

Representations of Barbarians in Late Antiquity

a) Characteristics of the *barbaricum*

Geographical boundary

1) **Orosius 1.2.54** “Now I will explain the territory (*Moesia and Thrace*) which the Danube separates from the land of the Barbarians (*a barbarico*) in the direction of the Mediterranean.” (*My translation*)

Appearance and social structure

2) **Ammian 31. 2. 5-6**: “They (*the Huns*) dress in linen cloth or in the skins of field-mice sewn together, and they wear the same clothing indoors and out. But when they have once put their necks into a faded tunic, it is not taken off or changed until by long wear and tear it has been reduced to rags and fallen from them bit by bit. They cover their heads with round caps and protect their hairy legs with goatskins; their shoes are formed upon no lasts, and so prevent their walking with free step.” (*Transl. J.C. Rolfe 1939, 383*)

3) **Ammian 31. 2. 17-18**: “ the **Halani**...although widely separated from each other and roaming over vast tracts, as Nomads do, yet in the course of time they have united under one name, and are, for short, all called Halani because of the similarity in their customs, **their savage mode of life** (*ob mores et modum efferatum vivendi*), and their weapons. For they have no huts and care nothing for using the plowshare, but they live upon flesh and an abundance of milk, and dwell in wagons, which they cover with rounded canopies of bark and drive over the boundless wastes. And when they come to a place rich in grass, they place their carts in a circle and feed **like wild beasts**. As soon as the fodder is used up, they place their cities, as we might call them, on the wagons and so convey them: in the wagons the males have intercourse with the women, and in the wagons their babes are born and reared; wagons form their permanent dwellings, and wherever they come, that place they look upon as their natural home.” (*Transl. J.C. Rolfe 1939, 391*)

4) **Eunapius fragm. 37**: “Valens dispersed them (*the Goths*) around the cities, keeping them in free custody and aroused the scorn of those who observed their physique, which was excessively tall, too heavy for their feet to bear, and pinched at the waist like the insects that Aristotle describes. When the inhabitants of the cities received them into their home and realized their feebleness, they were force to laugh.” (*Transl. R.C. Blockley 1983, 53*)

5) **Ambrose *Epistula extra Collectionem* 4. 9-10**: “This man (Julius Valens) dared to appear in the view of the Roman army wearing a collar and bracelets, dressed in the manner of tribesmen, being desecrated by Gothic impiety, behavior which without doubt is sacrilege, not only in a bishop, but anybody who is Christian.” (*Transl. Liebeschuetz 2012, 15*)

6) **Orosius 7. 43. 4-6**: “At first I (*Athaulf*) wanted to erase the Roman name and convert all Roman territory into a Gothic empire: I longed for Romania to become Gothia, and Athaulf to be what Augustus had been. But long experience has taught me that the uncontrolled wildness of the Goths will never submit to laws, and that a state cannot be a state without law. Consequently I have more prudently chosen the different glory of revitalizing the Roman name with the vigor of the Goths, and I hope to be acknowledged by posterity as the initiator of a Roman restoration, since it is not possible for me to change the character of this Empire.” (*My translation*)

b) Intellectuals and barbarians

7) Themistius Oration 16. 211 a-b: “Was it better to fill Thrace with corpses or with farmers? To make it full of tombs [b] or living men? To progress through a wilderness or a cultivated land? To count up the number of the slaughtered or those who will till the soil? To colonize it with Phrygians or Bithynians perhaps, or to live in harmony with those we have subdued? I hear from those who have returned from there that they are now turning the metal of their swords and breastplates into hoes and pruning hooks” (*Transl. Heather- Moncur 2001, 280*)

8) Themistius Oration 16. 211 c-d: “[c] Human existence has in the past forth many such examples and our times are not the first when it has come to pass that those who have transgressed have found forgiveness and thereafter been of use to those who had been wrong. Look at these Galatians, the ones on the Pontus. Yet these men crossed over into Asia under the law of war, and, having depopulated all the region this side of the Halys, settled in this territory which they non inhabit. And neither Pompey nor Lucullus destroyed them, although this was perfectly possible, nor Augustus nor the emperors after him; rather, they remitted their sins and assimilated them into the Empire. And now no one would ever refer to the Galatians as barbarians but as thoroughly Roman. [d] For while their ancestral name has endured, their way of life is now akin to our own. They pay the same taxes as we do, they enlist in the same ranks as we do, they accept governors on the same terms as the rest and abide by the same laws. So will we see the Scythians do likewise within a short time” (*Transl. Heather- Moncur 2001, 281*)

