

## Strabo, *Geography* 7.3.7-9

(on Scythians and other northern peoples)

7. Just now I was discussing the Thracians, and the "Mysians, hand-to-hand fighters, and the proud Hippemolgi, Galactophagi, and Abii, men most just,"<sup>4</sup> because I wished to make a comparison between the statements made by Poseidonius and myself and those made by the two men in question. Take first the fact that the argument which they have attempted is contrary to the proposition which they set out to prove; for although they set out to prove that the men of earlier times were more ignorant of regions remote from Greece than the men of more recent times, they showed the reverse, not only in regard to regions remote, but also in regard to places in Greece itself. However, as I was saying, let me put off everything else and look to what is now before me: they<sup>5</sup> say that the poet through ignorance fails to mention the Scythians, or their savage dealings with strangers, in that they

<sup>5</sup>Eratosthenes and Apollodorus.

sacrifice them, eat their flesh, and use their skulls as drinking-cups, although it was on account of the Scythians that the Pontus was called "Axine," but that he invents certain "proud Hippemolgi, Galactophagi, and Abii, men most just"—people that exist nowhere on earth. How, then, could they call the sea "Axine" if they did not know about the ferocity or about the people who were most ferocious? And these, of course, are the Scythians. And were the people who lived beyond the Mysians and Thracians and Getae not also "Hippemolgi,"<sup>1</sup> not also "Galactophagi"<sup>2</sup> and "Abii"?<sup>3</sup> In fact, even now<sup>4</sup> there are Wagon-dwellers and Nomads, so called, who live off their herds, and on milk and cheese, and particularly on cheese made from mare's milk, and know nothing about storing up food or about peddling merchandise either, except the exchange of wares for wares. How, then, could the poet be ignorant of the Scythians if he called certain people "Hippemolgi and Galactophagi"? For that the people of his time were wont to call the Scythians "Hippemolgi," Hesiod, too, is witness in the words cited by Eratosthenes: "The Ethiopians, the Ligurians, and also the Scythians, Hippemolgi."<sup>5</sup> Now wherein is it to be wondered at that, because of the widespread injustice connected with contracts in our country, Homer called "most just" and "proud" those who by no means spend their lives on contracts and money-getting but actually possess all things in common except sword and drinking-cup, and above all things have their

<sup>3</sup> "A resourceless folk."

<sup>4</sup> Cp. the similar words quoted from Ephorus, 7. 3. 9.

<sup>5</sup> A fragment otherwise unknown (*fr.* 232; *Rzach*, *fr.* 55).

wives and their children in common, in the Platonic way? <sup>1</sup> Aeschylus, too, is clearly pleading the cause of the poet when he says about the Scythians: "But the Scythians, law-abiding, eaters of cheese made of mare's milk." <sup>2</sup> And this assumption even now still persists among the Greeks; for we regard the Scythians the most straightforward of men and the least prone to mischief, as also far more frugal and independent of others than we are. And yet our mode of life has spread its change for the worse to almost all peoples, introducing amongst them luxury and sensual pleasures and, to satisfy these vices, base artifices that lead to innumerable acts of greed. So then, much wickedness of this sort has fallen on the barbarian peoples also, on the Nomads as well as the rest; for as the result of taking up a seafaring life they not only have become morally worse, indulging in the practice of piracy and of slaying strangers, but also, because of their intercourse with many peoples, have partaken of the luxury and the peddling habits of those peoples. But though these things seem to conduce strongly to gentleness of manner, they corrupt morals and introduce cunning instead of the straightforwardness which I just now mentioned.

