

The ultimate goal of Hersch's work is a better understanding of women's role in Roman society. Hersch undoubtedly accomplishes her goal through a detailed analysis, which shows the importance and the significance of the Roman wedding ritual for a woman. However, as the author is well aware, research based on male texts does not allow us to explore better the thoughts and the feelings that accompanied the Roman bride during her wedding ceremony.

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GREG WOOLF: *Tales of the Barbarians: Ethnography and Empire in the Roman West*. Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester – Malden 2011. ISBN 978-1-4051-6073-5. VIII, 167 pp. GBP 50, USD 89.95, EUR 60.

The year 2011 apparently witnessed something of a rediscovery of Arnaldo Momigliano's *Alien Wisdom* (1975). Recently, the insightful little book has not only inspired Erich S. Gruen to a study published earlier in the year by Princeton University Press (cf. above p. 235), but it moreover seems to have stimulated Greg Woolf as well – a scholar known for his studies regarding the Roman West. Another formative predecessor recognised by Woolf is the 1992 monograph *Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought* by James Romm, a very remarkable study that is rightly considered essential in its field. Considering this and Woolf's own earlier contributions from the oft-quoted *Becoming Roman* (1998) onwards, a rough outline of this new book could perhaps have been predicted. Even the concept of an ethnographical "middle ground" – a model developed in the field of North American colonial studies and applied in this book to Roman studies – featured prominently in Woolf's 2009 article "Cruptorix and his kind" (in *Ethnic Constructs in Antiquity*, edited by T. Derks and N. Roymans, Amsterdam University Press).

The "middle ground", however, is no mere fad. Woolf's main point is that a creative process of "barbarian tales" grew in the recently subjugated provinces of the Roman West. Envisioned by Woolf as "exercises in cultural conservation", these tales mostly constitute a form of barbarian *interpretatio* based on the classical information and myth now available to them. What earlier has been seen as a largely one-sided process of Greeks and Romans imposing their own traditions and their constructed linkages upon their recent neighbours/allies/subjects, is cast in Woolf's approach as a more nuanced and bilateral exchange of interpretations (cf. Gruen 2011). After a short introduction situating the study within the wider field of research inspired by postcolonialist discourse, Chapter One ("Telling Tales on the Middle Ground") takes a look at the varieties and registers of information regarding the western barbarians during the Roman Republic and early Empire. Some terminological definitions are provided and several worthwhile remarks made on their use before the "middle ground" is brought along – to a large extent the most refreshing heuristic device in use throughout the book. The interpretation of the sources is done convincingly; for instance, Woolf provides a quite plausible explanation for the notably static nature of much of ancient ethnography in remarking that Pliny appears to derive ethnography from the geographic reality of the world itself. Combined with climatic explanation models this comes a long way in accounting for the curious "ethnographic stasis" and the "impossibility of new barbarians" remarked upon by, among others, Herwig Wolfram (1997, *The Roman Empire and its Germanic Peoples*, 37). The

subject of stasis and possible dissonance are again taken up in the extremely inspiring closure of the work (pp. 111–7).

Chapter Two ("Explaining the Barbarians") provides an outline of the epistemic regimes involved in the ordering and creation of "barbarographic" information, with Woolf quite rightly noting an ancient tolerance for a "plurality of paradigms" in accounts of barbarian ethnography. He suggests that since the different paradigms of ancient ethnography served different practical functions (which are examined in turn), a kind of "intellectual stalemate" was reached, in which the field (if such it can be called) became much more static than, say, ancient medicine or mathematics. Indeed, it would seem that the complementary ethnographical explanations were primarily used to bolster the prestige of any writer using them, and to anchor their account in the earlier tradition. First the genealogical, then the geographical explanations and their respective attraction to both writers and audiences are examined. Regarding the former subject, Woolf keeps a respectful distance from the "ethnogenesis" school (a rather welcome move); the latter subject is approached first through the almost mandatory *Airs, Waters, Places*, after which some interesting discrepancies between different authors (e.g. Pliny and Vitruvius) are highlighted within what is too often taken to be homogenous field of climatic determinism. Finally, the end of the chapter discusses ancient ethnographic explanations as *ad hoc* creations, and notes how rarely such explanations are contrasted with each other or creatively combined in the literature. Ancient ethnography emerges as a principally literary, not a scientific, pursuit that never even aspired to the status and coherence of, say, mathematics. Chapter Two could perhaps have benefited from Bardesanes' *Liber legum regionum* (e.g. 592 in Nau's edition), which contains an interesting discussion about the validity of astrological determinism in characterising population groups, including many westerners.

