

# CLASSICAL RECORDS AND GERMAN ORIGINS

Part One, By: William Finck © 2007

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Short Quotations May Be Taken From This Article, But Not To Edit

The nations of the Near East often made their monumental inscriptions and other records in multiple languages. This is to our benefit today since such a practice has greatly assisted our understanding of the various ancient languages of the region. With the rise of Classical Greece came Greek historical and geographical inquiry which, as is apparent from their own records, began in the late 7th century B.C. The Greek writers were first acquainted with their neighbors to the east in the form of the Assyrian empire, which had fallen by 612 B.C., and then even more so with the Persian empire, whose power was consolidated under Cyrus II by 540 B.C. While there were earlier Greek historians and writers of epics historical in nature, along with the many other poets whose works have survived, the first serious prose historian whose work has survived to us is Herodotus, who wrote about 100 years after the death of Cyrus. It may be evident, therefore, that the earliest written Greek accounts concerning the east were influenced by the Assyrians, and later by the Persians and Medes.

A people whom the Greeks called *Kimmerians* invaded Anatolia from the east (see, for example, the article "King Midas: From Myth to Reality" by G. Kenneth Sams, *Archaeology Odyssey*, Nov. - Dec. 2001), in or just before the time of Homer, as attested to by Strabo, who relates that "The writers of chronicles make it plain that Homer knew the Cimmerians, in that they fix the date of the invasion of the Cimmerians either a short time before Homer, or else in Homer's own time" (*Geography* 1.2.9). Dating Homer, there is found a note in the Loeb Classical Library edition *Greek Iambic Poetry*, p. 35, at Archilochus, 5, where it is related that, as also discussed by Tatian in his *Address to the Greeks*, 31, Homer was a contemporary of Archilochus, the Iambic Poet who flourished in the 23rd Olympiad (688-685 B.C.) "... at the time of Gyges the Lydian, 500 years after the Trojan War." Strabo relates that, having destroyed the nation of the Phrygians of which the famous Midas was king, the Kimmerians "overran the whole country from the Bosphorus to Ionia" and "marched as far as Lydia and Ionia and captured Sardes" (*Geography* 1.1.10; 1.3.21). After withdrawing from Anatolia (where surely they had begun the fulfillment of the prophecy found at Isaiah 66:19, since the Ionians are the Javan and the Lydians the Shemitic Lud of the Old Testament), the Kimmerians are found inhabiting the regions north and west of the

Black Sea, north of Thrace. The “Cimmerian Bosphorus”, the modern Crimea, retains its name from them (see Strabo, 11.2.5). Homer, knowing of these people, later included a mention of them in his *Odyssey*, yet the events which that epic is based upon are from a much earlier period (the Trojan War ended around 1185 B.C.), and placing the Kimmerians in that era, as the Tragic poets also do, is anachronistic, and an error on Homer’s part which later writers followed.

Subsequent waves of nomadic tribes from Asia became familiar to the Greeks, and these were generally called by the name *Scythians*. Herodotus tells us that *Sakae* is the name which the Persians “give to all Scythians”, yet later the Greeks retain the name *Sakae*, also often written *Sakans* by English translators, for only some of the Scythians, and distinguish others by names such as *Massagetae*, *Arimaspi*, *Däae*, *Asii*, *Tocharians*, *Sacarauli*, et al. (cf. Herodotus, *The Histories*, 4:11, 48; 7:64; Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, 2.43.1-5; Strabo, *Geography*, 7.3.9 and 11.8.2). While Herodotus and later writers distinguished Kimmerians and Scythians (but Homer never mentioned either *Scythians* or *Sakae*), note that they all wrote long after the Greeks became acquainted with the Kimmerians, and after the Persians came to power in the east, the Assyrians and their Akkadian language having faded into obscurity.

Yet the Persians themselves did not distinguish the Kimmerians from the Scythians, for in the multi-lingual inscriptions which they left to posterity, it is evident that these peoples were one and the same. For instance, in an Akkadian inscription of the Persian king Xerxes, there are mentioned “the Amyrgian Cimmerians” and “the Cimmerians (wearing) pointed caps”. A note accompanying the translation of this inscription which appears in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, edited by James B. Pritchard, Princeton University Press [hereinafter *ANET*], p. 316, tells us that in the Persian and Elamite versions of this same text these “Cimmerians” are called “Sakans”. The Akkadian language was the lingua franca of the Near East during the earlier Assyrian and Babylonian empires (*ANET*, pp. 103, 198), before it was supplanted by Aramaic in the time of the Persian empire. Surely the Greeks of Homer’s time must have been familiar with it. The obvious conclusion here is that *Kimmerian* is from the Akkadian word for those people whom the Persians called *Sakae*, and whom the Greeks called *Scythians*, and that all of these names identify the same group of people, although they had divided into various sub-tribes. The first of these people to come into Europe, in Assyrian times, the Greeks called by the Akkadian name. Later, in Persian times, the Greeks called subsequent waves of these people (or perhaps even descendants of those first tribes) – as well as those who remained in Asia – by the Persian name *Sakae*, or by the name *Scythian*. The Greeks may have learned the name *Scythian* from the people themselves, since one possible etymology for the word, from the Hebrew word *succoth* or *tent*, is quite plausible and well describes the Scythian mode of life, while also being consistent with classical accounts of Scythian origins. This would also explain how the word *Scythian* appears in a fragment which is attributed to Hesiod, who was regarded by later Greeks to have been a contemporary of Homer. Yet whether the work in question was Hesiod’s, and the dating of Hesiod himself, are both problematical.

