

CLASSICAL RECORDS AND GERMAN ORIGINS

Part Five, By: William Finck © 2007

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

It has already been established here, in Part Three of this essay, that the Scythia of Diodorus Siculus extended west to the amber district of the Baltic, and perhaps even to the Elbe, as described by that historian. Likewise, Herodotus accounted the Danube and its tributaries from the north as "Scythian" rivers. Strabo also often discussed the Scythians, or Sakae, north of the Danube and west of the Black Sea. Yet Strabo wrote in much later times than Herodotus, and perhaps 30 to 50 years later than Diodorus. While Diodorus did not use the term *German*, he was certainly familiar with the writings of Julius Caesar, and Caesar used the term. Yet Diodorus used only the terms *Kelts* and *Galatae*, and used them interchangeably, when referring to both the people of Celtica and the lands north of the Danube, while we learn from Strabo that the Romans made a distinction between them, which certainly was an arbitrary one, calling those of Celtica *Gauls* and those east of the Rhine *Germans*. Strabo wrote in Greek, and cited many earlier Greek writers, and it is evident that most often his perspective was that of a Greek, and usually in agreement with the earlier writers whom he cites. Yet where Strabo writes of the northern Europe of his own time, it is in an era when Rome had been fighting many battles against the northern tribes, in an attempt to establish – and even expand – its northern borders and its control over the inhabited earth, or *oikoumenê*, and in these places Strabo's perspective is clearly a Roman one.

Keeping this in mind, Strabo writes of northern Europe: "Now the parts that are beyond the Rhenus and Celtica are to the north of the Ister [Danube]; these are the territories of the Galatic and the Germanic [genuine Galatae, as he explains in the subsequent paragraph] tribes, extending as far as the Bastarnians and the Tyregetans and the River Borysthenes [the Dnieper]. And the territories of all the tribes between this river and the Tanaïs [the Don] and the mouth of Lake Maeotis [the Sea of Azov] extend up into the interior as far as the ocean [the Baltic] and are washed by the Pontic [Black] Sea" (*Geography*, 7.1.1). The Tyregetans were those Getae who lived along the Tyras river, the modern Dniester. The Bastarnians, found inhabiting the region called elsewhere "Little Scythia", on the western shores of the Black Sea, who are said by Strabo to be a Germanic tribe (7.3.17), shall be discussed further below. What is most striking here is an absence of any mention of Scythians. Rather, we find mention

of “Germanic tribes” occupying the territory where we found mention of Scythians, or Sakae, for nearly 500 years up to Strabo’s writing of his statement here. Of the Scythians in Europe the historian Thucydides, writing towards the end of the 5th century B.C., had written: “For there is no nation, not to say of Europe but neither of Asia, that are comparable to this, or that as long as they agree, are able, one nation to one, to stand against the Scythians” (*History of the Peloponnesian War*, 2:97). The only logical conclusion is that by Strabo’s time the Romans had created yet another distinction: the Scythians of Europe, whom the Greeks had called Galatae, were being called Germans. As Strabo had often explained that many of the Scythians were nomadic, dwelling in wagons (i.e. *Geography*, 11.2.1), and living off of their flocks were “eaters of cheese made of mare’s milk”, where he quotes Aeschylus (7.3. 7, and see 7.3.9), Strabo likewise related of the Germans: “It is a common characteristic of all the peoples in this part of the world [here in the Loeb Classical Library edition a footnote reminds the reader that Strabo means the Germans and Galatae] that they migrate with ease ... they do not till the soil or even store food, but live in small huts that are merely temporary structures; and they live for the most part off their flocks, as the Nomads do, so that, in imitation of the Nomads, they load their household belongings on their wagons and with their beasts turn whithersoever they think best” (7.1.3). Strabo wrote this while discussing many of the Germanic tribes, such as the Suevi (or Suebi), later described by Tacitus in *The Germania*. Here it is clear that Strabo has described these Germans in the exact same manner as he had described the Scythians, and they are found occupying the same lands that were said in many places elsewhere to have been occupied by Scythians. For instance, while Strabo described the displacement of those Getae north of the Danube by Scythians (7.3.13, et al.), Tacitus mentions no Getae north of the Danube, nor any Scythians, but names German tribes occupying those lands. It is quite evident, that with all of these things considered, the Germans are indeed the Scythians, and only the names have changed.

