Concepts and Antiquity. 2022 Chronicle - Barbarians in Ancient Civilizations 1

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LES CONCEPTS EN SCIENCES DE L'ANTIQUITÉ : MODE D'EMPLOI

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I- Introduction: Barbarian webs in space and time

— Τι περιμένουμε στην αγορά συναθροισμένοι;
Είναι οι βάρβαροι να φθάσουν σήμερα.
— Γιατί μέσα στην Σύγκλητο μια τέτοια απραξία;
Τι κάθοντ' οι Συγκλητικοί και δεν νομοθετούνε;
Γιατί οι βάρβαροι θα φθάσουν σήμερα.
Τι νόμους πια θα κάμουν οι Συγκλητικοί;
Οι βάρβαροι σαν έλθουν θα νομοθετήσουν. [...]

—Γιατί κ' οι άξιοι ρήτορες δεν έρχονται σαν πάντα
να βγάλουνε τους λόγους τους, να πούνε τα δικά τους;
Γιατί οι βάρβαροι θα φθάσουν σήμερα·
κι αυτοί βαρυούντ' ευφράδειες και δημηγορίες.

— What are we waiting for, assembled in the forum?
The barbarians are due here today.
— Why isn't anything happening in the senate?
Why do the senators sit there without legislating?
Because the barbarians are coming today.
What laws can the senators make now?
Once the barbarians are here, they'll do the legislating. [...]
— Why don't our distinguished orators come forward as usual
to make their speeches, say what they have to say?
Because the barbarians are coming today
and they're bored by rhetoric and public speaking (translated by E. Keeley, Ph. Sherrard, Cambridge, 1975).

Constantine Kavafy's poem Περιμένοντας τοὺς Βαρβάρους (*Waiting for the Barbarians*, written in 1898) gives probably the best insight on the ancient barbarians: politically, they symbolize the foreign enemy which stimulates a civilization by putting it in danger; historiographically, before the 20th-century bibliography, they first refer to the Hunnic, Germanic and Turkic invaders who put an end to the Western and the Eastern Roman Empires; historically, the barbarians are those who do not appreciate the *logoi* – words, speech, language and thinking of the Greeks and Romans, even when they became able to make the laws.

If the Greek *ethnos* and the Roman *natio* are based on the idea of blood and therefore genealogy (real or invented), the *barbaros* is essentially related to the *logos* that he mispronounces and misunderstands. This semantic nuance makes possible the identification of the barbarians with all foreigners, in particular with the Persians, then with the Macedonians and the Romans, who took away the freedom of the Greeks. It also allows an extended use of the word, for all those who are slaves or do not reach a certain level of intelligence and culture. Besides multiplicity, it permits a certain fluidity in the plane of content: according to Plato,[1] the mythical Danaoi were barbarians by birth and Greek by custom (φύσει μὲν βάρβαροι ὄντες, νόμῳ δὲ ″Ελληνες). As any other criterion for defining the cultural cohesion of a community assuming a collective identity, the barbarity functions by opposition: Thucydides[2] clearly states

1 *Menexenus*, 245c-d.

2 Thucydides, I, 3, 3.

that the Barbarians could not exist without the Greeks, in Homer. Thinking in terms of Greek *versus* Barbarian determines polarization and analogy in the identification and description of the self and the others. Still, in order to survive throughout time, the notion remained flexible, being always negotiated and adapted to the new historical conditions of the group and of those who used it as an identifier: Barbarians were those met by the Greeks during their colonization of the Internal Sea; Barbarians were the Persians, threatening the existence of the Greeks; Barbarians were those who did not adopt the Hellenic and then Hellenistic culture; Barbarians were those who were no part of the Roman memory and law, remaining outside the Empire; Barbarians were those who did not adopt the Empire's Christianity;[3] Barbarians were those who came to occupy the spaces historically assigned to (other) barbarians, sometimes taking over their names and descriptions. The notion and the concept have necessarily a history, just like any other philosophic concept or like a coin: in the "parable of the coin" told by Francis MacDonald Cornford,[4] coin and concept preserve their shape, but change their value, depending on the context.

The importance of the barbarians in the Classical literature is due to the centrality of the concept of *logos*, as one can see from some of its earliest occurrences: Homer's Carians are misusing the language of the Ionians, with whom they lived together for millennia;[5] in the 6th century BC, an Ionian thinker, Heraclitus of Ephesus[6] refers to the "barbarian souls" unable to properly understand the senses of the eyes and ears (κακοὶ μάρτυρες ἀνθρώποισιν ὀφθαλμοὶ καὶ ὦτα βαρβάρους ψυχὰς ἐχόντων). According to Herodotus' Athenocentric definition of Greekness, speech is only one of the criteria for defining ethnicity, besides genealogy (identity of blood lineage, ὅμαιμόν), religion (temples and sacrifices, θεῶν ἱδρύματά τε κοινὰ καὶ θυσίαι) and way of life (ἤθεά τε ὁμότροπα).[7] Nonetheless, all these criteria are fundamentally discursive: the blood connection is not genetic, but constructed in historical and mythic genealogies; the

3 See Dumézil 2016.

4 In Robb 1986.

5 Κᾶρες βαρβαρόφωνοι, *Iliad*, II, 867, an expression which can be compared with the Σίντιας ἀγριοφώνους in *Iliad*, VIII, 294; see Strabo, XIV, 2, 28, with Herda 2013.

6 B107 Diels-Kranz *ap.* Sextus Empiricus, VII, 126.

7 τὸ Ἑλληνικόν, formulated from the perspective of the Athenian supremacy in Herodotus, VIII, 144. Cf. Hall 1997; 2002; Skinner 2012. For the ever changing "Greekness" (already perceived by Strabo, VIII, 6, 6), see Saïd 1984; Malkin 2001; the studies dealing with Hellenicity in McInerney 2014; Snyder 2019; Figueira 2020.

polytheistic religion is usually "open"; the character is determined by education and therefore by rhetoric.

Working on and by the *logos*, by the 5th century BC the Greeks already created a complex structure of multiple "otherness", able to explain their superiority among all those with whom they shared the Internal Sea and from whom they claimed to descend. Herodotus and Plato (claiming the heritage of Protagoras of Abdera) offer two examples of the anthropological mapping of the space and time, by the Classical Greeks. Far from the bipolarity We-Greeks *versus* Others-Barbarians assigned by some modern scholars to Herodotus, his world can be rather represented as a web with four concentric cycles (**fig. 1**).

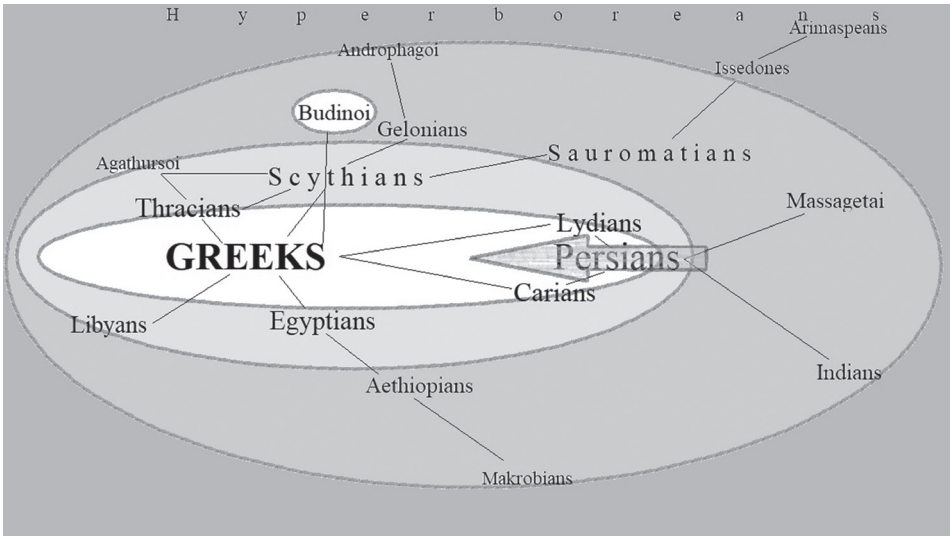

Figure 1: Herodotus' mental mapping of the barbarians, CC-BY Anca Dan.

The first one, in the Aegean, corresponds to the Greeks, living aside other Homeric peoples (such as the Thracians); the second is the periphery of the Scythians, Egyptians, maybe Libyans, and it was invaded by the Persians, coming from farther away. The third ripple is that of the distant populations, which are not directly in contact with the Greeks. Consequently, they are even more different than the previous ones, as barbarity is, from an ancient point of view, directly proportional to the distance from the sea and from the Greeks. The last ripple does not really belong to the oikumene, which is certainly not round and not well defined for Herodotus, opposing the anonymous

Ionian cartographers:[8] these are the edges of world, occupied by the fabulous creatures, monsters or Hyperboreans. Of course, awareness with the acculturation process, as early as the 5th century, explained the presence of some "intermediary" ethnic groups, belonging to two adjoining civilizations. This was the case for the Agathyrsoi, Scythians by their names and by their geographical position, Thracian by their customs, but somehow more barbarian than Thracians and Scythians put together.[9]

The complexity of this so-called ethnographic picture should encourage us to look behind Herodotus' "archaic smile". In fact Herodotus (and of course, probably other contemporary logographers we have since lost) was familiar with some of the sophistic teachings and with their interest in giving a definition of what humans are. The most famous definition of the human being and one of the rare reflections upon the evolution of the humanity we have from the Classical antiquity is that of Plato's *Protagoras* dialogue.[10]

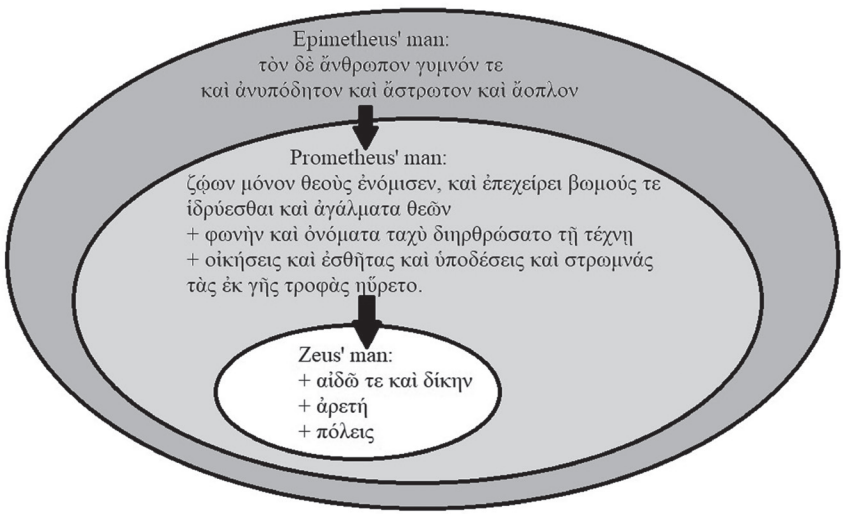

Figure 2: Schematic representation of Protagoras' evolutionary theory, CC-BY Anca Dan.

