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**The impact of Western trade on barbarians:  
Lessons from the ancient Greeks and Romans**

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## Abstract

Although the ancient Greco-Romans traded with barbarians, they wrote sparingly about the effects of trade on barbarians. The near silence is odd because ancient Greco-Romans thought deeply about the division of labor, ethics, politics, statecraft, and the world around them. The impact of globalization on indigenous peoples is a topic of contemporary interest so one wonders what we can learn from the ancients who were so silent on the topic. I review what ancient Greco-Roman writers had to say about the effects of trade on barbarians. I find: *(a)* increasing clarity and depth of analysis with the passage of time, *(b)* increasing sophistication in methods used, and *(c)* insights relevant to our contemporary understanding of how trade and globalization affect people at the fringe of the market economy. The ancient Greco-Romans wrestled with the unit of observation and analysis, with the endogeneity of trade exposure, and with outcomes. They focused on the group rather than on the individual, household, or village. They acknowledge that trade with the empire stemmed from an endogenous mix of barbarian myopia and status concerns, and they cast the net wide when examining outcomes (e.g., freedom, consumption). On the substantive front, they found that trade with barbarians produced winners and losers, engendered ambiguous effects on barbarian society (e.g., increased consumerism, less freedom), and that strong barbarian societies ensured that trade worked on their behalf. Some of the empirical hurdles they identified in estimating impacts remain unsolved to this day

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**The impact of Western trade on barbarians:**

**Lessons from the ancient Greeks and Romans**

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Even though the ancient Greeks and Romans had markets roughly as we know them today with agoras, archaic coinage, and loans, and although they traded with barbarians beyond their borders, it almost never occurred to them to ask: “What is the effect of markets and trade on barbarians?” The tattered answers they left strike us as odd because the writers thought deeply about the division of labor, ethics, politics, statecraft, and the world around them. One wonders why they remained so silent about a topic of obvious contemporary importance. Today’s concern with how trade and globalization affect indigenous peoples takes many shapes, including the fair-trade movement, UN declarations protecting the rights of indigenous peoples, and concerns about how exposure to trade and markets affect the well-being of disadvantaged ethnic minorities in poor nations (Engle Merry, 2006; H. G. Hall & Patrinos, 2012; Hossain, 2013). Nevertheless, in the wisp of answers the ancient Greco-Roman left us we find messages that foreshadow our contemporary understanding of the query. In exploring the topic they raised questions that remain unanswered to this day.

In Herodotean fashion I let writers speak for themselves, however real, apocryphal, or garbled their tales (Goodman, 2007, p. 125). My stress lies not on actual trade, but on what writers said about its impact on barbarians. By trade I mean the exchange of goods with money beyond the homeland. I use the terms trade and markets incestuously, but the context should make clear what I mean. For evidence I turn to the writings of the ancients, an oeuvre thin, scrappy, fragmented (Millar, 1984, p. 4), and biased (Burns, 2003; Cartledge, 1983, p. 14). Greek and Roman writers typically came from the aristocracy, and as the upper crust they had wan interests in learning the language of barbarians, or finding out first-hand about the messy realities of barbarian life (Momigliano, 1975). As patricians they valued heroic Homeric gift exchanges between the mighty, but viewed as a *pis aller* and indeed scorned prosaic cabotage by full-time merchants (Bresson, 2000; Cartledge, 1983, pp. 3-4; I. Morris, 1986, pp. 5-6). Thus, in much of what follows I “interpret silence” or connect dots as best I can (Finley, 1985 [orig. 1963], p. 136).

### **Views of trade’s impact on barbarians: The ancient Greeks**

Some say that the outlines of the modern market economy were visible as early as the classical period of Athens (508-322 BCE) and the early Roman Empire (27BCE-284AD) (Bergh & Lyttkens, 2014; Lyttkens, 2010; I. Morris, 2004; Temin, 2013). The ancients had market places, coinage, monetary purchases and sales, loans, “widespread use of markets in goods, labor, and financial capital” (Temin, 2006, p. 146), international trade, and policies to regulate business deals (Bergh & Lyttkens, 2014; I. Morris, 2004). The nascent market economy fired Greek thinkers of the time to speak about the division of labor, scarcity, leisure, fair prices, luxuries, and value (Baloglou, 2012; Gordon, 1961, 1975; Leshem, 2012; Lowry, 1979; Lowry & Gordon, 1998; Polanyi, 1957), with some of their insights lasting to our days (Sen, 1987). Inchoate economic theory and inchoate modern economic institutions were moving hand in hand. But others impugn the view that the ancients had price-setting markets and note that the infant market economy had too much barter, re-distribution, gifts, kinship, status concerns, and plunder of cattle, women, and slaves, and go on to note that it also lacked signposts of a mature market economy, such as free merchants and institutionalized banking and credit (Bang, 2008; Finley, 1985 [orig. 1963]; I. Morris, 1986; Nafissi, 2005). If it existed, critics demur, the market

