ON THE EDGE OF IDENTITY
A STUDY OF THE CONCEPT OF THE ‘BARBARIAN OTHER’ ALONG THE GRAECO – ROMAN FRONTIERS

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The concept of identity and the concept of a frontier are inextricably intertwined. Indeed the very notion of a ‘frontier’, a dividing barrier between ‘us’ and ‘them’ arises from a polar sense of identity. This concept exists not only in ancient communities, but in the minds of modern scholars who attempt to comprehend frontiers as well. Rarely has scholarship stepped outside the core periphery model which argues that an empire constitutes a core, a transitional zone (=frontier) and the other (=barbarian).¹ A study of ancient sources, both Greek and Roman² shows that it is conflict with a foreign power, followed by the establishment of a frontier, that sparks the creation of a hostile or alien ‘other’. Moreover, concepts of ‘barbarian’ differ between the core of the empire and its periphery, although it must be noted that there may not be a defining pattern to these differences; what we are seeing may be individually unique responses which defy any greater generalisations. The idea of the barbarian was dependant on the frontier, and when these frontiers collapsed, as in the Hellenistic Period under Alexander and in late Roman antiquity, people were forced to rethink and remodel their views on just who exactly was ‘other’. Nothing illustrates better the link between identity, alterity and the notion of a frontier -- a dividing line to separate ‘us’ from ‘them’.

Of course any frontier study must deal with several historical problems. First of all, what precisely constitutes a ‘frontier’? Different frontiers existed in different periods and differed geographically, but for the purposes of this

¹ Argued by Owen Lattimore, discussed by Hugh Elton (1996) 1-9 Although Elton discusses many of the problems with frontier studies, he nonetheless concludes that the main purpose of the frontier ‘was to maintain imperial security’ against enemy (barbarian) threats (6) Luttwak’s largely strategic analysis of the frontiers assumes them to have the purpose of keeping barbarian invaders out of Rome as well – ‘the purpose of the linear barriers was to divide the barbarians beyond from the barbarian within, who were in the process of becoming Romans’ (Edward N Luttwak [1976] 78) Perhaps Whittaker, in his more diverse study of frontier purposes, is an exception to this, but even he admits that ‘some of the reason for these watchtowers and forts was without doubt the character of what we call “the barbarian invasions”’ C R Whittaker (1994) 159.

² This study is primarily focused on Rome, however a survey of Greek sources is also useful, since often Romans obtained their image of ‘other’ from Greek discourse. ‘It is surely altogether likely that Rome’s images of Carthage were actually informed by this Athenian discourse (perception of the Persians )’ (Emma Dench [1995] 72).
study, most frontiers existed *ideologically* at least as a division between peoples. More problematic is the classification of a ‘frontier source’ – how can a historian gain insight into the ideas of those who lived at the periphery? Does St. Augustine, who lived in both Africa and Rome, become a source for barbarian ideology at the centre of the empire, or at its margin? The issue is a complex one. Because an author is writing along the frontiers, it does not necessarily mean that their views are typical of people who lived on the edge of the empire. The issue is intensified by the countless other divisions in ancient societies – a wealthy person may have a different perspective from the poor, the educated from the uneducated, a male perspective as distinct from a female one. In many ways the problems here cannot be fully resolved; however through a thorough analysis of the sources used in this study, at least some of the limitations can perhaps be overcome. Also problematic are the differences in the type of sources that have survived – a different perspective of ‘barbarian’ may simply be the result of genre, not necessarily of a ‘core’/‘frontier’ ideological disparity. However, in instances where the genre of the source is the same and is produced in the same period, there is a marked difference in the concept of the ‘other’: what emerges is not merely the result of a difference in genre. These problems not withstanding, it is possible to examine the role of the ‘frontier’ in ancient identity.

