

Mapping the Barbarian world – outline of the issues

Judyta Rodzińska-Nowak¹
Jagiellonian University in Kraków

Michał Kasiński²
Jagiellonian University in Kraków

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the main problems accompanying attempts to map the areas of Barbarian Europe. These problems relate to the difficulties in reconstructing both the ethnic situation and settlement structures prevailing in the territories of Barbaricum. Projects such as *Tabula Imperii Romani* and *Corpus der römischen Funde im europäischen Barbaricum* produce maps of all the finds of Roman imports recorded in a given area. In recent years, archaeological research has revealed new sources that allow the complex relationships between Barbaricum and the Roman state to be viewed in a completely new light.

KEYWORDS: Barbaricum, mapping, ethnic situation, settlement structures, Roman Empire, contacts, Roman imports, chronology.

1. INTRODUCTION

Beyond the borders of the Roman Empire, east of the Rhine and north of the Danube, there was a Barbarian Europe – Barbaricum. The demographic, cultural, settlement and economic situation on both sides of the Limes was radically different. They were two separate worlds but with different relationships. Military confrontations with the peoples of Barbaricum, as well as contacts of a diplomatic and commercial nature contributed to the acquisition of knowledge relating to these peoples by the Romans. Based on data from ancient written sources, it's possible to reconstruct, to some extent, the ethnic map of Barbaricum during the Roman period. The greatest amount of this data relates to the first two centuries after the birth of Christ and come from the works of Pomponius Mela, Pliny the Elder, Tacitus and Claudius Ptolemy, among others. The works of the above-mentioned authors contain the

names of peoples from Barbarian Europe, as well as information about the areas they occupy (Kolendo, 1998a, previous literature there; Kolendo, 2005; Kaczanowski, Margos, 2002, XV-XXIII; Nowakowski, 2005). It should be noted, however, that sometimes the same ethnonym appears in different parts of Europe (e.g. *Wenedi/Venethi*), and sometimes similar but different names appear in the sources (*Lugii/Lupiones Sarmate/Longiones*), at times separated by a chronological distance, which does not allow us to be sure they are the same tribe (Kolendo, 1998b, previous literature there; Kaczanowski, Margos, 2002, XXIV-XXV). In addition, ancient authors have sometimes transferred the names of peoples they knew well to other, newly-known tribes. It's also known that there are obvious anachronisms in ancient written sources as well as literary *topoi* – stereotypical images of Barbarians (Kolendo, 1998a, 50).

The ethnic map of Barbarian Europe, reconstructed by philologists and historians on the basis of data from ancient written sources, has been contrasted by archaeologists with an

1. E-mail: judyta.rodzinska-nowak@uj.edu.pl

2. E-mail: michal.kasinski@uj.edu.pl

image of cultural diversity, drawn from the results of analysing archaeological sources. According to contemporary archaeology, Barbaricum can be divided into taxonomic units of a higher and lower order: cultural circles as well as cultures and cultural groups. Limits to the range of these units are sometimes difficult to define precisely as they are influenced by differing intensities of settlement for individual areas in different chronological ranges, as well as the state of archaeological research. At the same time, it should be assumed that, in most cases, the cultural units distinguished may have been polyethnic in nature. However, for some areas of the Barbaricum, terms referring directly to tribal territories are used, such as in the case of the Marcomannic settlement in the Czech Basin (Droberjar, 2009; Salač, 2016), or contemporary geographical terms are used, e.g. historical materials from the Danish islands, Gotland, etc. (Kaczanowski, Madyda-Legutko, 2005; Kaczanowski, 2010).

Contacts between peoples of Barbaricum and the Roman Empire were characterised by variable intensity, both in terms of time and space. The differences observed in this respect were not only quantitative but also qualitative. An important factor influencing these differences was, among other things, the distance of the Barbarian tribes' settlements from the borders of the Roman state (cf. Lund Hansen, 1987; Bouzek, Ondřejová, 1990; Jílek, 2016; Suharoschi, Dumitrache, Curca, 2020; Opreanu, Cociș, Lăzărescu, 2020).