economy was too fragmented and entwined in Noachian mores and political and religious furniture to unveil its full contours (Liverani, 2005, pp. 52-54; I. Morris, 1994; Polanyi, 2001 [orig. 1944]; Rauh, 1993).

Both sides had a point (Cartledge, 1983). Ancients went overseas to swap or buy goods, including slaves (Finley, 1981, p. 103). But ancient trade also took the form of routing and plunder (Berent, 2000; Rihll, 1995). Merchant crews were warrior crews (Millar, 1984, pp. 5, 10; Rihll, 1995, p. 94) and the pentekonter could fit either. Which is not to say that trade grew out of a wish to conquer, or vice versa, as Finley (1985 [orig. 1963], p. 204) points out, but that the two happened at the same time. What matters is that territorial enlargement, whether through conquest, adventure, sightseeing, Stoic exploration, or trade brought the ancient Westerners face to face with barbarians in far-flung lands from Persia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Thrace, Iberia, northern Europe, Britain, and India. If so, then we care about what Westerners thought of trade's impact on their barbarian customers.

Classicists used to view barbarians as the metonymical polar other, the “reverse mirror” (Gruen, 2010, p. 1), those on the other side of the fence (or wall), which Romans and classical Hellenes needed to define their own identity as men of a city state, particularly after the Peloponnesian War (5 BCE) (E. Hall, 1989; J. M. Hall, 2002, pp. 44-46; Hartog, 1988; Kuper, 2005; Thomas, 2000, pp. 71-72). Where the Greeks were sedentary and urban, the barbarians were nomadic and rural; where the Greeks spoke, the barbarian growled; where the Greeks wedded outside their family, the barbarians mated within theirs; where the Greeks cremated their dead, the barbarians ate theirs; where the Greeks cured the sick, the barbarians left theirs to die<sup>i</sup>. And so on. But the Greeks also saw themselves in the barbarians: They both loved freedom and fought hard. As revisionist historians like to point out, the standard “discourse of barbarism” (E. Hall, 1989), elides the mutuality, osmotic walls, synergy, correlative borrowing, fictive kinship, common genealogies (long and short, real and imagined), alliances, miscegenation, exchange of identities (K. Clarke, 2001, p. 105) and overlapping affections that tied barbarians and western conquerors (Almagor & Skinner, 2013; Gruen, 2010; Malkin, 2011, pp. 62-63, 218-219; Skinner, 2012).

Akin or different, the ancients Greeks as far back as Hesiod and Homer viewed trade with barbarians disparagingly (Giardina, 1993, p. 247; Rosenbloom, 2002, p. 308; Tandy, 1997, pp. 72-75)<sup>ii</sup> and xenophobically (Lavery, 1974, pp. 374-375), and perhaps for this reason wrote cryptically about the impact of trade on those beyond imperial borders. Herodotus, the father of ethnography and lies (Murray, 1972), implies in The Histories that the impact of trade on barbarians depended on the ruggedness of the barbarian trading partner. Against stronger barbarians, Greek merchants had no option but to obey supinely barbarian rules of trade. The philhellene pharaoh Amasis allowed Greek merchants in his land, but only within the well-defined segregated emporium of Naucratis along the Nile River, and only “for mercantile purposes advantageous to Egypt” (S. Morris, 1998, p. 274). If by mistake a Greek merchant landed

*.... at any of the other mouths of the Nile [besides Naucratis], he had to swear that he had not done so deliberately, and then after making this statement under oath bring his ship round to the Canobic mouth. Alternatively, if contrary winds made it impossible for him to take his ship around, he had to transport his goods around the Delta by baris and get to Naucratis that way (Herodotus, 1998, pp. 166-167; 2.178-179).*

Herodotus does not tell us about the impact of trade on people surrounding Naucratis, but he underscores the point that Greek merchants had to follow pharaonic ukases and bear the costs of breaking them<sup>iii</sup>. Some of the rules spelled out were permanent and transient Greek merchants could live and build shrines (Rauh, 1993, pp. 125-127). An Egyptian funnel moderated the impact of Greek trade on barbarian economies.