8 Herodotus, IV, 36-45, cf. IV, 16. See Asheri *et al.* 2007, *ad loc.*; Dan 2015; Gagné 2021.

9 Herodotus, IV, 104.

10 *Protagoras*, 320d *sq*.

Table: Comparing Protagoras' evolution of man with Herodotus' barbarian circles.

Plato: Socrates in *Protagoras* 320c-323c		Herodotus
Epimetheus' man (prehistoric being = animal)	τὸν δὲ ἄνθρωπον γυμνόν τε καὶ ἀνυπόδητον καὶ ἄστρωτον καὶ ὅπλον	4th circle: Hyperboreans, monsters, savage beings living in a specific balance with the others and their environment
Prometheus' man, who acquired the fire and the arts = *homo faber*	ζῷων μόνον θεοὺς ἐνόμισεν, καὶ ἐπεχείρει βωμούς τε ἱδρύεσθαι καὶ ἀγάλματα θεῶν	3rd and 2nd circles in Herodotus' webb, where religion, language, roofing, garments and food allow distinctions among different human groups
	φωνὴν καὶ ὀνόματα ταχὺ διηρθρώσατο τῇ τέχνῃ	
	οἰκήσεις καὶ ἐσθῆτας καὶ ὑποδέσεις καὶ στρωμνάς	
	τὰς ἐκ γῆς τροφὰς ηὕρετο.	
Zeus' man = *homo politicus* (ὁ δὲ νόμος, τύραννος ὢν τῶν ἀνθρώπων)	αἰδῶ τε καὶ δίκην	1st and partially 2nd circle (absent on the 3rd circle, where the νόμος can be replaced by ἦθος – like for the Androphagi IV, 106: Ἀνδροφάγοι δὲ ἀγριώτατα πάντων ἀνθρώπων ἔχουσι ἤθεα, οὔτε δίκην νομίζοντες οὔτε νόμῳ οὐδενὶ χρεώμενοι).
	ἀρετή	
	πόλεις.	

Socrates' pupil credits Protagoras with the explanation of man as an animal made by the gods, but naked, unshod, unbedded, and unarmed after Epimetheus' gifts distribution to the inanimate world. On the next step of the evolution, the Promethean man acquired the knowledge of the arts and of the fire: thus, he worships the gods, invents dwellings, cloths, sandals, beds and the foods that are of the earth. But it is Zeus who completes the "political" human being: Hermes brings respect and right among men, who are then, only then, able to live in cities, under the governance of the νόμος.

This general definition of man is not only a possible model for specific definitions of human groups in the century when the Greeks invented the so-called ethnographic description of the barbarian: the chronological steps of the human creation (Epimethean, Promethean and Jupiterian) can be compared with the different degrees of humanity that are part of Herodotus' spider web with concentric circles or ripples. After all, Herodotus and Protagoras were contemporaries and had probably the occasion to discuss their ideas about humanity both in Athens and in Thurioi.[11] Epimetheus' animal would correspond to the Herodotean monsters, such as those men with goats' feet, said to inhabit high and impassable mountains in the Northeastern extremity of the world: they are only known from the testimony of the "bald men",

[11] See Remotti 2017; more generally, Sassi 2001, p. 28-30.

who, in their turn, were only visited by Scythian businessmen.[12] The people of the 3rd ripple can be situated on a superior level of evolution, that of the Promethean man: they acquired the basics of the human civilization, having a religion, a language, houses and cloths and they produce their food. However, some of them, like the Androphagi, at the northern limit of Scythia,[13] have no νόμος; others, as the Neuri, who otherwise have Scythian customs,[14] seem to be wizards and thus distinct from the people living under the justice of Zeus. Finally, the Jupiterian man only belongs to the Mediterranean sphere: however, not all the people of the 2nd ripple reach the top of civilization, which is to live in cities: nomads are necessarily inferior to sedentaries, from a sedentary point of view. Herodotus, a civilized living in a city with a political life and therefore a rhetorical culture, can even explain the meaning of "nomad", through its etymological parents: the nomads are "those who have no fixed city"[15] but also "those who are shepherds".[16]

What happens when this apparently perfectly hierarchic system fails and when the nature of places where the Greeks never went to is different from what they imagined and when this nature determinates a way of life not very different from the Greek one? Herodotus describes the Gelonian enclave, a city of wood built by the Budini in the middle of the nomadic steppe.[17] Such anomaly could be explained only by Greek migration and therefore legendary parenthood, proven by the Dionysiac religion. The myth – a Greek *Wanderungsnarrative* – comforted Herodotus in his general systematization of the humanity.

The Herodotean description of the wooden fort matches the aspect of the constructions excavated in the second half of the 20th century in the Bel'sk region, on the middle Dnjepr. However, this is not the only example of wooden fortified settlement in the woody steppe of Ukraine and we can be certain that Herodotus himself had no direct knowledge of the place, even if he could be aware of the commerce with Greek objects on long distance, along the Scythian rivers. Although it always included a pejorative meaning from an ethnocentric point of view, barbarity as linguistic, intellectual and ethic otherness did not exclude the eulogy – as Herodotus'

12 Herodotus, IV, 24-25.

13 Herodotus, IV, 106.

14 Herodotus, IV, 105.

15 Herodotus, VII, 10: ἄνδρας οὐδαμόθι γῆς ἄστυ νέμοντας.

16 Herodotus, IV, 191: οἱ νομάδες νέμουσι, for the Libyans, but cf. IV, 2 for the Scythians.

17 Herodotus, IV, 108-109. In general, for such Greek imaginary connections, see Green 2010.

fully acknowledges it, for example when praising the freedom and the invincibility of the Scythians,[18] worthy sons of the Greek Heracles.[19]

However, the Greeks and their Roman and later Westerner heirs are not the only ones to divide humanity between themselves, who properly speak and understand their language, and the others. First, if the word "barbarian" seems to be Greek, it has Indo-European roots, that one finds in the Sanskrit **barbara-* and the Latin *balbus* or *balbutio*.[20] The semantic evolution of the term reflects the history of the Greek interaction with the other: the qualification of the Carians as *barbarophonoi* can be explained through the interaction of the Ionians with their Carian neighbors in Anatolia or in their common commercial and "colonial" endeavors, from Egypt to the Black Sea. Since Herodotus himself testifies that the Egyptians treated the others as "barbarians",[21] they must have included the Carians, just like the Greeks.

The growing negative character of the "barbarian" can only be understood in the context of the Persian wars. The openness of the Hellenism from the 4th century BC is directly determined by the new waves of Greek colonization, in Anatolia and then, with Alexander and the Seleucids, up to India, and finally by the renewal of Hellenism in the 1st century BC context of the Roman Empire. When so many people speak Greek, for better or for worse, the linguistic opposition either dissapears, or develop into an ethic one, in order to justify further political and military conflicts. This is how the moralising aspect of barbarity gained strength and finally allowed the survival of the Classical hellenocentrist as well as the Herodotean *topoi* throughout the Roman, Late Roman and Byzantine histories. As a consequence, an early medieval *mappamundi* like the one in Albi, which reflects the idea of an ideal Augustan Empire covering the *oikoumene* at the birth of Christ and the start of Christianisation, still preserves the memory of the barbarian circles of enemies and monsters on the edges (**fig. 3**).[22]

18 Herodotus, IV, 46-47; 127-128.

19 Herodotus, IV, 5-11.

20 For the difficulties of a Summerian origin spread in the linguistic studies of the 20th century (cf. Hall 1989), see *infra* Kim and Konstan.

21 Herodotus, II, 158; cf. Johnson 1999.

22 Cf. Romm 1998, p. xiv, 89-90. For the notion in the long run, see Dubuisson 2001 and the contributions in Dumézil 2016 with bibliography.

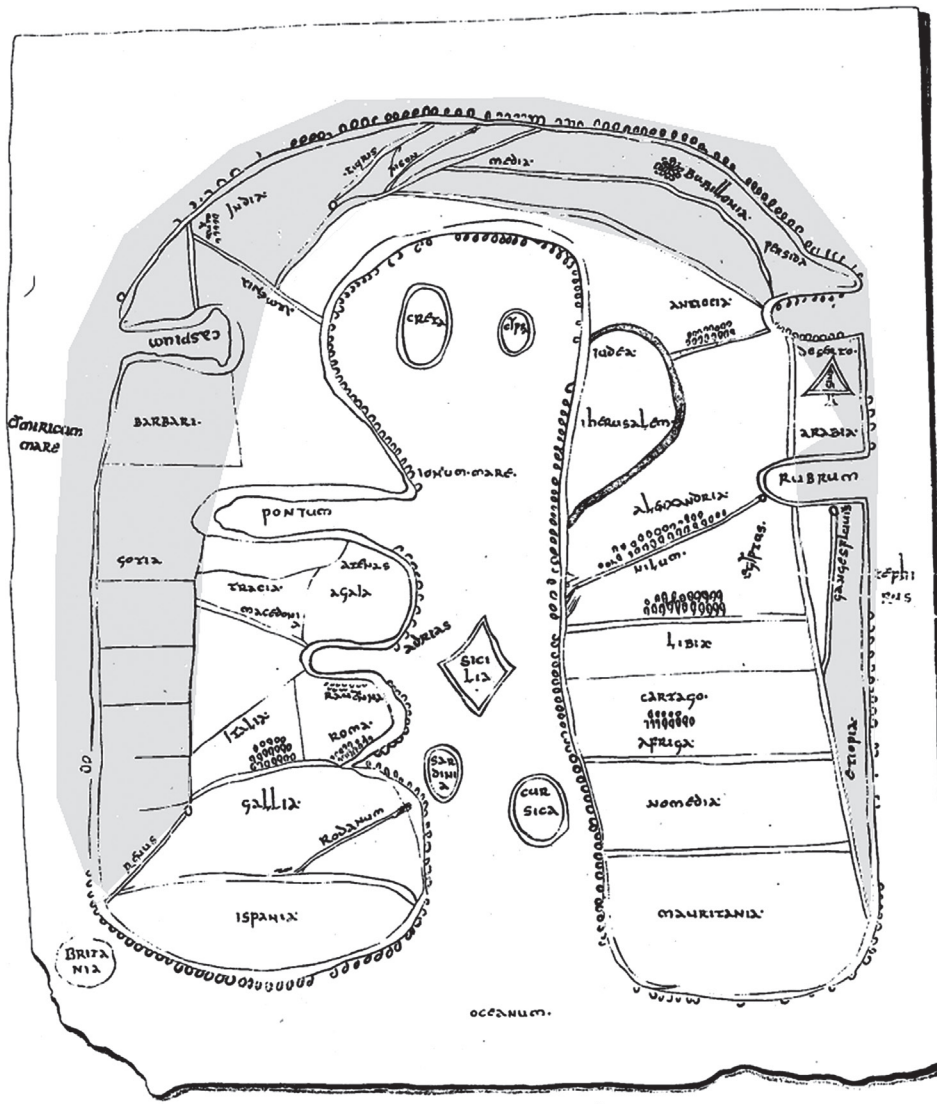

Figure 3: The barbarian circle of peoples around the Roman world on the Albi *mappamundi*, CC-BY Anca Dan drawn after Miller 1895-1898, III, p. 58.