The very existence of a frontier, especially in the Roman world, is a testament to the Graeco-Roman concept of a ‘barbarian other’. The purpose of Hadrian’s Wall, according to ancient observers was ‘to divide the Romans and the barbarians.’ The sentiment expressed in the *Scriptores Historia Augusta* is also encapsulated by an anonymous author of the fourth century:

> ‘Above all it must be recognised that wild nations are pressing upon the Roman Empire and howling about it everywhere, and treacherous barbarians, with the cover of natural places, are assailing every frontier (*limes*)... An unbroken chain of forts will best assure the protection of these frontiers.’

That the Romans felt the need to have a barrier between themselves and what was envisaged (and in the fourth century existed) as barbarian hordes is a statement about identity in the Roman Empire. The barbarian was a threat, and needed to be kept at bay through military force, or at least separated from civilisation by a frontier. Both sources cited above come from the late Roman Empire, but there is also evidence for this attitude in earlier periods. While the Greek construct of ‘frontiers’ differed substantially from that of their Roman counterparts, the concept of a barrier between themselves and ‘other’

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3 SHA *Hadrian* 11.2
4 Anonymous *De rebus Bellicis* 6.20
can still be found in the geographical comprehension of barbarian worlds. Many Roman frontiers were along rivers (e.g. Rhine, Danube), and the ancient Greeks likewise saw barbarian races as confined by natural phenomena. Herodotus for example, in his description of the Egyptians notes that ‘The Ionians maintain that Egypt proper is confined to the Nile Delta’,
\[5\] and then gives his own opinion on the matter - ‘the only true boundary between Asia and Libya is formed by the frontiers of Egypt.’\[6\] Likewise in his speculation on the Scythians Herodotus notes that ‘These Scythians [Olbiopolites] extend eastward as far as a river named the Panticapes.... and northward as far up the Borysthenes as a boat can sail in eleven days.’\[7\] Unlike the Romans, Herodotus had no reason to fear the people whom he was describing, but the barbarians are still discussed in terms of their boundaries. In many ways the Romans inherited the thoughts and perceptions of their Greek counterparts, and Herodotus’ descriptions are echoed in Pliny, who notes of the Asmaji: ‘They are bounded by the river Indus and surrounded by a ring of mountains and deserts.’\[8\] Indeed, the very concept of ‘barbarian’ could move along with the perceived frontier of empire:

‘Once it had become obvious that the Gauls could be assimilated, Roman horror at their inhuman stature, passions and hatreds thus irrevocably shifted, together with Rome’s frontiers, from the Celts to the Germanic tribes.’\[9\]

So, on contact with the Aethiopes, Roman concepts moved from mere speculation\[10\] to hostility since the people became a military threat, as outlined in the Greek novel by Heliodorus, *Aethiopica*.*\[11\] Similarly, through the works of Polybius and Posidonius, which presented the Romans as essentially Greek, the concept of the ‘barbarian’ was pushed further West on to the Celts and Carthaginians, to a new frontier.*\[12\]

That frontiers functioned as a defining barrier for both ancient cultures and modern scholars is illustrated in Roman North Africa, where there is no clear delineated border. Without one, it is increasingly difficult, if not impossible for a modern scholar to distinguish between ‘Romans’ and ‘barbarians’.\[13\] Barbarians, especially at the outskirts of Rome often cannot be culturally

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5 Hdt 2.15.
6 Hdt 2.17.
7 Hdt 4.18.
8 Pliny *NH* 6.73.
9 Lellia Cracco Ruggini (1987) 193
10 That they lived near the sun, etc. (Ruggini [1987] 194).
11 As in descriptions of the Ethiopian King Hydaspes during the siege of Syene — ‘Then he remained inactive, the mere spectacle of his army irresistible’ (Heliodorus [1957] 217).
12 Arnaldo Momigliano (1975) 48-49.
separated from Roman citizens. Elton may have a point when he noted that modern scholars should cease to separate ‘Roman’ and ‘Other’ through the use of a frontier - political allegiances are often a more accurate indication of culture than geographical position on one side of a river or another.