9) Orosius Hist. adv. Pag. 7. 41.7 : “The Barbarians, having forsworn their swords, have turned to the plows and nurture the surviving Romans as allies and friends so that now there may be found among them some Romans who prefer poverty with freedom among the barbarians rather than to pay tributes with anxiety among the Romans.” (*My translation*)

10) Theodoret Hist. Eccl. 5. 30-31: “[30] It was perceived by **John** (*Chrysostom*) that the Scythians were involved in the Arian net; he therefore devised counter contrivances and discovered a means of winning them over. Appointing presbyters and deacons and readers of the divine oracles who spoke the Scythian tongue, he assigned a church to them, and by their means won many from their error. He used frequently himself to visit it and preach there, using an interpreter who was skilled in both languages, and he got other good speakers to do the same. This was his constant practice in the city, and many of those who had been deceived he rescued by pointing out to them the truth of the apostolic preaching. [31] On learning that some of the Nomads encamped along the Danube were thirsty for salvation, but had none to bring them the stream, John sought out men who were filled with a love of labor like that which had distinguished the apostles, and gave them charge of the work. I have myself seen a letter written by him to Leontius, bishop of Ancyra, in which he described the conversion of the Scythians, and begged that fit men for their instruction might be sent” (*Transl. Blomfield 1892, 351-352*)

11) Salvian *De gubern. Dei* 5. 8: “Whose injustice so great, except among the Romans? Whose injustice so great except our own? The Franks are ignorant of this crime of injustice. The Huns are immune to these crimes. There are no wrongs among the Vandals and none among the Goths. So far are the barbarians from tolerating these injustices among the Goths that not even the Romans who live among them suffer them” (*Transl. O’Sullivan 1947, 141*)

12) Salvian *De gubern. Dei* 7. 2: “Perhaps you are thinking that, since I have spoken at length about public games and public immorality, in this respect only are we worse than the barbarians, because they do not commit the sins we commit and they are not stained in the same way with the sin of carnal lust and the filth of deadly fornication. If you will, let me also compare the Romans with the other nations in respect to the latter. Indeed, I do not know that they are more rightly comparable to any other than to those barbarians whom, placed as possessors in the very bosom of the state, God has made the masters of the Roman soil. Hence although God’s judgment can in no way be disputed, since he has taken from us the best portion of our right and given it to the barbarians, let us see whether he apparently acted according to a just judgment in this removal and bestowal” (*Transl. O’Sullivan 1947, 187*)

13) Salvian *De gubern. Dei* 7. 6: “Among chaste barbarians, we are unchaste. I say further: the very barbarians are offended by our impurities. Fornication of Goths is not lawful among the Goths. Only the Romans living among them can afford to be impure by prerogative of nation and name. I ask: what hope is there for us before God? We love impurity; the Goths abominate it. We flee from purity; they seek it. Fornication among them is a crime; with us a distinction and an ornament.....here and now I ask them who think we are better than the barbarians: tell me which of these vices is committed even by a very few Goths, or which of them is not committed by the Romans or by nearly all Romans? And we wonder when the soil of Aquitainians, or all of our own is given by God to the barbarians, since the barbarians are now cleansing by chastity those lands which the Romans polluted by fornication”. (*Transl. O’Sullivan 1947, 193-194*)

14) Synesius *De regno* 22a- 26c: “Arming peoples who have been raised under different laws...is like mixing in wolves with your sheep dogs....the Scythians must be excluded; all romans must be pressed into service. The military must be kin with them it defends, or it will prey upon them. The first step will be to ban these skin-wearing foreigners from the roman civic honors they insult.....the foreign infection must be purged from the army, before it spreads. The Scythians are an effeminate race the Romans conquered of old. They have come to us as suppliants driven from their own land. Theodosius raised them up. But now they repay his compassion with insolence... hordes of foreigners extort subsidies from us. We must recover our military strength and drive them forth. (*Summary from Cameron –Long 1993, 105-106*)

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