Research projects have been carried out over several decades, resulting in publications aimed at mapping the areas of Barbarian Europe from the perspective of their inhabitants' contacts with the Roman Empire. In practice, this means recording all the finds of Roman imports from individual Barbaricum regions. This trend includes volume *M-34 Kraków* issued as a part of the prestigious international series *Tabula Imperii Romani*, published in 2002 by a team of researchers led by Professor Piotr Kaczanowski of the Institute of Archaeology of the Jagiellonian University in Kraków (Kaczanowski, Margos, 2002). The study covered an area comprising a significant part of the territory of today's Poland, as well as parts of Slovakia, the Czech Republic,

Hungary, Romania, Ukraine and Belarus. Currently, this volume is being digitised by means of an application used by all participants of the TIR-FOR Project. However, it should be remembered that the rules for describing and mapping the archaeological material in the *Tabula Imperii Romani* were developed with the territory of the Roman state in mind, so we are currently encountering some difficulties in adapting to them. Such difficulties result, among other things, from the specificity of the settlement structures in the Barbaricum and consequently from the presence of other categories of archaeological sources in these areas.

2. SPECIFICITY OF THE SETTLEMENT STRUCTURES OF THE PEOPLES OF BARBARICUM

Many attempts have been made by different specialists to identify models of settlement used by the peoples of Barbarian Europe. The view commonly accepted at present is that the settlement pattern was dispersed. In the territory of interest there is an observable, to some extent chronologically variable pattern of variously discernible microregions, sometimes visibly separated from one another by a zone with more sparse settlement or even by uninhabited lands. However, it should be mentioned here that, in some cases, the results of more recent field studies, mainly surface prospection, show blurring of the boundaries of previously differentiated microregions (Jankuhn, 1976; Godłowski, 1985; Kobyliński, 1988; Kobyliński, 2005; Kolendo, 1998c; Leube, 1992; Leube 2009; Rodzińska-Nowak, 2012, 11).

Apart from a few exceptions, in the vast majority of Barbaricum areas there are only open settlements; i.e. without any fortifications. Comprehensive analysis of archaeological sources makes it possible to attempt to reconstruct the spatial arrangement of settlements in relation to their various functions, including economic, as well as to restore the original size of settlements. Micro-regional settlement studies provide further information. On the basis of these studies, it's possible to try to determine the preferences of given groups of people in terms of selecting the landscape zones they inhabit, as well as infer

their demographic potential and, indirectly, the nature and scale of environmental exploitation. These micro-regional studies also contribute to our knowledge of the spatial and functional relations, including economic, between individual settlements (Leube, 1992; Leube, 2009; Rodzińska-Nowak, 2016, 308-310).

However, the research carried out in many Barbaricum micro-regions has not enabled the exact reconstruction of the settlement network existing in individual, short time periods, corresponding to the life span of one or more generations. In a few cases, on the other hand, it was possible to identify contemporary settlement complexes, consisting of settlement/settlements and cemetery (cf. Dąbrowska, 2008, 82-83). Moreover, the aforementioned studies do not lead, with some exceptions, to the recognition of mutual relations between individual settlements. For instance, in many cases it's not possible to convincingly identify settlements, within an area of a given concentration, that clearly differ in function and rank from the others and may therefore serve as a main centre within it (cf. Schuster, 2003). One extremely important factor that has a negative impact on the effectiveness of studies on the transformation of the economic structures of the Barbarian population of Europe is the difficulty in determining the chronology of archaeological materials discovered in the settlements. These difficulties are mainly related to the nature of the source base that tends to come from such sites. The most common category of artifacts, often the only one, is ceramics which, in the light of more recent research, provide a less precise basis for dating than was previously thought (cf. Rodzińska-Nowak, 2006; Rodzińska-Nowak, 2011).

Written sources, both ancient and early medieval, underline the importance of the family-neighbour communities in the social, economic, political, religious and ritual life of the inhabitants of Barbaricum. Based on the results of an analysis of written sources, it can be assumed that one characteristic feature of tribal territories was their segmental structure, consisting of small, local links. For 'civilised' observers, the number of these local links was important in attempts to determine the demographic and military potential

of individual tribes or their associations (Modzelewski, 2004, 255-284, 287, 348).

Individual microregions, perhaps the same as the structures described by Tacitus as *civitas*, probably consisted of many smaller territorial units, described as districts or 'neighbouring communities'. These communities probably correspond to those called by Caesar (*Commentarii de bello gallico*, IV.1) and then by Tacitus (*Germania*, 39) as *pagus*. In addition to their many economic tasks, neighbouring communities also carried out other activities collectively that indirectly affected how the economy performed, such as those of a policing, judicial and military nature (Modzelewski, 2004, 288, 322; cf. Sempke, Sanmark, Iversen, Mehler 2021).

3. METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS ARISING FROM THE APPLICATION OF TIR-FOR TO ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES LOCATED IN THE BARBARICUM AREA

As mentioned above, in most areas of Barbaricum there are only open settlements. In addition there are numerous attested settlement points, necropolises, single graves, treasures, votive deposits in aquatic environments and scattered loose finds, including numismatics. It should be noted that not all of the above categories of archaeological sources are fully reflected in the typology developed for the TIR-FOR project.

First of all, it's important to emphasise a fundamental qualitative difference between the sites mapped within the Roman Empire and those recorded in the area of Barbaricum. In the case of the first category we are dealing with sites or complexes of sites representing the remains of various activities of Roman inhabitants (towns, *villae*, roads, aqueducts, etc.). On the other hand, the mapped sites in the Barbaricum area, with few exceptions, usually correspond to single finds of objects imported from the Roman provinces, or to groups of such finds, most often occurring within the context of settlements or sepulchral sites and sometimes as hoards or loose finds. Labelling sites recorded in the Roman Empire and in the areas of Barbaricum with the same name can therefore sometimes contribute to a distorted picture of reality.

Nonetheless, an attempt can be made to adapt the typology proposed by the TIR-FOR application for the purpose of describing the realities of Barbarian Europe. In the case of known settlements within its area, it can be assumed that they correspond to the category of rural settlements. They meet all the criteria which currently classify a site in this category. Another numerous group are sepulchral sites, to which the categories of “necropolis” and “burial” proposed by the TIR-FOR typology can be applied. It should be remembered, however, that the nature of these sites, when compared to the realities of the Roman state, is markedly different. In the case of numerous loose, surface or undetermined finds, the category ‘unknown’ should be applied, referring to finds whose full archaeological context is not known.

Particularly noteworthy are undoubtedly the finds of Roman coins, an important source for understanding the relationship between Rome and the Barbarians. In the territories of Barbaricum, coins usually occur as single, scattered finds and in treasures, which are the result of intentional hoarding, carried out for economic or non-economic reasons, e.g. as part of cult practices. Occasional finds of coins in graves have also been attested. In most cases a single category, “numismatics”, will be used for these groups of finds in the TIR-FOR application.

The excavations carried out over the last few decades in central and northern Europe, as well as underwater archaeological explorations, non-invasive surveys (aerial, geomagnetic, etc.) and prospecting with metal detectors, have led to the discovery of groups of sites with special characteristics. These discoveries allow us to look at the relationship between Rome and Barbaricum from a completely new perspective. This observation applies, for instance, to sites documenting military confrontations between the peoples of Barbaricum and the Roman army. Particularly noteworthy is the site of the famous Battle of the Teutoburg Forest in 9 AD, with considerable probability located at Kalkriese near Osnabrück, Lower Saxony, as well as the site of the battle supposedly fought by Maximinus the Thracian against the Alemanni

around 238 AD in Harzhorn, Lower Saxony (Meyer, 2018, previous literature there). Mention should also be made of the remains of temporary camps set up by the Roman army in what is now Slovakia, Moravia and Hungary, during the second phase of the so-called Marcomannic Wars in the second half of the 2nd century AD (Fig. 1), when the Romans shifted the fighting to the Barbarian banks of the Danube (Komoróczy, Vlach, Hüssen, Rajtár, 2019). Sites specific to the northern part of Barbaricum are the votive bog deposits, found primarily in the Scandinavian zone but also sporadically recorded in other parts of the Baltic Sea basin. These are the remains of cult practices connected with the intentional depositing of offerings in an aquatic environment, usually consisting of the weapons and personal equipment of warriors captured



FIGURE 1. Charvátská Nová Ves (Czech Republic). Aerial photo showing the course of the ditch and reconstructed area occupied by the Roman marching camp (orthophoto ©ČÚZK) (acc. to Komoróczy, Vlach, Hüssen, Rajtár, 2019).

from the enemy (Fig. 2). They often include numerous items of Roman provenance (cf. Blankefeldt, von Carnap-Bornheim, 2018, previous literature there).