Also of interest is the role of imminent threat in the formulation of the concept of a barbarian. A prime example of this is the treatment of the Romans by the Greeks in the Hellenistic Period. As Gruen’s study illustrates, the Greeks did not even deign to consider the Romans until they became a formidable military force in the region. It was only when they became a threat to Greek hegemony that a true attempt at analysis or understanding of these ‘refined barbarians’ was attempted by the Greeks, as recorded in the works of Polybius and Posidonius. Indeed, it seems that the Romans themselves were well aware of their ‘barbarity’ - Plautus certainly notes it and the foundation myth in Virgil’s Aeneid can be explained by the desire to place Rome inside a traditionally accepted Greek history. Similarly in the Greek world the depiction of the Persians as effeminate and enslaved in Aeschylus’ Persians can be seen as a reaction to the Persian Wars of the fifth century B.C. The relationship between the Libyans and Cyrenaicans is also an excellent example. Marshall’s study in this area illustrates that the Cyrenaicans perceived the Libyans according to the relationship between the two people at the time - so when there was no conflict the Cyrenaicans recognized a common identity with the Libyans, but at times of war the Cyrenaicans constructed the Libyans ultimately as a barbaric ‘other’.

‘When the existence of an ethnic group may depend on the reduction of another group, it defines itself in opposition to the group with which it is in conflict.’

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14 For example barbarians in North Africa put up inscriptions in Latin, but it is most likely that they spoke a native language. Often intermarriage meant that an individual could have both barbarian and Roman heritage (Elton [1996] 134).
16 Ethnic stereotypes are often formulated in a ‘situation of tension or conflict’ Dench (1995) 23. This is supported by Ruggini (1987) 191.
17 Gruen (1984) 317-356 Before the end of the third century ‘No firm attitude existed for none was demanded. To most Greeks, Rome was distant and remote, not of direct concern nor an object of special attention.’ (321)
18 This category was created by Eratosthenes, who places the Romans with the Carthaginians, Indians and Aryans (Strabo 1.4.9. in Gruen [1984] 321).
19 The prologue of Trinummas reads ‘Plautus translated it into barbarian’ (Robert Browning [2002] 262).
20 Cartledge argues that the polarity of Greeks and barbarians only became firmly embedded after the Greek victory in 480-79 B.C. (Paul Cartledge [2002] 11).
Thus it is that the Persians, so despised during Aeschylus’ time, were actively sought out during the Peloponnesian War\textsuperscript{22} - the perceived threat had changed. It must be noted however that in the Roman imperial period, Roman emperors and generals often exaggerated the threat which barbarians posed\textsuperscript{23} in order to maintain the imperial regime. Although the perceived hostility of barbarians was necessary for the construction of a negative ‘other’, the Roman elite prolonged this concept to their own advantage.

This concept is basic to the study of the differing views of the ‘barbarian’ that occurred along the frontiers in Rome. Often the most disparate views are those which occur during times of crisis. The best example of this is the disparity is that which occurred along the Roman eastern frontier at the height of the so-called ‘third century crisis.’ The extreme east of the empire at this time rose to fabulous heights of power under the city of Palmyra.\textsuperscript{24} Differing perceptions of this event evolved in Rome and along the Eastern frontier. The sources from the Eastern frontier applaud and legitimise both Odaenathus’ and his son’s achievements and power, for example the \textit{Thirteenth Sibylline Oracle}.\textsuperscript{25}

‘Then shall come one who was sent by the sun (i.e. Odaenathus) a mighty and fearful lion... he himself, entire, unhurt and great, will rule over the Romans, but the Persians will be weakened.’\textsuperscript{26}

By contrast those authors who originated and lived in Rome described Odaenathus not in control of a Roman military force, but of ‘a band of rustics’;\textsuperscript{27} indeed one author reports that ‘As soon as Quietus, the son of Macrinus, had established imperial rule at Emesa, Odaenathus came upon him with a barbarian horde...’\textsuperscript{28} Many modern authors have interpreted Zenobia’s subsequent horde as a ‘clash of cultures’,\textsuperscript{29} an indication of the role that ethnic identity has to play in modern historiography. Notably this divergence in perceptions of the ‘barbarian’ occurred during a Roman