8. Those, however, who lived before our times, and particularly those who lived near the time of Homer, were—and among the Greeks were assumed to be—some such people as Homer describes. And see what Herodotus says concerning that king of the Scythians against whom Darius made his expedition, and the message which the king sent

<sup>2</sup> From a play now lost (Nauck, *fr.* 198).

back to him.<sup>1</sup> See also what Chrysippus<sup>2</sup> says concerning the kings of the Bosphorus, the house of Leuco.<sup>3</sup> And not only the Persian letters<sup>4</sup> are full of references to that straightforwardness of which I am speaking but also the memoirs written by the Egyptians, Babylonians, and Indians. And it was on this account that Anacharsis,<sup>5</sup> Abaris,<sup>6</sup> and other men of the sort were in fair repute among the Greeks, because they displayed a nature characterized by complacency, frugality, and justice. But why should I speak of the men of olden times? For when Alexander, the son of Philip, on his expedition against the Thracians beyond the Haemus,<sup>7</sup> invaded the country of the Triballians<sup>8</sup> and saw that it extended as far as the Ister and the island of Peuce<sup>9</sup> in the Ister, and that the parts on the far side were held by the Getae, he went as far as that,<sup>10</sup> it is said, but could not disembark upon the island because of scarcity of boats (for Syrmus, the king of the Triballi had taken refuge there and resisted his attempts); he did, however, cross over to the country of the Getae, took their city, and

<sup>4</sup> *i.e.* the letters of the Persian kings, such as those quoted by Herodotus.

<sup>5</sup> Anacharsis was a Scythian prince and philosopher, one of the "Seven Sages," a traveller, long a resident of Athens (about 590 B.C.), a friend of Solon, and (according to Ephorus) an inventor (7. 3. 9). See Herodotus, 4. 76.

<sup>6</sup> Abaris was called the "Hyperborean" priest and prophet of Apollo, and is said to have visited Athens in the eighth century, or perhaps much later. According to the legend, he healed the sick, travelled round the world, without once eating, on a golden arrow given him by Apollo, and delivered Sparta from a plague.

<sup>7</sup> The Balkan Mountains.

<sup>8</sup> A Thracian tribe.

<sup>9</sup> See 7. 3. 15 and footnote.

<sup>10</sup> *i.e.* as far as the island.

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returned with all speed to his home-land, after receiving gifts from the tribes in question and from Syrmus. And Ptolemaeus,<sup>1</sup> the son of Lagus,<sup>2</sup> says that on this expedition the Celti who lived about the Adriatic joined Alexander for the sake of establishing friendship and hospitality, and that the king received them kindly and asked them when drinking what it was that they most feared, thinking they would say himself, but that they replied they feared no one, unless it were that Heaven might fall on them, although indeed they added that they put above everything else the friendship of such a man as he. And the following are signs of the straightforwardness of the barbarians: first, the fact that Syrmus refused to consent to the debarkation upon the island and yet sent gifts and made a compact of friendship; and, secondly, that the Celti said that they feared no one, and yet valued above everything else the friendship of great men. Again, Dromichaetes was king of the Getae in the time of the successors of Alexander. Now he, when he captured Lysimachus<sup>3</sup> alive, who had made an expedition against him, first pointed out the poverty both of himself and of his tribe and likewise their independence of others, and then bade him not to carry on war with people of that sort but rather to deal with them as friends; and after saying this he first entertained him as a guest, and made a compact of friendship, and then released him.

<sup>3</sup> Lysimachus, one of Alexander's generals and successors, obtained Thrace as his portion in the division of the provinces after Alexander's death (323 B.C.), assuming the title of king 306 B.C. He was taken captive, and released, by Dromichaetes 291 B.C.

Moreover, Plato in his *Republic* thinks that those who would have a well-governed city should flee as far as possible from the sea, as being a thing that teaches wickedness, and should not live near it.<sup>1</sup>

9. Ephorus, in the fourth book of his history, the book entitled *Europe* (for he made the circuit<sup>2</sup> of Europe as far as the Scythians), says towards the end that the modes of life both of the Sauromatae and of the other Scythians are unlike, for, whereas some are so cruel that they even eat human beings, others abstain from eating any living creature whatever. Now the other writers, he says, tell only about their savagery, because they know that the terrible and the marvellous are startling, but one should tell the opposite facts too and make them patterns of conduct, and he himself, therefore, will tell only about those who follow "most just" habits, for there are some of the Scythian Nomads who feed only on mare's milk,<sup>3</sup> and excel all men in justice; and they are mentioned by the poets: by Homer, when he says that Zeus espies the land "of the Galactophagi and Abii, men most just," and by Hesiod, in what is called his *Circuit of the Earth*,<sup>4</sup> when he says that Phineus is carried by the Storm Winds "to the land of the Galactophagi, who have their dwellings in wagons." Then Ephorus reasons out

<sup>1</sup> Corais and Groskurd point out that the reference should have been, not to the *Republic*, but to the *Laws* (4. 704-705), where Plato discusses the proper place for founding a city; cp. Aristotle's *Politics* (7. 6) on the same subject.

