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## Conquest, Political Space and Sound in Antiquity: Concerning Barbarians and Romans, and Roman Discourse on Music and Civilization

### Summary

During the period of their expansion, Roman sources conceive of Barbarian musical instruments – trumpets and drums – as ‘strange’ or ‘savage’ and their sounds as unmusical. In both Greek and Latin literature the Barbarian world is viewed as a space of noise, especially in the West, and Barbarians’ ignorance of music becomes a mark of their inhumanity since musical knowledge is believed to lead to a harmonious society. Only the Eastern Barbarians seem truly musical, being closer to Greek civilization. Nevertheless Eastern music is effeminate and lascivious, like the Orient itself. Such an opposition feeds Roman discourses on acculturation which enable Rome to assert its moral superiority over other cultures. It also gives us an idea of the manner in which Romans perceived their own music.

Keywords: Barbarians; noise; savagery; war; ethnography; identity; ancient Rome

Während der römischen Expansionszeit wurden barbarische Instrumente – Trompete und Trommel – in den Quellen als ‚eigenartig‘ oder ‚primitiv‘ und ihr Klang als unmusikalisch verstanden. Sowohl in der griechischen als auch in der lateinischen Literatur wird die Welt der Barbaren – vor allem im Westen – als ein von Krach erfüllter Raum beschrieben. Ihre Ignoranz gegenüber Musik wurde zum Zeichen ihrer Unmenschlichkeit, da nur musikalisches Wissen zu einer harmonischen Gesellschaft führte. Nur die östlichen Barbaren schienen wahrhaft musikalisch, da sie in größerer Nähe zur griechischen Gesellschaft lebten. Dennoch galt ihre Musik als verweichlicht und wollüstig – wie der Orient selbst. Dieser Gegensatz nährte den römischen Diskurs über Akkulturation und legitimierte die moralische Überlegenheit der Römer über andere. Dies erlaubt auch Rückschlüsse auf die Wahrnehmung ihrer eigenen Musik.

Keywords: Barbaren; Krach; Wildheit; Krieg; Ethnographie; Identität; antikes Rom

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## I Introduction

During the Roman Empire, between 27 BCE and 476 CE, music theoreticians, all belonging to a philosophical school, agree that amongst Greeks and Romans music has a philosophical dimension, and that Greeks and Romans frequently express degrees of civilization of parts of the Empire in terms of their musics. The work of the music theoretician Aristides Quintilianus sets the tone in this regard, when Barbarian peoples are reviewed on the basis of their relationship to music, ranging from the *Garamantes* and Iberians “savage and like wild animals” and the Phoenicians and Carthaginians “who display excessive moral weakness” to the Thracians and Celts who are “excessive in their anger and wild in war”. He concludes: “on the contrary, peoples who have devoted themselves to the study of music and to the healthy practice of this art – I mean the Greek people and any other which has followed their example – are richly gifted in qualities and knowledge, and, furthermore, are distinguished by their humanity.”<sup>1</sup>

For the Ancients, music had a broader definition than it has today: for them it is a science (*scientia*) that is based on an eruditely elaborated theory, but it also has a religious basis. All musical instruments – organ and trumpet excepted – have a divine origin. It also carries a civic dimension, especially with regard to military musicians and musicians concerned with public cults and games in the service of the city. But it is especially its educative impact that various authors stress: the metaphor of musical harmony as pledge of social harmony is a well-known theme since Cicero:<sup>2</sup> in Rome *Concordia* is the translation of *Harmonia*.<sup>3</sup> It is on the basis of this definition that the Romans consider what music, or conversely, its perceived absence, could mean amongst Barbarian peoples.

This perception of musics of the Other is the consequence of a ‘Romanocentric’ perspective of authors who, often, may never have had direct contact with the Barbarian peoples themselves. The Barbarians have left us no written testimony of their music during the Roman period: Barbarian oral poetic repertoire has entirely disappeared. Even their art provides only very rare images of musical instruments, and our only good body of archaeological evidence comprises the ‘metallic archives’ of remains of horns and trumpets. Although very remarkable, this resource is very restricted in its scope and does not allow us access to their wider musical universe; thus only the discourse of the Greeks and Romans enables us to begin to interpret the image that Rome has of Barbarian music.