\textsuperscript{22} Thucydides details the Persian intervention ‘The war with the Athenians shall be carried on jointly by the King and the Spartans and their allies ’ (Thuc. 8 18).
\textsuperscript{23} For a detailed analysis see Drinkwater (1996) 20ff. Also Burns (2003) 30 who presents a less cynical view of affairs.
\textsuperscript{24} For an overview see Richard Stoneman (1994)
\textsuperscript{25} Although the author is largely unknown, the widely held view is that he was a Syrian who had finished his work by 253 AD (Potter [1990] 141-144).
\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Oracula Sibyllina XIII} 155ff, in Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) 4.3.2.
\textsuperscript{27} See Jerome \textit{Chronicon} 266, Festus \textit{Breviariun} 23, in Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) 4.3.2
\textsuperscript{28} Anonymous Continuator of Cassius Dio, in Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) 4.3.2.
\textsuperscript{29} ‘It may be that the brief claim to empire by a “queen” and her son from Palmyra did represent the abortive assertion of an “Arab” or “Syrian” nationalism...’ Fergus Millar (1993) 334, with the response of Glen Bowersock (1987) 19ff.
military and political crisis, reinforcing the idea that hostility often is a determinant in identity.

But even outside military conflict, it seems that Palmyra was not considered to be either Roman or Persian by many in Rome. Appian records that Palmyrenes ‘living as they did on the border between the two people, manoeuvred between the two sides; for, being traders, they bring from Persia Indian and Arab commerce and sell it in the Roman Empire.’\(^{30}\) This was before the city was brought under Roman jurisdiction, but even then the ambiguity of identity remained. Palmyrenes lived uniquely within the Roman Empire – they had control over their own taxation,\(^{31}\) had bi-lingual inscriptions using their own language and were the only provincial city to have an army of its own.\(^{32}\)

This ambiguity of identity is also witnessed in Palmyrene sculpture which is an interesting mix of Oriental and Roman art, and illustrates the fact that there was not always a clear division between ‘Roman’ and ‘barbarian’, especially along the frontier. As Webster notes, ‘Art is an important medium through which issues of identity and power are represented, contested and resolved.’\(^{33}\)

Palmyra, as Appian suggested, is an exceptional case, but art in other areas of the Roman Empire demonstrates similar differences in the concept of ‘barbarian’: at Ephesus, in the very non-classical Ephesian Artemis,\(^{34}\) and in the early Greek portraiture of the ‘barbarian’ Romans.\(^{35}\) Another example is the art which accompanied the rhetoric of Trajan’s victories in Dacia. Here ‘the image of the Dacian barbarian was altered or manipulated according to whether it appeared on a monument in Rome itself, at the very centre of power, in an Italian context (as at Beneventum) or in the distant provinces (as at Adamklissi.).’\(^{36}\) Indeed, here is a true representation of just how precisely the concept of a ‘barbarian’ differed in the core and periphery, since all these

\(^{30}\) Appian BC 5 1.9. This view is supported by Pliny NH 88
\(^{31}\) Explained in Matthews (1984)
\(^{32}\) Millar (1987) 155. For further instances of the similarities between the Palmyrenes and their eastern neighbours see Graf (1989) 143ff, which details the modelling of the Palmyrene army on its Persian counterpart, the existence of cloth and silk from China, etc.
\(^{33}\) Webster (2003) 24. Her article is also of interest in that it advances the model of ‘Creolisation’ instead of the now outdated ‘Romanisation’. For the sculpture, see Stoneman (1994) Plates 12-22
\(^{34}\) ‘Rather than depend on mainland Greece for their Hellenic Identity, cities such as Ephesus, and other smaller cities in Asia Minor, can instead be seen to have asserted rival claims to importance through their own local myths.’ Newby (2003) 194
\(^{35}\) Smith (1981) 24ff, concludes that the often bizarre images of Romans was the result of ‘an inborn, cool objectivity towards them as a foreign race’ (38).
representations are made in the same genre during the same period – the differences cannot be related to anything else. The barbarian representations in Rome during this period on Trajan’s column and in his surrounding forum emphasise the disparity between ‘Roman’ and ‘Barbarian.’ On the column, barbarians are often depicted destroying forts and buildings, whereas Romans are shown in the process of construction. Dacian women are shown torturing Roman soldiers – an extreme representation of ‘other’. In another ‘core’ representation of the war, the great Trajanic frieze (below), the ‘barbarian’ Dacians are represented in classical Graeco-Roman style – ‘generic, timeless enemies of Rome, overcome by the power imbued in the figure of the emperor.’