It could not have been an accident, that in his description of those inhabiting northern Europe in his seventh book, Strabo neglected to mention the Scythians. In his second book he had given a statement similar to the one repeated above: “This river [the Danube] flows from the west towards the east and the Euxine [Black] Sea; it leaves on its left the whole of Germany (which begins at the Rhine), all the country of the Getans, and the country of the Tyregetans, Bastarnians, and Sarmatians as far as the river Tanaïs [the modern Don] and Lake Maeotis [the Sea of Azov]; and it leaves on its right the whole of Thrace, Illyria, and, lastly and finally, Greece” (*Geography*, 2.5.30). Here again we see that there are no Scythians mentioned in Europe, although Strabo gave much testimony elsewhere, from older writers, confirming their prominence there. The only explanation is that here they are being called Germans, who are indeed the Scythians of the earlier writers, and here Strabo portrays Germany as extending from the Rhine to the Black Sea, north of the Danube, except for the region held by the Getae, since he tells us that the Bastarnians are German (7.3.17). Strabo tells us elsewhere that the Getae share a border with the Germanic Suevi (7.1.3), yet indicates that the Getae were driven south of the Danube by the Scythians (i.e. 7.3.13), and Tacitus names several tribes inhabiting that region, but no Scythians. Rather, Tacitus

tells us that east of the Quadi (a division of the Suevi called Coadui, or in some mss. Coldui, by Strabo) dwell the Germanic Marsigni and Buri, not Suevi but both “exactly like the Suebi in language and mode of life”, and the Cotini and the Osi who both pay tribute to the Suebi and to the Sarmatians. Using language as his determinant, Tacitus distinguishes the Cotini and Osi from the Germans, and says that the Cotini are Kelts, which shall be further discussed below, and that the Osi are Pannonian (*The Germania*, 43). It is possible, yet difficult to ascertain, that the Osi were a remnant of the Getae, whom Tacitus does not mention, who managed to remain north of the Danube. As discussed in Part Three of this essay, Pannonia was a Roman district south of the Danube, apparently inhabited by a mixture of Keltic, Illyrian and Thracian tribes.

Before continuing a discussion of Germany as it was perceived by Strabo and Tacitus, it is appropriate to discuss the Galatae and Scythians as they were mentioned by the historian Polybius. Polybius lived from about 208-126 B.C., and the main part of the history which he wrote covers the years 264-146 B.C. His is an excellent work concerning the Punic Wars between Rome and Carthage, and the exploits of Hannibal and Scipio, but he also described wars of the period among the Greek states to the east, and the causes for and the beginnings of the Roman empire, for which he was an apologist. Many who write about the Kelts cite Polybius endeavoring to show that either the Kelts had dominion throughout all of northern Europe at one time, or that they originated in the east, or both. Like the later Diodorus Siculus, Polybius also used the terms *Galatae* and *Kelts* interchangeably (i.e. *The Histories*, 2.30.7-9), and he never used the term *German*, calling all the people of the north *Galatae*. Concerning the origins of peoples, the founding of cities, and related things, Polybius did not write, and he explains his reasons for abstaining from such at length in his ninth book (9.1-2).

Polybius directly mentioned the Scythians in Europe only once, where of a certain point along the coast near Byzantium he writes: “It is here, they say, that Darius bridged the straits when he crossed to attack the Scythians” (4.43.2). Yet Polybius mentioned the Galatae often, both those north of Greece who had conquered Thrace and invaded Anatolia, and those further west. While Polybius’ mentions of the Galatae, or Kelts, say nothing of detriment to that which is being presented here, neither are they of great assistance. Yet in general they support one major contention made here: that those people of Europe originally said to be Scythians (for instance by Ephorus, whom Strabo quotes at length) were the same people later called Galatae by the Greeks, and then divided into Germans and Gauls by the Romans, since in the era of Herodotus and Thucydides only Scythians were known in the north – and neither Herodotus nor Thucydides knew the term *Galatae* – and only Kelts were known in the west. Yet later the people of the north were called Galatae, and no longer are Scythians mentioned there, unless older writers are being followed. Both Galatae and Scythians are described by Strabo in the exact same manner, where Strabo is certainly discussing the same people in two different eras, by two different names: the first from earlier writers, and the latter in his own time.