1 Aristides Quintilianus, *De Musica* II. 5. The author is probably writing during the 2nd century CE.

2 Cicero, *De Republica*, II. 42.69.

3 Poulle 2002, 285.

## 2 Barbarian and civilized: a system of opposing values

Contrary to formerly accepted ideas, recent research shows that the Barbarian and Graeco-Roman worlds were not closed spaces that existed in isolation: there were early contacts and in due course major commercial trading connections between them, for example, between the Mediterranean world and the Celts.<sup>4</sup> Yet literary sources give the impression of two antagonistic worlds, and an entire system of opposition is developed in both literature and imagery.<sup>5</sup> The Barbarian in the West lives in a hostile environment (in the middle of forests and marshes), he has a peculiar physique (tall, with long hair); moreover his mode of dress (naked in combat or covered in furs<sup>6</sup>), his house (made of wood), his wild customs (human sacrifice in Carthage; severed heads among Gallic warriors); and these are some of the many elements that sunder him from the Greeks and Romans. The perception of aboriginal peoples in these antique sources is based upon a need to express the advantages and superiority of the Graeco-Roman world. This in turn allows and encourages the creation of a notional barrier, even a frontier, between the worlds of the city and of the Barbarian. It is based largely upon stereotypes and ethnotypes. Theodore S. Schmidt calls this “the technique of contrast”, referring to Plutarch’s discourse,<sup>7</sup> that leads to the literary disadvantage of the Barbarian world.

Ancient theory of climate further contributes to the marginalization of the Barbarian of the North. For the Ancients, Earth is divided into five areas (two polar and cold zones, a warm zone and two temperate ones): and the degree of barbarism of a people partly corresponds to its situation in an extreme zone. Thus the climates of the North and South are characterized by ferocity, and their inhabitants share this nature, while the temperate zone brings equilibrium. In his *De architectura*, Vitruvius considers that Italy, because of its intermediate position, is “a unique region regarding its equilibrium” and that this character explains and justifies its current political hegemony.<sup>8</sup> The ignorance and savagery of the Barbarians predisposes them in turn to be dominated by Rome. In this ethnographical vision, formed by the victors, of Barbarian people, the question of music – one that has not previously seemed of much interest to modern historians<sup>9</sup> – contributes to definitions of difference, and appears as an important element in Romans’ cultural and political model of the Barbarian world.

The dominant ideological discourse firstly raises the question of the existence of music. Antique authors sometimes record the absence of music or the absence of certain musical aptitudes amongst foreigners; for instance, in his *Histories*, Herodotus is

4 Goudineau 1991; Buschenschütz 2004.

5 See Dauge 1981; Thollard 1987; for Germany, Chevallier 1961.

6 Only shepherds and Barbarians wore furs: Lavergne 2002, 218.

7 Schmidt 1999, 328.

8 Vitruvius, *De architectura* VI. 1.

9 Wille 1967, 562–576, has sketched a method by gathering texts related to several Barbarian peoples: he reviews the Etruscans, the Gauls, the Germans, the Carthaginians.

surprised by the absence of auletes (players on the *aulos*) during sacrifices amongst the Persians.<sup>10</sup> However, F. Hartog has convincingly explained that Herodotus' representation was no more than a mirror, aimed first and foremost at reflecting back to the Greeks an image of their own superior identity.<sup>11</sup> Plutarch shows that Scythians not only ignore the vine but also eschew cities and the music of auletes.<sup>12</sup> He goes so far as to make fun of the king of the Scythians who preferred to hear the whinny of his horses than listen to the music of the great aulete Ismenias,<sup>13</sup> which echoes his animal nature. Aristides Quintilianus considers that Barbarian people, being "savage and like wild animals", are not capable of tasting "the beauties offered by music."<sup>14</sup> Such ideas would prove very resilient. Still in the 18th century, the French philosopher Rousseau could persist in the notion that "le vrai sauvage ne chante jamais" ('the real savage never sings').<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, most scholars today would accept that "total indifference to music (any music) is exceptional" and indeed that there seems to be no society without music.<sup>16</sup> Rather, every people has its own preferred kinds of sound- and music-making. Barbarian music, when ancient texts agree to give it any credit, is often portrayed as disconcerting. For the Romans, the Barbarian, because of his isolation from civilization, is close to nature and thus prefers sound tools which have not been modified by human hand: "some Barbarians" blow into conches (*stromboi*),<sup>17</sup> their huge spiral-shaped shells being considered suited to use as rudimentary horns before the invention of the metal trumpet. The Scythians, meanwhile, reportedly use *pletra* made of goats' hooves.<sup>18</sup>

Should a Barbarian people turn out to know something of music, it is naturally considered as a cause for surprise, as it is by Strabo in considering the Dardanians, neighbours of the Thracians,<sup>19</sup> who "live in a wild state to the point of living in holes made under their manure stack" but who "still are interested in music; they play it on *auloi* as well as stringed instruments". However, it must also be said that these are Barbarians who are living in close contact with the Greeks.