In order to understand the Greek conception of "barbarian", one can compare the Greeks with the Persians: inspired by the Assyrians and the Egyptians, the Persian

Achaemenids expressed the power of their Empire by the victory upon the others, enumerated in the kings' eulogies for victories and prayers, and realistically illustrated as tribute-bearers on the most important monuments of Persepolis. Unlike the Easterners, the Greek preferred to monumentalize the myth through which they explained the antinomy with the other.[23] The Romans took over by developing further the Hellenistic dream of a world empire: yet, the territorial thinking of a homogeneous "civilized" space surrounded by Barbarians (**fig. 3**) is similar to self-representations developed by empires – like those of the ancient China –[24] which cannot be suspected as heirs of the Classical tradition. Just like the Greek who looked in the mirror of the other in order to define themselves, the modern Classicist who want to go beyond the Greco-Roman edges and explore the articulations of different Barbarian webs, must become familiar with the other ancient cultures, compare them with the European ones, seize each ones' debts and originalities.

In June 2017, the Labex Transfer(S) in collaboration with the Institute for Advanced Studies in Paris hosted an international workshop, convened by Huang Yang and Anca Dan, and devoted to the notion of "barbarian" in the ancient world and beyond. The aim was to overcome the traditional approach of the "Barbarian" as a Classical (Greek and Roman) construct and to compare the representations of the "Other" in ancient China, Egypt and the Middle East, Greece, Rome, Islam, Medieval and Modern Europe. By confronting the literary evidence from these various cultures, we wanted to emphasize not only the peculiarities of each "ethnic" or "national" tradition, but also the cultural transfers at work – in the ethnic hybridization (inevitable for all peoples in contact) as well as in the representations of the barbarian, throughout different languages and epochs. The participants were invited to define the Barbarian in the culture they knew the best, by keeping several questions in mind: How do a notion as "barbarian" and a concept as "barbarism" come out in a culture? What are the words, the descriptions and the narratives about the barbarians in the different languages and how are they deployed throughout literary genres? How does the notion of "barbarian" impact the definition of the self and of an ethnic group in the long run? We eluded concepts like "identity", "race", "imperialism", "colonization", "acculturation", "hybridity/hybridization" and *Kulturtransfer* on purpose, in order to let our guests free of using, discussing and rejecting them, according to the scholarly traditions or personal opinions they wanted to (re)present.

[23] See Mitchell 2007.

[24] Poo 2005.

Papers and answers were filmed and published on the Internet, on the site of the Institute of Advanced Studies in Paris.[25] The impressive amount of books and articles published on this topic in the last years, by scholars from West and East altogether, made us doubt about the interest of another heterogeneous volume. Therefore, we have decided to publish some reworked articles in a series of "Chronicles" of the *DHA*, as a testimony of some fruitful collaborations and original idea made possible by this encounter.

The two papers published here illustrate the geographic and chronologic limits of the "Barbarian" question, in a transcultural perspective. Hyun Jin Kim and David Konstan have marked the field of the "barbarian studies", by innovative contributions about the Greek and Roman ethnicities[26] and by re-connecting the Greco-Roman civilization with the ancient Inner Asia.[27] In this paper, they exclude the idea of a Greek "invention" of the barbarian,[28] and emphasize the Archaic emergence as well as the Classical evolution of the notion. They refer to the linguistic, ethnic, geographic, social and political alterities highlighted by the Greek term, throughout the first three centuries of its attestations. The negative connotation of βάρβαρος – when compared with other names for foreigners, such as the usual ξένος[29] and the composed ἀλλόγλωσσος and ἀλλόθροος,[30] ἀλλοδαπός or ἀλλογενής – explains the relatively late occurrences of the Greek term. It also makes it comparable with the Korean *Orangke*, whose meaning extended from the northern steppe peoples to the whole China – a scenario which recalls the switch between the "Romans" and the "Barbarians" in the time of the Holy Roman Empire (of the German Nation).

Michel Espagne focuses on the steppe barbarians as connectors between East and West, from Antiquity until today – that is to say from the Huns, the Turks and the Tatars, until the modern people of Mongolia and Siberia. Over the last decade, Espagne extended his influential research on cultural transfers between Germans, Russians and

25 https://www.paris-iea.fr/en/videos-list/barbarians-in-ancient-civilizations-10932.

26 *E.g.* Konstan 1987, 2001, 2002.

27 Kim 2009, 2019; the paper published here alleviates the hypotheses of Kim 2013, about the Homeric interpolation and the Persian origin of the Greek word "barbarian".

28 *Pace* Hall 1989.

29 Cf. Konstan 2022, who argues for the original meaning of "stranger", against the commonly assigned meaning of "guestfriend", deduced from the association with the Latin *hospes* (according to Benveniste 1969, I.92-96, reproduced in Chantraine 1977, *s.v.*; cf. Herman 2002).

30 Cf. Gera 2003.

Frenches in the 18th-19th centuries to the Caucasus, the Altai, Siberia and the Silk Road.[31] This is how he drew the history of a world of contacts, exchanges and mingling, in full contrast with the antagonisms described in common history schoolbooks and everyday news. In this essay, he sketches a short history of the ancient and medieval migratory peoples of the Eurasian steppe as a background for excursus on the modern scholarship dealing with the barbarians. Classicists will find out about the inventors of ethnography – the German scholars who visited and described the indigenous populations included in the Tsarist empire of Catherine the Great.[32] All those interested in the Russian imperialistic ideology, discover the contribution of Lev Gymilev, the historian of the Huns, the Old Turks and the Khazars, to the geopolitical doctrine of Eurasianism and Russian Eurasian ethnogenesis.

In the present-day context of the Chinese construction of the "Silk Road" and of the Russian war in Ukraine, for all those who want to understand our world, the encounter with the ancient barbarian is precisely as Kavafy put it: "a kind of solution" (μια κάποια λύσις).

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[31] Espagne *et al.* 2016, 2019 ; Alexeiev et al. 2018. Cf. Espagne's contribution in the *DHA* Concepts-Chronicle of 2014.

[32] Ancient historians should not forget that "ethnography" is a modern invention. The first attestation of the term goes back to Johann Friedrich Schöpperlin, in 1767 and the German descriptions of Siberia are among the most important in the creation of an ethnographic method: cf. Dan 2016; Skinner 2018.

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Anca Dan

II- The emergence of the Barbarian

The question of ethnicity and race, despite efforts to build more inclusive and cosmopolitan societies, continues to loom large in our modern world. Due to this concern with contemporary problems relating to race and ethnicity, there has been a tendency to interpret ancient phenomena in the light of modern paradigms. It is common, for example, to attribute modern racism to the ancient Greeks, treating Greek assertions of ethnic superiority as an early instance of proto-racism.[33] But did Greeks

[33] Cf. Isaac 2004, p. 286.

in the classical period regard themselves as better than their neighbours? Perhaps, depending on particular contexts and circumstances. But did this amount to proto-racism? And was this decisive in the formation of their conception of the "barbarian" other? In this paper, we argue that the conception of the barbarian in late Archaic and Classical Greece was anything but simple or straightforward. Rather, it developed over the course of several centuries, and assumed different ideological contours in relation to the prevailing socio-political context of each era. What is more, perhaps contrary to popular perception, the Greek idea of the "barbarian" differs from commonplace ethnic stereotyping. The Greeks and Romans had various prejudices concerning foreign peoples, from the lurid depictions of the supposed savagery of the Scythians and Thracians[34] to the effeteness of the Lydians (which, Herodotus affirmed, was deliberately forced upon them by the Persians, so that they would not pose a threat to their empire). It would be easy to cite modern parallels to this tendency.

Yet, the Greek idea of the "barbarian" is not this. Rather, after a period of evolution, the term, certainly by the late Classical period, came to encapsulate all non-Greeks, who all supposedly had come to share certain common traits without regard to local distinctions. This is not nearly so widespread a phenomenon. The practice that comes closest to this is perhaps to be found among certain ethno-religious communities where the in-group of believers categorize all non-believers as constituting a single category, typically distinguished from believers by their moral, social and religious views and their behavior. At all events, there is nothing corresponding to such a broad collective notion of the other in the languages of modern nation states such as the USA, China,[35] Korea,[36] France, Spain, and many others. Of course, the Greeks had words for "foreigner" (*xenos*, *allodapos*, etc.); but these carried no necessary pejorative

[34] Herodotus, IV; Thucydides, VII, 27; 29-30.

[35] Early China ruled by the Han dynasty comes closest to the Greeks in categorizing all foreigners as inferior to themselves, but even they did not apply a single value-laden term to all foreigners. A wide range of terms, such as Rong, Di, Yi, Man, Rongdi, Manyi, Baiyi and Hu were used to describe different groups of foreigners, all considered to be inferior in some way to the Chinese Huaxia, but nevertheless each having distinct differentiating features, marking them as inferior to the Chinese but for various reasons. For an up to date analysis of the Chinese representation and categorization of foreigners see Ford 2020.

