

## A Galling Problem: The Cultural Identity of Galatians in Scholarship

The reception of the Galatians by modern scholarship has been mixed in regards to their cultural identity through the Hellenistic period and the Roman Empire. In scholarship, the Galatians are portrayed in two different lights. Philip Freeman and Peter Ellis present the Galatians as a Celtic group that preserved their heritage for several centuries in Asia Minor (Freeman 2006; Ellis 1997). A more moderate approach is taken by Mitchell Stephen; he presents the Galatian as having gradually adopted local practices while still maintaining a few Celtic practices (Stephen 1993). The different representations of the Galatians in scholarship call to question the evidence employed in identifying the Galatians and how the narrative of each group of scholars shows metahistorical bias.

Primary sources for the Galatians are particularly lacking. Strabo's *Geographica* and Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia* discuss the Galatians (Strabo XII.V; Pliny V.XLII), while other mentions of Galatian are found scattered through these and other works as well as inscriptions from Galatia. Both Freeman and Ellis use Strabo's passage concerning the Galatian government to draw connections between the Galatians and the Gauls in modern day France, in particular asking whether there was the possibility of druids in Galatia (Freeman 2006, 43-45; Ellis 1997, 129). Both scholars base their arguments on the assumption that the Galatians maintained similar cultural practices and values as the western Celts in the time of Strabo in the late 1<sup>st</sup> Century BCE, nearly 250 years after the Galatians migrated to Anatolia. Such sweeping statements require a strong foundation of evidence, which both authors admit is lacking. For scholars to make such arguments based on conjecture calls into question whether there is an underlining motivation for their conclusions. I believe that the representation of the Galatians

provided by Freeman and Ellis is an example of historiography twisted by personal or political bias towards the notion of a western Celtic culture.

In contrast, Stephen acknowledges that there is a possibility of the existence of some priestly class carrying out religious practices in Galatia, but he does not make a one to one comparison between the Gauls and Galatians. Additionally, Stephen discusses how the Galatians adopted local religions particularly the cult of Cybele. The examples he provides are primarily Galatian leaders who act as priests for various cults, a stark difference from the Gauls (Stephen 1993, 48-50). An issue with this argument is, once again, the use of partial evidence to complete a larger concept. Stephen's arguments assume that the Galatian leaders reflected the practices of the entire population. Although Stephen represents the Galatians differently from Freeman and Ellis, I believe that historiographical biases could once again be influencing the scholarship.

It appears that due to the incomplete evidence of the Galatians, the portrayal of the Galatians in scholarship becomes liable to biases through metahistory. I believe these biases may stem from preconceptions based on the national heritage and cultural dispositions of the scholar. To gain a better understand of why these biases occur, I examine how the available evidence is employed and the possible societal or cultural factors which could influence its interpretation. Scholars such as Ellis may wish to present the Galatians in a more purely Celtic light. On the other hand, scholars lacking in Celtic heritage can be equally influenced by other cultural factors as well. Freeman's arguments about the Galatians and the cult of Cybele may be influenced by the prolonged issues of immigration and naturalization in the United States. I hope by looking into the possible factors that influence the different presentations of the Galatians, a clearer image of the truth behind the Galatians can be found.

## Bibliography

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