10 Herodot, *Historiae* I.132.

11 Hartog 1980.

12 The Symposium of the Seven Sages, 5 (Plutarch, *moralia* 150 D).

13 Plutarch, *Apophthegmata laconica* 18.

14 Aristides Quintilianus, *De Musica* II. 5,6–11.

15 Rousseau 1768, s. v. Chant, p. 82: "quoique les

Sauvages de l'Amérique chantent, parce qu'ils parlent, le vrai Sauvage ne chanta jamais".

16 Sève 2003, 70.

17 Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus musicos* 24.

18 Pollux, *Onomastikon* IV. 60.

19 Strabon, *Geographica* VII. 5.7.

### 3 A different vision of the eastern Barbarians: a music, yes, but languid

The discourse on barbarism, although made up of recurrent stereotypes and often applied to several peoples indiscriminately,<sup>20</sup> is not uniform. We can observe a difference between the perception of the eastern and western Barbarians, as the former are considered more uncouth while the latter are wilder because the western limits of the Empire are regarded as the domain of savagery and obscurantism (resistance to wider knowledge).

The musical portrait of the eastern Barbarian is generally less negative because, living closer to Greek civilization, this Barbarian knows urban civilization. Athenaeus points out that “several Barbarians also negotiate to the sound of the *aulos* and of the zither in order to soften the heart of their enemy.”<sup>21</sup> Plutarch takes care to state that the king of the Parthians and the king of the Armenians “offered each other parties and feasts where shows from Greece were often introduced” because both kings knew Greek and it is even said that Euripides’ *Bacchantes* was played in front of the Parthians.<sup>22</sup> But to live close to the Greeks is not enough: music produced by these peoples corresponds to the supposed faults of Eastern people (Parthians, Syrians or Phoenicians): effeminate, corrupt, soft and perverted. For instance, the Syrian king Sardanapalus, paragon of luxury and vice, lives surrounded by men and women dancing to the sound of a softening music.<sup>23</sup> It paints a vivid picture of the ravages of *truphè* (luxury) among Eastern peoples.

The conquest of the Greek East (Macedonia, Asia Minor) towards the end of the Republic coincides with the introduction of the harp into Rome (Fig. 1),<sup>24</sup> appearing in Latin vocabulary as *sambuca*, *chordae obliquae*, *psaltria* just after the conquest,<sup>25</sup> and also the lute *pandura*; both are eastern musical instruments.<sup>26</sup> The Greeks start to distinguish Greek instruments from ‘foreign’ instruments, the latter sometimes retaining their Barbarian names, as noted by Strabo.<sup>27</sup> The conquest also leads to the import from the Eastern world of many slave musicians in Rome, in sharp contrast to the Barbarian West which, according to Cicero, was unable to produce a single well-read slave.<sup>28</sup>

20 Schmidt 1999, 332 notes the lack of real differentiation between Barbarian peoples.

21 Athenaios, *Deipnosophistae* XIV. 627c.

22 Plutarch, *Crassus* 33.

23 Dio of Prusa, *Discourses* IV. 106; LXII. 6.

24 Several oriental populations are associated with the harp: the Egyptians of course, but also the Parthians and the Troglodytes (on the Red Sea) who “played the four-string *sambyke*” (Athen. XIV. 633f).

25 Vendries 1999, 111–116 and 217.

26 On the lute amongst the Parthians: Duchesne-Guillemin 1984–1985, 23–28.

27 Strabon, *Geographica* X. 3.17.

28 The prosopography of slave musicians in Rome demonstrates the preponderance of eastern names: none has a Celtic name. See Cicero, *epistulae ad Atticum* IV. 16.7: the island of Britain “offers no hope of booty besides slaves amongst whom I think you should not expect to find any that are literate or musicians”.



Fig. 1 Imported from the East: the harp in Roman art. Woman with harp. From Boscoreale, Villa rustica; Stuttgart, Württembergischen Landesmuseums.