[36] The Korean word *Orangke* (오랑캐), which we will return to below, was sometimes used as a blanket term to refer to hostile, savage foreigners, and was utilised until very recently to refer to various non-Korean groups such as westerners, Chinese and steppe nomads, but the term was only used to describe peoples who were hostile, and was never used to designate all foreigners. For an excellent analysis of Korean ethno-racialism see Pai 2000.

connotations. *Barbaros* was different – or came to be so. And a further point specific to ancient Greece: what we call "Greece" (and modern Greeks call "Hellas") consisted of hundreds of more or less independent city-states, which, even when they fell under the domination of a super-power such as imperial Athens, retained a sense of autonomous identity. The contrast between Greeks and the "barbarian" other presupposed not only the assimilation of all foreigners under a single, ultimately disparaging label, but also the emergence of a notion of Greekness, or being Greek, as opposed to being Athenian or Spartan, Ionian or Doric.

In this paper, we seek to outline the stages by which the opposition between Greek and "barbarian" developed, paying particular attention to the various ways it was inflected at different times and the slow and cumulative process by which the term *barbaros* acquired the many negative connotations that we associate with it today. We argue that there was no single moment when the barbarian was "invented," inasmuch as the term barbarian did not possess the same range of meanings throughout early Greek history but varied in relation to different social and historical contexts.

We may begin with a brief survey of scholarly opinion on just when the notion of the "barbarian" first appeared, since authoritative views have located it all along the spectrum from Homer to the 4th century and beyond. Irad Malkin, for example, argued that oppositional identity creation among Greeks dates back to the 9th century BC. He saw this as a direct consequence of the East Greek, more specifically, Ionian experience of colonisation and their interactions with non-Greek Western Anatolians.[37] Jonathan Hall adopted a different perspective, arguing that "Hellenicity," that is, a sense of Greek identity, was articulated much later, sometime in the late archaic period. This sense of being Greek, according to Hall, was formulated largely via the mingling of disparate elites in the Panhellenic Olympic games and the marriage alliances they contracted with each other. This aggregative "Hellenicity", in turn, was the precondition for a concept of the "barbarian" other.[38] Edith Hall associated what she called the

[37] Malkin 1998, p. 268.

[38] Hall 1997, p. 2002. Thomas Figueira, however, has recently criticized the aggregative model advanced by Jonathan Hall as rendering Greek ethnogenesis artificial, asserting that "ethnogenesis [...] comprised processes that structured social praxis and so actually affected [...] behaviour, and the organisation and conduct of their lives." Figuiera takes non-Greeks to include any group that did not conform to Hellenic "pan-cultural norms," and primarily those that lacked proficiency in the Greek language (Figueira 2020, p. 7). But language, though an important indicator of Greek identity, was not the only or even the most important criterion mentioned by the Greeks themselves in determining "Greekness."

"invention of the barbarian" with the Persian Wars, and identified the inception of the idea of the barbarian with the representation of non-Greeks in Attic drama (most notably Aeschylus' *Persae*), in the context not of the Persian invasion itself, but rather of Athenian propaganda vis-à-vis members of the Delian League in the aftermath of that war.[39] Benjamin Isaac, in turn, posited that the increasingly "xenophobic" 4th century was the more likely context for this development.[40] The predominant emphasis on "othering" at the expense of more nuanced interactions between Greeks and their neighbours was subsequently criticized by Erich Gruen, who argued that the dichotomy of Greek and barbarian was not the dominant mode of representing relations between Greeks and non-Greeks in classical Greek literature. According to Gruen, Greeks regarded non-Greeks as distinct from themselves, to be sure, but for the most part not as "sub-human, uncivilized, and beneath contempt,"[41] as is characteristic of modern racism. He maintains that racism was absent in the Greek representation of non-Greeks, as was "any concept of congenital inferiority."[42] On the contrary, Aeschylus, Herodotus and Xenophon show marked respect for the Persians. What is more, common blood, one of the elements mentioned by Herodotus as constitutive of Greek identity, was, according to Gruen, largely irrelevant to the Greek articulation of their ethnicity.[43] Kostas Vlassopoulos has argued further that oppositional identity construction and an appearance of polarity disguise a more intense and complex history of Greek and non-Greek interaction[44]. Various networks of exchange[45] facilitated acculturation, by way both of Hellenization and the adoption by Greeks dispersed across Western Eurasia and North Africa of foreign practices and ideas. Greek identity is thus seen in recent scholarship as heterogeneous and multifaceted, both aggregative[46] and at times oppositional, depending on the context.

This mobile "heterogeneity" was probably the case during much of the archaic period. Later attempts on the part of Ionians in particular to homogenize their origins

39 Hall 1989, p. 1-3.

40 Isaac 2004, p. 286.

41 Gruen 2020, p. 41.

42 *Ibidem*.

43 Gruen 2020, p. 44, 49, 55; cf. Figueira 2020, p. 45.

44 Vlassopoulos 2013, p. 7.

45 Cf. Malkin 1998, p. 268.

46 Hall 1997, 2002.

via the re-articulation of their founding myths, thereby assuming a purer Greek identity and eliding their interrelationship with their Anatolian neighbours, were constructed against the backdrop of quite different social and political conditions.[47] Ancient Greek society was thus the product of intense cultural exchange and ethnic mixing among Greeks and non-Greeks, and we may plausibly suppose that representations of ethnic identity among Greek peoples were inherently unstable and largely open to more localised renegotiations and frequent reinterpretations.[48] Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the strange term *barbaros* and the idea it conveys of a collective oppositional identity that is markedly different from that of the *Hellenes* appear more prominently in Classical than in Archaic Greek literature, and that anti-barbarian vitriol becomes more acerbic and discriminatory over the course of the classical period.

Let us begin, then, with Homer. Scholars have generally accepted that the root *barbaros* first appears in the *Iliad*, in reference to the non-Greek Carians as *barbarophônôn*.[49] It has been assumed, from this compound, that the root "barbar" itself had something to do with language, and more particularly, that it imitated the way that foreign speech sounded to Greek ears. Doubt has been cast on the authenticity of this passage, as a possibly later interpolation,[50] a matter to which we return below. Taking it, for the moment, as pertaining to the oldest stratum of the *Iliad* as we know it (say sometime in the 7th century), what does the description of the Carians as *barbarophônoi* tell us about the conception of the other at the time of Homer? Shortly before this verse, Homer remarks that Iris, the messenger goddess, was sent by Zeus in the form of Polites to advise Hector to have each of the leaders of the Trojan allies give orders to his own people, since they speak a multitude of languages.[51] This suggests that Homer was aware of the contrast between the multifarious ethnic groups fighting on the Trojan side and the more or less homogeneous linguistic character of the Achaeans, or Danaans, or Argives, to cite the most common terms that Homer applies to the Greek forces collectively. At the beginning of the third book, which follows pretty

47 In the 6th century, *polis* identity always trumped pan-ethnic appeals to "Hellenicity." For a recent analysis of identity and ethnicity as they relate to the several *poleis*, see Thomas 2019, especially p. 188, 195, 200.

48 For pluralism as the dominant driving force of Greek society in the 5th century, see Apfel 2011.

49 Homer, *Iliad*, II, 867: "speaking barbarously". Werner 1989, p. 170 f., provides a good summary of the representation of the Carians in Homer.

50 Kim 2013.

51 Homer, *Iliad*, II, 802-806; cf. 804, ἄλλη δ' ἄλλων γλῶσσα πολυσπερέων ἀνθρώπων.

much directly on the occurrence of the word βαρβαροφώνων, Homer describes the Trojans as racing into battle with loud cries and shrieks like birds or the cranes that attack the Pygmies, whereas the Achaeans march forth in silence and full of menace.[52] Plutarch believed that these lines reflected the disorderly nature of the barbarians, in contrast to the strict discipline of the Greeks on the battlefield;[53] but Homer may have been capturing as well the strange sounds produced by the Trojans and their allies, their foreignness intimated also by the allusion to the distant Pygmies. Again in Book IV, Homer contrasts the silent advance of the Achaeans, who obey in fear the orders of their marshals, with the clamorous marching of the Trojans who bleat like sheep, since, as Homer says, they have a multitude of languages.[54] There may be therefore a sense in the *Iliad* of a common Greek identity based on a shared language. But the very multiplicity of foreign tongues among the Trojan allied forces indicates that they are not all reduced to a single class of "barbarians," certainly not in regard to language, at any rate. It is surely noteworthy as well that the term βαρβαροφώνων is applied specifically to the Carians: they speak a foreign language, but the term is not applied to all the ethnic groups on the Trojan side. Thus, the term does not provide evidence that non-Greeks were collectively subsumed under the label *barbaroi*.[55]

To be sure, language difference was one of the features (though certainly not the dominant feature) associated with the *barbaros* in the classical period. In a fragment of Aristophanes' *Babylonioi*, quoted by Photius (p. 540), βαρβαριστί or "in the barbarian manner" modifies the word κεκράξονται ("they will screech"; cf. the scholia to Aristophanes' *Peace*, v. 458), reminiscent of the Homeric passages; it is hard to know, however, whether language was the main reference here,[56] and in any case, it would seem to be applied to the Babylonians in particular. The term *barbarismos* acquired the sense of the modern English "barbarism," that is, a linguistic fault. But this is not surprising, since some Greeks, at least, regarded their language as special; only such a view can explain how the Epicurean philosopher Philodemus, who was a contemporary of Cicero and Julius Caesar, could have declared with a straight face that

52 Homer, *Iliad*, III, 1-9.

53 Plutarch, *De audientis poetis*, 29d; cf. Nikolaidis 1986.

54 Homer, *Iliad*, IV, 428-438.

55 So too, the term *agriophonous* is applied to the Sintians in *Odyssey*, VIII, 294, as a people whom Ares is visiting; it conveys no negative sense, nor is it a collective term for foreigners.

56 cf. also Aeschylus, *Persae*, 635; Herodotus, II, 57; Plato, *Theaetetus*, 175d.

when the gods philosophized, they did so in Greek, since that is the only language in which people were ever heard to do philosophy.[57] In sum, there is no indication in the *Iliad* that the term *barbarophônoi* had a negative connotation, given that in general the poem does not represent Troy and its allies as inferior, morally or otherwise, to the Greeks. The Trojan Paris is guilty of having carried off Helen, and this breach of hospitality must be avenged, but there is nothing to suggest that the Trojans as a whole are to be condemned. Greeks and Trojans worship the same gods, and some of the most important ones, like Apollo, take the side of the Trojans. The only apparent difference registered in the Homeric epics between the customs of the Greeks and Trojans is the polygamy of Priam, the Trojan king; there seems to be no counterpart among the other peoples involved, but if this is a sign of Trojan particularity, it is never noted in the poem as strange, much less barbaric.

