Marta Raczyńska: Rethinking the "otherness". Selected aspects of Roman proto-ethnography of the European Barbaricum

Abstrakt

Etnografia – według James'a Clifforda, jednego z największych i najbardziej wpływowych humanistów XX wieku – to sposób myślenia i pisania o kulturze, lecz zawsze z perspektywy obserwatora, która bazuje na niezbywalnym podziale na „swoich" i „obcych" (Clifford, 1988, 9). Zrozumienie natury źródła etnograficznego oraz podłoża, na którym w dobie antyku ukształtowany został „etnograficzny sposób myślenia", stanowi punkt wyjścia nie tylko do refleksji nad światem antycznym i *mentalité* epoki rzymskiej, która wyłania się z dzieł zawierających opisy barbarzyńców i zamieszkiwanych przez nich terytoriów. Dla archeologów to także jeden z kluczy do interpretacji tła zjawisk kulturowych uchwytnych na podstawie reliktów kultury materialnej z obszaru europejskiego *Barbaricum* (m.in. jego północno-środkowej części, czyli wschodniego krańca Wielkiej Germanii – obejmującego obecne ziemie polskie). Zadanie to nie jest jednak proste i musi być poprzedzone osobną, antropologiczną refleksją. Jak zatem odczytywać uwagi Cezara odnośnie Germanów, bądź też jak spoglądać na Swebię Tacyta, by nie popaść (nawet przypadkiem) w pułapkę identyfikacji etnicznej? W pierwszej kolejności prześledzić należy historię myśli związanej ze sposobami interpretowania źródeł dotyczących barbarzyńców w naszej części Europy. Dopiero następnym krokiem będzie próba zrozumienia natury antycznego źródła etnograficznego i korzeni rzymskiej proto-etnografii. Rzymskie przekazy rzecz jasna nie dostarczają gotowych obrazów zróżnicowania kulturowego na terytoriach *Barbaricum*, albowiem – po pierwsze – tożsamość etniczna jest z definicji stanem dynamicznym, a zatem podlegała ona ciągłym przeobrażeniom, po drugie zaś – kategorie opisu, którymi posługiwali się autorzy, są z natury swej subiektywne. Tymczasem, pośród literackich toposów (w tym świadectw wpływu greckiej tradycji historiograficznej) odnaleźć można rozmaite, niezwykle interesujące etnograficzne próby zdefiniowania „obcego", jak również pewne uwagi świadczące o niewątpliwie bacznej obserwacji i refleksji nad inną kulturą. Nie należy więc zapominać, że to one przez wiele stuleci stanowiły tło wzajemnych relacji między Rzymem a światem barbarzyńskim.

Słowa kluczowe: źródła antyczne – etnografia rzymska – *Barbaricum* – Germanie

Abstract

According to James Clifford, an influential anthropologist and historian of the 20th century, ethnography is "ways of thinking and writing about culture", but always from an outsider's perspective which is based on the not negotiable "we"/"they" division (Clifford, 1988, 9). Studying this in the light of Roman

ethnographic texts is some starting point for reflection on the ancient *mentalité,* but not only.Archaeologists can try to put this into a context of Roman proto-ethnography of the European *Barbaricum* (especially the north-central part of this, including *Germania Magna*) in the first centuries AD, to understand some questions which arise during the interpretation archaeological and literary sources in relation to one another. However, there is not a simple task. How should we read some Caesar's accounts of Germans or Tacitus' description of the Suebic realm, to not to make a simple ethnic interpretation by accident? Despite of the fact that ancient writers created particular visions of the world to describe barbarians, they were generally very attentive and watchful observers of the reality. If we only go over the literary level of their works, shaped in the result of different historical and cultural factors, we get a chance to extract from these accounts some remarks and indications concern the way of Romans "ethnographic thinking". It will be essential in trying to interpret single phenomena occurred in the materials dated to the period of Roman influences, but also – more broadly – the process of evolving ethnic constructs in *Barbaricum*. But firstly, we need to present the history of approaches to the collating archaeological and literary evidences in the north-central Europe in detail. Next, this requires an explanation of the complex nature of ancient ethnographic sources, and emphasising the fact that a basis of ethnographic thinking is the universal mechanism of perceiving the "otherness".

(…) Perhaps ancient ethnography as a whole are a little more "modern" than we thought, [so] the nature and origins of early ethnographic enquiry have yet to be explored in any detail.
(J. E. Skinner, "The Invention of Greek Ethnography. From Homer to Herodotus", 2012).

Archaeological materials are generally the main source of our knowledge about people inhabiting the north-central Europe[1] in the antiquity. In case of Germanic societies at earlier stages of cultural development (which means the time before they started to write their own history[2]), obviously none of them left behind literary evidences (Jones, 1997, 29-39; Kulikowski, 2006, 56). However, unlike almost all archaeological remains related to earlier periods of time in this territory, material part of their heritage can be verified in view of ancient accounts

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[1] I will focus mainly on territories of the present Germany, and the north-western Poland in the case of its connection to the South Scandinavia (the Jutland Peninsula and Danish islands above all).
[2] About the sixth century AD.

including particular references to *Barbaricum,* its space and peoples who lived there (Grane, 2003; 2012; Kolendo, 2015; Kolendo and Płóciennik, 2015). But, although both sources in their general meanings are parts of the history (Collingwood, 1946), the practice shows that collating them is not a simple task.