Athenaeus acknowledges an eastern legacy in terms of music theory, when he explains that Lydian and Phrygian harmonies “come from the Barbarians”.<sup>29</sup> The theoretician Aristoxenus of Tarentum already knew that in his own time – during the 4th century BCE – theatres were becoming ‘Barbarian’ because of the musical mixes that arose between Greek and Eastern traditions.<sup>30</sup>

The expansion and opening up of Rome to the East, through the conquest of Asia, Anatolia and Egypt, has musical and therefore also moral consequences: the enrichment of the palette of sounds marks the abandonment of the masculine music that was supposedly symbolic of Rome’s heroic origins. This musical transformation is deprecated by the moralists who regret the lost ‘purity’ of the old music. And that is perhaps why the harp came to be rejected in Rome by the élite, because of its Eastern connotation; for this instrument, like the lute, and unlike the Greek lyres, seems to have remained very marginal.

29 Athenaios, *Deipnosophistae* XIV. 625e.

30 Aristoxenos, *Historia harmonicae* XIV. 632b.

While the existence of music amongst the Eastern peoples is admitted, some musical practices still continue to be viewed as peculiar: for instance, among percussion instruments, drums are used only by the Parthians and the Indians<sup>31</sup> – whereas Greeks and Romans use the tambourine instead – and for them such drums occupy the place of horns in warfare.<sup>32</sup> This comes as a surprise to the Greeks and Romans. Eastern ignorance of the use of horns in warfare is part of a wider ignorance of the rules of war: the Parthians “do not know how to fight in line and close, nor to besiege or take cities”;<sup>33</sup> their drums struck “with hammers” produce “deafeningly loud sounds such as a mix of wild howlings and thunder.”<sup>34</sup> Sometimes the uses of a music make it suspect, as when music is used to accompany the bloody rituals of the Carthaginians, descendants of the Phoenicians, with human sacrifices described by Plutarch: “the entire space in front of the statue [of the god Baal] was filled with the sound of the *auloi* and of the tambourines (*tympanoi*), so that no one could hear the screams” of the murdered children.<sup>35</sup>

#### 4 Sound production among the Celts and the Germans: a music close to noise

The Barbarian West offers a peculiar aspect since its distance from the Mediterranean and Greece implies the absence of any theatrical tradition. This does not help its relationship to music. The most distant peoples (Germans and Britons) apparently lack music of any sort: German music is completely absent and there is not a single mention of any horn in Tacitus’ *Germania* – a sign of the greatest savagery. And if these Barbarians even try to make music it immediately recalls the noises of the less melodious animals: the emperor Julian states that he has seen Barbarians “from beyond the Rhine [...] sing wild poems (*agriæ melè*), which recall the cawing of husky birds.”<sup>36</sup> There is no mention of any music amongst the Britons described in Tacitus’ *Agricola*. Their position in the ‘Far West’ of the known world and their unsophisticated state seem tacitly to preclude the knowledge of any form of music.

It is upon the Gauls that ancient authors have focused, making them the sole people for whom we have any detailed information regarding their sound-making and musical practices. Of these authors, the Greeks are our prime source for Gallic trumpets (notably

31 Quintus Curtius, *Historiae Alexandri Magni* VIII. 11.20–21.

32 Quintus Curtius, *Historiae Alexandri Magni* VIII. 14.10.

33 Junianus Justinus, *Epitoma historiarum Philippicarum* XLI. 2.7.

34 Plutarch, *Crassus* 23.

35 Plutarch, *De superstitione* 13 (*Moralia* 171). This theme has been adopted by Flaubert in his novel *Salammbô*.

36 Julian, *Misopogon* VII. 1.

Polybius and Diodorus). Julius Caesar mentions such things only once, and without offering any description.<sup>37</sup> Polybius, on the other hand, provides an informative picture of the sounds heard during the Telamon battle, between Celts and Romans in the plain of the River Po: “the quantity of horns and trumpets was innumerable<sup>38</sup> and there was also a cheer so vast and loud when this entire army began shouting its war song, that not only the soldiers’ instruments, but also the surrounding places that were echoing, seemed to shout<sup>39</sup> Celtic horns are described by Diodorus as “resounding and Barbarian”, probably alluding to the *carnyx*.<sup>40</sup> The zoomorphic character of the *carnyx* attested by the notice of a lexicographer<sup>41</sup> – it is the sole Celtic music instrument known by its name – and the remains of *carnyces* discovered at Tintignac (Corrèze, France) have confirmed the terrifying aspect of such ornament.<sup>42</sup> The Gauls are often depicted as having a “frightening appearance” (Diodorus) and the Cimbrians seen by Plutarch wear helmets figuring the “open mouths of strange and formidable animals.”<sup>43</sup> In these conditions, how could their music not be strange?