Outside Rome, but still in Italy, on Trajan’s arch at Beneventum, the barbarians are not polarised to the extent they are in Rome, but rather depicted in terms of the benefits barbarian conquest had for Italy, for example the alimenta scheme. The juxtaposition of submissive Danubian and eastern provinces and Trajan’s scheme for a food allowance for children suggests an association between conquest and material benefits. Different again are the depictions on the tropaeum at Adamklissi; the monument here is far simpler. The emphasis is on the ‘other’ of the enemy and the depth of the barbarian defeat, so ‘there would have been no need here for implicit depictions of the benefits of Romanitas: there was probably no audience here for whom the message was appropriate.’ At Adamklissi, it is not simply a victory monument, ‘but also a symbol of revenge.’ It appears that the emperors themselves recognised the diversity of their subjects, and accordingly altered the image of ‘other’ according to geographical position and intended audience. Numismatic evidence further illustrates the point: barbarian depictions on gold coins, targeted at the Roman elite, differ widely from those minted on denarii which were intended for Roman soldiers, and as does the image of the emperor himself. Augustus’ image was substantially different in Rome from his representation on wall paintings in Egypt, compared to that on the Ara Pacis in Rome, for example.

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37 Ferris 55-56
38 Hall argues that in Greek ethnography ‘the more barbarian a community the more powerful its women’ (Ferris [2003] n 36, 56). However, Smith (2002] 79] argues that this image represents Dacian men being tortured by local provincial women, now on the side of Rome.
39 Ferris 59
40 Ferris 60-61
41 For the tropaeum see Ferris (2003) 64.
42 Ferris 65.
43 Ferris 67.
Egypt may be an exceptional case. But what all these representations show is that there was no uniform sense of identity, at least in art, which depicted ‘Roman’ and ‘barbarian’ in a uniform manner. Self identity and alterity depended on geography.

There is also more fragmentary evidence that suggests a difference in ethnic perceptions along the frontier. The Roman army along the *limes* certainly formed a different perception of the barbarian enemy from that of the citizens of Rome. Epigraphic evidence testifies to relationships between soldiers and foreign women, an indication that they were not viewed with the same revulsion as in Rome. The settlement of Roman veterans in Dacia, married to local women and on prosperous local farms, is a concrete example of this.

St. Augustine is an interesting example of the differing perceptions in a frontier province, and illustrates the effect that the rise of Christianity had on the concept of ‘other’ — if a man was a Christian, his perceived ethnicity did not matter. St. Augustine certainly believed this so; writing to an acquaintance he chides:

> if you disapprove of Punic as a language, then you must refuse to admit that many wise things have been recorded in Punic books, as is declared by learned men; you must even feel shame that you were born in a district in which the cradle of that language is still warm."

The final line is perhaps of more interest than Augustine’s defence of the Punic language, for it shows that the ridiculer of Punic is himself an African, as Augustine noted earlier in the letter. Such an example highlights the problems with assigning an identity to a particular group; ethnicity is an overlapping and complex entity, as several modern studies have illustrated. In Ptolemaic Egypt an immense diversity of ethnic groups can be found. In one particular papyri (a list of cleruchs), the names of the individuals are given followed by their *ethnika*. What is noteworthy is that, although all of the individuals have Greek names, their ethnicity includes Persian, Kyrenean, Macedonian, Jew, Alexandrian, Byzantine, Lokrian, Arkadian, Thrakian, and Libyan. Not only does this indicate the enormous diversity of ethnicity within one area of Ptolemaic Egypt (Herakleides Meris) but the matter-of-