Polybius also makes statements which show that the archaeological Hallstatt culture should not be so readily associated with the Galatae. For he says of the Galatae

that “their lives were very simple, and they had no knowledge whatever of any art or science”, and that their possessions were scarce so that they could “shift where they chose” (2.17.10), much as Strabo had described them. He also described at length their highly inferior arms, and how easily their swords bent after a single hard blow (2.30.7-9; 2.33.3). None of this accords with the more advanced metallurgy and the fine arts of the Hallstatt culture, which likely belonged to Thracians, Milesians, other Phoenicians, and other earlier settlers of the Danube River valley and western Europe – the “proto-Kelts”.

In the times of Strabo and Tacitus a Germanic tribe called the Bastarnae dwelt on the Danube near the Black Sea, in the same region which Strabo and others called “Little Scythia” elsewhere. Polybius mentions these people, who were the reason for a mission of the Dardanians (an Illyrian tribe) to the Roman Senate in 177-176 B.C.: “A mission from the Dardanians now arrived, telling of the Bastarnae, their numbers, the huge size and the valour of their warriors, and also pointing out that Perseus and the Galatians [of Anatolia] were in league with this tribe. They said they were much more afraid of him than of the Bastarnae, and they begged for aid. Envoys from Thessaly also arrived confirming the statement of the Dardanians, and begging for help” (*The Histories*, 25.6.2-4). These Bastarnae are not said by any of these writers to have migrated from anywhere, nor to have been conquerors of the Scythians or Galatae who inhabited this region, and so it seems plausible that *Bastarnae* is only a name for the Scythian tribe which long inhabited the area, of which the Greeks and Romans only later acquired a more intimate knowledge. Strabo was uncertain about the Bastarnae, and says “but what is beyond Germany and what beyond the countries which are next after Germany – whether one should say the Bastarnae, as most writers suspect, or say that others lie in between ... it is not easy to say ... or whether any part is uninhabitable by reason of the cold or other cause, or whether even a different race of people, succeeding the Germans, is situated between the sea and the eastern Germans [here it is absolutely evident that the word *German* stands for *Scythian*] ... for I know neither the Bastarnae, nor the Sauromatae, nor, in a word, any of the peoples who dwell above the Pontus ...” (*Geography*, 7.2.4). By “know” Strabo must mean that he didn’t know them first-hand, and so was not able to describe them completely, since both Diodorus Siculus some years before, and Tacitus some years after, confirm his statements concerning the Sarmatians, the Bastarnae, and the Germans – once one accepts as fact that Strabo and later writers used “German” to describe the people that Diodorus and earlier writers called Scythian, and then Galatae, which shall hopefully be further established in a discussion of the Peucetians.

Diodorus Siculus mentions the Peucetians (*Peuketio*) where he says that Agathocles, king of Sicily, supplied “both the Iapygians and the Peucetians ... with pirate ships, receiving in return a share of their booty” (*Library of History*, 21.4.1), Sicily being at war with Carthage, Macedon, and the “barbarians of Italy” about 295 B.C. (21.2.2). Strabo tells us that certain of the Bastarnians lived on Peuce (*peukê* means *pine* in Greek), an island in the Danube, and were therefore called Peucini (*Peukinoi*), which must be Diodorus’ Peucetians, the name and location being identical. Strabo names other tribes of the Bastarnae, the Atmoni and Sidoni, and the Roxolani who

“roam the plains between the Tanaïis and the Borysthenes [the Don and Dnieper rivers], and here is more evidence that the Germanic Bastarnae are of the European Scythians. The Roxolani, Strabo tells us, are known from their wars with Mithridates Eupator, king of Pontus, 120-63 B.C.” (*Geography*, 7.3.15, 17). Elsewhere where Diodorus Siculus discusses Macedonian and Thracian relations with their neighbors during this period, he mentions only Scythians in this region, and no Bastarnae (i.e. *Library of History*, 16.1.5; 19.73.1-5). It should be manifest here, that *Bastarnae* is a name for the Scythian, later called German, tribes in this same area. The people did not change, only the names did, once the perspective changed from Greek to Roman: *German* was a strictly Roman term.