This situation resembles interpreting of any old ethnographic records of some illiterate traditional societies (in spite of all clear differences, e.g. in case of nineteenth-centuries accounts) (Jones, 1997, 50-51). Their customs and other behaviours are of course "dead" and totally distant parts of the by-gone socio-cultural reality, so it is necessary to reconstruct them on the basis of preserved information (Ostoja-Zagórski, Posern-Zieliński, 1977, 50). This is a great problem, because from the point of view of today's anthropologists we have only historical texts illustrating both selective ethnographic knowledge about the object of writers' interest, and ways these authors (and, to some extent, society in which they grown) perceived the world around.

Meanwhile, for the Roman period there is a particular potential for tribal ethnicities which seems to provide some categories of the historical-anthropological interpretation (e.g. Jones, 1997, 35-36, 96; Roymans, 2004; Burmeister, 2009; Kulikowski, 2006). That "potential" is signalized both by archaeological materials, and by different ancient writers, but in different ways. Hence, first of all, such studies requires understanding the complex nature of an ancient ethnographic source as the exceptional mirror of the other – following the François Hartog's concept of the "mirror of Herodotus" (Gillet, 2008, 392-408; Hartog, 1988; Skinner, 2012: 5).

Problems and assumptions

This paper – as an anthropological essay about various problems of interpretation – should be treated as a set of theoretical remarks concerning ways of reading literary data, in order to understand more questions connected with Roman proto-ethnography. Because the text obviously makes no claim to completeness, I will discuss only chosen accounts – especially relating to Germans during the Republic's period of decline and the beginning of Principate – to support this reflection[3].

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[3] However, the main focus needs to be on selected passages about the Suebians and their realm, illustrating an ethnographic dimension of the Publius Cornelius Tacitus' tearty *Germania* (chapters 38-45). The whole work, written-off at the end of the 1st century AD (largely – apart from the anonymous text of the *Descriptio Suebiae* – related to information which had been gained by Pliny the Elder in the mid-first century, and included in the *Bella Germaniae*) is considered as a classic example of ancient ethnographic treaty (Grane, 2003, 135-138; Kolendo, 2015). At the same time, I will show that while the *Germania* contains a very significant description of areas extending beyond the Roman frontier, it cannot be read independently of other ancients literary sources. In fact, this is not the only Roman text providing the useful (for archaeologist) knowledge about the north-eastern Germans. In case of Tacitus in himself, *Agricola*

It is not my purpose to interpret individual geographical names in Roman accounts, or to specify location of some groups of people, nor any to describe their manners and customs. I would like to identify the most pressing problems only. Firstly, I will provide the synthesis of how the theoretical approach to relationship between literary and archaeological data has changed over the years in this part of Europe. Then I will endeavour to show the complex nature of ethnographic record as a key to understand the role of ancient accounts in studying the Germanic culture in the co-called late *pre-Roman* and *Roman periods[4]*. This requires, however, the explanation historical circumstances and all factors – such as former literary tradition, cultural patterns borrowed form Greeks, as well as propaganda or moralistic tendencies – influencing the shape of narration at the turn of the ages[5].

By the way, we finally cannot forget about the role of ancient literature in the origin of some ethnogenetic myths in the early-medieval Europe. A lot of earlier Roman texts were being interpreted by writers such as Jordanes, Bede or Gregory of Tours in order to invent "barbarian" traditions, and to build a foundation for some ethnic constructs of the Goths, Anglo-Saxons or Franks, and others (Gillet, 2002: 85-121; Goffart, 2006; Härke, 1997, 125-170; Kolendo, 2004, 9-27; Roymans, 2004, 4). This is, however, a further problem to discuss in studying the historical memory and its influence on barbarian identities (Goffart, 1988, 15; Hobsbawm, 1983, 1-14).

Approaches – a bit of history

Without a doubt: material culture cannot be treated as a direct reflection of ethnic groups defined on the basis of ancient accounts and *vice-versa* (Kulikowski, 2006, 62). There is rather a need for "analyse the political, economic and religious contexts in which processes of ethnogenesis and ethnicity construction must be understood" (Roymans, 2004, 6; see also: Betremes,2011, 46-48; Burmeister, 2009, 46-63; Grane, 2007b, 99-101; Jones, 1997). As one of most problematic matters relating to the theory and methodology of the central-European archaeology dealing with the proto-historic period, this question has been discussed by a number of scholars over time; from the last years of nineteenth- and first decades

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and *Annales* also add a lot to the study of the Germanic socio-cultural universe and its evolving over the time (Grane, 2007b, 84-85).

[4] These archaeological terms correspond to a whole period I discussed in that article.