There is, as one of us has argued,[58] also some reason to regard the crucial passage in Homer as an interpolation. The argument rests on two considerations: the evidence provided by Thucydides, who noted that Homer did not use the word *barbaros* at all;[59] and an alternative derivation of the word *barbaros*, dating in all probability to a time later than the composition of the epic in the 7th century (or thereabouts). Certainly the feminization of the Carian leader Nastes seems more congruent with 5th-century attitudes toward non-Greeks than with the ethos of the Homeric epics, where non-Greek warriors, even cowardly ones like Paris, are likened to dandies, perhaps, but not to women. For the possibility of this term being a foreign loanword that was introduced into the Greek language some time in the 6th century from Old Persian as a Greek imitation/adoption of the word *barabara* ("he who carries a burden/load"[60]), we refer the reader to Kim's publication in 2013. On this view, the term "barbarian" originally carried a political and social meaning – tax-payers to the king – rather than a cultural or ethnic one.

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[57] Philodemus, *De dis*, 3.

[58] Kim 2013.

[59] Thucydides, I, 3, 3. For analysis of this passage see Hornblower 1991, p. 17-18 and Gomme 1945, vol. 1, p. 98. Strabo, who introduced the notion that the word was onomatopoeic and implied inability to speak Greek (XIV, 2, 28), noted the glaring contradiction between what Thucydides says here and the text of Homer that was available to him. See Almagor 2005, p. 44-47, for an in depth discussion of this portion of Strabo. See also Dueck 2010, p. 242-243.

[60] see also *PFNN* 704, 23; 26.

In the end, however, for our purposes here, it is largely immaterial whether the word is onomatopoetic and of Homeric provenance or of foreign provenance post-dating Homer, since, as we have indicated, the word *barbaros* does not apply to all foreigners in Homer nor does it convey the predominant characteristics associated with the term in the classical period. The word *barbaros* as such appears in Greek literature only in the late 6th century BC, where it occurs three times in fragmentary texts, and in contexts that are too ambiguous to interpret with any degree of certainty.[61] In both Anacreon and Heraclitus the term is evidently used in a pejorative way. Its use in Hecataeus[62] is, however, neutral in this respect, not clearly different from such words as *allothroos* or *alloglossoi*.[63]

To be sure, as noted above, negative sentiments towards non-Greeks can be detected already in archaic Greek literature and art. The period was not simply a pluralistic age devoid of prejudice against foreigners. As the Greeks encountered unfamiliar non-Greek populations through settlements and trading activities and became better acquainted with Phoenicians, Egyptians, etc. during the Archaic period, both mutual admiration and intense resentment were expressed towards these foreigners depending on the context. Lydia had governed the coastal cities of Asia before the Persians wrested control of them, upon defeating Croesus in 546 BC. The Lydians spoke a language as foreign to Greek ears as Persian, and Caria in particular provided some of the best fighting forces in the Lydian empire – those same Carians seemingly singled out by Homer as speaking a barbarous tongue. If such a prejudice against the Lydians existed, however, documentation is lacking – which is no surprise, given the paucity of our sources for this early era. Still, as we have noted above, there is good reason to think that the crucial moment in the development of the notion "the classical barbarian" occurred later.

When we come to the time of Aeschylus we are on firmer ground, for here we encounter the collective use of the term "barbarian" freighted with conventional stereotypes. It is noteworthy that here the notion of "barbarian" connotes specific socio-political ideas, such as subservience, slavery, Medizing, and the status of being a Persian subject. It does not matter for our present argument whether these associations originated with Aeschylus or were derived from earlier Greek encounters with the

61 Anacreon, fr. 423; Hecataeus, fr. 119; and Heraclitus, fr. 107.

62 See Lévy 1984, p. 6.

63 See Gera 2003, p. 2.

Persians, although there may well be an earlier Ionian layer to this fairly developed image the barbarian.[64] The word *barbaros*, as evidenced by the hostile use of the term in Anacreon and Heraclitus mentioned above, was clearly undergoing an evolution in meaning in late 6th century Ionia at the time of the Ionian struggle against the Persians. But what began as an expression of resentment (most likely tinged with fear) towards the Persians and a sense of Greek/Ionian vulnerability before the Persian threat, slowly gave way to confidence after an alliance of Greek cities, by no means representing all, repelled the Persian invasion of the Greek mainland.

The *Persae* of Aeschylus, which is in itself hardly a xenophobic text,[65] equates the Persian-controlled continent of Asia with *barbaroi* in general. In line 12 of the play Aeschylus makes the startling and unique claim of the existence of an Asiatic race (Ἀσιατογενὴς) which subsumes all hitherto disparate nations (Lydians, Persians, Indians, Babylonians, Egyptians etc.) under the single class of those reared in the land of Asia.[66] Xerxes is configured in this discourse as the ruler of all Asia (v. 74) and his realm is set apart from the Greek land,[67] which is now imagined in this play as being a distinct separate entity from βάρβαρον territory (v. 187). All Persian-controlled troops from Asia lose their ethnic specificity, an astonishing vagueness when we consider that this is the very time when Greek knowledge of and interest in the actual differences between ethnic groups had reached its highest level, as evidenced by the near contemporary work of of Hecataeus and, somewhat later, of Herodotus. All groups are collectively labelled as the army of the barbarians (v. 255) and the imperial fleet stationed at Salamis is referred to as that of the βάρβαρον, in clear juxtaposition to the Greeks.[68] Aeschylus indeed calls the Persian language βάρβαρα (v. 635) – and this in the mouth of the Persian queen Atossa.

In this new rhetoric, specific ethnic identities are disregarded and the geographical *locus* of the "barbarian" *genos* is clearly situated in Asia. All differences, including linguistic differences, yield, in Aeschylus' description of barbarians, to the imagery of their subservience to the king and their general lack of political freedom.[69]

64 Kim 2009, p. 23-29.

65 Contrary to the assertions of Said 1979.

66 Aeschylus, *Persae*, 61: χθὼν Ἀσιῆτις.

67 Aeschylus, *Persae*, 186: Ἑλλάδα.

68 Aeschylus, *Persae*, 337-338: Ἕλλησιν.

69 Isaac 2004, p. 257 sees this as a 4th century articulation.

In Aeschylus' *Suppliant Women*, Greek freedom (*eleutheria*) is emphatically contrasted with barbarian tyranny. The Argive ruler Pelasgus (supposedly a Greek, though curiously having a name associated with the non-Greek, "barbarian" Pelasgians) can do nothing without the approval and consent of the people.[70] This is in stark contrast to the despotic inclinations of the Egyptian born Danaids, who are at this point represented as seeking refuge in Argos. The Danaids believe that the monarch is authority unto himself (v. 170 f.). Furthermore, Greek respect for the rule of law (v. 390) is emphatically juxtaposed with the violence (*bia*) and lawlessness (*hybris*, another attribute of the newly moulded image of the barbarian, v. 863) of the Egyptians. As Euripides would later put it, in the voice of Helen: "All Barbary is slave except a single man."[71]

Thus, we would argue that the classical Greek hostility towards *barbaroi* and the unique politicization of the Greek vs. non-Greek divide in classical Greek rhetoric were originally not so much part of an ongoing process of articulating an oppositional identity vis-à-vis foreign peoples as a more specific consequence of late 6th and early 5th century Greek anxiety, initially from a position of weakness, not confident strength predicated on some purported cultural or military superiority, at the prospect of becoming just another subject group of the alien, world-conquering[72] Persian king[73] – a condition comparable to that of being enslaved, according to the understanding of the Greeks at the time. Herein may lie to the key to understanding the emergence of the particularly Greek notion of the barbarian. Greek ethnocentrism of the classical period is not proto-racism of the modern sort but an almost visceral reaction to the prospect of being conquered and enslaved, reduced to tax-paying tributaries of the Persian empire. At the same time, this posture of resistance contributed to creating an inchoate panhellenic identity, in contrast to the fractiousness, internal divisions and heterogeneity that characterized the multiple city-states. If submission to the Persians meant slavery, then independence took on the contours of freedom as a distinguishing feature that separated Greeks from all the peoples conquered and ruled by the Persians.

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70 Aeschylus' *Suppliant Women*, *Suppl.* 369 f.: *dèmos.*

71 Papadodima 2013, p. 195 argues that "a pejorative value term [*barbaros*] is a more frequent and easily recognizable practice in extant Euripidean tragedy" than in the other dramatists, including Aeschylus.

72 The German title of the 2011 publication "Herodot und das Persische Weltreich", is particularly appropriate in capturing the magnitude of the peril faced by the Ionians.

73 See Thomas 2019, p. 224, for the observation that a sense of being beleaguered was what drove the Ionians to articulate foundation myths which stripped their cities of the barbarian, foreign elements.

In the wake of the victory over Persia, Athens launched a campaign to liberate the Ionian coastal cities from Persian suzerainty, the success of which eventually formed the basis of Athens' own empire. It is here that the opposition between Greek freedom and barbarian servitude most likely attained its distinctive classical features, not simply as a result of contact between the Greeks and Persians or even outright war but as part of a conscious propaganda offensive to justify Athens' campaign to Athenians, to the Ionian cities they were committed to freeing, and to other Greek cities such as Sparta, that may have entertained suspicions of Athenian intentions. The negative view of barbarians as unfree may have been due as much to a self-conscious and politically motivated process by which the opposition between ostensibly Greek and barbarian ways of life was promoted as to the fear of Persian might and any distaste toward paying tribute to the Persian king.[74] Edith Hall, as we have mentioned, identified this moment as constituting a crucial impulse to "inventing the barbarian":

> The notions of Panhellenism and its corollary, all non-Greeks as a collective genus, were [...] more particularly elements of the Athenian ideology which buttressed first the Delian league, the alliance against the Persians formed in the years immediately after the wars, and subsequently the Athenian empire. The image of an enemy extraneous to Hellas helped to foster a sense of community between the allied states.[75]

Besides this political motivation, Hall writes, "the economic basis of the Athenian empire was slavery, and most of the large number of slaves in 5th-century Athens were not Greek. This class division along ethnic lines provided further stimulus for the generation of arguments which supported the belief that barbarians were generically inferior, even slavish by nature".[76] We may note too that the Athenian democracy was a recent achievement at the time of the Persian invasion, dating to the last decade of the

[74] What is more, the process was to be reversed when Sparta, in the year 412 during the course of the Peloponnesian War, made a treaty with Persia to restore Persian domination of Greek cities on the coast of Anatolia in return for financial support (Thucydides, VIII, 18 ; 58). Again in 386, Sparta combined with Persia to enforce the so-called King's Peace, which confirmed Persian sovereignty over most of the Greek cities in Asia Minor as well as Cyprus (Xenophon, *Hellenica*, V, 1, 31) – a treaty that Isocrates, at least, was ready to praise (*On the Peace*, VIII, 16, which most likely refers to this agreement).