Although in one place Strabo does seem to distinguish the Bastarnae from the Scythians, where he says that the Thracians had suffered the encroachment of “Scythians and Bastarnians and Sauromatians” from north of the Danube (*Geography*, 7.3.13), this does not mean that Strabo counted them as a distinct people. Rather, Strabo is referencing an extended period of time, and in the earliest migrations of the Scythians into Thrace, no particular tribe was distinguished among them, where the Bastarnae are named only much later, yet are clearly the same people as those Scythians inhabiting the same area throughout the centuries up until Strabo’s time. Strabo also distinguishes the Bastarnae for another reason, where he says that “they also being, one might say, of Germanic stock” (7.3.17), and it is learned from Tacitus, who says that “The Peucini, however, who are sometimes called Bastarnae, are like Germans in their language, manner of life, and mode of settlement and habitation [but] ... Mixed marriages are giving them something of the repulsive appearance of the Sarmatians [Sauromatae] ...” and so Tacitus says “I do not know whether to class the tribes of the Peucini [Bastarnae], Venedi [Slavic Wends], and Fenni [Finns] with the Germans or with the Sarmatians” (*The Germania*, 46). So it is evident that on the heels of the Germans, who were the westward-migrating Scythians, were the Slavic tribes pushing into western Europe, and intermingling with them along the way.

In *The Germania*, Tacitus gives an account of how the Germans came to be so called, stating that “The name *Germania*, however, is said to have been only recently applied to the country. The first people to cross the Rhine and appropriate Gallic territory, though they are known nowadays as Tungri, were at that time called *Germani*; and what was at first the name of this one tribe, not of the entire race, gradually came into general use in the wider sense. It was first applied to the whole people by the conquerors of the Gauls, to frighten them; later, all the Germans adopted it and called themselves by the new name” (§2). Yet the Germans did not use the name *German* of themselves, it is strictly the Roman term for them. Latin becoming the language of learning in the Middle Ages, the name prevailed. Neither Diodorus Siculus nor Strabo, who both knew more of the tribes of Celtica west of the Rhine and south of the Alps than they did of Germany, ever mentioned such a story, nor did they ever mention any individual tribe named *Germani*. Neither did Caesar in *The Gallic War*, where he used the name *Germani* of those tribes east of the Rhine, corroborate any part of Tacitus’ story concerning this name, and so it is certainly implausible. Therefore it must be a coincidence that there was apparently a tribe of this name, *Germanians* in Rawlinson’s

edition, mentioned by Herodotus as being among the Persians (*The Histories*, 1:125), and there is nothing from the time of Herodotus to that of Caesar by which to connect the name of this tribe to the west. Diodorus Siculus and all of the other earlier writers calling all of the tribes of the north *Galatae*, the account of Strabo is much more credible: that the Germans were called so by the Romans because they were esteemed to be genuine Galatae, i.e. those not mixed with Thracians or Greeks or Etruscans or any of the other previous inhabitants of the European coasts, *germanus* being the Latin for *genuine*.

Like Strabo, Tacitus tells us that Germany stretched from the Rhine in the west to the east as far as the Bastarnae whom he calls Peucini, although by this time the Venedi and the Sarmatians, Slavic tribes, had also advanced into those parts of Europe west of the Dniester and north of the Danube (*The Germania*, 46). The Venedi are the later Wends of eastern Germany, who occupied the area around Brandenburg southwest of Berlin. As we have seen, Tacitus would not account the Sarmatians as Germans (and Diodorus Siculus tells us that they derived from the Medes, not the Scythians), yet he wasn't as certain concerning the Venedi, Fenni (Finns) and Peucini (Bastarnae), only for rather arbitrary reasons. For instance, he spoke of the Bastarnae mingling with the Sarmatians, and he said of the Venedi that they "have adopted many Sarmatian habits; for their plundering forays take them over all the wooded and mountainous highlands that lie between the Peucini and the Fenni. Nevertheless, they are on the whole to be classed as Germans; for they have settled homes, carry shields, and are fond of travelling – and travelling fast – on foot, differing in all these respects from the Sarmatians, who live in wagons or on horseback" (*The Germania*, 46). Living in wagons and on horseback was the manner by which Strabo's Germans and Scythians had lived (*Geography*, 7.1.3; 11.2.1), and it seems that Tacitus' classification depends only upon whether or not these once-nomadic tribes had yet settled into a given area, quite arbitrary indeed. The Venedi may only have been later classified as Slavs because of their language, nevertheless, there were wars between the Saxons and the Wends down through the time of Otto I, who defeated and ended the menaces to Germans from both the Magyars and the Wends by 955 A.D. (*The Encyclopedia of World History*).