[5] The political ambitions of Rome activated various "intellectual" – not just military – strategies of the conquering of remote lands, such as writing about them (Krebs, 2006, 118; Osgood, 2007). Of course, the search for self-presentation and propaganda tools was closely linked with an exploitation of former, paradigmatic literary representations of these territories and people lived there (Dan, 2013, 61; Krebs, 2006, 111). With regard to Greg Woolf's elaboration, it should also be recalled that "the reality of Germania [to Tacitus' mind] meant the game could be played in a more serious mode than if it simply concerned one or another Utopia" (Woolf, 2013, 137).

of the twentieth centuries when a scientific approach was developed, through the time of isolation resulting from the intellectual division into two isolated blocks during the Cold War, to the self-reflection of archaeologists and scholars in related fields after the 1989, with drawing an attention to theoretical and interpretative levels (Bertemes, 2011, 41-55; Härke, 2000, 11-39).

According to former, cultural-historical approach[6], both artefacts and different, non-material sources of knowledge about human culture in the past, can serve to answer the following main questions: *what?, where?* and *when?* (Childe, 1929)*,* but rather not *why?* and *how (it happened* or *it was created* and *used)?* Archaeological details and informations from texts dating back to Roman times, taken jointly in this field, were supposed to either confirm or not correspond with each other but nothing more (Kulikowski, 2006, 60). It is suggestive of the fact that this assumption had been the starting point of some extreme ideas, including Gustaf Kossina's settlement-archaeological method of interpretation (*Siedlungsarchäologie*) that used not to take into account the mechanism of cultural change (Bloemers, 2000, 375-397; Haßmann, 2000, 65-139; Härke 2000, 12-39; Kulikowski, 2006, 60-61; Veit, 2000, 40-64). This impacted on the issue of prehistoric migration too. But the problem lied not only with the wrong way of defining an ethnicity, but also with comparing selected, single phenomena, e.g. appearance of humans and objects, character of ritual behaviours or relationships between people, such as their socio-political organisation (Gillet, 2002, 149-176; Kolendo, 2015, 42; Kulikowski, 2006, 62; Roymans, 2004, 5). Significantly, in some twentieth-centuries German editions of Tacitus' *Germania (De Origine et situ Germanorum),* descriptions of archaeological artefacts (without taking into account nor their chronology or any different details) have only illustrated particular passages of the text (e.g. Much, 1967).

From a modern point of view, on the contrary, the main task of such a comparative study is to look for appropriate instruments for interpretation and to interpret acquired data in a universal, ethnically-historically undetermined way. Some historiographical concepts useful for archaeology in this part of Europe appeared already in the second half of the past century, but they were not immediately derived. Probably the most influential at this point were the concept of a *Traditionskern* ("nucleus of tradition") by Reinhard Wenskus, as well as Herwig Wolfram's and Walter Pohl's approaches to the ethnogenesis of Germanic tribes – all of them developed in the so-called Vienna School (Wenskus, 1961; Wolfram, 1988; Pohl, 1998). These models of interpretation shed a totally different light on ancient accounts, so therefore they are still appreciated by archaeologists of proto-historic period, until today (e.g. Burmeister, 2000, 540; 2009, 61-63; Hummer, 1998, 2-8).

[6] Echoes of it still can be seen in today's Polish and German archaeology to a certain extent.

The knowledge resulting from literary data and preserved elements of material culture should be considered together not as the final explanation of the historical process, but as a complementary interpretative framework (Woolf, 2009). This is most evident in the Western European scholarship, where reflections on ways of reading ancient ethnographic accounts in the light of material remains have developed as a part of research in the Anglophone tradition. On that background also other ways of interpretation had been shaped; by focusing on different aspects of culture which derive indirectly from historical and archaeological sources, some anthropological methods of research have found their application in the study of Germanic people in the antiquity. The contextual approach to research seems to be particularly useful to capture some meanings readable both in the material culture and other sources of knowledge about social (authorities, richness), economic (trade activity), or religious phenomena, which could provide contexts of interpretation (Hodder, 1982; 1995, 150-187; Renfrew and Bahn, 2000). A good example can be an interest in the elite ("princely") burials, and using historical evidences which suggest the presence of this phenomenon, to ask about roots of political processes and their continuity in Germanic societies – from the birth of Christ to the Migration Period (Burmeister, 2009, 46-48; Steuer, 2006, 11-25).

Despite this, function and significance of primary sources in the contemporary studies on cultural and settlement changes in the European *Barbaricum*, especially the north-eastern frontier of that, is still being discussed. The post-modern approach requires having the awareness of all fundamental limitations in the process of collating two different types of data, and placing strong emphasis on hermeneutic (interpretative) methods (e.g. Grane, 2007a, 7-30; Grane, 2012). To be sure, the selectivity of archaeological evidence is the first problem; the second one is an exceptional nature of the historical source as such, which – in line with the post-modern thought – is to be perceived as fragmented narration of the past, full of rhetorical images and more or less credible informations hidden below the textual content (Goffart, 1988, 15, 36; Minta-Tworzowska, 1998, 329-333; Topolski, 1996, 339). The truth of that matter is that ancient accounts, specifically Roman texts, as any other source of our knowledge of the past (or any ethnographic source in general!), are saddled with a certain degree of subjectivism (Geertz, 1986, 119). There is probably the reason why they are viewed today differently by different scholars, depending on attitudes to research and the aim of the study. "Indeed the truth-value of these accounts is itself controversial – as Greg Woolf claims – some scholars treating them as essentially fictional, others assuming their broad veracity, yet others choosing to evade the issue by focusing on ancient *mentalités*[7], on literary tropes or the notion of a Roman *imaginaire*" (Woolf, 2009, 210).

