in the person of Tacitus. Two of his works, the *Agricola* and the *Germania*, not only deal directly with barbarians, but have also generated a huge bibliography³¹. There have been many different opinions about the purpose of the *Germania*.³² It is however generally accepted that it is a genuine ethnographic work and that the excursus on the Britons in the *Agricola* (10-12) also has an ethnographic character. The genre of these two works certainly explains then why the description of the Britons and especially of the Germani is much more

²⁹ Bowie 1991, 201-4.

³⁰ Beside his *Indica*, Arrian also wrote works related to barbarians which are either lost (*Alanikê*) or only preserved in fragments (*Parthica*). On these, see Stadter 1980, 133-63.

objective and differentiated and does not refer to the usual stereotype, at least at first sight. It is impossible here to enter into the details of Tacitus' presentation of the Britons and the Germani. But it is well known that Tacitus offers a particularly positive description of these two peoples, especially of the Germani. The latter are described as a pure race (2.1; 4.1), uncorrupted by money (5.2-3), respectful of the gods (9.1-10.3), having wise and "democratic" institutions (7.1; 11.1-2; 22.3), living in chastity (18.1; 19.1) and attached to their country and to their freedom to a degree that forces admiration (7.2; 8.1; 14.1). Tacitus provides an almost idealistic image of these primitive barbarians, whose pure and sound way of life contrasts with the decay of the Roman society³³.

However, in Tacitus' two major works, the *Annales* and the *Historiae*, the image of the barbarians is radically different. There may still be a number of positive descriptions of barbarians, in which Tacitus particularly expresses his genuine admiration for their moral strength and their love of freedom³⁴, but the overall picture of the barbarians is extremely negative and takes up all the traditional and stereotyped characteristics. It would be vain to try to give a complete overview of these in a few lines³⁵, but a good insight into Tacitus' opinion about barbarians can be gained from some of his more general statements about them, i.e. when he refers to barbarians in general and not to a particular people³⁶. So, for instance, about the king of the Sedochezi (Caucasus), we find the following sentence: *fluxa, ut est barbaris, fide* (*Hist.*, 3.48.), and about the Germani, we read *vinolentiam ac libidines, grata barbaris* (*Ann.*, 11.16). In another passage, Inguiomerus, a leader of the Germani, makes propositions which are described as *atrociora et laeta barbaris* (*Ann.*, 1.68). Elsewhere (in relation to the Parthians) *clementia ac iustitia* are said to be *ignota barbaris* (*Ann.*, 12.11), and Civilis is described as *ultra quam barbaris solitum ingenio sollers* (*Hist.* 4.13). There are many more

³¹ For recent bibliographical surveys: on the *Agricola*, see Ogilvie et al. 1991 and Hanson 1991; on the *Germania*, see Lund 1988, 248-83; Lund 1991b; Rives 1999, 329-40.

³² Recent discussions (with *status quaestionis*): Timpe 1989; Lund 1991a; Rives 1999, 48-56.

³³ In the *Germania*, this idea is expressed several times (e.g. 5.2-3; 19.1; 20.1-3; 26.1-3).

³⁴ See in particular his descriptions of Civilis (*Hist.* 4.13ff) and of Arminius (*Ann.* 2.88ff).

³⁵ A convenient summary may be found in Dauge 1981, 255-56 and 261-62; see also Walser 1951, 67-85.

such statements, even in the *Agricola*, where for instance it is said that *nec ullum in barbaris ingeniis saevitiae genus omisit ira et victoria* (*Agric.*, 16.1, about the Britons under Boudicca), and that the Britons acclaim Calgacus' speech *ut barbaris moris, fremitu cantuque et clamoribus dissonis* (*Agric.*, 33.1)³⁷.

All these examples refer to a “universal barbarian” and this seems indeed to be the dominant features of Tacitus' description of barbarians. Even in the apparently objective *Germania*, implicit reference is made to this “universal barbarian”: the Germani are often described by contrasting them with the commonly expected type of barbarian: they are not superstitious but respect the gods (10.1-2), they never (or rarely) commit adultery and punish it severely (19.1), they do not have many wives as do other barbarians, but are content with one wife only (18.1; 19.1), their kings do not have unlimited power (7.1), etc. The only difference with the other authors examined so far is that Tacitus does not use the method of contrast as systematically. Of course, the barbarians are also used to bring out the virtues of the Romans and the superiority of the Roman civilization, of which Tacitus is absolutely convinced (despite his critical remarks about it)³⁸, but in general, the contrast is rather implicit than explicit.