We do not know what Herodotus thought about the impact of Greek trade on weaker barbarians, but he tells us what the mightiest barbarian thought of trade with weaker trading partners. When the Persian king Cyrus conquered the Lydian, one of “the most courageous and strongest people in Asia”(Briant, 2002, p. 206; Thomas, 2000, p. 109), he was told by the vanquished Lydian King Croesus that if he wanted to emasculate the Lydian forever he should:

*Send a message that they are forbidden to own weapons of war, that they are to wear tunics under their coats and slippers on their feet, that they are to take up the cithara and the harp, and that they are to raise their sons to be retailers. Before long, my lord, you will see them becoming women instead of men, and so there will be no danger of them rising against you”(Herodotus, 1998, p. 69; 1.155; my emphasis).*

Though perhaps untrue, the account highlights that unless seared with puissance from above, the market ritual of buying and selling would not develop on its own among a brave people. To meet their needs, hard barbarians like the Lydian relied on “heroic modes” of exchange and looting; soft barbarians like the Egyptians relied on markets (Redfield, 1985, pp. 119-111). Croesus’ advice to cripple the Lydian by foisting trade on them fell on ears willing to hear such counsel. Elsewhere Herodotus<sup>iv</sup> says that King Cyrus disdained the Spartan practice of peddling in central public places. Cyrus could not understand why the Spartans did not follow the polished Persian custom of circumscribing buying and selling to areas far from temples and palaces. When King Cyrus heard that Spartan emissaries had arrived warning him not to invade Greece, King Cyrus answered with derision:

*‘I have never yet found occasion to fear the kind of men who set aside a space in the middle of their town where they can meet and make false promises to one another’...This was intended by Cyrus as a slur against Greeks in general because they have town squares where they buy and sell goods, whereas it is not Persian practice to use such places at all and the town square is entirely unknown among them” (Herodotus, 1998, p. 68; 1.153; my emphasis).*

In these two snippets Herodotus through King Cyrus links trade and markets with effeminacy, luxuries, soft lifestyle, legerdemain, and deceit under oath (Redfield, 1985, p. 111). More importantly, he makes the point that untamed trade – not ordinary trade – turns into sacrilege by violating cultural expectations of where hucksterism should take place, and, in so doing, wounds the ethical sensibilities of the aristocracy. The two observations -- the one about how banal trade softens miens and behaviors, the other about how unbridled trade harms the ethical sensibilities of the high-born -- resurface throughout the next millennia, with different generations offering different readings of how trade and markets affect individuals and the group. Not long after Herodotus, Aristotle (1981; 7.1331 a30-b3) taught that rulers should restrict buying and selling to bounded places in their city to avoid tarnishing the morals of the polity.

In any event, King Cyrus' unkind view of trade and unregulated markets fits with the view of trade and markets voiced by the ancients in their schizophrenic myths about the Golden Age, a time that nursed a wobbly mix of good and evil (Dench, 1995, p. 80; E. Hall, 1989, p. 149). Good or evil, the Golden Age nonetheless lacked markets and sea-fearing trade (Romm, 1992, p. 74). The ancient texts compiled by Lovejoy and Boas (1965) about the Golden Age of pre-Hellenic and pre-Roman Pelasgians, Lydians, Scythians, Thracians, Jews, and Ethiopians either do not mention trade and markets, or portrayed them scathingly. The mythical ancient Ethiopians, Agatharchides (200 BCE) wrote, "do not endanger their lives by navigation for the sake of gain" (Quoted in Lovejoy & Boas, 1965, pp. 349-350). Philo Judaeus (25 BCE-25CE) noted that the monastic Jews known as Essenes "never dream(ed) of trade or commerce or navigation" (Quoted in Lovejoy & Boas, 1965, p. 353) and Josephus (1981, p. 134) adds that among the Essenes "nothing is bought or sold". When describing the people of the Golden Age, Aratus (300 BC) remarked that they did not trade, and so does Ovid (Quoted in Lovejoy & Boas, 1965, p. 46). In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the people of the Gold Age "knew no shores except their own" and foraged for a living. Only during the last phase of creation, the Iron Age, did people begin to sail the sea for trade (Ovid, 1998, pp. 4-5; 1.97-127, 128-159). In the Third Elegy Tibullus (65-19BC) described Saturn's golden days as a time when "man liv'd happy on his natal shore" (Tibullus, 1992, p. 49; Vol. 1, iii.35-52). Seneca's Ninetieth Epistle describes a rural, autarkic, ascetic, bucolic Golden Age populated by ignorant but honest rubes who knew no trade, plunder, frills, travel, or avarice (Seneca, 1953, pp. 395-431; Volume II, Epistle 90). In the paraenetic poem *Work and Day* Hesiod spoke about a pristine Golden Age, but does not mention trade (Hesiod, 1978, p. 216; 236-237)<sup>v</sup>. The Father of History asserted that in ancient times "there was no commerce and people were insecure about making contact with each other" (Thucydides, 2013, p. 4; 1.2). In Plato's allegory of the Kronian Age money for trade in foreign lands was earmarked for "ambassadors...[and] any other necessary messenger whom the city must send out" (Plato, 1980, p. 129; 4.742a-742b). Rulers would curtail foreign trade because it poisoned morality:

*For although a land's proximity to the sea affords daily pleasure, the sea really is a 'briny and bitter neighbor.' It infects a place with commerce and the money-making that comes with retail trade, and engenders shifty and untrustworthy dispositions in souls; it thereby takes away the trust and friendship a city feels for itself and for the rest of humanity....If [the city] were [productive in every way], that would mean large exports and a resulting infection of silver and gold money (Plato, 1980, p. 90; 4.705a-705b) .*

Plato put "the pursuit of money" at the bottom of "the scale of honor" (Plato, 1980, p. 131; 5.743e), and Aristotle agreed, adding that trade with money arose from greed, or people trying to "gain from each other" (Aristotle, 1981, p. 87; I.258a38. See also I.256b40-258a18, pp. 80-85). Plato deprecated foreign trade, and assigned metics rather than citizens to the task (Bresson, 2000, p. 159). A complementary body of myths, romances, and histories says that in ancient times people were "full of justice" and did not trade with money. Instead, they bartered in upright silence with foreign customers in non-partisan mingling grounds (Dolfsma & Spithoven, 2008; Giardina, 1993, pp. 248-249; Pliny, 1855, VI.24; Romer, 2001, p. 118; Pomponius Mela, *The Chorography*, III.59).

Taken together, these bits of evidence suggest that trade came after the Golden Age. Most of the texts do not make clear whether dalliances with trade and markets soiled righteous mythical ancestor, or whether they arrived among a rake already on their way to bastardization.

Plato and Aristotle stand apart. They draw a clear causal arrow from trade and markets to perdition. By allowing entrepreneurs to seek and keep the gains from trade, commerce eroded trust, friendship, and cohesion.

Perhaps in response to the growing share of international trade in the Greek economy, views of long-distance trade turned more positive, away from Lycurgan xenophobia and Spartan bans of trade with barbarians (Lycurgus 24.2-3, 27.4 quoted in Lavery, 1974, pp. 374-375). Xenophon embodies the transition. In *Oeconomicus* Xenophon deals only with the internal rural household economy and remains silent about trade beyond the borders of the state, though he chides sea merchants for speculating with grain (Xenophon, 1994, pp. 205-206; 20.27-28). In *Memorabilia* (Xenophon, 2013, pp. 159-162; 2.7.2-6) he begins to see money making as a respectable occupation, and in *Ways and Means* he endorses overseas trade (Lis & Soly, 2012, pp. 40-42). In fact, *Ways and Means* reads as a business plan to attract foreign investments to Athens and strengthen state-sponsored Athenian trade after the “disaster of the Social War” (357-355 BCE) (Bresson, 2000, pp. 158-159; Burke, 1992, p. 208; Dillery, 1993). Xenophon begins by noting that Athens was blessed with favorable weather and placement for trade:

*...all the winds of heaven bring to her the goods she need and bear away her exports, as if she were an island; for she lies between two seas; and she has a vast land trade as well ...* (Xenophon, 1946, p. 195; 1.7).