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[7] See more about a microhistorical perspective: Breudel, 1973; Le Goff, 1985; Ladurie, 1983.

An ethnographic way of thinking – what is this?

In the lore, the space seems to be a symbolic construction divided into two main parts: the own and – from the opposite side – the other, foreign space consisting of elements which defy definition or any categorization, or which are difficult to categorize (Eliade, 1969, 39-56; Helms, 1988, 7-11, 20-21, 64-65). But there is not only a phenomenon which ethnographers indicate and explain, but also the ground on which ethnography was invented (Skinner, 2012, 8).

Both Greco-Roman and Roman authors were not only "reporters" providing their audience with the knowledge of barbarians, but also creators a particular vision of the world[8] (Roymans, 2004, 5). Understood in a such way, ancient sources are full of examples creating (not describing simply) the reality of barbarians by playing with words, images and their meanings (Woolf, 2013, 137). To tell the truth, a creative role of writings is the principle governing an ethnographic or any different record, either in the past or even today (Clifford, 1988; Geertz, 1986). However, adopted by archaeologists uncritically, this post-modern approach to literary data could result in treating texts as narrations of totally imagined world. In any case this assumption may induce to go far beyond the socio-anthropological level of interpretation, and to devalue the importance of remarks concerned factual observation and ways of perceiving of the otherness by Ancients. These ways, in general, were universal in essence but determined only by historical context and leading to express that literally in a specific manner (Grane, 2012, 22; Helms, 1988, 22-32, 115-116; Woolf, 2009, 215). It is therefore very important to extract only some valuable information from apparent fictional parts of description (Helms, 1988, 261, 265-266).

Ethnography is not only a method of research by description arising from particular theory; it means also recording of experience of variety, motivated by curiosity of the world which is inscribed in the human nature, and by the need for others to understand ourselves (Jones, 1997, 64). In this context, ethnography is always the translation of culture, based on the tension between *emic* and *etic* as internal and external ways of defining cultural identity[9] (Agar, 2010, 2-3; Clifford, 1986, 115; 1988, 9; Jones, 1997, 56-57; Woolf, 2009). As a matter of fact, ethnography and cultural anthropology as academic disciplines, aimed at explanation of human diversity using appropriate methodology, had originated in

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[8] As Nico Roymans claims, there is „how the Romans, especially the administrative and military elite, *wished to see [Germans]"* (Roymans, 2004, 5).

[9] Siân Jonen, regarding to *etic* and *emic* perspective, makes a distinction between the „objectivist" and „subjectivist" definitions of ethnicity (Jones, 1997, 56-57). The first concerns the cultural categorisation and defining ethnic groups from an outsider's perspective, on the basis of socio-cultural differentiation („we-they" division; *etic*); the second – in contrast – is defining an ethnicity on the background of the subjective self-categorization (*emic*). This paper, due to the object of our discussion, is focused mainly on the first way of thinking about the ethnicity.

the nineteenth century (Skinner, 2012, 37; Woolf, 2013, 133). Meanwhile, in the antiquity there was no separate humanistic discipline: any work concerning the history and, sometimes, the natural world and its interesting facts, or even a poetry, could have contained – put it this way – quasi-ethnographic passages (Skinner, 2012; Gillet, 2008, 398). As one of most respected anthropologists of the mid-twentieth century Ralph Linton would put it, they had to create and use a particular "cultural construct" to describe different barbarian "real culture" (Linton, 1945). But they surely were not able to distinguish these two concepts.

Why have I mentioned all of that?

It seems obvious that the aim of scholars compiling both literary and archaeological evidences needs to be to detect the outlook of Roman authors and their current audience at a given time. Roymans is right when he notices that "archaeology can [only] inform us about themes that the Romans *failed to see"* in barbarian Germans ethnicity (Roymans, 2004, 5). Following the Edmund Leach's theory of symbolic culture as a special kind of communication system, Romans were all – as the Greeks previously – some recipients and interpreters of information or messages "sending" by societies from the north of the Greco-Roman world in various ways: through specific dress or clothing, social and gender roles, ritual behaviours or, obviously, language (Kulikowski, 2006, 57-60; Leach, 1976). Such information, however, were often not only the human activity, but also some distinct features of the whole space (deep forest, marshes, mountains or other parts of cultural landscape), in which barbarians – especially middle-European ones, which is confirmed by Tacitus' Suebians description – have lived, and which were generally perceived by Ancients as the foreign space (Helms, 1988, 20-33). Some scholars duly remarks that Romans were used to consider geographical conditions as an important element determining the population and its characteristics[10] (Grane, 2003, 136-138). There was a great influence of ancient ethnographic concepts in the linking of Germanic otherness to the northern climate (Roymans, 2004, 225).