A contemporary author often compared to Plutarch because he was active in the same literary genre is Suetonius. But surprisingly enough Suetonius hardly makes any use of barbarians throughout his work, at least not in the sense of a contrast with the Romans³⁹. There are other writers whose works fall in or around the reign of Trajan, but their contribution to the question of the image of the barbarians is of less importance and may also be omitted in the present discussion. Like Suetonius, they make little use of barbarians and, in

³⁶ This is what Dauge (1981, 256 and 261) calls “le Barbare universel” or “le Barbare en soi”.

³⁷ For other such general judgments about barbarians, see *Germ.*, 39.2; 45.5; *Hist.* 4.15; *Ann.*, 1.57; 1.65; 2.2; 4.45; 6.32; 12.12; 12.14; 13.38.

³⁸ See Walser 1951, 70-72.

³⁹ The word *barbarus* occurs only 20 times in the *Lives of the Caesars* and is never used as a doublet nor with a particularly negative meaning. Other passages referring to barbarians (without using the word “barbarus”) are listed in Dauge 1981, 267, n. 572. None of these mark a direct contrast to positive qualities, except *Aug.* 21.5-6,

most cases, tend to stress the degeneracy, or as it were, the barbarization of their own Roman society⁴⁰.

Another author who does not usually mention barbarians in his works is Pliny the Younger. There is one notable exception, however: his *Panegyricus*. There, a whole section (chap. 12-17) is devoted to Trajan and the barbarians. This section is particularly interesting for two reasons. First, we find again the stereotyped image of barbarians: their main characteristics are *ferocia*, *superbia*, *insolentia*, *furor*, and their large numbers. Pliny had of course precise historical situations in mind when he mentioned the barbarians: battles against the Germani and against the Parthians (in Trajan's "youth", as he says in 14.1, i.e. at the age of 23), and also against the Dacians (though not as a part of the actual Dacian wars). However, he never or rarely refers to them by name. It is always done in an allusive way, so that his descriptions are of a general type and thus universal. Secondly, this negative image is systematically used to bring out Trajan's superior qualities: fighting against *ferocissimis populis* and *ferae gentes* (12.3), he intimidates them simply by his presence (12.4); likewise, the Parthians lose their *ferocia superbiaque* (14.1) at the mere mention of Trajan's approach (14.1); the *plurimae gentes* and *infinita vastitas* of the Germania (14.2) are contrasted with the efficiency of Trajan's actions (*velocitas*, *alacritate*, 14.3-5); his *fortitudo* (16.3) is such that the barbarians do not even dare to fight against him (16.3); the *insolentia furorque* of one of their kings (16.4) is countered by Trajan's *virtutes* (16.5) and the atrocities committed by the barbarians (*immania ausa*, 17.2) bring out his greatness (*te sublimem*, 17.2) and his *moderatio* (17.3). In a later section, it is also stressed that against their terrifying threats and shouting (*minacibus ripis*, *fremitus barbaros hostilemque terrorem*, 56.7) Trajan remains calm (*tutum quietumque*, 56.7).

where the faithlessness of the barbarians (*perfidiosius rebellantis*, 21.5) brings out Augustus' *virtutis moderationisque fama* (21.6).

⁴⁰ For a global view on authors of that period, see Dauge 1981, 228-46.

IMPERIAL PROPAGANDA

Pliny's *Panegyricus* is interesting because it comes close to what could be called official propaganda. In the case of Trajan, we are fortunate to have a number of public monuments and others records such as coins which allow us to get a fair idea of what the official propaganda was like⁴¹. And as far as barbarians are concerned, it can be noted that they play an important role in this propaganda: quite naturally, one might say, since Trajan indeed fought against barbarians, first the Dacians, and later the Parthians. And so it is not surprising that it is precisely these two peoples that are depicted in the official propaganda, i.e. the references will be to Dacians and Parthians in particular, and not just to a universal barbarian.

This is illustrated on coins, where the barbarians depicted can be instantly recognized as Dacians or Parthians because of their characteristic attributes, the curved sword (the *falx*) and the round cap for the Dacians, and the large trousers for the Parthians. We do not learn much more about these barbarians, however, since most of the coins are designed to represent plain facts: the conquest of Dacia or that of Parthia. So it is often Dacia herself, i.e. the personification of Dacia, which is represented. Numerous coins show her down on her knees⁴², or sitting on top of a heap of arms and mourning⁴³, or standing with her hands tied⁴⁴. Often, this is accompanied by the legend *Dacia capta*⁴⁵. We also get some narrative scenes from the Parthian wars. These are the coins of the type *Rex Parthus*, where the Parthian king is seen placing his crown at the feet of Trajan⁴⁶, or of the type *Regna adsignata* and *Rex Parthis datus*, where Trajan is shown imposing new kings on the conquered nations⁴⁷. These coins, as many others from that period, are not intended primarily at a *laudatio Caesaris*

⁴¹ Most recently discussed by Bennett 1997.