[75] Cf. p. 59, where Hall attributes "the polarization of Greek and barbarian in Athenian art and thought throughout the fifth century" to "the ideology which bound together with ties of collective loyalty the members of the Delian league, the alliance of Ionian, Hellespontine, and island states under Athenian leadership formed in 478/7 against the Persians," as the Athenians "sought to encourage democracies in the allied or subjugated states."

[76] Hall 1989, p. 2.

6th century, and the struggle over its extent and nature continued well into the 5th. The contrast between free and slave referred originally to the status of individuals; it was as a result of the institution of democracy that the notion of freedom was extended to cover the political constitution of a community.[77] Still another step was the idea that a city as a whole might be free of foreign domination. During the Persian assault on Greece, the Ionian cities provided loyal troops for Darius' and then Xerxes' armies, and even major mainland cities, such as Thebes, sided with the invaders. It was only with the defeat of Persia that it became possible to think of drawing the coastal cities of Ionia out from under Persian rule under the banner of democracy – something that not all of them eagerly embraced. As Kurt Raaflaub explains in his splendid book, *The Discovery of Freedom in Ancient Greece*,[78] "no euphoria broke out among those who were to be liberated, and allied actions more often than not resembled forced 'liberations.'" Raaflaub continues: "Later, the theme of liberty was used for propagandistic purposes to justify its exact opposite, the oppression of the allies."[79] As Athens consolidated its power over the allied cities, the Athenians came to view their empire as crucial to their freedom, and Athens in turn was increasingly regarded as the "tyrant city".[80] All the while, Athens continued to exploit the notion that the cities now subject to its rule were in fact free since they were no longer under the authority of barbarians.

Where we differ from the consensus that the "barbarian" was "invented" suddenly, in the aftermath of the shock of encountering the powerful Persian enemy, is that this "shock" was only one of the several moments that ultimately contributed to the classical image of the "barbarian." What is more, the "barbarian" referred in the beginning mainly to Persians, not to all foreigners collectively. But because Persia, as a vast empire, embraced much of the world known to the Greeks, this terminology, which began by denoting a particular, hostile foreign force, facilitated the on-going creation of oppositional identity *vis-à-vis* foreigners. The end result was a complex synthesis in which political stereotypes specific to the Persian Wars and their aftermath combined with constructions of oppositional identity and more neutral representations of foreigners, as in Homer, and in the more pluralistic literature of the 5th century, to form a never entirely stable image of the "other."

77 But see Lewis 2018 for a more nuanced view.

78 Raaflaub 2004.

79 Raaflaub 2004, p. 88; but contrast p. 100-101, where Raaflaub assigns the emergence of the "Greek-barbarian antithesis" to the immediate aftermath of the Persian invasion.

80 Thucydides, I, 124.

Finally, by the 4th century, after the Peloponnesian War and increasing strife among Greek cities, which often resorted to seeking Persian support for their side, we see a hardening of the contrast between Greeks and others as such. There had already been appeals to climate as the explanation of the supposedly superior physiques and minds of mainland Greeks (as opposed to both the non-Greeks of Europe and Asia and even Ionian Greeks of Anatolia), as in the Hippocratic treatise, *Airs, Waters, Places*, datable to the second half of the 5th century.[81] Plato affirmed his opposition to Greeks enslaving fellow Greeks, implying that enslaving foreigners was entirely permissible,[82] and Plato's contemporary Isocrates urged Philip of Macedon to turn his armies against the Persian empire as a way of uniting all Greeks in a common enterprise (in his speech titled *Panegyricus*). Xenophon has the Spartan king Agesilaus lament the thousands of Greeks slaughtered when they fought among themselves as a loss of manpower to resist and conquer the barbarians.[83] It was left to Aristotle to provide a biological rationale for the inherently servile status of certain peoples on the basis of their incapacity to make rational judgments. As a result, submitting to the authority of Greek males who were so endowed was portrayed as being in their own interest.[84] Such polarized and in reality somewhat isolated extreme views, which disparaged all non-Greeks as naturally servile barbarians, have left the strongest imprint on modern interpretations of ancient Greek attitudes toward "the other." And yet, by this time in the second half of the 4th century it was not Persia that constituted the threat to the independence of the city-states, but rather Macedon, variously viewed as Greek, or partly Greek, or sometimes as not Greek at all. We may see in this impulse to define themselves as superior to non-Greeks a sign yet again not of confidence but of a renewed anxiety at the prospect of the destruction of their local institutions and their absorption into a new kind of political structure – an empire that would rule them from without. The conception of the barbarian took on the character of a reaction formation, a consolation that would last well into the Hellenistic age and even into the era of Roman domination.

81 Papadodima 2013, p. 87, suggests that even in *Airs Waters and Places*, "the exploration of the collective differences among peoples on the basis of the particular continent in which they happen to live remains largely explanatory and descriptive."

82 Plato, *Republic*, V, 469b-c.

83 Xenophon, *Agesilaus*, VII, 5-7.

84 It must be granted, however, that Aristotle never explicitly identifies natural slaves with barbarians and non-Greeks; cf. Ward 2002, p. 28.

There are many situations in which a people will be moved to define itself as different from and maybe better than foreigners. The particular context of the Greeks, we have argued, originated both in response to a natural intermingling of populations, as the Greeks colonized distant territories in the Archaic period, and out of their fear of the overwhelming military and political colossus that was Persia. During the Persian wars, the Greeks engaged in a kind of compensatory disparagement of this powerful enemy, not due to racism but more like an effort to insulate themselves against panic and defeatism. The use of the term *barbaros* was also never entirely pejorative, applying as it did firstly to a people who were recognized as having a refined culture and enormous political power – and this at the very moment when Greeks were fighting for their political existence against a vast army and fleet. With victory came a new inflection in Greek attitudes toward the Persians. It is likely that the rhetoric of democracy in particular, home grown in Athens, as opposed to that of freedom, emerged not when the foreign threat was imminent and Greece was facing the prospect of defeat but rather after the danger had passed and Athens was articulating a new political order for the Ionian world. This sharp political differentiation, tinged with arguments of ethnic superiority, between Greeks and others was particularly useful in lining up support among the polities that the Athenians sought to bring under control, that is, the Ionian city-states that Athens was purporting to liberate, and where, as Edith Hall notes, local tyrannies or oligarchies did not necessarily feel that they would be better off siding with Athens than with the Persian king.

It is tempting to compare this situation with an analogous but not identical development in East Asia, the case of Korea. As noted at the beginning of this article, the Koreans had a blanket term denoting groups of hostile foreigners, *Orangke*. What is interesting is that this term was originally borrowed from Mongolian and Manchurian and it originally designated only northern steppe peoples, who were a lingering military threat to the Korean Joseon dynasty (1392-1910 AD). However, the once despised Manchus then went on to conquer Ming China (the traditional locus of Hochkultur for the Koreans) in the 17th century and became a vast territorial empire that embraced much of the world known to the Koreans at the time. The powerful, world-conquering Manchu empire was seen by the neo-Confucian elite of Korea as an existential threat. While they were stuck in this position of weakness vis-à-vis the Manchus the Koreans gradually lost respect for the Han Chinese, who were seen to have meekly submitted to the Manchu "barbarian" yoke and abandoned their neo-Confucian principles, while the Koreans supposedly upheld those principles as a matter of honour. In this

context the term *Orangke* took on a broader application and came to designate all of the territory controlled by the Manchu Qing dynasty (including China and the Han Chinese). The Koreans began to believe that they, as the last vestige of the "civilized" neo-Confucian world to have escaped "barbarian" conquest, were now the real China (by which they meant civilization or as the Korean literati of the Joseon dynasty put it *sojunghwa*, "little China"), while the Han Chinese were barbarized. Later the term *Orangke* came to be used to refer to any foreign group that was hostile and alien to this neo-Confucian "civilized" order.[85]

The parallels with the Greek context are striking. The Greeks likewise may have borrowed the term *barbaros* from the Iranian Persians (who were originally steppe nomads) and the word, as we have noted above, was used at first primarily to designate Persians and their immediate subjects. Then the range was expanded to encompass the whole civilized world of the Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean (which earlier, especially Egypt, had been the source of Hochkultur for the Greeks) that had been conquered by the vast Persian Empire, and finally was applied to the entire non-Greek world. The Koreans never quite reached the point of defining all foreigners as *Orangke*, as the Greeks had. That the Greeks pushed the contrast between themselves and others to the extreme of identifying all non-Greeks as "barbarian" may be largely due to the one aspect which is specific to the Greek context: sustained political fragmentation and the persistent independence of the several Greek *poleis*.

In sum, the barbarian was not "invented." Rather it emerged through the Greek experience of a series of historically specific socio-political contexts. Its emergence in the ancient Greek context was not a single or a continuous phenomenon. It will not do to try to explain Greek ethnocentrism and anti-barbarian rhetoric from the point of view of modern European racism or the globalizing, cosmopolitan rhetoric of the 19th and 20th centuries. The notion of the "barbarian" in the classical Greek context was as much a product of intermingling as of distance, of anxiety as of self-confidence and a will to domination. The application of its negative sense may originally have been limited to the Persians, from whom, indeed, they may have borrowed the very word, and because the Persian empire embraced a multitude of peoples, the term included all its tributary nations. From there, and still only gradually, it expanded to encompass all non-Greeks, and even then, not always as an expression of cultural superiority. But the

[85] For Korean neo-Confucian orthodoxy and the claim to being the "little China," see Kim Haboush 1988, p. 21-28.

Greeks themselves were anything but a coherent and united group, and the contrast with the "barbarian" served also to create an identity for themselves as distinct from others. This facilitated the expansion of the term, which could project an idea of Greek homogeneity precisely by subsuming all other peoples under a single description, a tactic that may have served the interests of Athens as it assembled its own anti-Persian alliance. Their campaign was successful, but it was succeeded by internecine Greek conflict that threatened to tear apart the fragile notion of Greek identity. And finally, just when the domination of Macedon overshadowed and undermined the independence of the Greek city-states, the contrast between Greeks and all others seems most to have hardened, once again out of a position of weakness rather than strength. Such is the complex trajectory of the ancient idea of the "barbarian."