Just as their predecessors, Roman writers created series of classificatory criteria serving as categories of a description on the basis of different acquired informations (Hummer, 1998, 3; Jones, 1997, 61-62)[11]. Then, they fit them to certain tribal names of barbarians, who were a set of differentiated groups (referred to *gentes* or *nationes* in Latin and *ethne* in Greek) rather than the universal "others" which could have given an "order to the world beyond civilization" only (Kulikowski, 2006, 56-57). This is how – on the basis of a series of

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[10] To illustrate this with an example: „(...) for throughout their territory – as Grane notes – the Chatti are followed by the Hercynian mountain country" (*Ger.* 30.2; Grane, 2003, 136).

[11] Which, moreover, posed many interpretative problems and leaded to an *interpretatio romana* key application (see more in the next chapter).

questions about the other – the ethnographic way of thinking was being shaped, and this is why all these accounts set examples of proto-ethnography (Dan, 2013, 33-35; Gillet, 2008; Grane, 2003; Krebs, 2006; Woolf, 2013).

However, according to Joseph E. Skinner, "(…) perhaps ancient ethnography as a whole are a little more "modern" than we thought, [so] the nature and origins of early ethnographic enquiry have yet to be explored in any detail" (Skinner, 2012, 7). In fact, primary ancient historiographers and geographers made various descriptions of outlying areas and peripheral tribes, which were grown from the observation or experience of reality, and also from the reflect on that. Indeed, although their ethnography was obviously so far from a contemporary approach to cultural research for several reasons[12], there was basically – as today's fieldwork – the result of an attempt to explain cultural variations observed around, and yet the need to understand themselves and their own position in the political landscape (Helms, 1988, 7-19; Kolendo, 2015, 13-14; Woolf, 2009, 210). By focusing on an extreme exoticism or – on the other hand – a similarity of some phenomena, they tried to define and re-present from their own point of view the whole space they had just known or been informed of that, more or less[13]. However, despite all these created categories of description, there was not easy for them to understand such a multi-ethnic realm and diagnose an ethnic diversity among non-Greeks or non-Romans (Burmeister, 2009, 60; Kulikowski, 2006, 56). Therefore they used to create some broad, macro-ethnic entities[14] (Grossgruppen), such as Gauls or Germans indeed (Roymans, 2004, 2-3). Over the time these categories have included smaller groups. Names of them – on the contrary – have most certainly been generated by barbarians to call themselves or their neighbours, which were known by Roman informants and finally recorded by ancient authors (Kulikowski, 2006, 57-60).

The problem with reading foreign culture by Romans obviously determined ways of interpretation of many other elements, such as the Germanic society organisation, structure of which – in Tacitus' *Germania* especially, when he writes about Suebian slaves – was rather a reflection of the Roman actuality[15] (*Ger*. 38, 40; Burmeister, 2009, 48). These difficulties were also reflected so clearly in the *interpretatio romana* key – a form of transcultural mediation which means much more than just a tool for describing other beliefs, customs or rituals through

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[12] The problem is the lack of methodology and a norelativistic perspective. For example, ancient authors did not use so-called ethnographic analogies to explain some "traditional" habits, as today's anthropologists, but described these phenomena by their own categories.

[13] Literary "depictions" of the exterior world, foreign landscapes and places, singular representations of outsiders, strange animals or even plants and precious raw materials from distant lands, were an important element of cultural identity expression in pre-modern societies to a large extent.

[14] This also refers to the ethnic name Allemanni, as a collective term created by Romans with the previously meaning "all men" (Burmaister, 2009, 62; Hummer, 1998, 4).

[15] Tacitus mentions five estates: kings, princes, freeborn, freedmen and slaves.

the prism of Roman culture: the need for rethinking the other (Buchholz, 1968, 119-120; Kulikowski, 2006, 57, 59-60; Woolf, 2013, 6).

The Meeting of two Worlds

To discuss the "otherness" category as a general tendency in the clash of culture, we ought to emphasise the high importance of former literary tradition, which had an impact on Roman historiographers. Traces of their ethnographic writing were obviously determined to some extent by stereotypical images of barbarian lands and its inhabitants[16] as "calques" and transpositions from the Greek historiography[17] (Grane, 2012, 8; Kulikowski, 2006, 14-15). But there is definitely more complicated. Apart from accounts expressing some petrified names as examples of literary *toposes,* not attempts at ethnic interpretation(as in case of the fourth-fifth centuries Roman texts, in which the Goths were called the Scythians – the name taken from Herodotus' *Histories[18]*), some passages give also insight into images of barbarians evolving over the centuries. For instance, some fragments of *De Bello Gallico* and *Germania* in comparison, become a literary expression of the changing Roman view on the Germania and its peoples. Meanwhile, we will start by definition.