Chapter Three ("Ethnography and Empire") contextualises the imperial ethnography by considering possible imperial patronage and political uses for such information, with the rather familiar terrain of plundered libraries and Greek scholars flocking to the Roman elite giving way to less-discussed aspects, such as the discrepancy between Greek geo- and ethnography in its traditional, literary form, and the kinds of utilitarian information most needed (and provided) by the Roman elite in their running of provincial affairs. The real ethnographic import of the Roman Empire, according to Woolf, was generated by the fact that the empire made people move, and along with the movement of people moved the tales they had heard. Indeed, the rhetoric claiming that the empire had opened wide areas to enquiry is easy to attest, but the information, the narrative tropes, and barbarian ethnonyms all largely derive from the literary tradition, aptly characterised as "a bookworld that did not quite coincide with the territorial reach of Rome" (p. 79). The disciplining of ethnography and its uses within Roman literature find parallels in the broadly similar disciplining of paradoxography, examined toward the end of the chapter, while the relationship between propaganda and ethnography is covered as well. As could be anticipated, Woolf encounters very little evidence for practical use of received ethnographical knowledge among during the Late Republic and early Empire – although the contemporaries would hardly even have expected such.

The final part, Chapter Four, takes up some practical questions, such as how the new ethnographical "knowledge" was used in the Roman world, and how open to revision and change it was. The intuitive answer to the last point would quite naturally be "not very", particularly as Woolf presents several cases where ethnographic writing and ethnographic knowledge were far from commensurate. This has a great deal to do with the static and timeless mirage created by ethnographical register, which Woolf quite correctly links with the rhetorical

usefulness of having at hand a set of stock images regarding the margins of the world. His chosen examples demonstrate this very nicely when it comes to Imperial writings about Britain, an area that "never became domesticated" (p. 92) in literature because it had much more use the other way. Generally, the anachronistic material and the ensuing "threat to dissonance" could, one feels, be best explained by a context where the conventional mode of doing ethnography was predominantly a literary phenomenon rather than a basis for epistemic regime. Woolf, however, reluctant to endorse "such an austere position" (p. 113), suggests a potential new "middle ground" in the permeable transfer zone of the Rhenish borderland – always an extensively studied area – though doing so necessitates viewing Tacitus as a slightly more innocent and agenda-free transmitter of "barbarian tales" than usual (p. 104). The stratified and highly antiquarian nature of western ethnographical tradition is well demonstrated by Woolf's look into Ammianus' famous Gallic ethnography, followed by some extremely perceptive general remarks regarding the nature of the classical ethnographic tradition. Lastly, copious endnotes and a very commendable bibliography lend an appropriate amount of support to this insightful study. A short general index provides some essential guidance and suffices nicely in a work of such conciseness, particularly in conjunction with an index of the main source passages discussed.

Time and again this book brings up intriguing possibilities and excellent points, demonstrating the author's learning in his subject. Woolf uses the concept of "middle ground" cleverly in addressing old scenarios from a new angle, and in a study generally demonstrating the formulaic and uninformative nature of ancient ethnography, the results are remarkably constructive and optimistic. The literary matrix of tradition-bound ancient literature, however, differs from the original context of the term "middle ground" to such an extent that the applicability of the concept to ancient literature will need to be examined in even more detail in the future. In a vast majority of cases, it will be very difficult to prove conclusively that the "barbarian tales" would indeed have been born in the "middle ground" of provincial informants being suggestively interrogated by the Romans or Greeks – and even if they were, we are left with the question of who transmitted them into the literary tradition preserved by such bookish writers as Diodorus, Strabo, or Parthenius. The chronological horizon for many such "new" traditions to be transmitted from the field into the learned literary accounts appears curiously narrow, and it seems slightly mysterious how something close to travellers' tales would have managed to cross the socio-literary prestige gap so swiftly. Either we must accept improbably early dates for these nameless "barbarian *érudits*" (p. 89), or postulate an even more acute hunger for alien wisdom among the literati than Momigliano did.

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CRISTINA MAZZONI: *She-Wolf. The Story of a Roman Icon*. Cambridge University Press, New York 2010. ISBN 978-0-521-19456-3 (hb), 978-0-521-14566-4 (pb). XIV, 282 pp. GBP 55, USD 85 (hb), GBP 16.99, USD 24.99 (pb).

Professor Cristina Mazzoni of the University of Vermont has written the first comprehensive study of the Roman she-wolf. This is a wide-ranging book in which this author illustrates various roles of the she-wolf by analyzing paintings, statues, maps, poetry, fiction, and historical narrative from antiquity to contemporary times.