

Representations of Barbarians in Late Antiquity

One of the most significant transformations of the Roman world in Late Antiquity was the integration of barbarian peoples into the social, cultural, religious and political background of the Roman Empire (Pohl 1997; Barbero 2007; Mathisen-Shanzer 2011).

In this paper I explore how the Roman intellectuals defined the Barbarians after the battle of Adrianople. The clash prompted Romans to reassess the political strategies in integrating the Barbarians after the failure of Valens's policy (Heather 1991; Lenski 2002) and also to reconsider the values that gave them distinctness and to shape those values by contrast with a constructed "Barbarian" (*barbaricum*). Scholars have pointed out how the concept of *barbaricum* often coincides with foreignness: the *barbaricum* commences where the Empire finishes (Chauvot 1998, 467) and it is even physically separated by the Empire through natural barriers, such as the river Danube (Orosius, *Hist.* 1.2.54). The *barbaricum* appears different in outward appearance (Von Rummel 2007), religion (Simonetti 1980a), etc.

The first part of this paper defines the characteristics of the *barbaricum* and then suggests that the concept of *barbaricum* was often used by Christian and Pagan, Western and Eastern writers in order to oppose or support political, cultural, or religious disputes, such as the debate after the sack of Rome in 410. I argue that it is rare that all the different features of the *barbaricum* are used in the same dispute. The analysis of the literary sources of the time shows that the Roman writers selected different features according to the messages they want to deliver to their readers. The manipulation of the features of the *barbaricum* and the "opportunistic" views of the foreigners adopted by the Roman writers became a political instrument and created "schizophrenic" images of the barbarians.

Thus while Synesius, who fiercely criticized and opposed the “philanthropic” attempt of integrating the Goths theorized by Themistius, depicted the Barbarians as hordes of effeminate, skin-wearing, nomadic foreigners extorting subsidies from the Romans, a few decades later Salvian of Marseille, who unleashed a harsh invective against the pagans, contrasted the licentiousness and greediness of the weak and effeminate Romans with the moral virtues of virile barbarians (namely the chastity of the Huns, the piety of the Goths, etc.). Similarly, while Ambrose emphasized the Arian belief of the Goths and compared them to heretics, John Chrysostom celebrated a mass with an Arian Gothic priest and Orosius considered the barbarians *instrumenta dei* and people who, once converted, could fill up the church with new believers.

In the hands of the Roman writers the images of the Barbarians and the concept of *barbaricum* became malleable, fluid, variable and at the mercy of the ideology of the Roman intellectuals.

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