In depictions of the battlefield, Barbarian horns are shown symbolically rather than as strict portraits of musical instruments, and indeed the *carnyx*, because of its especially emblematic character, is often sufficient to symbolize Gallic identity. The horn of the Barbarians does not, it seems, have the same function of structuring and ordering the battlefield as the Roman *tuba* has.<sup>44</sup> It is meant to motivate the warriors and to provoke fear amongst their enemies, yet apparently not to deliver coherent signals of the kind that the Romans used.<sup>45</sup> When shown on Celtic coinage, horns are associated with Celtic leaders (Fig. 2),<sup>46</sup> whereas in Roman art they appear only in the context of the Triumph, and specifically of Barbarian submission. Already on Greek coins from Aetolia, minted after the victory over Brennus’ *Galatae* at Delphi in 279 BCE, the *carnyx* that lies on the floor is crushed by the personification of Aetolia, while the horn even has its mouth shut in order to show that its cannot sound any more. In Roman iconography, meanwhile, the *carnyx* is the sole Barbarian horn ever shown: it is either portrayed being destroyed by Roman chariots, or set on top of trophies (captured weapons, armour and insignia).<sup>47</sup>

37 Caesar, *De bello Gallico* VII. 81.3 (with Vercingetorix) and VIII. 20.2 (Gauls calling the assembly with trumpets).

38 The theme of the multitude can be applied to the literature of the Barbarians: cf. Schmidt 1999.

39 Polybius, *Historiae* II. 29.68.

40 Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* V. 30.

41 Eustathius, s. v. *carnyx*.

42 For archaeological testimonies on the *carnyx*, see Roncador 2009 for the *carnyx* of Sanzeno in north Italy, and Maniquet 2011 for the *carnyces* of Tintignac in Gaul.

43 Plutarch, *Marius* 25.10.

44 Aristides Quintilianus, *De Musica* II. 4; Vegetius, *Epitome of Military Science*, II, 22 on the respective rôles of the *tubae* and *cornua* and the relationship between sound signals and insignia.

45 On Celtic trumpets: Vendries 1993; Vendries 1999 and Vendries and Clodoré 2002; for archaeological testimonies on the *carnyx* see again Roncador 2009 for the *carnyx* of Sanzeno in north Italy, and Maniquet 2011 for the *carnyces* of Tintignac in Gaul.

46 Hunter 2009.





Fig. 2 Roman coin showing a Barbarian horn presented in association with leadership. 2nd century BCE.



Fig. 3 Roman horns on Trajan's Column, Rome. From a modern bronze cast preserved in the Musée des Antiquités Nationales, St-Germain-en-Laye. Marble original, 113 CE.

On the columns of Trajan and Aurelius in Rome, only Roman horns (*tubae* and *cornua*) are shown (Fig. 3), ever-present during fights against the Dacian or German Barbarians, whereas the horns of the Barbarians themselves are nowhere represented. Sometimes, curiously, triumphal reliefs representing the Dacian wars ascribe the *cornyx* to the Dacians, which thereby becomes a generic symbol of the Barbarian. The multiplicity of Roman horns on Trajan's column offers a fine illustration of Quintilian's words on Roman military superiority: "the brighter the sounds [of the horns], the more the glory of

the Roman armies dominates in war over all others.”<sup>48</sup>

Besides the sounds of horns, other expressions of sound are related to military activity. When the sources evoke first of all the fights between Rome and the Celts, the sounding and clinking elements are all put forward: the crash of weapons against shields (Titus Livius; Dionysus of Halicarnassus), the small bells attached by the Celts of Scotland to the bottoms of their spears (Cassius Dio),<sup>49</sup> the shouts and the war songs of the Germans (Tacitus). According to Tacitus,<sup>50</sup> in order to sing their *barditus*, the Germans “who are essentially seeking to emphasize the roughness of the sound and the huskiness of their roars” place their shields in front of their mouths in order to make their voices resonate. Singing and sound-making amongst Barbarians thus seems to be being defined as an acoustic but non-musical phenomenon, which is to say noise rather than music. In the value system of the Ancients, noise thus becomes a defining attribute of the Barbarian and a defining element in Barbarian practices:<sup>51</sup> their geographical marginality is then doubled by a cultural marginality. In the *Vita Homeri*, roars characterize the Barbarians, in opposition to the quiet of the Greeks.<sup>52</sup> Already for Homer, the Barbarian is exemplified by noise, and Xenophon describes Cyrus’ Persian army as moving forward with great noise.<sup>53</sup> Plutarch several times uses words such as *kraugè* and *thorubos* to evoke the hullabaloo of the Barbarian armies. The otherness of the Barbarians is thus measured by the way they produce sounds. The latin term *carmen* or the Greek *melè* are applied to songs, whereas the term for music (*mousikè*) is never used to define the sounds of Celts or Germans. It seems however that the absence of music has one advantage, for Tacitus: total ignorance of music, in his view, offers the Barbarian a defence against easy pleasures, when he praises the purity of customs of the Germans who eschew those shows and feasts which are leading to moral corruption in Rome.<sup>54</sup>