⁴² Strack 1931, 108 (nr. 82; 348).

⁴³ Strack 1931, 110 (nr. 64; 70; 71; 84; 85); 121 (nr. 156; 157; 365); Richier 1997, 601.

⁴⁴ Strack 1931, 121 (nr. 117; 158); Richier, 1997, 601.

⁴⁵ Strack 1931, 121 (nr. 117; 156; 157; 158).

⁴⁶ Strack 1931, 218 (nr. 209; 220; 450; 465); Calo Levi 1952, 18-19; Richier 1997, 604, n. 66.

⁴⁷ Strack 1931, 222 (nr. 240; 250; 475); 224 (nr. 476); Calo Levi 1952, 19; Richier 1997, 605; 607, n. 81.

(although this is of course implicit), but simply represent, in Strack's words, a "sachlicher Bericht", i.e. a factual statement⁴⁸.

However, the *laudatio Caesaris* is clearly present on coins as well. Numerous coins represent Trajan, for instance, with his foot on a fallen Dacian⁴⁹, or on his horse turning his spear towards a vanquished Dacian⁵⁰, or with his foot on the head of the Dacian king Decebalus⁵¹. These same types also occur with a personification of Victoria, Pax or Rome instead of the emperor⁵². All these coins are designed to glorify the emperor, his Victoria, his *fortitudo*⁵³ and his virtues in general – on a number of coins he is offered the *corona civica* and the *clipeus virtutum*⁵⁴ –, but also the Pax, Securitas and Felicitas he has established⁵⁵. Once again, it should be stressed that these coins refer to specific barbarians, mainly the Dacians, but that they bring out the emperor's achievements and virtues through the traditional method of contrast. In that respect it is interesting to note that the coins of Trajan introduced a new type of small barbarians, standing at the foot of the emperor or of Victoria, Pax and Mars Ultor. Here, it seems, no specific victory or event is referred to, but the barbarians become something like an attribute of the emperor, symbolizing the emperor as *victor omnium gentium*⁵⁶. Here, we have indeed the image of the universal barbarian, where the identity of the barbarian does not matter because he has become a mere symbol of the emperor's invincibility. This type of small barbarian may have earlier examples, as some have argued⁵⁷, notably during the Republic, but it is important to note that it was apparently developed particularly in the reigns of Domitian and of Trajan, and that it was to become a

⁴⁸ Strack 1931, 131.

⁴⁹ Strack 1931, 113 (nr. 83; 358); Calo Levi 1952, 16.

⁵⁰ Strack 1931, 119 (nr. 80; 81; 360; 361); Richier 1997, 600, n. 37.

⁵¹ Richier 1997, 600, n. 38.

⁵² Strack 1931, 118 (nr. 371); 124-25 (nr. 93; 94; 366; 367; 368); Calo Levi 1952, 17, n. 16; Richier 1997, 600, n. 38.

⁵³ See Richier 1997, 598; 600.

⁵⁴ Strack 1931, 117 (nr. 99; 100; 142; 377); 57 (nr. 307; 315; 319; 324; 329; 334; 341).

⁵⁵ These themes are frequently mentioned on Trajan's coins, see the catalogue in Strack 1931, 238ff.

⁵⁶ On the small barbarian as an attribute, see Calo Levi 1952, 25-40.

⁵⁷ For instance Demougeot 1984, 128.

common type of representing the emperor later in the second century⁵⁸. The universal barbarian thus made its entry even into official propaganda.

The same may be gathered from a quick survey of public monuments such as Trajan's Column in Rome or the Tropaeum Trajani in Adamklissi (Romania), on which barbarians, or to be exact, Dacians, play an important role⁵⁹. It should immediately be said that, here too, not the universal type of barbarian is represented, but one very specific enemy, i.e. the Dacians. Both monuments are very realistic and give a very detailed ethnographic representation of the Dacians. We find them with the same characteristics as on coins – the *falx* and the round cap on the head – but also with many details of their national dress, the way they wear their hair, etc⁶⁰. Here we come close to Tacitus' objective and ethnographic portrayal of the Germani. And indeed, on Trajan's Column and of the Tropaeum Trajani a genuine admiration is expressed for the courage of the Dacians (XI.66; XXIV.155), for their brave though vain defence of their liberty, and a lot of pathos is present, especially in Decebalus' suicide (XXII.145) and in the two scenes of collective suicide (XIX.120; XXI.140).

