CHAPTER ONE

CLASSICAL AND BARBARIAN

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In contrast to recent conferences and publications on the Greek idea of the barbarian, The Barbarians of Ancient Europe *deals with the indigenous peoples of Europe who had contact with Greek culture during its flowering – Thracians, Scythians, Celts, Germans, Etruscans, and other peoples of Italy, the Alps, and beyond (Map 1.1). The chapters in this book were first presented as papers at a conference held at the University of Richmond in March 2003. Since that time, there has been growing interest in the reality of the peoples who were long referred to as "barbarians" in the pejorative sense. In this chapter, I review some of the major themes and debates presented in this volume and lay out a framework to help the reader situate the arguments and conclusions of each contributing author.[1]*

The subtitle of this volume, *Realities and Interactions*, refers to two kinds of archaeology. The first is the classical "antiquarian" approach to prehistoric archaeology, which illustrates the life, manners, customs, and beliefs of ancient peoples. The second emphasizes technology, trade, connections, and interactions, and defines cultures as the product of an interaction between society and environment.[2] Both approaches are illustrated in the volume. Though the available evidence is the same for both, however, the focuses are different, as are the methodology and conclusions.

The evidence consists of references and descriptions in Greek and Roman literature as well as an ever-growing body of archaeological

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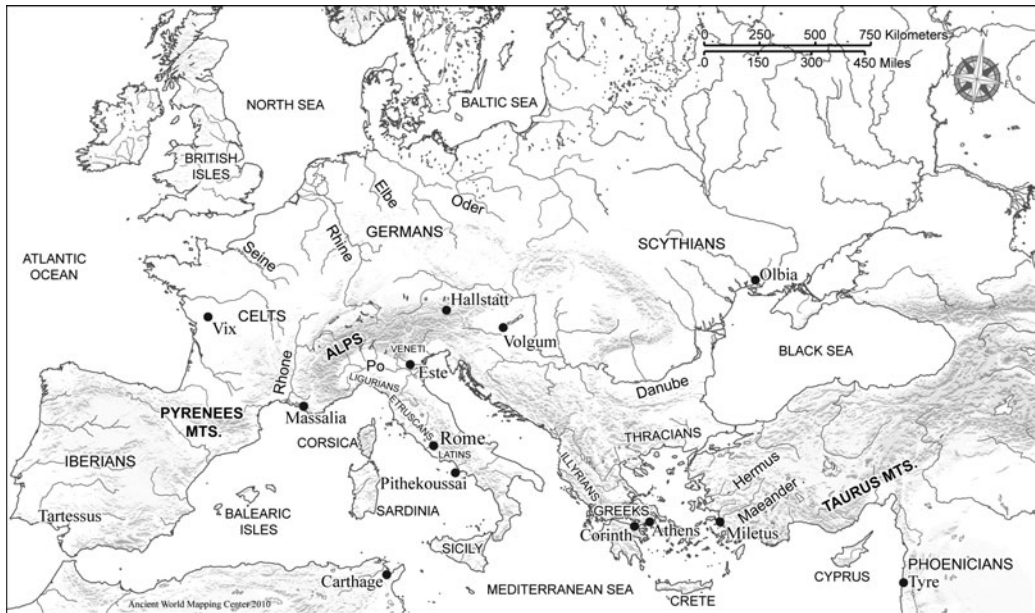
Map 1.1. Areas covered by the barbarians. (Courtesy Ancient World Mapping Center, copyright 2010; www.unc.edu/awmc.)

information. How do we understand the relationship between these two kinds of testimony, between the way classical authors represented these non-Greek peoples and the way we read their cultures today on the basis of their art and imagery, their burial practices, their homes, and their way of life? Which of the two has more authority and should be accorded priority? Can we reconcile archaeological discoveries with statements and narratives of literary sources that represent ancient perceptions of the nonclassical peoples of antiquity? We ourselves are necessarily bound by our own modern views of these cultures as we try to re-create the past and create new myths.