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Abbreviation

PFNN = *Persepolis Fortification NN. Unpublished Elamite texts*, numbered and transliterated by R. T. Hallock.Studies

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III- Barbarians as a connection between China and Russia

Little was known about barbarians in the ancient West as well as in China:[86] they spoke no Greek and Latin; their customs and way of life made them different from the Chineses. But in many cases neither their language, nor their religion, nor their customs were subject of descriptions, as if this knowledge was of no interest.

When Ovid was exiled to Tomis, he suffered of being close to the Getae and the Sarmatians and was afraid that he would finally imitate their language.[87] But there is no Thracian and no Iranian word in the *Tristia*, nor in the *Pontica*. We know that Augustine of Hippo was of Punic origin, that his mother was Berber, but his work does not include a description of these ethnic groups. Herodotus' father had a Carian name, *Lyxès* (according to the *Suda*). Often, we refer to the King Mausolus and his Mausoleum in Halicarnassus, Herodotus' city of origin, in order to recall the struggle between the Greeks and the Persians, while the cultural exchanges remain implicit in the decoration of the monument. Tacitus' interest for the culture of the Germans is almost an exception in the Latin literature. Barbarians are those who live beyond the borders of the Classical peoples, whether these are marked or not by a fortified *limes*. They are all considered as threatening peoples, even if it was difficult to deny them an advanced culture, as in the case of Egypt or Persia, from which Greece had been able to draw inspiration.

The history of China involves many contacts with peoples who do not belong to the Chinese cultural area. They also remained relatively undefined and it is sometimes difficult to specify their linguistic and religious identity. During the last millennia, Northern China was dominated by the dynasties of the Huns, the Turks and the Tibetans. The Western Xia dynasty from the 11th to the 12th century is a Tangute dynasty belonging to the Tibeto-Burman group. The Yuan dynasty, from 1260 to 1368,

86 For a general overview on the question of barbarians, see Dumézil 2016.

87 *E.g. Tristia*, V, 7.

is a Mongol dynasty. The last dynasty of China, that of Qing, is a Manchu dynasty. Fom the ethnic point of view, this means that the Tungusic peoples took the power over the Chinese empire. Even if the Great Wall, like the Roman *limes*, was meant to keep the nomadic barbarians of the North out of China, these barbarians clearly played an important part in the history of the country. This participation, however, should have recalled a special effort from the Chineses, to know more about the culture and the tradition of these peoples. For example, the Tangut culture has a written language and produced many Buddhist texts. Uighur Turks participated in the translation of Buddhism into China.

Beyond those who founded dynasties, there were barbarians who breached the peace at the border and engaged in wars with Chinese sovereigns. The Xiongnu at war with the Hans, especially in the 3rd century BC, were perhaps proto-Turks, or Mongols, or possibly Palaeosiberian peoples. The Donghu and the Wuhuan were Mongolian peoples living on the territory of the present-day Inner Mongolia, but also in Shanxi. The Yuezhi, living in Gansu, were Indo-European tribes who were driven back to the West by the Xiongnu; they founded the Kushan Empire in the 1st century AD, while the Xingnu were perhaps somehow related to the later Hephtalites Huns, whose strongholds have been found in Central Asia.[88] According to historians such as Sima Qian, these peoples have reached a high cultural level and got involved in the ancient history of China, for example by helping sometimes the Chinese emperor to put down a rebellion. Yet, they are not well known, as if their location outside China remained the priority of those who wrote about the past. Their nomadic character, opposed to the Chinese sedentary peasants, was a sufficient difference in order to justify a radical opposition.

In a book published in 2008 (*Ethnic Identity in Tang China*), Marc Abramson highlighted the construction of the dichotomy between the Self and the Other during the Tang Dynasty. Every non-Han was a barbarian, comparable with the animals. As animal breaders, the barbarians developped special skills and could raise horses better than the Chinese people. Eroticized non-Han female dancers or the barbarian singers were part of the Tang society. Many emperors had a great respect for the Indian culture. However, the stereotype of the non-Han untrustworthyness explained the rebellion of the barbarian general An Lushan. The despise for the barbarians was deeply rooted in the Chinese cosmology, according to which all people living far from Luoyang

88 Grenet 2002; La Vaissière 2003.

were characterized by a very low level of literacy and civilization. Even the great poet Li Bo had to conceal his barbarian origins. An anti-Buddhist polemic argued that the Buddhist lack of filial piety offended the Chinese values. The otherness shaped the body and physiognomy of the barbarian Buddhist monks and Sogdian merchants.[89] Even after many generations, the gap between the Chinese population and the small barbarian settlements was not easy to overbridge. The assimilation of the barbarians was no primary goal for the Tang dynasty: Barbarians had to settle on the periphery of the empire and protect it against the ferocious Nomads. In order to be completely assimilated, a barbarian living on the Chinese territory had to choose a new surname with a certified Han provenience and to invent Han ancestors, who would have been taken captive outside the Chinese boundaries.

Turks, Mongols or Tungus, the barbarians of China are often connected to the North, that is to say to Mongolia and southern Siberia. If China has never considered the study of these ethnic groups to be a priority, Russia has been much more interested in their characteristics and past. A key moment was the reign of the Empress Catherine the Great, who asked the new Russian Academy of Sciences to explore the ethnic groups of her empire, until the remote desert regions where many of them were living. This vast project involved the exploration of the Caucasus and, above all, of Siberia. Large amounts of money were devoted by the Russian government to this enterprise. The appointed travelers were not adventurers but scholars, generally Germans, trained in the best universities.[90] The results of their surveys were to remain the property of the Academy of Sciences, even if many scholars published books about the peoples of Siberia. Among them, there are Karl Heinrich Merck, who visited the Chukchi;[91] Johann Georg Gmelin explored southern Siberia, particularly the regions that separate Lake Baikal from China;[92] Georg Wilhelm Steller analysed the culture of the Itelmens in the Kamtschatka;[93] Gerhard Friedrich Müller developped an inventory of the archives concerning Siberia and explored the territory of the Yakuts;[94] Peter Simon Pallas

89 La Vaissière 2002.

90 Espagne 2018.

91 Merck 2014.

92 Gmelin 1751-1752.

93 Steller 1774.

94 Müller 1732-1764; Müller 2010.

travelled beyond Lake Baikal up to the Chinese border.[95] The result of the numerous publications made by these German scholars with the intention to integrate the Siberian populations into the Russian empire was that the barbarians could not be rejected to the periphery any more: they were integrated as an Eastern dimension of the Russian identity.

These scholars, accompanied by interpreters, had all the available literature and maps of North-Eastern Asia in their luggage. They were interested in all aspects of the countries they were crossing, from geology to fauna, flora and linguistics. They studied the languages of the Siberian peoples by drawing up vocabularies: this is how it became possible to establish more clearly the identity of these Siberian ethnic groups and the history of their relations. Some of their linguistic observations have been collected in a large book that was supposed to study 500 languages of the Earth and was published in 1806 by Johann Christoph Adelung under the title *Mithridates or Universal Table of Languages*.

These German scholars also tried to understand the Siberian religions and especially the shamanic rituals known to have played an important role in the ancient history of China. Although the rites seemed very strange, the anthropologists who observed them did not always condemn them. They also observed the food practices, the clothes, the architecture of the houses and recorded a picture of the barbarian populations in Northern China in all their diversity. Certainly, from the chronological point of view, this ethnographic portrait does not correspond to the warrior peoples whom the Great Wall attempted to contain outside China. But at least their descendants, from the same family of peoples, were directly concerned. In fact, the Turkic-speaking populations of the Altai, the Mongols and the Tungus are the three main families that stand out in the ethnic landscape of southern Siberia. One could add some other Palaeosiberian populations like the Kets. Curiously, the role that the Siberian ethnic groups may have played in Chinese history is not of particular interest to the German explorers, even if they set up hypothetical routes for their migrations. They were more concerned with the relations that the peoples of Siberia had with North America through the Bering Strait, thus foreshadowing the aim of the great expedition of Franz Boas, the *Jesup North Pacific Expedition*, meant to discover the relationship between myths of the Siberian nations and those of ethnic groups in North America.

[95] Pallas 1771-1801.

The first of the barbarians who could represent a sort of union between China and Europe are the Huns. They passed through an area of about 10 000 kilometers, from the Great Wall of China to the Roman *limes*, and they have been presented as the living embodiment of the steppe nomads.[96] They were probably the result of mixtures of peoples: they appear for the first time in Roman sources at the end of the 4th century AD, when they reached the Caucasus and come up against the Alans. Their originated on the boundaries of China, and must be related to the archaeological discoveries in Xinjiang and Altai. In their wanderings, they crossed the southern regions of Russia. Of course, in the ancient histories, the Huns are characterized by their extreme brutality. Yet, we know also that they had diplomatic relations with the Romans: at the beginning of the 5th century, Flavius Aetius, a Roman general and consul who grew up as a hostage at the Hunnic court, spoke their language, which enabled him to lead political negotiations and to bring Hunnic military forces in the conflicts involving the last Roman rulers of the West.[97] Some Huns became Christians and participated in the Roman defense against other barbarians. It is important to keep in mind that the Huns were not a single group with everlasting identity; an ethnic mix with the Ostrogoths seems to have taken place, among other forms of hybridization.

On the Chinese side, the Huns could be identified with the Xiongnu who come into conflict with the Zhōu dynasty in the 5th century BC. In this context, they are considered as Turko-Mongol invaders whose threat was sufficient to trigger the construction of the Great Wall. But the wall did not stop the barbarian invasions in China and the Han turned towards more traditional forms of warfare. Before them, the Qin dynasty completed the unification of China by integrating Hunnic tribes; they even got inspired by some of their customs.

By the end of the 3rd century BC, Modun Chanyu, a military leader of the Nomads, killed his father Touman and founded the Xiongnu empire, which extended up to the Lake Baikal in the North. He inflicted a military defeat to the Han emperor Gaozu, forcing him to initiate a policy of peace and to mark the alliance by sending a princess to marry Modun Chanyu. Modun even offered to marry the widow of Gaozu, the emperess Lü Zhi, in order to take control over the entire Chinese empire. But he never enjoyed absolute power among his people. The Huns possessed a military force that enabled them to fight effectively against other peoples. We know that they had

96 Meier 2019.

97 Hughes 2012.

a patriarchal society and that the widow of the elder brother became the wife of the younger brother. Attempts at identifying their way of life and their social habits are based on comparisons with the other nomadic populations they encountered.