Again, noting the names on this particular Akkadian inscription of the Persians, “the Amyrgian Cimmerians” and “the Cimmerians (wearing) pointed caps”, to this we must compare the language used by Herodotus, who discussing certain of the nations allied with Persia in Xerxes’ invasion of Greece, wrote of the “Amyrgian Scythians” and said that “The Sacae, or Scyths, were clad in trousers, and had on their heads tall stiff caps rising to a point” (*The Histories*, 7.64). In a footnote at this passage in his edition of Herodotus, George Rawlinson noted that: “According to Hellanicus, the word ‘Amyrgian’ was strictly a geographical title, *Amyrgium* being the name of the plain in which these Scythians dwelt.” Indeed the Cimmerians were but an early migration of the Scythians, or Sakae, into Europe.

While Homer never mentioned *Scythians*, Strabo offers a protracted argument that he knew about them, since he used the epithets “Hippemolgi” (*mare-milkers*), “Galactophagi” (*milk-fed*) and “Abii” (*those without a living or having a simple lifestyle*), for which see his *Geography* 7.3.2, 6, 7 and 9. In places he cites the use of these epithets for Scythians by both Aeschylus and Hesiod (in an otherwise lost fragment) to make his point. Yet Strabo also admits that Homer may have been referencing Thracians, who were said by others to have also led a lifestyle which beckoned such epithets (cf. *Geography* 7.3.2, 3, 4), where he cites Poseidonius. While Strabo wavers in this matter, and seems to want to believe that Homer indeed knew of the Scythians, he also seems to concede that in the environment of the more rugged north such a lifestyle, where men live off of their flocks rather than from agriculture, is quite natural (*Geography* 7.3.8, 9; 7.4.6). Yet while Homer may surely have meant other northern tribes by his use of such epithets, such as the Thracians or other Slavs, and later poets simply transferred the epithets to the Scythians, the argument is rather irrelevant. Once it is realized that the Kimmerians were simply Scythians by their Akkadian name, something that later Greeks did not explain and probably did not realize, it is sure that Homer did know the Scythians: that first wave of Kimmerians from Asia who destroyed Phrygia, threatened all of Lydia and Ionia, and then crossed into Europe to inhabit the lands north of Thrace. Seeing then that the Kimmerians and Sakae, or Scythians, are one and the same in eastern inscriptions, and that the Greeks employed at the first the Akkadian name for these people, and only later the Persian name (names well documented in eastern inscriptions before these people were known in the west), the fact that the Scythians originated in Asia, as Diodorus Siculus relates (*Library of History*, 2.43.1-5), is certainly validated.

Writing of a period some time before his own, Herodotus says that the Kimmerians were dispossessed of their Eastern European lands by the Scythians, and relates a tale wherein the Kimmerians had fled into Asia (meaning Anatolia, or Asia Minor, where Phrygia, Lydia and Ionia were located) to escape them, at which point the Scythians, in pursuit, missed them and poured into Media (*The Histories*, 4:12). Herodotus takes this story from the earlier poet Aristeas, and like his forebear, is evidently seeking to account for the appearance of these peoples in the Greek world, Anatolia and the Near East. Strabo tells us that “Aristeas was a Proconnesian – the author of the Arimasian Epic, as it is called – a charlatan if there ever was one” (*Geography*, 13.1.16), and does us a service since the account given by Herodotus is