Such discourse on Barbarianism and music represents in a sense a warning to those peoples of the Greek world who appear to ignore the beneficial effects of music. Polybius tells that in Arcadia citizens of Kynaitha are the only ones *not* to cultivate music, which has led to the introduction of disorder and has made their nature rough.<sup>55</sup>

47 Desnier 1991.

48 Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* I.10.14

49 Cassius Dio, *Historia Romana* 77.12.

50 Tacitus, *Germania* III. 2. See Speidel 2004, 111.

51 Schmidt 1999, 29–30, 46–47, 88–89, 157–159.

52 Pseudo-Herodotus, *De vita Homeri* 149.5. Quoted in Schmidt 1999, 157.

53 Xenophon, *anabasis* I. 7.4.

54 Tacitus, *Germania* XIX. 1 and XXIV. 1: the only type of permitted spectacle consists in making young men jump with weapons in their hands.

55 Polybios, *Historiae* IV. 21.5–12. This story has since become famous and is used by Rousseau in his *Dictionary of Music*. Rousseau 1768, under *musique*.

## 5 From ‘noise’ to ‘music’ thanks to Greek influence: when the Gauls become ‘good savages’

For Posidonius, who visited southern Gaul in around 100 BCE, the Hellenization of the Gauls who had enjoyed contact with Greek culture allows some mitigation of the Barbarian condition. For Julius Caesar such mitigation brings with it a realization that the Gauls can indeed be assimilated.<sup>56</sup> For him and others after him, however, the same cannot be said of the Germans; and that is why the Rhine will in future become an ideological as well as a political frontier between Civilization and the Barbarian.<sup>57</sup> Strabo also notes how Barbarians from Iberia can be transformed: the Turdetans, he writes, are “entirely converted to the Roman lifestyle”; the Celtiberians “have adopted the Italian lifestyle”; the Cavares “deserve no longer to be called Barbarians”; the Gallic peoples living around Marseille “have abandoned war and are turning to citizenly activities”. In contrast to Cicero, of course, Strabo is writing at a time when pacification is starting to take effect, at the beginning of the Principate during the reign of Augustus (from around 27 BCE to 14 CE): such Barbarians are no longer to be pushed aside, now they are to be integrated.

The evocations of encounters with music by the anonymous 1st-century Greek poet ‘Pseudo-Scymnus’<sup>58</sup> and of the poetic and musical activities of the Gallic bards (*bardos* or *mousikos*) by Diodorus Siculus<sup>59</sup> or Ammianus Marcellinus<sup>60</sup> at last offer us the opportunity to set aside sounds of war and the sphere of noise. Descriptions of the bard singing poems to the accompaniment of the lyre have been corroborated by the discovery at Paule, in modern Brittany, of a stone statue of a lyre-player, which has been dated to the 2nd century BCE: a time when trade between Brittany (or Armorica as it then was) and the Mediterranean region is well documented (Fig. 4). Found in an aristocratic settlement continuously occupied for several centuries, this exceptional document seems to confirm knowledge of the lyre amongst bards active within the milieu of the Celtic aristocracy. The celebration of the bard in the form of a stone statue, preserved in the settlement along with other ancestral portraits, seems to borrow a form of Mediterranean commemoration that Y. Menez identifies in the *lararia* (shrines to the *lares*, the protective deities) of the houses of Pompeii, where images of the ancestors were preserved.<sup>61</sup> This statue thus begins to allow us to nuance the Roman image of a Gallic music that

56 Caesar, *De bello Gallico* VI.

57 Thébert 1995, 222.

58 ‘Pseudo-Scymnus,’ 183–186.