Challenging classical scholarship's dependence on the written word raises many questions. What kinds of histories can be written about peoples with no written historical traditions of their own? What did these different cultures have in common, aside from their geographical situations and their nonclassical status? And finally, how do we deal with questions of their chronology and historical change? Identity is not fixed, but changes for all of us, as it did for the Greeks and the various peoples around them.

The Evidence

We can try to learn about the life of the barbarians through the art and artifacts they have left behind, but this archaeological evidence must be translated. We must interpret it from its context, and we can never be sure that we understand it correctly. "No fact exists without an interpretation. For facts are like words in a dictionary; they are dead."[3] Though we feel on surer ground when we have classical texts that describe the appearance and culture of the peoples we are dealing with, classical texts tell us something of other peoples only when their history touches that of the Greeks and Romans, and their accounts tend to be biased, driven by their own agendas. Reflected in the various chapters of this volume are ongoing discussions and disagreements among modern scholars about the relative value of various kinds of evidence – linguistic, archaeological, philological, historical – while the inclusion of Russian, Bulgarian, and other specialized bibliographies makes available the results of new research and archaeological discoveries.

Askold Ivantchik illustrates a method for matching the historical information and archaeological data. For the Scythians, whom we know mainly through archaeology, a careful comparison of Herodotus's account of royal burials with the results of actual excavation brings out numerous convergences and surprising similarities, from the sacrificial horseback riders who stood guard around the royal mound to their tattoos.[4]

Renate Rolle's account illustrates a different method by which we can reach an understanding of aspects of the Scythian way of life. Her re-creation of the royal procession of the empress of Russia through her far-flung empire is reminiscent of the Scythian and Thracian royal round.[5] It includes a description of the luxurious little houses on golden runners of the empress's cortège, much like the ox-drawn wagons of the nomadic Scythians described by various authors of antiquity, which were inhabited by women and children as well as the old and the sick.

Herodotus (4.46) attributes to the Scythians the invention of taking their homes with them. "The advantage of this way of life was the fact that no one marching against them could escape them, while on the other hand no one was able to lay their hands on the Scythians unless

they allowed themselves to be found." Rolle's excavations at Bel'sk, a site that was the destination of Greek traders with a rich supply of goods, also proves the existence of a different Scythian way of life, that of a population who lived in a nomadic or seminomadic way together with resident inhabitants.[6] Such a huge, complex structure, she points out, can only have been realized under the central direction and protection of Scythian kings – those same Scythian kings whose royal graves are found in the necropolis of Bel'sk.

Peter Wells likewise provides archaeological evidence for a previously unrecognized supracommunity political organization of the Germans in the pre-Roman Iron Age period. It includes the surprising discovery of the construction of wooden trackways across marshy areas, and of a deposit of weapons large enough to outfit eighty warriors and presumably warships, evidence of far more complex organized warfare than was thought possible before the arrival of Roman armies on the Rhine.[7]

Recent publications have emphasized the interpretation of images within a particular culture. In the case of the Greeks, the focus has been on the iconography of vase painting as evidence for the religion, society, myths, and customs of fifth-century Athenians,[8] for which Greek literary texts can provide social, historical, and literary contexts for the images. But for most other cultures, the rarity or total lack of written texts means that we must depend on purely visual and archaeological evidence. Several authors confront the problem of trying to understand the significance of local myths and iconography when there are no written texts to guide us.

Nancy de Grummond's analysis of the motif of the talking head in Etruscan and Thracian art brings out meanings and structural frameworks and provides an example of the way an iconographic motif can be interpreted. Analogous observations on the iconography of Thracian art by Ivan Marazov, who relies heavily on semiology, illustrate the way the Thracians chose images and situations of Greek myth that appeared to be most suitable for motivating power and then transformed them. The Thracians perceived the ordering of the world as a hierarchy, and in their art the powerful goddess who protects the king has a prominent place. The iconography makes clear the authority of the king in visual terms, focusing on the figure of the hero, the Thracian Horseman, and the sequence of the royal choice: trials, consecration, investiture, and

marriage. Marazov's contribution serves to make us aware of the way these images were transformed and of the different meanings they had for the people for whom they were made.