According to some scholars, the term *barbarus* was adopted into Latin from Greek not as a simple expression, but rather as a full package of concepts (Dan, 2013, 56; Gillet, 2008, 397, 399; Modzelewski, 2004, 9). In fact, both an onomatopoeic word[19] and an idea of *bárbaros*, indented to "clarify" images of foreigners (frequently neighbours or peoples with whom some contacts were

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[16] We might say that the peoples of *Barbaricum* were occupying Greco-Roman minds and therefore, in a way, they exerted influence on forming a classical culture in stark contrast to the foreigners. The whole ancient literary tradition petrified some imaginations and led to establishment of canonical views of barbarian tribes (Kolendo and Płóciennik 2015: 17). These stereotypes were relatively permanent. Interestingly, Burmeister mentions some sixth and seventh-centuries accounts about the Germanic people as wild and fearless warriors, which is a barbarian literary *topos* and some reference to earlier Roman writings (Burmeister 2009: 47).

[17] According to Christopher B. Krebs, *Germania Magna* in Julius Caesar's *Commentaries (De Bello Gallico)* is presented as *apeiron* ('απειρον) – boundless, infinite forests and empty, immense territories (Krebs 2006: 130). In fact, the earliest descriptions of the Earth accepted a rigid distinction between the civilized Ancients in the hearth of the world and the barbarians on its edges (Romm 1994). To some degree, Caesar's narrative about remote parts of *Barbaricum* presents itself as reminiscent of Herodotus' account of the Scythian steppe, which also impacted on Marcus Vispanius Agrippa's representation of *deserta Sarmatiae,* the Pomponius Mela's description of the eastern frontiers of the world, and others (*B. Gal*. 8; *Chor.* 33; Kolendo and Płóciennik, 2015, 61, 104). Some peculiar digression about that "secret" region suggests a significant aspect of the space, that can be read – literally and lyrically – with reference to the inhuman, barbarous nature of its inhabitants (Dan, 2013, 49).

[18] What is also interesting, Dexippus, the Greek historian, classified Allemanni as Scythians in the third century AD (Kulikowski, 2006, 59).

[19] From the Greek verb meaning „to babble" (Grane, 2003, 127).

being maintained), was defined in ancient Greece, and covered not only people from the north, but also the Persian or Semitic peoples (Skinner, 2012). However, the meaning of this term was absolutely not the Greek invention. There also cannot be said that the general barbarian *topoi* was taken over by Romans as a whole, because it was an expression of some universal (and only determined by ancient political and philosophical thought[20]) mechanism of perceiving others (Grane, 2003, 127-129; Skinner, 2012, 8-13). In essence, different peoples in the Mediterranean world – for example, indigenous tribes of Italy before the rise of Rome – were perceived each other and constructed their own identity on a similar principle (Skinner, 2012, 34-43; 192). The same is true of our times. However, whereas the concept of "barbarians" should not be simple treated as a product of ancient Greeks self-portrait shaping, the Greeks obviously made a strong contribution to this idea. We can suppose that its significance and function in ancient cultural universe in general, created a special condition to maintain some stereotypical and still actual images in later centuries (Gillet, 2008, 400).

A particular discourse of the "otherness" developing from the dawn of history, gained a special character at the turn of the Empire, as the result of trade and military expeditions and many other forms of interaction between Romans (servicemen, scouts, merchants...) and Germans, especially representatives of local elites (Woolf, 2013, 133). But let us get back to the beginning. Julius Caesar in the *Commentari de Bello Gallico,* relating to events from 50-58 BC, described the endless space of the Germanic *Hercynia Silva[21]* in contrast to the Gallic

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[20] E.g. Aristotle, *Politics,* 7.7.1327; Cicero, *De re publica,* 1.58.

[21] Caesar's ethnography of Germania, presented as an infinite extension in eight chapters of his work, ends with a long passage regarding an incredible and eerie place in central Europe, the so-called Hercynian Forest. On the basis of major sources, e.g. the *Geography* by Strabo (*G.* VII, 1. 3), as well as Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* (*H. Nat.* 4.80) and commentaries about the Map of Agrippa (*Comm.* 19), this woodland extended from the northern part of the Danube Region in the west to the Carpathian Mountains in the east (Grane, 2007a, 10-13; 2012; Hyde, 1918, 231-232; Kolendo and Płóciennik, 2015, 64, 82-83). In that way, it set the frontiers of the world that had been known and organized by the Ancients. "Beyond the reach of human knowledge and culture – as Hester Schadee noticed – the Hercynian Forest forms the natural realm of several exceptional animals" (Schadee, 2008, 178). Four telling chapters of the Caesar's work (so exactly half of all the "Germanic" ones) can be considered as a starting point for the interpretation of an idea of *Barbaricum* by taking a phenomenological approach, in view of Bernhard Waldenfels' study of encountering the Other. Manifestation of the difference or strangeness, as the philosopher indicated, can perform both in real and imagined places as the odd topography (Waldenfels, 1997, 68-73; 2002, 6). A description of the Hercynian Forest can be obviously verified through the lens of former ancient sources and considered as an attempt to iterate (but not in an automatic way) Herodotus' or his successors' narratives of the edges of the world (Schadee, 2008, 179; Barker, Bouzarovski, Pelling and Isaksen, 2013,230-231). For one thing, however, the Hercynia can be treated as a metaphoric representation of the Central European *Barbaricum* in the middle of the 1st century BC as a whole. Moreover, a figurative meaning of the forest as the "nether world" in the lore and classical myths is emerging from this. It is strengthened by Caesar's digression about some striking phenomena of atypical animals living in the wood: the ox with a