Yet Tacitus never mentioned any Scythians in Europe, although his Germany stretched, like that of Strabo, from the Rhine to the Black Sea. If the Scythians of the west are not the Germans, then in a very short time, and after so many centuries of being so well entrenched in Europe, those Scythians whom Thucydides said were so powerful had simply vanished into thin air, and the Germans – coming from nowhere – consumed the entire northern continent without any evidence of cataclysm or struggle. Rather, as demonstrated throughout all parts of this essay, the Germans are indeed the Scythians, and the Saxons (Sachsens) of the west are the Sakans (Sakae) of the east, and descended from those Sakans whom Darius the Persian could not defeat (i.e. Strabo, *Geography*, 7.3.9).

In *The Germania*, Tacitus conjectures that at one time the tribes of Gaul migrated east into Germany, because the Gauls had been more powerful than the Germans (§28). By this Tacitus attempts to account for the presence of tribes which he

considered Gallic in regions east of the Rhine, such as the Boii and the Cotini (§43). Of the Cotini, Tacitus distinguishes them from the Germans by language, saying that “The Cotini and the Osi are not Germans: that is proved by their languages, Celtic in one case, Pannonian in the other ...” Yet language is no determinant of race, and there were many dialects among the tribes of both Germany and Gaul. Speaking elsewhere of language, Tacitus classified the Aestii along the Baltic shore as Germans, but tells us that their language was “more like the British” although they had “the same customs and fashions as the Suebi” (§45), and the British spoke Celtic dialects much like those of Gaul, as he himself stated elsewhere (*Agricola*, 11). Today’s Estonians speak a language classified as Finno-Ugric, and not even Indo-European. Tacitus does not mention the language of the Fenni (Finns), and was unsure whether to classify them as Germans, cited above. Speaking of the Treviri and Nervii, tribes of Gaul, Tacitus seems to doubt the “German descent to which they claim”, where he describes the German tribes which had migrated west of the Rhine (§28). But here Tacitus fails to address their language or any other significant reason to doubt their claim, stating only that “Such a glorious origin, they feel, should prevent their being thought to resemble the unwarlike Gauls”. Here Tacitus’ distinction between Gaul and German crumbles, being revealed as both arbitrary and prejudiced. Writing nearly 100 years earlier, Strabo tells us that “The whole race which is now called both ‘Gallic’ and ‘Galatic’ is war-mad, and both high-spirited and quick for battle, although otherwise simple and not ill-mannered”, going on to describe their strength and large physiques, among other things, while also explaining that they are with the Germans “kinsmen to one another” (*Geography*, 4.4.2). Strabo also attests that both the Treviri and Nervi are indeed German (4.3.4). It is clear that Tacitus’ distinction between Germans (whom Strabo considered *genuine* Galatae) and Gauls (Galatae) afforded him a way by which to display his contempt for those tribes who had been conquered by Rome, and who had adopted the civilization of their conquerors, a contempt which Tacitus also showed for the Britons who did likewise (*The Agricola*, 21). Elsewhere, Tacitus himself acknowledged that the Gauls had become unwarlike only under Roman subjection (§11). Yet among Whites the cultural or political state of a tribe or nation is certainly a less reliable determinant of race than is language, and Tacitus’ distinctions in these areas are therefore demonstrated to be wholly unreliable, made for political reasons and not for the sake of true historical or anthropological inquiry. The Greek writers tell us that the Galatae and the Germans are one and the same race, and the eastern inscriptions tell us as much concerning their ancestors: Kimmerians, Sakans and Scythians.