59 Diodorus Siculus V, 31.

60 Ammianus Marcellinus XV, 9.

61 Four stylistically similar statues have been found on the site: each is anthropomorphic and dates from

the 2nd or 1st century BCE. The statue with the lyre wears a *torc* (penannular neck-ring) and, perhaps, a diadem. None comes from a sanctuary. Menez sees evidence of a family-based ancestor cult among the leading Gaulish aristocratic families, as part of a process of elevating the dead to heroic status. Cf. Ménez 1999.



Fig. 4 Celtic statue of a lyre player. Saint-Symphorien-en-Paule, Côtes d'Armor, Brittany, 2nd century BCE.

only sounded 'noisy'. It is consistent with the statements of some ancient authors who consider the Celts to be Greek-lovers who are breaking from barbarism thanks to Greek influence: and the figure of the bard with his lyre may be taken to represent this 'Barbarian wisdom':

## 6 A metaphorical image of the civilizing influence of music on Barbarians: Orpheus charming the wild animals

During the early part of the Empire, while the integration of the Barbarians is not yet expressed in the same terms as the building of the Empire and of its provinces, Roman iconography continues to invite an allegorical interpretation of Rome's political domination over the Barbarian world. The wild animals charmed by Orpheus become a metaphor for the Barbarians' submission to Civilization: the cithara player is placed at the centre, shown from the front or in three-quarters view, while the animals, placed

at the periphery, in repose, extend their legs to express their submission. This image, which exists only in Roman iconography, proved highly popular in mosaic compositions of the Imperial period, especially in the West and during the 2nd and 4th centuries CE. The choice of Orpheus as a topos to represent Civilization dominating Barbarianism stemmed from the literature, where comparisons between animals and barbarism were frequently made. Some have said that there is a “real identity with nature” because Barbarian and beast alike represent something that has to be fought and dominated.<sup>62</sup> There are several conspicuous examples of such association in the literature:<sup>63</sup> Diodorus says of the Ligurians that they have “the vigour of wild animals” and that the Libyans “have the lifestyle of wild animals”; Seneca, regarding the Germans and the Scythians, affirms that “all the nations whose savagery makes them independent resemble lions and wolves.”<sup>64</sup> The shouts of the *Ambrones* of northern Germany evoke the “hootings of wild animals”<sup>65</sup> while the howling of other Germans is called *barritus* in reference to the trumpeting of the elephant.<sup>66</sup>

Eventually the music that characterizes the civilized world allows the pacification of the ‘animal’ by using the same method for “the men of savage customs very close to the state of animals.”<sup>67</sup> Music’s educative and ethical virtues, praised everywhere within the Empire, can thus be applied, with much the same methods and success, to the Barbarians as they can to the wild animals, since the Barbarian is demonstrably close to the animal not only because of his physical aspect but also because of several other traits, such as the wearing of animal skins and furs.<sup>68</sup> For Macrobius “even the wildest characters and the fiercest hearts are forced to yield to the influence of harmony”, and that is why Orpheus and Ambion symbolize the power that singing has over the Barbarian, who, like the animals, lacks reason, “because they were the first to use poetry and music to soften the wild peoples.”<sup>69</sup> Whether applied to the wild animal (*theria*) or to the Barbarian, one may often observe this same dichotomy in various forms of discourse on ‘otherness’, and indeed rhetorical reference to ‘wild nature’ has been used (and abused) on many occasions during more recent times, in relation to indigenous peoples.<sup>70</sup>

So, thanks in part to the myth of the musician Orpheus, “*pax romana* came to coincide with *pax musicalis*.”<sup>71</sup> On the reverses of Imperial coins minted in Alexandria under

62 Dauge 1981, 605–606.

63 Stern 1973, 65, no. 54, gives other literary references. See also Garezou 1994, 104.

64 Seneca, *De Ira* II. 15.4. Dauge 1981, 605 considers that this book is “a typical example of this system of correlations”. On the theme of the bestiality of Barbarians: Schmidt 1999, 29–35.

65 Plutarch, *Marius* 20.2–3.

66 Ammianus Marcellinus XVI. 12.43 and XXVI. 7.16.

67 Aristides Quintilianus, *De Musica* III. 8.17–20.

68 On this stereotype of Barbarianism as applied to the Gauls, Germans and Scythians: Besnier 1873–1919 [1905] s. v. *Pelles*, 373; Lavergne 2002, 219.

69 Macrobius, *commentarius in Ciceronis somnium Scipionis* II. 3.7–8.

70 Thomas 1985, 50.

71 Garezou 1994, 104.



Fig. 5 Orpheus plays the lyre to wild animals. Coin of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. Alexandria, 164 CE (Paris, Cabinet des Médailles).