Besides ease of access from being the world’s hub, Athens offered foreign merchants a wide range of goods and currency to take back home after unloading their cargo:

*...at most other ports merchants are compelled to ship a return cargo, because the local currency has no circulation in other states; but at Athens they have the opportunity of exchanging their cargo and exporting very many classes of goods that are in demand, or, if they do not want to ship a return cargo of goods, it is sound business to export silver; for, wherever they sell it, they are sure to make a profit on the capital invested* (Xenophon, 1946, p. 199; 3.2).

Although well-positioned to trade, Athens could do better if it improved conflict resolution between merchants in its harbor, and if it lured more traders to settle in Athens. To improve conflict resolution between merchants and make Athens a more attractive dwelling place for merchants, Xenophon recommended awarding prizes to magistrates “for just and prompt settlement of disputes, so that sailings were not delayed” (p. 199). Because merchants brought wealth and tax revenues to Athens, the city should confer honors on them and consider them “benefactors” of the state. To implement the idea, the city should “reserve front seats in the theater for merchants and ship owners”. Flattered and hooked by the “prospect of these honors”, Xenophon adds, traders “would look on us as friends and hasten to visit us to win the honors as well as the profit” (1946, p. 201; 3.4.9). Quietism coupled with the right policies would encourage trade, lure talent to settle in Athens, and increase the city’s mammon, all without imperial ambition (Dillery, 1993).

All these texts intrigue us about how the ancient Greeks viewed markets and trade, but – Herodotus’ Croesus aside -- they say little about what the ancients thought about the impact of markets and trade on barbarians<sup>vi</sup>. Croesus’ message contains two linked points. First, he says that market transactions would sap the mettle of brave Lydians and turn them into effeminate

cowards, an undesirable outcome for Lydians. Second, by softening Lydians, the same market transactions would help Persian rulers manage their vassals. From a panoptic viewpoint, trade springs up as a rose with thorns. It brings pain or pleasure depending on the vantage of the historical actors. It harmed the Lydians, but helped the Persians.

### **Views of trade's impact on barbarians: The ancient Romans**

As a result of their territorial expansion, the Romans began to voice a more cogent view of the impact of trade on barbarians. The Roman Empire was much larger than previous Western empires, extending from Britain to the Middle East, Africa, to Asia. With a larger dominion, Romans had more opportunities to deal with barbarians than the Greeks, making it easier for Romans to see, think, and write about how trade affected barbarians (Temin, 2013)<sup>vii</sup>. Strabo (1949, pp. 454-455; II.2.5.12) noted that as the volume of trade with barbarians in India rose, so did the amount and quality of information about Indians available to Romans.

A larger imperial dominion went along with mixed views about trade with barbarians. The Romans of the early empire remained ambivalent and sometimes disparaging about trade (Aubert, 1994, pp. 18-28; Leshem, 2013; MacMullen, 1974, p. 100; Rivers, 1999, p. 31) for some of the same reasons the Greeks had been (Giardina, 1993, p. 251; Lis & Soly, 2012, pp. 60-64, 223-225; Verboven, 2014). Trade with deceit, like trade with hoarding and no “generosity and beneficence” toward “the interest of the community”, Cicero deplored (1913, pp. 95, 321; 1.92; 3.50-57). The Carthaginians’ “love of gain with the love of cheating”, Cicero remarked in *De Lege Agraria*, arose from living in a port and dealing with merchants (M. T. Cicero, 1930, p. 471; *De Lege Agraria* 2.95; Giardina, 1993, p. 247; Lavery, 1974, p. 374). Polybius (2010, p. 311; 6.7.8) scorned the scion of the oligarchs for abandoning themselves to the “greed of gain and unscrupulous moneymaking”. Like the Greeks, the Romans distrusted retailers because retailers distorted “just prices” by adding profits to the value of labor embodied in goods (Giardina, 1993, pp. 245-246). For some a necessary evil, trade was a fleeting bridge to a more permanent, sedentary, landed, munificent aristocratic lifestyle (Vivenza, 1998, pp. 284, 323), though in practice the high-born and the ruck traded furtively on the side, perhaps as early as ancient Greek times (Bresson, 2000, pp. 145-146; D’Arms, 1981; Harris, 2000, p. 289).