Three contributions work together to give a picture of the complex interrelations of the richly diverse but related ancient cultures that developed and flourished in Europe between the international Orientalizing period and the fourth century. My chapter on the Etruscans as mediators, Frey's chapter on the situla art of the Alpine regions and beyond, and de Grummond's chapter on the motif of the severed heads illustrate artistic interconnections and seem to reflect similar features of the customs, society, and beliefs of the peoples involved.

My account of the Etruscans emphasizes interactions and their role in Europe as mediators by way of the conveniently funnel-shaped Italian peninsula, a crossroads between the Classical Greek cultures of the Mediterranean and the peoples beyond the Alps. Crossroads, as John Boardman noted, are busy and informative places.[9] The time is ripe for a discussion of the place of the Etruscans in ancient history and for an attempt to remove them from the isolation to which they have been condemned by much modern classical scholarship.

Were the Etruscans barbarians? Their Classical Greek contemporaries may have seen them as non-Greek barbarians, but in early times they looked more like the Homeric Phaeacians than the barbarous cannibal Cyclops.[10] For many peoples of Europe and the Mediterranean, they counted as a classical civilization. Keith DeVries coined a phrase, the "Nearly Other," for the Etruscans and the Latins of central Italy to the west, and the Phrygians and Lydians to the east, as peoples who belong to a Hellenizing penumbra beyond the Greek world.[11] Yet the role of the Etruscans as models and mediators, and the distinctiveness of their art, give them a place as a ranking classical civilization, along with the Greeks and Romans.[12]

Etruscan culture influenced the art of the Alpine regions north of Italy that we call *situla art*, which in turn mediated influences from the Mediterranean to the Celts of Europe. Otto-Herman Frey examines the art of these barbarians on the northern border of Italy and the Alpine regions of Switzerland, Austria, and Slovenia, who were influenced by classical art and customs mediated by Etruscan culture. He discusses chronological developments and mutual influences, including successive

contacts and distinctions between situla art and the figural style of early Celtic art, and reveals something of the lives, societies, and beliefs of the people who made, decorated, and used these well-crafted objects. Frey explores a number of questions raised by their iconography, including the implications of images of women for their role in these societies. He also asks whether these peoples merely adopted earlier classical art forms as artistic motifs or whether, and to what extent, classical culture actually influenced and transformed life in the Alpine region.[13]

Finally, Barry Cunliffe confronts modern interpretations of the term "Celtic" and traces the history of the controversy that has led some modern authors to go so far as to question the very existence of such a people. His contribution makes clear the extent to which modern biases have determined the various views of these ancient peoples.

What happened to the barbarians? The chapters by Marincola and Stevenson bring glimpses of later developments and overturn some prevalent preconceptions. The Romans, who adopted Greek culture, could define themselves as non-Greek "barbarians" – an intriguing idea for us, accustomed as we are to a Greco-Roman view of the Classical. Closely related to one of principal themes of this volume is Stevenson's view of the construction of an independent identity for the Goths, based on their participation in the classical culture of wine drinking and translation of the Bible, and ultimately on religion and language.

Identity

Modern scholars, and modern nations, often disagree on who the barbarian peoples were in antiquity and who their descendants are today. There is much debate over questions of identity and eventually of that most explosive issue, national identity.

Identity as a label that others apply to a group is the topic of the chapter by Paul Keyser, which illustrates the shifting nature of a vision of the barbarians of Europe in antiquity and of the successive structures in which the ancients placed the peoples on the fringe of their world in their mental maps. Ancients tended to see the world in East–West terms rather than divided between North and South, and it is not surprising that the Romans illustrated the extent of imperial gains from East to West.[14] This concept colored their view of barbarian geography over

time, including the way they saw distinctions between the more sophisticated barbarians of the East and the mostly less "civilized" barbarians of the West.