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45 Wells 141
46 Ellis (1996) 119
47 St. Augustine *Ep* 17.2
48 Pohl (1998) 15ff,
49 *P. Mich* 18: 781
50 For a discussion of this point see Dillery (1996) 167ff
fact way in which the names are recorded indicate an incidental occurrence of ‘other’. These, however, are no hostile forces to be feared, but merely individuals present in the city. This concept of ‘other’ is represented in other papyri as well – one from AD 41 records that the writer received the letter ‘you sent with the Arab’. Day-to-day contact with barbarians along the frontiers created a concept remarkably different from that presented in literary sources produced in Rome. Due to the nature of papyri we have only the experience of Egypt, but it is worth noting that modern studies which focus on literary evidence at the expense of documentary sources will produce a skewed view, overlooking the view of barbarians prevailing in daily life. It is noteworthy however, that the barbarians mentioned in papyri are nevertheless defined by their ethnicity (i.e. Persian, Arab), an indication that the polarity of thought which accompanies self definition still existed.

What happened when these frontiers, these boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’, collapsed? The fact that many conceptions of ‘barbarian’ had to be rethought and reconstructed is an indication of the central nature which a frontier has to ethnicity and identity.

The best example of this ‘collapse’ of frontiers can be seen in Roman late antiquity. The immense intake of what Romans believed to be ‘barbarian’ people, and the subsequent break up of the West under ‘barbarian’ leadership, led to a variety of responses from the traditional Roman elite. It is impossible to point to a coherent, unified response amongst the Roman population to their new barbarian leaders. As Mathisen’s study illustrates, different regions and different people reacted in different ways. Some reacted with hostility, such as Salvian of Marseilles, writing in the fifth century:

‘The ancient Romans were feared, we were afraid. The barbarian peoples used to pay them tribute, we are dependant upon the barbarians ... How unfortunate we are! How far we have declined!’

Salvian’s response can be contrasted with those Romans who actively worked with the barbarians, and reworked their concept of ‘other.’ (In this period differing perceptions of ‘barbarian’ can be seen in the East and West

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51 Sel. Pap 151.
52 An example of such a study is Greeks and Barbarians ed. Harrison (1998), which apart from a study of Athenian images of foreigners on pottery, focuses solely on literary texts such as Herodotus, Aeschylus and Euripides.
54 Salvian of Marseilles De Gub. 6.18.
of the Empire, as the two became increasingly separated. Many Romans began to redefine what constituted a ‘barbarian.’ This is evidenced in the works of Cassiodorus and Jordanes, both of whom sought to place the new Gothic leaders of the West in a traditional Roman structure. The Gothic history of the sixth century prefect Cassiodorus has been lost, but a summary of his purpose remains:

‘Thus did he assign a Roman origin to Gothic history, weaving as it were into one chaplet the flowers which he had culled from the pages of widely scattered authors.

Also in the sixth century Jordanes, who was himself of Gothic descent and confessed to using Cassiodorus, follows this tradition, tracing Gothic kingship through a traditional Graeco-Roman historical framework, with Amazons, the Trojan War, Sulla and Darius just some examples. The fact that in most instances it was individuals who came to terms with the new frontiers is evidenced by the experience of Sidonius Apollinarius, a leading figure in fifth century Gaul, who at times deplored the barbarians (‘You avoid barbarians because they are considered bad; I do so even if they are good’), yet elsewhere admits to several admirable aspects of their rule, (noting, of Theodoric, that ‘In his build the will of God and Nature’s plan have joined together to endow him with a supreme perfection; and his character is such that even the jealousy which hedges a sovereign has no power to rob it of its glories’). Similarly, Salvian also notes that the barbarians can have many positive qualities, and this mixed response is probably a result of the re-establishment of identity occurring at the time. Often the line between barbarian and Roman blurred – Salvian noted that