impossible. Diodorus Siculus gives us a much more credible account of Scythian origins. He relates their humble beginnings along the Araxes river in northern Media, explaining the origins of the various Scythian tribes from this common source, and their spread northward and to both the east as far as India and the west as far as the region of Europe north of Greece and Thrace (*Library of History*, 2.43.1-5). These migrations can be corroborated in many other sources, both historical and archaeological. Diodorus' account is fully cohesive with accounts from the east, such as the ancient Assyrian tablets uncovered by archaeologists in the 19th century, and the testimony of Flavius Josephus in his *Wars* and *Antiquities* (for which see my earlier essay related to this subject, *Classical Records of the Origins of the Scythians, Parthians & Related Tribes*). Contrary to the tale of Herodotus' cited above, from other sources (notably Strabo, *Geography* 1.3.21) we learn that Scythians, led by a certain king Madys, had driven the Kimmerians (none of the Greek writers realized that the Kimmerians were Scythians) out of Anatolia some time after Phrygia had been destroyed. The presence of a town named Sagalassus in northern Pisidia may well be evidence of Scythians in the region. The "saga", or "saka", sound occurs frequently in names associated with Scythians, such as Arsaces, Massagetae, Sacarauli, Sacasene, et al. Strabo, in his *Geography* mentions both Sagalassus and its people, the Sagalasseis, several times. Rather than the Scythians chasing the Kimmerians into Anatolia from the north, as Herodotus alleged, it is much more evident, and may be said with certainty, that Scythians – among them the Kimmerians – had migrated through Anatolia from the east.

Writing of his own time, Herodotus mentions Celtica, yet seeming not to know it by the exact location (i.e., from the Pyrenees to the Rhine) which later writers describe, he is somewhat inaccurate. Herodotus states: "This latter river [the Ister, or Danube] has its source in the country of the Celts near the city Pyréné, and runs through the middle of Europe, dividing it into two portions. The Celts live beyond the pillars of Heracles, and border on the Cynesians, who dwell at the extreme west of Europe. Thus the Ister flows through the whole of Europe before it finally empties itself into the Euxine [Black Sea] at Istria, one of the colonies of the Milesians" (*The Histories*, 2:33). Of course, the Danube runs through most of Europe, but doesn't have its sources nearly as far west as Iberia. Also by "the city Pyréné" the Pyrenees mountains may instead have been meant, something being misconstrued in communication. Yet from this we see that Herodotus knew of Kelts dwelling in the west, near the sources of the Danube (which would actually be just north of modern Switzerland) and in Iberia. Later in his history (4:49) Herodotus calls the Cynesians "Cynêtes" instead, and Rawlinson notes that nothing else is known of these people.

The Germanic tribes dwelling north of the Danube were originally called by the later Greek writers by the name *Galatae*. Strabo, who lived circa 63 B.C. to 25 A.D., says that "... the Germans, who, though they vary slightly from the Celtic stock in that they are wilder, taller, and have yellower hair, are in all other respects similar, for build, habits, and modes of life they are such as I have said the Celti are. And I also think that it was for this reason that the Romans assigned to them the name 'Germani,' as though they wished to indicate thereby that they were 'genuine' Galatae, for in the

language of the Romans ‘germani’ means ‘genuine’” (*Geography* 7.1.2). The Loeb Classical Library edition of Strabo, translated by H.L. Jones, offers the following footnote at this passage: “So also Julius Caesar, Tacitus, Pliny and the ancient writers in general regarded the Germans as Celts (Gauls). Dr. Richard Braungart has recently published a large work in two volumes in which he ably defends his thesis that the Boii, Vindelici, Rhaeti, Norici, Taurisci, and other tribes, as shown by their agricultural implements and contrivances, were originally, not Celts, but Germans, and in all probability, the ancestors of all Germans (*Sudgermanen*, Heidelberg, 1914).” And while I certainly have disagreements with Braungart, the fact that Germans were to the Greeks *Galatae* (Latin: *Gauls*) is clear. Diodorus Siculus describes the *Galatae* who dwell beyond (east of) the Rhine as tall and blond with very white skin, and says that they drank beer made from barley and the water in which they washed their honeycombs, which seems to describe an ancient form of mead (*Library of History* 5.26.2; 5.28.1). These *Galatae* used chariots, and wore what seems to be a type of tartan (5.29.1; 5.30.1).