The vast bibliography that has grown up today on identity – ethnic, racial, religious, linguistic, gender – and the related concept of alterity sees modern "Others" as those who are marginalized in terms of economy, race, gender, society, or religion. For an Athenian of the Classical period, the "Others" included barbarians, women, slaves, Amazons, and satyrs – anyone who was not a Greek, usually meaning a male citizen of fifth-century Athens.[15] Yet as Otto Brendel once put it: "We take the Greeks as our model, forgetting that the Greeks did everything differently from everybody else."[16] It was the Greeks of the Classical period who were the "Others," for they did things differently from all other peoples around them.

The concept of the barbarian as the "Other" crystallized with the sharp break between the archaic past and the post–Persian War period of the fifth century. At the same time, there also developed a consciousness of the otherness of their own past in relation to the Classical period. They distinguished themselves both from contemporary barbarians and from their own barbarian past. Herodotus, Thucydides, Aeschylus, and Euripides all indicate that Athenians felt that they had left their archaic past behind after their victory over the Persians and that their ancestors were as different from them as were the non-Greek barbarians of their own days.[17] To these Classical descendants, the Greeks of the archaic period were indeed a "foreign country," similar in many ways to the barbarians of their own times.[18] Because they saw otherness in chronological terms, they equated barbarian customs with those of their ancestors, who were not yet the "real" Greeks of Classical times.

Among the barbarians, on the other hand, earlier customs were held to be more genuine, purer characteristics of a people. Herodotus's description of Scythian royal burials shows a preference for attributing to the Scythians certain archaic traditions, as Ivantchik points out in this volume. According to Marazov and de Grummond, too, the Thracians, though contemporary with the Greeks, belonged to a different epoch in the process of history and exhibited social, political, and religious patterns not unlike those of the early Greeks of preclassical Homeric times.[19]

Fifth-century Athenians saw themselves as more Greek than their ancestors because Greekness was moving from an ethnic to a cultural identity. You could eventually become Greek by speaking Greek; you could be more or less Greek.[20] And foreigners could become more or less barbaric, sliding up and down the barbarian meter, from almost Greek, like Alexander, to fully barbarian, like a Scythian.[21]

Race, language, and culture have all been taken as markers of the Other. But in an important article, "Race, Language and Culture,"[22] whose date of publication in 1938 is deeply significant, Franz Boas explains how the bloodline, physical type, language, geography, customs, and culture of a group or nation rarely if ever remain permanent or work together all at the same time. Extended changes in language and culture often occur without corresponding changes in physical type, and there are many instances of permanence of "blood, or ethnic identity," along with far-reaching modifications of language and culture.

According to descriptions in Greek texts, barbarians spoke non-Greek languages and practiced non-Greek customs such as human sacrifice. In the eyes of the Greeks, they were set apart by their physical appearance, their dress and attitude to nudity, their *truphe* – conspicuous consumption, lust and luxury, the symbolism of gold as a status symbol – and the different role of women in society.

Differences and distinctions of language, dress, hair, housing, gender, and religion set groups apart from one another in the ancient world, as they have in every place and time. There were rules governing such distinctions, but they were more often unspoken assumptions than clearly delineated differences.[23] Such questions of identity constitute an anthropological problem that we try to understand through archaeological and written evidence. But what in the archaeological evidence, or in the texts, elucidates the attitude of a particular culture at a particular moment toward women's roles in society, illustrates its attitudes toward the dead, or illuminates the writer's or narrator's perception of the Other?