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55 This is not to imply a strict division in the Empire – the two halves were still connected. Rather it is to imply that the Greek rhetoric learnt in the East began to differ in the West, evidenced by the different traditions of historiography which begin to emerge.
56 Cassiodorus Variae 9.25.
57 Jordanes Getica 44ff
58 Get 58.
59 Get 67.
60 Get 63.
61 Harries points out that while for many citizens the frontier between ‘Rome’ and ‘barbarian’ was inevitably breaking down long before late antiquity, the sheltered intellectual elite had remained isolated, until a time that the issue could no longer be avoided. Sidonius insisted on the purity of Latin as a language which must be guarded against ‘barbarisms’, but ultimately his perceptions of the ‘other’ were used for political and literary reasons Harries (1996) 34ff.
62 Sidonius Apollinarius Ep. 7.14.10
63 Ep. 1.2.1
64 Salvian De Gub. 7.14. ‘In short all peoples have their own particular bad habits, just as they have certain good habits.’
many Gauls in this period fled to the 'barbarians' seeking Roman humanity among the barbarians because they cannot bear the barbarous inhumanity among the Romans.\textsuperscript{65} Perhaps some of the confusion can be explained by the notion that, as quite often in Roman history,\textsuperscript{66} the concept of 'barbarian' was confined to culture and ideology.\textsuperscript{67} Certainly it is this construction of 'other' that was the defining factor in Themistius' response in fourth century Constantinople to the 'barbarian invasions'.\textsuperscript{68} Real life contact with the 'barbarian' people whom the population had been conditioned to fear led to a reassessment of the 'us' versus 'them' polarity, as it became clear that often barbarians acted more humanely and could offer more opportunities than their 'Roman' counterparts.\textsuperscript{69}

The same diverse set of reactions can be seen in the disintegration of frontiers which occurred under the campaigns of Alexander the Great.\textsuperscript{70} Whilst the source material for this period is problematic,\textsuperscript{71} the accounts common to all sources of Alexander's attempt to 'fuse' Persian and Greek customs and peoples most likely reflect a historical reality, one which modern scholars have attempted in vain to comprehend.\textsuperscript{72} The actions of Alexander in attempting to introduce the Persian form of greeting, \textit{proskynesis},\textsuperscript{73} the training of the so-called 'inheritors', \textit{epigoni},\textsuperscript{74} the replacement of older Macedonian veterans by Persian soldiers, and the mass marriages of Macedonians at Susa to Persian wives\textsuperscript{75} Indeed even by adopting the dress of the Persian elite Alexander did more than cross a territorial boundary; he crossed a cultural one as well. Alexander's campaigns had completely demolished the traditional frontiers of the Greek world, and reactions to this were mixed. While Alexander adopted many customs of the Persians, many

\textsuperscript{65} De Gub 5.5
\textsuperscript{66} i.e. in relation to an individual's \textit{humanitas} Woolf (1998) 24ff.
\textsuperscript{67} Ruggini (1987) 197 This is consistent with the changes to the concept of 'other' with the rise of Christianity
\textsuperscript{68} Daly (1972) 351ff
\textsuperscript{69} e.g. The sons of Paulinus of Pella went to Bordeaux to further their careers (Nixon [1992] 73).
\textsuperscript{70} See Mitchell (1997) 167ff for an overview of Alexander's relations with the Persians.
\textsuperscript{71} There are very few primary sources, so it is difficult to distinguish between Hellenistic conceptions of 'other' from those of the late Roman authors whose accounts survive.
\textsuperscript{72} For diverse explanations of this seeming 'abandonment' of Alexander's Hellenic identity see Balsdon (1996) 19ff, Heckel (1978), Badian (1962) 80ff, to name just a few!
\textsuperscript{73} Arrian \textit{Campaigns of Alexander} 4 10 5-4 12 5, Plutarch \textit{Alexander} 54, Quintus Curtius Rufus 8 5 5ff.
\textsuperscript{74} Arrian 7 6
\textsuperscript{75} Arrian 7 5 - note that Arrian points out that these marriage ceremonies were 'in the Persian fashion'.
of his soldiers felt less than easy about the ‘effeminate’ and foreign nature of these habits:

‘Already the sight of Alexander in Median clothes had caused them no little distress, and most of them had found the Persian marriage ceremonies by no means to their taste. They resented too the growing ‘orientalism’ of Peucetas, Governor of Persia, who, to Alexander’s evident satisfaction, had adopted the Persian language and dress, just as they resented the inclusion of foreign mounted troops in the regiments...’  