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forest *Arduenna*, which he clearly presented as a fundamentally measurable place (*B. Gal.* VI, 25, 29, 31; Anthon, 1839, 457, 465). His work reflects that, until the turn of the Empire, Germania was being perceived by Roman elites and their writers rather as a far, non-differentiated landscape[22]. A century and a half later in Tacitus' work, chapters about the Suebian realm were written in a bit different way – within a specifically detailed description (Grane, 2007b, 201-204).

These cases illustrates the central-eastern part of *Barbaricum* as an outlying area which evolved, over the years, from a *terra incognita* into the space which – in the words of Greg Woolf – "offered a familiar kind of *otherness* and also an ethnographic complexity that might be more richly exploited than more stereotyped realms of the imagination" (Woolf, 2013, 137)[23]. But still, the further into Tacitus' Germania, the more strange was: knots on Suebians heads had an effect of engendering fear in enemies, cruel Semnones celebrated their barbaric rituals in deep forests, and monstrous, fiendish Harii (Arii) soldiers were used to paint their own bodies and shields in black[24]. Naturally, Romans needed for both "familiar" and "exotic" others. Such a quaint ethno-geography of Germania readable in these accounts is a multi-component model of the world, rather than a simple "we-they" division. The Suebians territory was sectioned into more and less distant parts. The western Germania's region, recounted by Tacitus (following the Caesar's well-known narrative strategy[25]) in the first paragraphs of his work, was closer to Romans than the eastern part of its, where the *secretiora Germaniae* ("secret Germania") extended (Kolendo and Płóciennik, 2015, 154; *Ger*. 41).

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single horn that looks like a stag or unicorn, the elk without knee joints and, at last, the exceptional ure-ox, which was about the size of an elephant (*B. Gal.* VI, 26, 27, 28; Schadee, 2008, 179).

[22] As it says in the words of Caesar, "(...) nor is there any person belonging to this part of Germany who says that he either has gone to the extremity of that forest, though he had advanced a journey of sixty days, or has heard in what place it begins" (*B. Gal.* IV, 25). Such a vast, absolute expanse actually has properties similar to as the basic matter from which the world had emerged, according to the Anaximander's natural philosophy. More than that, it can be somewhat reminiscent of the Chaos, a sacral substance mentioned in most mythological narratives explaining the origination. Anthropologists could read that – with the reference of the semiotic mechanism of culture – as an expression of the culturally active and "godlike" role of Rome, which was to transgress borders and introduce the new order (Lotman, Uspensky, Myhauchuk, 1978, 219, 221).

[23] But Germania has been never "festooned" with the toga (with a reference to *Gallia Togata* – "festooned with a toga" – as the name of Cisapline Gaul).

[24] The Arii, fierce beyond the superiority of strength they possess over the other just enumerated people, improve their natural ferocity of aspect by artificial help. Their shields are black; their bodies painted: they choose the darkest nights for an attack; and strike terror by the funereal gloom of their sable bands – no enemy being able to sustain their singular, and, as it were, infernal appearance (...) (*Ger*. 43).

[25] There is some reference to the words: *Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres...* (*B. Gal.* I, 1-4).

Most details of accounts of this kind, including stories and gossips of some "outside" terrestrial and non-terrestrial phenomena, or people living further away from the place where the narrator or his informants arrived, have been gathering from the so-called second hand, or being prescribed from older texts and obviously marked by authors' individual style. Of course, ancient writers tried to refer only well-known information in general (Grane, 2012, 9). Sources of the Suebian realm's description in the so-called *Descriptio Suebiae*, on the basis of which Tacitus wrote particular passages of *Germania*, included complied information given by Masyos, king of the Semnones and Ganna the prophet, as well as some knowledge obtained from one of Roman equites, and other soldiers or merchants (Kolendo, 2015, 41). By the way, the major part of *Germania* was already the set of details derived directly from the Pliny the Elder'swork as a thorough observation recorded during his stay on the Limes line in the mid-first century[26] (Grane, 2012, 8). This shows us that we also have to be aware of social origin, official functions and other aspects of their biographies. Julius Caesar as a statesman and prose writer, used to treat literature as a propaganda tool – what is an obvious matter (Krebs, 2006, 111-112). Natural philosopher and historian Pliny the Elder, born in 23 AD in Etruria, was an army commander and a soldier of the Equites, which led to his military interests reflected in the *Bella Germaniae* – a history of wars between Romans and Germans. He spend a lot of time in the field, studying natural phenomena and writing, with the main result in the encyclopedic work *Natural History*(Gibson and Morello, 2012). Historian Tacitus, in turn, was born in 55 or 56 AD in the Cisalpine Gaul. As a representative of the new (provincial) aristocracy, having an old ideology and political tradition, he was educated in the humanities and – tending to write in moralistic tone, supported by literary art – used to re-present uncivilized world in a rather idealistic way (Kolendo, 2015, 10-11). Hence, as seen above, writing all of them was depended on different factors. Moreover, an interesting issue is also the relation between knowledge of foreigners, and the power of ideologies – especially in case of Roman political and intellectual elites (Helms, 1988, 170, 261).