Names

Basic to the identity of any group is its name.[24] It carries messages of identity and self-presentation, nicely illustrating the distinction between

the way people see themselves and how others see them. Even today, we call the inhabitants of the Peloponnese Greeks, while they call themselves Hellenes. The country we call Switzerland is Helvetia to the Swiss. The citizens of Germany call their homeland Deutschland. The names of the Gallic tribes inscribed on the Augustan Trophée des Alpes at la Turbie are taken to define the beginning of French identity.[25]

Modern countries and groups have used names according to nationalistic biases in order to exalt their own ancestors or to claim an area or a group as their own. Descendants tend to idealize those they consider to be their ancestors:[26] Romantics and nationalists have maintained that the Druids were philosophers, never involved in human sacrifice,[27] while the Hungarian scholar Janos Szilágyi documents a case of a nineteenth-century search for imaginary ancestors.[28] The most infamous example is that of the mythical "Aryans," the nineteenth-century term for Indo-Europeans that was polluted by Nazi propaganda when the concept of Indo-European identity led to the aberrant abuse of the concept of an Aryan race.[29]

The names as well as the presumed locations of barbarian nations are fluid. But such fluidity is by no means limited to barbarians. When we speak of the ancient Greeks, we usually mean those of fifth-century Athens. "Rome" can mean many things, including the whole Roman Empire.[30] The names of the Celts, the Germans, or the Scythians meant different things at different times according to who was using the term and when: they could refer to different peoples or to different stages in the history of the same people. We do not always know whether the names we use actually correspond to particular ethnic groups. What did each one call itself? What did other people call them and when? How did the names of the geographical areas they inhabited reflect their history and the languages spoken there before the coming of the Greeks and Romans?

Ancient and modern authors have applied these names arbitrarily, with different meanings. The names we use here – Germans, Celts or Gauls, Thracians, Scythians, Etruscans – are innocent enough if we understand them to be a conventional, convenient way of recognizing a certain group of people with similar characteristics during a certain time.[31] We need names to work with: "I've got to use words when I talk to you."[32]

The situation with the names of the peoples dealt with in this volume varies. Classical authors gave the name "Scythians" to many different tribes. Medieval authors, knowing nothing of these faraway peoples, located them in the snowy North; on late maps various Sithe appear, including, from the East, the Hunni Sithe, the Issedone Sithe, and others.[33]

Greek authors called the Etruscans of central Italy, long their wealthy rivals in the Mediterranean, Tyrrhenians, and named the sea they controlled the Tyrrhenian Sea, while the Romans, for whom the Tarquin dynasty was part of their own early history, knew the people to the north of their borders as Tusci. Etruscans used the name Rasna to refer to their people as a whole. But a citizen of Tarquinia, Chiusi, or Volterra depended on his or her own city for identity rather than on the larger linguistic and religious entity.[34] Because Greek and Roman historians did not record them, however, we have no ancient names for the peoples of northern Italy and beyond who represented details of their lives and ideals in the art of their situlas or bronze vessels, decorated in a narrative style they had learned from their southern neighbors the Etruscans.

"Who were the Germans?" "Who were the Celts?" These questions are asked repeatedly in publications dealing with these peoples and in this book. According to Caesar, as every schoolboy used to know, Gaul was divided into three parts: southwest of the Garonne were the Aquitani; north of the Seine and Marne was the territory of the Belgae; and in the vast area lying between are "the people we call Gauls, though in their own language they are called Celts."[35] But the name, origin, and identity of these Celts have recently been the subject of much controversy. Some modern authors have even suggested that the concept of the Celts, or Kelts, was invented in later times. Indeed, it was antiquarians studying the indigenous languages of the Atlantic fringe of Europe who chose to call them Celtic and who went on to pose the question "When did the Celts arrive here?"[36]

This question of origins, closely related to language, is also regularly asked of the Etruscans and accounts for their so-called mystery. The fact that the Etruscan language is unrelated to that of their neighbors naturally brings up the question "Where did the people who spoke this language come from?"[37] It is a valid question for linguists, who ask why the Etruscan language is non-Indo-European and different from