Peaceful and diplomatic relations between the two worlds can, in turn, be seen in the grand residences of representatives of the Germanic elite built following the Roman model and using imported materials, erected by Roman craftsmen. Such buildings have been discovered in the middle Danube basin (cf. Varsik, 2020). One of the most impressive residences of this kind was discovered in Bratislava-Dúbravka, south-west Slovakia (Fig. 3), in the area covered by the settlement of the Germanic Quadii (Elschek, 2017). In addition, settlements described as ‘central places’, interpreted as centres for ceremonial exchange and the redistribution of Roman wealth, warrant special attention. Extensive sites of this nature have been discovered at Sorte Muld on the island of Bornholm, at Gudme on the island of Funen, at Upokrå in Skåne and possibly at Jakuszowice in western Lesser Poland. These settlements have provided evidence of a variety of manufacturing processes, a huge series of finds of Roman

imports, including coins, and sometimes traces of grand buildings (Bursche, 1998, 205, footnote 10; Watt, 2009; Lund Hansen, 2009).

A further difficulty in using the application developed for the TIR-FOR project with the Barbaricum area arises from the fact that, in practice, archaeologists dealing with these areas tend to use a system of relative chronological phases rather than an absolute chronology. For the dating of artifacts from the area of Barbarian Europe, both regional and supra-regional systems of relative chronology have been developed that are based primarily on the results of the typological analysis of metal parts of attire, among which *fibulae* are particularly important (Almgren, 1923), as well as other categories of finds, such as elements of armament. Sometimes it was also possible to carry out planigraphic studies; i.e. the horizontal stratigraphy of extensive, long-used cemeteries. It was only at a later stage of the research procedure that it could be determined which intervals, expressed in absolute dates, corresponded to the individual stages of relative chronology. These findings are based primarily on the results of an analysis of co-occurrence in



FIGURE 2. Finds from the Torsberger Moor (Germany). Photo: Archäologisches Landesmuseum Schleswig Schloss Gottorf (acc. to Blankefeldt, von Carnap-Bornheim 2018).