Counterbalancing these view, however, one finds writers like Seneca, Pliny the Elder, and the satirist Juvenal who admired *mercatores* engaged in long-distant trade because merchants took prudent “risks of the tightrope”, and -- as eyes and ears of the empire -- they brought back news about foreign lands which helped future voyagers (Beagon, 1992, pp. 161, 179, 182; Giardina, 1993, pp. 258-259; Harris, 2000, pp. 288, 291-292; Juvenal, 1970, p. 103; 14.265-283). Stoics endorsed trade for its role in linking scattered people and in reallocating utilitarian goods and luxuries from lands with surpluses to Rome (Beagon, 1992, pp. 59, 189-190; van der Hoven, 1996, pp. 59-60, 63-67).

But greater exposure to barbarians as the Roman Empire distended is unlikely to explain in full why the ancient Romans wrote more than the ancient Greeks about the impact of trade on barbarians. Exposure is probably not enough because culture teaches us what to see. The observer had to show an interest in the barbarian, and here Romans outdid the Greeks. As Momigliano (1975) taught, the ancient Greeks were too ethnocentric, too aloof, too aristocratic, too inward looking, and too xenophobic to deign learning the language of barbarians, and so with a thin empirical base, they wrote historical ethnographies and travelogues more imaginary than real. It “irritated” Montaigne (1987, p. 232) “that neither Lycurgus nor Plato had any knowledge

of [barbarians],” probably because neither of them had paid much attention to them. If Greeks wrote about markets and trade, it was narcissistically about their domestic markets and their trade and how it affected them, not the others. Which does not mean that Roman ethnographies were not peppered with fantasies, lies, ethnocentrism, and palimpsested texts (Almagor & Skinner, 2013; Cherry, 2007, p. 721; Krebs, 2011; Woodman, 2014, pp. 12-15; Woolf, 2011), but that -- compared with Greek narratives -- they were more likely to have come from chroniclers who had some fluency in the language of the observed, with more interest in how barbarians lived, and perhaps with a bit more autopsy (Veyne, 1993). In any case, the Romans might have had access to more, better, and more varied information than the Greeks. Because the ethnographies of Caesar and Tacitus contain the fullest treatment of the impact of trade on barbarians, we turn to them next.

In the periegesis of the Gallic Wars Caesar places the native societies of wealthy Gaul (Drinkwater, 1979) and Germany along an idealized folk-to-Rome continuum, with autarkic Belgae cultures such as the Nervii or the Germanic Suebi far to the north and east of Rome at one extreme of the continuum, and other cultures closer to Roman provinces placed at the other extreme of the continuum (Gruen, 2010; Woolf, 2013). He notes that groups closer to Rome were more civilized. In a modern, terse, pregnant, and perceptive passage worth dissecting, Caesar spells out why barbarians closer to Rome were more civilized. When speaking about the Ubii, one of the groups nearest to Rome, he says that they:

*....are somewhat more civilized than the other folk of the same race, because their borders touch the Rhine and traders visit them frequently, and, further, because the Ubii themselves by close neighborhood have grown accustomed to Gallic fashion* (Caesar, 1979, p. 185; 4.3).

First, Caesar implies that the outcome of interest when examining the impact of trade and markets on barbarians cannot be pared down to one indicator, such as wealth, health, freedom, virtue, or happiness, but should capture a larger construct: civilization. What he meant by civilization need not concern us here, but what does need stressing is that the outcome that interested him was a multidimensional package that included such things as language, culture, mores, institutions, and the like. He was not concerned with fine-grained indicators of well-being or specific attributes of civilization. Second, Caesar seems to have cared about groups, not about sub-groups or about individuals. He does not write about those at the top or those at the bottom of the barbarian hierarchy, nor does he write about the impact of trade on women, slaves, or children, but only about the impact of outside forces on the civilization of the entire group. He aggregated up, so to speak, not being concerned about the impacts of trade and markets on actors within the barbarian group. For Caesar, as for Thucydides and Herodotus (Sahlins, 2004, pp. 125-127), the group was both the unit of observation and the unit of analysis. In other texts, Caesar writes about the uses of trade to firm up alliances with client barbarian kings (A. P. Fitzpatrick, 1989, pp. 34-35), but this notwithstanding, his focus when writing about trade's impact is not on barbarian kings, but on each barbarian society as a whole. Third, he notes that the outcome of interest, civilization, varies between the collective of subjects. A people do not fall neatly into a dichotomy of civilized or uncivilized; we are told that the Ubii, as a collective, are “somewhat more” civilized than other collective of barbarians. The outcome, civilization, is continuous, not binary. This point gets expanded when Caesar describes other groups farther from Rome as being less civilized by degrees. Fourth, in generalizing about the Ubii, Caesar

conditions for confounders. He does not compare the Ubii to the Romans or to the Persians. No. The Romans or Persians differ too much from the Ubii to make them a valid reference group for comparison. Instead, he compares the Ubii to “other folk of the same race”. In econometric parlance, Caesar controls for ethnicity, race, or culture when making inferences about the impact of trade on barbarians.