<sup>2</sup> In his description, not literally.

<sup>3</sup> Cp. the similar statement in 7. 3. 7.

<sup>4</sup> This poem seems to have comprised the third book of the *Megalae Eoae* (now lost). See Pauly-Wissowa, *s.v.* "Hesiodus," p. 1206.

the cause as follows: since they are frugal in their ways of living and not money-getters, they not only are orderly towards one another, because they have all things in common, their wives, children, the whole of their kin and everything, but also remain invincible and unconquered by outsiders, because they have nothing to be enslaved for. And he cites Choerilus<sup>1</sup> also, who, in his *The Crossing of the Pontoon-Bridge* which was constructed by Darius,<sup>2</sup> says, "the sheep-tending Sacae, of Scythian stock; but they used to live in wheat-producing Asia; however, they were colonists from the Nomads, law-abiding people." And when he calls Anacharsis "wise," Ephorus says that he belongs to this race, and that he was considered also one of Seven Wise Men because of his perfect self-control and good sense. And he goes on to tell the inventions of Anacharsis—the bellows, the two-fluked anchor and the potter's wheel. These things I tell knowing full well that Ephorus himself does not tell the whole truth about everything; and particularly in his account of Anacharsis (for how could the wheel be his invention, if Homer, who lived in earlier times, knew of it? "As when a potter his wheel that fits in his hands,"<sup>3</sup> and so on); but as for those

<sup>1</sup> Not, apparently, the tragic poet, contemporary of Aeschylus, but the epic poet of Samos (fl. towards the end of the fifth century B.C.), who wrote, among other poems, an epic poem (exact title uncertain) based on the Persian Wars. *The Crossing of the Pontoon-Bridge* was probably a sub-title of the epic. The same Choerilus is cited in 14. 5. 9.

<sup>2</sup> In his campaign against the Scythians, including the Getae, as described by Herodotus (4. 83-93); see 7. 3. 15.

<sup>3</sup> *Iliad* 18. 600.

other things, I tell them because I wish to make my point clear that there actually was a common report, which was believed by the men of both early and of later times, that a part of the Nomads, I mean those who had settled the farthest away from the rest of mankind, were "galactophagi," "abii," and "most just," and that they were not an invention of Homer.

10. It is but fair, too, to ask Apollodorus to account for the Mysians that are mentioned in the verses of Homer, whether he thinks that these too are inventions<sup>1</sup> (when the poet says, "and the Mysians, hand-to-hand fighters and the proud Hip-pemolgi"), or takes the poet to mean the Mysians in Asia. Now if he takes the poet to mean those in Asia, he will misinterpret him, as I have said before,<sup>2</sup> but if he calls them an invention, meaning that there were no Mysians in Thrace, he will contradict the facts; for at any rate, even in our own times, Aelius Catus<sup>3</sup> transplanted from the country on the far side of the Ister into Thrace<sup>4</sup> fifty thousand persons from among the Getae, a tribe with the same tongue as the Thracians.<sup>5</sup> And they live there in Thrace now and are called "Moesi"—whether it be that their people of earlier times were so called and that in Asia the name was changed to "Mysi,"<sup>6</sup> or (what is more apposite to history and the declaration of the poet) that in earlier times their people in Thrace were called "Mysi." Enough, however, on this subject. I shall now go back to the next topic in the general description.

<sup>3</sup> Perhaps as governor of Macedonia. He was consul with C. Sentius 4 A. D.

<sup>4</sup> Lower Moesia.

<sup>5</sup> Cp. 7. 3. 2.

<sup>6</sup> See 7. 3. 4.