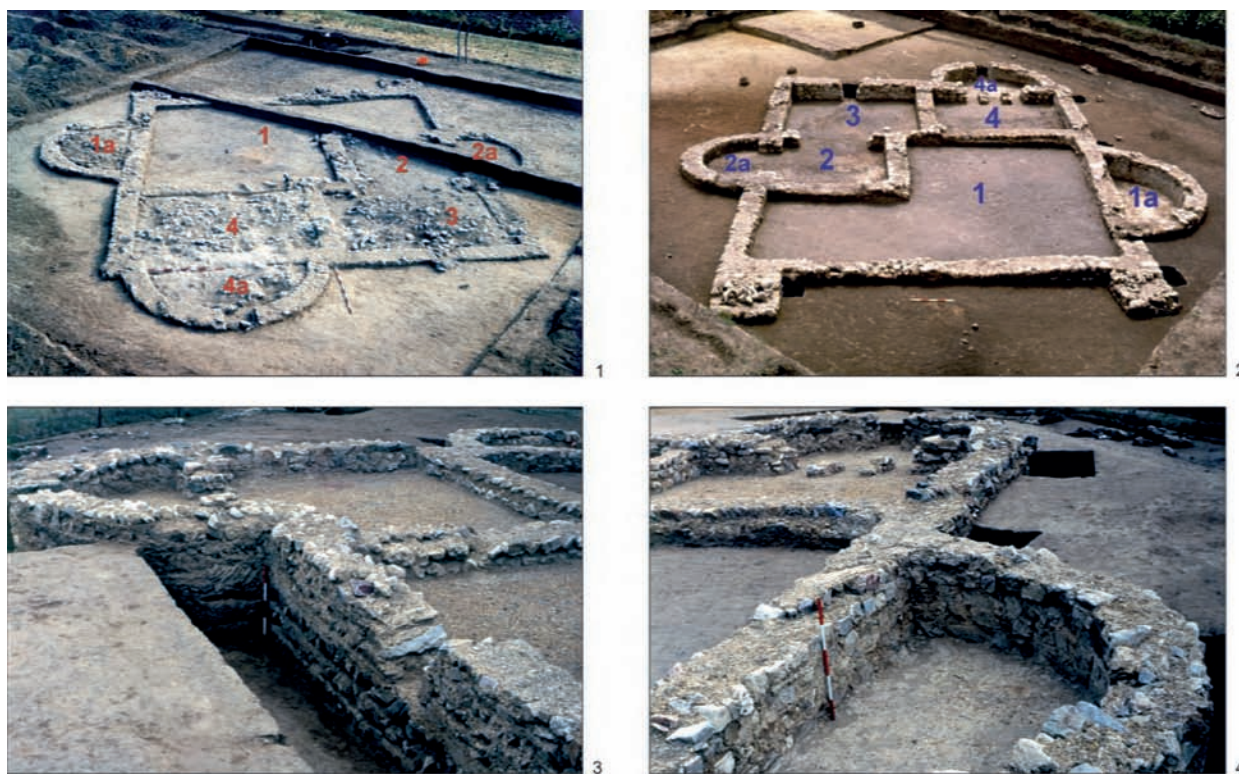


FIGURE 3. Bratislava-Dúbravka (Slovakia). Bath. 1. View from the west; 2. View from the east; 3. Caldarium/room 4 and 4a, view from the south-east; 4. Frigidarium/room 1a in the foreground, view from the north-east (acc. to Elschek, 2017).

compact sets (i.e. graves, hoards) of artifacts of Barbarian origin with precisely dated objects imported from the Roman state. The above inference has also been contrasted with findings from studies of the image of Barbarians in Roman iconography (cf. Eggers, 1955; Godłowski, 1970; Krierer, 1998; Hunter, 2009). Furthermore, data obtained by natural dating methods have been taken into account. This remark applies mainly to dendrochronology and sometimes also to radiocarbon dating; i.e. the C14 method (cf. Komoróczy, Vlach, Hüssen, Rajtár, 2019). Therefore, the absolute chronology of the different phases of the Roman period in the Barbaricum area still needs to be refined further.

An equally complex issue is the dating of certain objects of Roman provenance found in areas located to the east and north of the Limes. This applies in particular to republican *denarii*, as well as *denarii* minted in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. As can be presumed, their

circulation in the Barbarian environment, unlike many other categories of imports, may have sometimes lasted much longer than in the Roman Empire. Among the many finds supporting this thesis is the tomb of the Frankish king, Childeric, who died in 481 or 482, discovered in Tournai (Belgium) in the mid-17th century. The furnishings of this tomb included silver coins, among which the earliest chronological position is occupied by a republican *denarius*; i.e. more than 500 years older than the burial of the ruler. This was not an exceptional find, as it was accompanied by other *denarii* dating from the 1st and 2nd centuries AD (Quast, 2015, 179).

The example cited above shows that, while a coin's date of issue determines the *terminus post quem* for the dating of an assemblage or site in Barbaricum, it does not necessarily determine its chronological position. The dating of a given find must therefore take into account the results of an analysis of the entire context in which it

was discovered. For this reason, the system of relative dating developed by H.J. Eggers, with later modifications (Motyková-Šneidrová, 1965; Godłowski, 1970; Liana, 1970; Tejral, 1988; 1992), should be applied to the monuments from the Barbaricum area.

4. NEW RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

Slightly different in character from the *Tabula Imperii Romani* is the series *Corpus der römischen Funde im europäischen Barbaricum*, which was initiated by the Römisch-Germanische Kommission of the German Archaeological Institute. Currently, the Institute of Archaeology of the Jagiellonian University, in collaboration with the Faculty of Archaeology of the University of Warsaw, is working on the Polish edition of this series under the auspices of the UAI and the International TIR-FOR Commission (Nowakowski, 2001; Kaczanowski, Bodzek, Przychodni, Zuch 2017; Jakubczyk, Bursche, Mączyńska 2018). These volumes contain more data of interest to archaeologists of central and northern Europe, including the context of the find, type of monument, relative chronology, etc. An integral part of the volume are also illustrations and lists of particular categories of finds, such as coins, *terra sigillata*, etc.

The information contained both in volume M-34 Kraków and in the volumes of the *Corpus der römischen Funde im europäischen Barbaricum* can provide a basis for multifaceted analyses of the mechanisms and routes of the influx of Roman imports into Barbaricum, studies of the structure and chronology of these finds, as well as their presumed functions in the economic system and symbolic culture of the societies living there. These data can also be used to reconstruct the course of trade routes, which in areas outside the Limes should be understood as general directions of exchange. In all the cases mentioned above, it's necessary to pay attention to the broad environmental and settlement contexts in which the finds of Roman imports occur.

On the one hand, the examples selected of different types of finds, mentioned above,

demonstrate the complexity of Roman-Barbarian relations while, on the other hand, they illustrate the enormity of the research tasks facing archaeologists today. In the future, these studies may also result in new cartographic views of the Barbaricum area.

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