As in late antique Rome, the collapse of traditional frontiers did not result in a unified redefinition of ‘barbarian’, rather it evoked a collection of different individual responses. What did occur, however, alongside an instinctively hostile reaction to the barbarians who were to live alongside and often conquered the Greeks and Romans, was a redefinition of identity by many citizens. The fact that the Roman Empire felt the need to ban Roman citizens from adopting ‘barbarian’ pants demonstrates that this idea was just as true for the Romans as it was for Alexander. And it was not simply the victorious who had to re-evaluate their identity – the same process occurred inside the populations who had been conquered. The mixed reaction is still evident though – 1 and 2 Maccabees record with horror the hellenisation of Judea, but also report that the initiative for this hellenisation came from the Jews themselves – it was ‘a set of renegades who led people astray’ by building a gymnasium and disguising their circumcision. Similarly in Ptolemaic Egypt there is evidence for hostility towards the Greeks in texts such as the Potter’s Oracle, but alongside this is evidence that individual Egyptians worked with and accepted their foreign masters. Ethnic tension and redefinition abounded in both these Hellenistic states as new frontiers came to be defined.

76 Arrian 7 6
77 Theodosian Code 14 10 2.
78 1 Macc 111. The same can be seen in Antiochus’ decision to ban the practice of Judaism: the book of Daniel reports that ‘he will take action and turn and pay heed to those who desert the Holy Covenant.’ (Daniel 11 70).
80 This and other propaganda in Egypt at this time illustrates the difference felt by its inhabitants in terms of identity. Lloyd’s study concludes that ‘some propaganda serves mainly to confirm the sense of identity of the propagandist and the social group for which he works ’ (Lloyd [1982] 35) The very existence of propaganda in Ptolemaic Egypt is an indication of a difference in identity felt between its inhabitants and its conquerors. In the case of the Potter’s Oracle ‘the Egyptian’s sense of national identity is being confirmed by pinpointing an enemy and subjecting him to lengthy and bitter abuse ’ (52). Despite the anachronistic sense of ‘nation’ that Lloyd employs, the rest of his discussion is valid for the period
81 Austin (1981) Doc 222, in which Egyptian priests show their support for the Ptolemaic dynasty
Perhaps modern scholarship should not seek a universal, definitive ethnic identity for a particular group, but should examine individual identities in context. Indeed, conceptions of the ‘barbarian other’ differed remarkably in Rome and along the frontiers, and differed from one individual to another. This study attempts to show the central role which a frontier had to play in the creation of identity and ethnicity. The very idea of a frontier is the result of an ‘us’ and ‘them’ polarity, something visibly demonstrated when the established frontiers fell apart in the ancient world. It has been shown that different concepts of ‘barbarian’ and ‘Roman’ existed along the boundaries of Empire and in Rome itself. However, Rome’s empire grew through conquest, and as such frontiers inevitably moved back and forth, encompassing an enormous variety of people and cultures. Rome’s empire was a political institution; it never really was a cultural one. Perhaps the next step is to evaluate whether the provinces which had been conquered, which were at one time a ‘frontier’, also differed from Rome in their conception of the ‘barbarian’.

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82 In one papyrus from Egypt, a citizen laments that he was nearly killed by natives ‘because I am a Greek’ (Austin [1981] Doc 257, 434)
83 Xenophon’s view of Cyrus may an individual response to an enigmatic leader, not proof of the fact that ‘Although all barbarians as a category are by definition inferior to all Greeks, some individual barbarians might not be only as good as but actually, on occasion, superior even to model Greeks like Agesilaos ’ (Paul Cartledge [2002] 62)
84 ‘If people meet at all, they do so as individuals, not collectivities ’ Walter (Goffart [1980] 32)
85 Freeman (1996) 470.
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