Yet the name *Kelt* seems not to have originally belonged to the *Galatae*. Describing the inhabitants of what is now southern France, in the region of modern Narbonne, Strabo says of these people that “... the men of former times named [them] ‘Celtae’; and it was from the Celtae, I think, that the *Galatae* as a whole were by the Greeks called ‘Celti’ – on account of the fame of the Celtae, or it may also be that the Massiliotes, as well as other Greek neighbors, contributed to this result, on account of their proximity” (*Geography* 4.1.14). With this the earlier Diodorus Siculus, whose writing brings us to about 36 B.C. (since he describes the transition of Tauromenium in Sicily to a Roman colony) agrees, stating: “And now it will be useful to draw a distinction which is unknown to many: The peoples who dwell in the interior above Massalia, those on the slopes of the Alps, and those on this side the Pyrenees mountains are called Celts, whereas the peoples who are established above this land of Celtica in the parts which stretch to the north, both along the ocean and along the Hercynian Mountain, and all the peoples who come after these, as far as Scythia, are known as Gauls [Greek: *Galatae*]; the Romans, however, include all these nations together under a single name, calling them one and all Gauls [Greek: *Galatae*]” (*Library of History*, 5.32.1). So it is evident that *Kelts* and *Galatae* were at one time distinct. Herodotus knew of the *Kelts*, but did not use the term *Galatae*, yet at an early time the terms became synonymous to the Greeks and Romans. Polybius, who wrote up to about 146 B.C., over a hundred years before Diodorus Siculus, was already using the terms *Kelts* and *Galatae* synonymously, even in the same paragraph (i.e. *The Histories*, 2.17.3-5; 2.33.1-5). Throughout his own writings even Diodorus uses the two terms interchangeably, and also often in the same paragraphs (i.e. 14.113-117), while on other occasions he distinguishes between them (i.e. 25.13.1). Diodorus never used the term *German*, but called the tribes that dwelt east of the Rhine – some of which he mentioned by their individual names – *Galatae* also, where he tells of Julius Caesar’s conquests there (*Library of History*, 5.25.4).

Massalia (or often Massilia, the modern Marseilles) was an early Ionian (Phocian, Ionians from Phocis) Greek settlement in Keltica and in proximity to the *Kelts*.

Massalia is mentioned by Herodotus (i.e. *The Histories*, 5:9) and was founded circa 600 B.C. It is most likely that Herodotus learned about the Kelts only from these Phocian Greeks, who had founded Massalia and other western colonies with much resistance from the rival Phoenicians and Etruscans (c.f. *The Encyclopedia of World History*, 6th ed. Houghton - Mifflin Co., 2001, pp. 60-62). While I cannot presently determine with confidence whether Kelts were already inhabiting the southern parts of France when the Phocians founded their colonies – and it appears that they may not have been – they certainly were there by Herodotus' time (circa 440 B.C.), and so the Greeks and Romans surely must have been familiar with the Kelts around Marseilles well before the Galatae invaded Italy. Yet where the Galatae first appeared in northern Italy late in the 5th century B.C., Livy, the Roman historian, in his account calls them a “strange race, new settlers” (*History of Rome*, 5.17.6-10). A short time later, after conquering the Etruscans, these Galatae nearly destroyed Rome, circa 390 B.C. Yet, as Strabo attests that the Romans do, the Kelts about Massilia, like those who invaded Rome, are called “Gauls” by Livy as he relates the much earlier founding of that city (5.34.8). If the Romans were familiar with the Kelts around Massalia when that city was founded, and the Galatae were Kelts, how could Livy consider the Galatae who appeared in northern Italy 200 years later a “strange race”? And while Herodotus mentioned the Kelts, Kimmerians and Scythians of Europe, he never used the term *Galatae*, and may well have been ignorant of it. According to the 9th edition of the Liddell & Scott *Greek-English Lexicon*, the term *Galatae* does not appear until the 4th century B.C., where it is found in a fragment attributed to Aristotle. So with all of this, we see some confusion in the application of the names *Kelt* and *Gaul*, or *Galatae*, from the earliest times.

There is one possible solution to the paradox concerning the application of these names as described by the early historians, which I shall take liberty to propose here. The Phoenicians were of the same origins as the German tribes, for which see my earlier essays *Classical And Biblical Records Identifying the Phoenicians; Herodotus, Scythians, Persians & Prophecy*; and *Classical Records Of The Origins Of The Scythians, Parthians & Related Tribes*, along with subsequent portions of this current essay which shall endeavor to establish that German origins are found with the Kimmerians and Scythians. The Phoenicians, as described by the Greek tragic poets and others, such as the Roman Virgil, were fair and blond, and they settled the coasts and river valleys of Western Europe for several centuries before the arrival of the Greeks in that region. So it is plausible that with these people lies the origin of the original *Celtae*, and that these are people often identified as “proto-Celts” by modern archaeologists, at least on many of the occasions where “proto-Celts” are identified, and that once becoming known to the Greeks and Romans, the other tribes appearing to the north were also called by the same name, having been imagined to be related, as in truth they actually were. A Phoenician presence on the coasts as well as the interiors of Iberia and Britain, where they mined metals such as tin and silver, can be established as having existed long before the Greeks and Romans began writing of Celti, Galatae, and Gauls. Perhaps coincidentally, the smaller island northwest of Malta, south of Sicily, which was colonized by the Phoenicians, Diodorus Siculus calls *Gaulos* (the modern Gozo) in his *Library of History* at 5.12.4. While this hypothesis may be

conjectural, it does agree with the testimonies of Strabo regarding the names *Celtae* and *Celti*, and of Diodorus regarding *Celts* and *Galatae*, cited above. What all of this has to do with the Kimmerians and the Scythians shall hopefully become evident in the parts of this essay which follow.