After Modun's death in 174 BC, the Xiongnu continued to threaten the Chineses for centuries, while fighting against other barbarians, like the Yuezhi. The Yuezhi lived especially in Gansu and spoke an Indo-European language, belonging to the Tokharian family. Pushed by the Xiongnu-Huns towards Bactria, they founded the Kushan Empire. There is debate if the White Huns or Hephtalites, who lived in the Turfan region at the beginning of the Christian era, before invading Central Asia, were descendants of the Yuezhi or of the Xiongnu-Huns. Despite the attention paid to them by the historian Sima Qian (in the Hua-Yi, Sino-Barbarian distinction), little is known about their customs or social organization. However, we know for sure that the Kushan empire was a vehicle of Buddhism and even of Greco-Buddhism throughout Bactria in the direction of China and that it maintained direct and indirect relations with Rome, across the Sassanian empire and the Indian Ocean. Inscriptions in Greek language are linked to the Kushan empire. So we are at the same time confronted with the history of the Huns and with barbarians building a bridge between the East and West of the Eurasian continent.[98]

The Huns themselves may have had a civilizing effect by teaching the use of iron to Bronze Age populations near Lake Baikal. When the Huns attack the Chinese empire, they were not just a wild and completely primitive population: they had occupied the space of today Mongolia and knew about Buddhism, even if they were not yet converted. Their ethnic and linguistic roots are not clearly defined: they could have been closely linked to the Turks. Their linguistic family – including Turkish, Mongolian and Tungus – seem to have originated in the Altai region. In fact, this ethno-linguistic group includes many of the "barbarians" who attacked China until the seizure of power by the Manchus and the founding of the Qing Empire.

It is generally said that the Turkish group originated in Mongolia in the Orkhon valley where proto-Turkish runes have been found.[99] This is the starting point of a vast movement of the Turks towards the West, including the Uyghurs of the present Xinjiang, then the Kirghizes, born out the mix of Turks and the Palaeo-Siberians, then the Uzbeks or Turkish Tchaghatai resulting from interbreeding between Turkish

98 Parzinger 2006.

99 On the question of cultural transfers in Central Asia, see Espagne *et al.* 2016.

elements and Mongolian troops of Gengis Kahn, then the Turks who reached Anatolia and the Balkans, together with the Kazakhs and Tatars who occupied the southern parts of the future Russian empire. The Turks were also among the barbarians who threatened the Chinese space, while the Liang dynasty was dominating the South, and the Wei dynasty the North. Each of these dynasties corresponds to a phase of sinization of the barbarian elements that had their own emperor and adopted the Chinese language. In the 5th century, the Ruanruan – roughly identified with the Avars – were in Manchuria and Xinjiang. They used Chinese script and traded with China. The Uyghurs, on their side, belong to the ethnic groups who participated in the translation of Buddhism from India to China: the Paleo-Uighur texts are testimonies of a strong presence of Buddhism in Central Asia. Later on, the Tang dynasty, willing to include Central Asia in their empire, pushed the Turks towards the west. The Tang hesitated between the separation of the foreign groups (like the barbarian settlements attested in some ports for example) and a policy of assimilation. In any case, at the linguistic level, assimilation prevailed: apart from Sanskrit, the Tang supported no use of foreign languages. The non-Han remained savages on the periphery, whose bestiality was recognizable even by their physical features. Yet, during the Tang dynasty, the Khazar empire with a strong Turkish nomad component was created in the North of the Caucasus and operated a strange conversion to Judaism.

The Turkic-speaking barbarians who distressed China in regions belonging today to Southern Russia pre-dated the creation of the Kiev Russ, considered by the Russians as the first Russian state.[100] Given the scarce evidence, it is very difficult to identify the ethnic group that made up the vast movement of nomadic peoples from the East to West of the Eurasian steppe. The Turkish peoples played obviously a central role. This Turkish presence, of the barbarians rejected from Asia and particularly from China, is easily perceptible in Russia. Beyond the presence of a Turkish Khanate in the Crimea, whose presence in the long term is still recognizable in Pushkin's poem on Bakhchysarai, Russia itself is formed on the basis of wars against the Turks, especially againts the Tatars. The siege of Kazan by Ivan the Terrible in 1552 is a founding moment in the history of modern Russia. The Tatars of Kazan succeeded another Turkish state, Volga-Bulgaria, and were identifiable as descendants of Gengis Khan, that is to say, they were connected with the great movement of peoples who left Mongolia after being initially involved in the wars against the Jin dynasty.

[100] Gumilev 1992.

The Mongols are the last among these barbarian nations of northern Eurasia. They have their own Chinese dynasty, that of the Yuan (1260-1368). They adopted the Chinese language and made Beijing their capital. It was during the Yuan period that Marco Polo visited China. The founder of the Yuan dynasty is the grandson of the Mongol Genghis Khan. He was born in Mongolia near Ulan Bator and attacked two sinicized dynasties – the Xia and the Western Jin who are supposed to be Tanguts – therefore barbarians. It is well known that Genghis Khan founded an empire which stretched beyond the Volga and the Black Sea. In 1242, Mongols even reached the Adriatic. If the Southern Song dynasty managed to escape at first, all Northern China was included in Genghis Khan's Empire. After his death, his descendants formed various khanats: Djaghataï, Genghis Khan's second son with his main wife Börte, occupied Central Asia; the descendants of Djötchi, the eldest son, covered a large part of the steppes. In the first half of the 14th century, there is already a shift in the identity of the barbarians, which shows that the ethnic differences between the nomadic peoples and especially between the Mongols and the Turks had obviously no decisive meaning: while the khanate of Djaghataï passed into the hands of the Turks, that of Djötchi was relayed by the Tatar Turks. The Mongols of the Golden Horde reached the region of Moscow and Toktamysh burned Moscow in 1382. The Mongols mingled gradually with the Turks to form the Tatar ethnic group, which suffered decisive defeats only against the Russians, in the 15th century.

Despite the very negative common view of the Mongolian barbarians, one must admit that on religious matters, for example, they were much more tolerant than the Teutonic knights, who sought to colonize the Russian space from the West, by settling on the shores of the Baltic Sea. Moreover, the *pax Mongolica*, throughout northern Eurasia, made possible all kind of exchanges and allowed several emissaries of the Pope to reach Mongolia. Giovanni da Pian del Carpine arrived there in 1245. The interpreters who accompanied him in this dangerous journey were Slavs, able to make connections between the European emissaries and the Mongols.[101] The Dominican André de Longjumeau conducted two successive embassies to the Mongols. William of Rubruck was in Karakorum in 1254, where he found a Nestorian church and Buddhist temples. He even heared of a Parisian goldsmith in the capital of Mongolia.[102] The Mongols were welcoming the Nestorian Christians who inspired the legend of

[101] Tanase 2014.

[102] Jackson 1990; cf. Rachewiltz 1971.

the location of Prester John and of his Christian state in the Extreme Orient, beyond the Muslim world. This invited the Europeans to conceive a sort of alliance with the Mongols.[103]

All ethnic minorities living in China can be regarded as barbarians, as far as they did not share the Chinese culture. However, the term seems to be reserved more specifically to the ethnic groups in the North, against whom the Chineses built the Great Wall. We call them "Huns" for the ancient and medieval or early Chinese times, and then Turks and Mongols, mingled and often confused the ones with the others. One should perhaps mention also the Tibetans, who created an empire ruled by several dynasties during the Tang and the Song. We can also add the Tungusic peoples who founded the Jin dynasty (1115-1234) under the name of "Jurchen" and took power in China in the Qing dynasty, in 1644, under the name of "Manchus". Therefore, if the history of China begins with struggles against the barbarians, it also ends with a barbarian dynasty. The barbarians were not only sinicized but they also opened the communication between the Chinese world and Europe.

The Russian historian Lev Gymilev was the son of two important Russian poets of the 20th century, Anna Akhmatova and Nicolas Gumilev. After a first part of his life darkened by political emprisonnement, he published a book on the Huns widely identified with the Xiongnu of the Chinese history.[104] This work commissioned by the Institute of Orientalist Studies in Leningrad was followed by other publications in the same field: a dissertation on the Ancient Turks, another controversial work on the Khazars.[105] All these publications are guided by two concepts: Eurasianism and ethnogenesis. Eurasianism consists in approaching the Eurasian continent no longer as an opposition of Asia and Europe but as an ensemble centered on Russia: Russia strongly determined by its Asian part and the ethnic groups there. By considering the ethnogenesis, one does not see nations as closed entities, but as groups that mix and create new identities. It is therefore important to follow the encounters and the hybridisation of the ethnic groups in order to understand the emergence of new nations. In these processes of circulation and fusion, Gumilev stresses the geographical determinants. The consequence of this theoretical construction is the rehabilitation and the reassessment of the Huns, the ultimate barbarians of the ancient times, in

[103] Gumilev 1987.

[104] Gumilev 1993.

[105] Gumilev 2007; Gumilev 2013.

the history of Europe and China alltogether. Gumilev clearly wanted to define the foundations of a Russian identity but this Russian ethnos had to include elements of Chinese history. The Eurasian steppe with Central Asia and southern Siberia become an essential part of this history. Nonetheless, in order to explain the conquering fury of the Huns, Gumilev invented psychological terms such as a "passional crisis".

The results of Gumilev's work have been criticized by Russian sinologists, who considered that it relied on bad translations of 19th-century sources. But the idea of a fundamental historical connection between Europe and China through the category of the barbarians deserves to be taken seriously. If we consider that beyond the Huns, the Mongols of Genghis Khan and the warriors of Tamerlane were also barbarians, the question of the barbarians in Northern China brings us to the very modern debate on the Silk Road, determined by the new political Chinese project "one belt one road". The space that was not yet – and probably never – a pure silk road, has always been a way of passage. For Gumilev, this was the meeting point between a Roman empire obsessed by its barbarians and a Han empire that was just as much endangered by them.

Ethnic groups are not eternal, but they are historical. They die and are replaced by others. Gumilev's book on the Russian ethnos ranges from the Kievan Russ to Moscow-Russia and presents the Turks as the first ethnic group that managed to unify Eurasia from the Pacific Ocean to the Black Sea. This potential of the northern barbarians was already shown by the Huns. Modu Chanyu, the Hunnic leader who killed his father in 209 BC, threatened the Qin dynasty as soon as it unified China. Liu Bang, founder of the Han dynasty, preferred to negotiate with Modu and to make peace, opening the way of trade with Central Asia. It is true that the Huns did not remain a pure ethnic group, that they quickly merged with other groups – like the Mansi of Siberia –, but their dissolution in a range of nomadic peoples created precisely that ethnic link between China and Europe, postulated by eurasianism.[106] This is the reason why Kazakhstan recently founded a Gumilev Eurasian National University in Astana.

[106] Laruelle 1999.

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