Antoninus Pius, and then in 164 CE under Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus,<sup>72</sup> we can see Orpheus playing the lyre to the wild animals (Fig. 5). Here he appears as “the symbol of the superior man who knows how to master human passions around him to create concord”, following the teachings of the philosopher Frontinus found in a letter to his pupil, the young Marcus Aurelius.<sup>73</sup> The symbolic value of the figure of Orpheus as musician cannot have been lost on the prince, and its wider use can only have reinforced his political reputation, civilizing, in effect, the Barbarian world.

We have no idea of the way in which imported Roman music was perceived by the indigenous peoples involved, and the question of its acculturation has never been addressed by historians:<sup>74</sup> nevertheless, in each city the sounds of trumpets and *tibiae* must have resounded in the forum, in front of temples and during processions, and the iconography shows that the *tibicen* was even enlisted to celebrate the rituals of indigenous divinities. The integration of Graeco-Roman musical culture was no doubt slow, and would have remained incomplete even in those annexed territories that became

72 On this coin: Stern 1973, pl. XXXII, 1 (Antoninus) and 2 (Marcus Aurelius); Stern 1980, pl. XIII, 12 (Marcus Aurelius); Poole 1892, no. 1372 (Lucius Verus) and pl. XI.

73 Marcus Cornelius Fronto, *epistulae*. (Loeb ed., 71–75). The same notion can be found in the case of Chinese emperor Fou Hi, who would have fixed musical rules in order to tame wild animals and to bring peace amongst civil servants: Duchemin 1960,

145.

74 Only Chr. Goudineau briefly raises the question (Goudineau 1993, 106): “Les formes culturelles antérieures, architecture, musique, poésie, peinture etc. [...] se sont effacées devant la nouvelle culture, reconnue comme supérieure” (‘Previous cultural forms, architecture, music, poetry, painting, etc. [...] have faded before the new culture, [which is] recognized as superior’).

provinces of the Roman Empire. When Philostratus mentions the alarm expressed by the inhabitants of the small city of Hispala in Spain, under the Empire, when first discovering actors wearing masks and *cothurnes* (the half-length buskin boots favoured by tragedians) his anecdote may serve to remind us that theatrical practice and music are profoundly linked only to urban society. Familiarity with, and taste for, theatre and music in the Roman style was therefore not necessarily shared by everyone in the Empire.

## 7 Conclusion

Within the frameworks developed by the Greeks and the Romans, the Barbarian peoples remain at the frontier of the civilized world precisely because of their lack of musical culture (*amousia*) or their improper use of music (*kakomousia*).<sup>75</sup> This view does not seem to have changed much over the centuries, since stereotypes of Barbarians exist until the end of Antiquity. Thus Greek and Roman discourse on Barbarism remains unfixed and undefined in chronological terms. In describing the sound effects produced by horns during the Barbarian wars of the 4th century CE, we find the writer Ammianus Marcellinus employing much the same clichés.<sup>76</sup> This dual vision of music thus contributes to the delineation of two markedly different soundscapes, one Barbarian and the other Roman; and for the Romans ‘noise’ always carries a negative connotation. It is sign of disorder (noises are often ominous), of rupture (as on the occasion of the fall of an emperor) and sometimes of transgression (notably in the noises that accompany Dionysiac processions).

The Ancients’ perspectives on the music of the Barbarians, in this game of comparisons, call to mind the composer Hector Berlioz’s unsympathetic opinion of the music of the Chinese during the 19th century: this people who, he says, “n’a pas la plus légère idée de l’harmonie” (‘who do not have the slightest idea of harmony’). It leads him to conclude that “Les Chinois et les Indiens auraient une musique semblable à la nôtre, s’ils en avaient une, mais ils sont encore à cet égard plongés dans les ténèbres les plus profondes de la barbarie” (‘the Chinese and the Indians would have a music similar to ours, if only they had such a thing, but they are still, from this point of view, submerged in the deepest darkness of Barbarism’).<sup>77</sup>

75 See Aristides Quintilianus, *De Musica* II. 5.

76 Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae* XXIX. 5.39.

77 H. Berlioz 1854, quoted by Schaeffner 1968, 309.

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1 After Melini 2008, 39. 2 After De Lagoy 1849,  
pl. II, 15. 3 Photo: C. Vendries. 4 Ménez 1999,

485, fig. 28. 5 After Stern 1980, pl. XIII, 12.

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