However, here too are expressed the universal themes which could apply to any barbarians. Trajan's Column stresses the ferocity and cruelty of Dacians: there are scenes of torture of Roman prisoners by Dacian women, possibly a human sacrifice (VII.45); one of the depicted Dacian towns even has human skulls hanging on the walls, a stereotyped barbarian custom in Graeco-Roman thought, although here it may be historically true (IV.25; see also VIII.57). The Dacians are also often represented fleeing in chaos before the Roman army, as barbarians are expected to do (VI.37, VIII.57; *TT* VI), or angrily disputing with each other (XVII.111), displaying the stereotypical barbarian lack of unity, or conspiring even after they have been

⁵⁸ Calo Levi 1952, 27-28.

⁵⁹ The following observations are based on the descriptions of the Column by Cichorius 1927 and Rossi 1971 and of the Tropaeum by Florescu 1965. References to the Column will be by spiral (in Roman numerals) and scene number in Cichorius, to the Tropaeum by initials *TT* and metope number in Florescu. For a bibliographical survey on the Column, see Koeppel 1982, 491-94. For full "cartoons" and photographs of the Column, see also the essay of Koeppel in this volume and the splendid website of the McMaster Trajan Project 1999 at <http://www.stoa.org/trajan/>.

⁶⁰ Cf. Rossi 1971, 60; 121-26; 184; Florescu 1965, 587-638.

defeated (XII.76), a reference to the theme of ἀπιστία. The participation of women and children in war (*TT* XL-XLIII), as described for instance by Tacitus in the case of the Germani (*Germ.* 8.1), is also typical.

All these universal characteristics of the Dacians are apparently used to bring out the superiority of the Roman army and particularly of the *imperator* Trajan. The official propaganda likewise projects a very stereotyped image of the barbarians and a traditional use of this image, as has been seen throughout this quick survey. The universal type of barbarian is indeed omnipresent in the authors examined above, particularly in the Greek writers, for whom the universal barbarian is an unquestioned reality. Indeed, as Simon Swain has put it, in the works of the writers of the Second Sophistic, the opposition Greek – barbarian was still “alive and kicking”⁶¹. It might even be interesting to investigate whether there was a revival of this antithesis in a time when the Greeks felt again so strongly about their own identity. On the Roman side, the issue seems to be more differentiated if one looks at Tacitus, but one should not forget that two of his works – the *Agricola* and the *Germania* – are exceptions because of their ethnographic nature, while in his two majors works, as was argued above, the reference is always to the universal barbarian. Elsewhere too, and particularly in the official propaganda, despite the reference to specific barbarians, we always end up with the universal characteristics of barbarians and with the traditional use of them. This is certainly not peculiar to the Age of Trajan: the stereotyped barbarian image and its conventional use were inherited from the Classical period, as was said in the introduction, and were to remain the standard presentation of barbarians in late Antiquity⁶². But, to come back to the starting point of this paper, I hope to have shown that Plutarch’s timeless barbarians are not anachronistic in as much as they perfectly agree with the general image of barbarians in the age of Trajan. These, at least, are the conclusions which may be drawn from the literary and “propagandistic” evidence about the barbarians. It may well be that if one looked at this issue from a political

⁶¹ Swain 1996, 68.

or economical point of view, as e.g. Karl Christ did in a brilliant essay⁶³, or from the archaeological evidence of the interaction between Greeks/Romans and barbarians⁶⁴, different conclusions would be reached about the attitudes of the Greeks and the Romans towards the barbarians. It would not, however, make much difference for our perception of Plutarch since he is so firmly anchored in the literary tradition. One might perhaps want to argue that the timelessness of Plutarch's barbarians relates to the general, cautious timelessness which Christopher Pelling has noted when it comes to potentially "hot" issues in Plutarch⁶⁵, but in the case of the barbarians, this was just too much of a generally accepted and universal concept to reveal any conscious choice of Plutarch in that direction. It rather shows how powerful the traditional, stereotyped image of the barbarians still was in the time of Trajan.

⁶² See Chauvot 1998.

⁶³ Christ 1959.

⁶⁴ See e.g. Cunliffe 1988.

⁶⁵ Pelling 1995; Pelling 2000, 58-60; see also his paper in the present volume.

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