But anyway, it just come down to the perspective. One should still remember: the main criteria of perception are always results from an ethnocentric view of the world, which is common for people but determined by particular questions of the time, and internalized by individuals (authors with their own viewpoints) as such[27].

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[26] Just to compare, the Caesar's *De Bello Gallico,* as a literary personal report, was created as a summary of author's comments concerning not only his own participant observation among Gauls, but also information heard on principles of curiosities, which concerned Germans indeed (Schadee, 2008, 158-159).

[27] At this point, as a digression, it may be noted some well-known Max Weber's remark: „One need not be Caesar in order *to understand Caesar" (Hodder, 1995, 47).*

Conclusions

In the ancient literary tradition the elfin peoples were always located on the world's furthest outposts (Kolendo, Płóciennik, 2015, 103). There are numerous examples, not only those we have seen above. Some passages in Pomponius Mela's and Pliny the Elder's works concern three weird tribes: the Oeonae, described as eaters of birds' eggs and oats, the Hippopodes as human-horse hybrids, and the Panotti with large ears covering their naked bodies (*Chor.* 56; *H. Nat.* IV, 95). Such an illustrative account of mythical creatures living on any of the northern islands is perfectly clear and – in a way – clichéd, so obviously nobody decides to use these fairy tales in comparative archaeological and historical studies. There is no doubt: the closer to the Mediterranean, the more trustworthy and appropriable the foreigner's picture is. But even an interpretation of the most reliable "historical" excerpts (such as information of Marbod's kingdom presented by Tacitus in the *Annales*) should be made with a full awareness of the representation's modes, not directly. The topography of Germania in the light of Roman ethnographic writing is just the Waldenfels' topography of the Other, whether it manifests itself as a concrete, living entity (a hybrid-beast or a ghostly warrior belonging to the Harii tribe), or indeed as the author's endeavour to "grasp" any *mirabilia*, but also to come near and explain something that is so simply obscure and distant.

The function and the significance of primary sources in contemporary studies on cultural and settlement changes in the European *Barbaricum*, especially the north-eastern frontier of that, is still being discussed especially in archaeology. Although information collected by the Romans (very meticulous in some cases) can enrich our general knowledge about groups of humans associated with archaeological cultures located between the Elbe and the Vistula, it is not only that. Needless to say, numerous aspects of barbarian culture (belief and religious customs in particular) were surely summarized by applying the practice of *interpretatio romana* (Woolf, 2013, 133). Works such as *Germania* by Tacitus and *Natural History* by Pliny the Elder exemplify modes of perceiving the universe uniquely in the classical tradition. Basically, the major difficulty is to read these sources – according to historical relativism – in ways that are specific to the people living there, in those times, but not in our categories.

To find out about the mutual relation between these two worlds, we have to consider ancient texts in a questioning way by using the "critical apparatus" and become aware of figures of speech in the historical record as a typical literary genre (Kolendo, Płóciennik, 2015, 25). What is more, every act of reading and interpretation of that should be done in parallel with application of knowledge about basic cultural mechanisms which determine the way of describing the world (e.g. the relational "otherness" matrix), as well as thinking about how this mode has been changing over a considerable period of time. Thereafter, it is necessary

to see a particular text as though it was "a set of counters that could be deployed in cultural play" (Woolf, 2013, 137). However, ethnographic knowledge that Romans had can be particularly valuable in the context of relationships between them and Germans confirmed by archaeology, because it defines circumstances under which certain cultural patterns and goods were transmitting. It should be assumed that accounts of Germanic "tribes" and their realm, by making some kind of basis for interpretation of archaeological records, and studying social phenomena involved in the materiality, expose the mechanism of trans-cultural understanding. This "understanding", however, was concentrated on two parallel levels: while Ancients tried to describe the barbarian culture in their own way, barbarians attempted bring them closer throughout activities involving adaptation and transformation foreign cultural elements. All of that, over the centuries, led to creation both types of sources which are discussed by archaeologists and historians.

To conclude, Germanic peoples, by establishing ways of using Romans patterns in their own social background, created the unique cultural universe which is visible today in two "distorting mirrors": archaeological and literary. I hope that it was illustrated clearly by the case of the north-central part of *Barbaricum,* but this is – obviously – just a drop in the ocean of interpretation.

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