Then we turn to the part of the sentence that deals with the determinants of civilization of a group. Caesar points to three capacious determinants, of which trade is one: (a) physical propinquity to civilization (“their borders touch the Rhine”), (b) exposure to peripatetic traders who “visit them frequently”, and (c) the desire of the Ubii to accept such traders. Much in the same way Caesar thought big when defining the outcome (Civilization writ large), he also thought big when explaining why groups varied in their level of civilization. The degree of civilization of a group grew out of a package of linked causes. Roman traders might have brought goods to the doorstep of barbarians, but barbarians had to accept such offers for traders to come back, and accept they did because barbarians had “grown accustomed to Gallic fashion” (Burns, 2003, pp. 142, 187). Barbarians worked for wages and sold goods in Roman markets in the periphery of the empire. As the Roman presence grew (M. T. Cicero, 2012, p. 19; Fonteiis 2.11) and became more permanent, barbarians switched from long-distance trade in high-valued feral resources, minerals, and slaves for the empire to trade in crops grown next to Roman settlements (Burns, 2003, pp. 187-188). The skeptic might say that barbarians like the Ubii had to accept offers and take up sedentary living because they had nowhere else to go, taxed by the Romans on one side (M. T. Cicero, 2012, pp. 19, 43; Fonteiis 2.11; Vivenza, 1998) and locked into their lands by struggles with fellow barbarians on the other. Perhaps, but could they have not leapfrogged farther into the hinterlands, away from the Romans, if dealing with Romans brought so much anguish? Barbarian choice lay at the core of Caesar’s explanation. Barbarians decided how much to trade, when to trade, and where to live. If trade ruined a once-bucolic people, then barbarians themselves shouldered part of the blame since they aided their own enculturation to Roman ways (Gruen, 2010, pp. 149-150). The empirical challenge of untangling choice, trade, and civilization from each other when assessing the impact of only trade remains unsolved to this day (Godoy, Reyes-Garcia, Byron, Leonard, & Vadez, 2005), but Caesar deserves credit for having been the first to framed the challenge so clearly.

Barbarians near Rome grew corrupt, lazy, and effeminate from trade in luxuries with the Romans. In contrast to barbarians changed by trade with the empire, autarkic groups in barbaricum remained unalloyed, strong, and truculent. So far, Caesar’s trope about decay from trade resembles Herodotus’ trope, but Caesar is clearer than Herodotus about what explains variation in trade exposure – it is mainly relative distance from Rome. In the opening of the Gallic Wars he notes that of all the people in Gaul,

*...the Belgae are the most courageous, because they are farthest removed from the culture and the civilization of the [Roman province of Gallia Narbonensis], and least often visited by merchants introducing the commodities that make for effeminacy (Caesar, 1979, p. 3).*

To Herodotus, variation in trade exposure had to do with absolute latitude: Those in the south traded, those in the north raided (Redfield, 1985). Herodotus treated distance as exogenous; nature put barbarians here or there, and depending on where they fell, they traded or not. To Caesar, in contrast, distance is endogenous; barbarians decide how far to live from the empire.

As we shall see, pin-pointing why barbarians varied in autarky matters for Caesar's interpretation of the effects of trade on barbarians.

Like Aristotle (1981; Politics I.256b40-258b8) before him, Caesar thought people had a proneness to trade and accumulate wealth from their "boundless wants" (Leshem, 2013, p. 45). If nature hard-wired the inclination to swap for gain, and people lacked sound minds to curb their greed (Leshem, 2013, p. 51), then barbarian chiefs had to step in to prevent trade with the empire from transmuting barbarian society (Gruen, 2010, pp. 149-150; Lowry, 1979, p. 69; Riggsby, 2006, pp. 16-17). As Caesar's army wended its way through Gaul, it confronted the Nervii, one of the most secluded groups in Gaul and the "fiercest among the Belgae" (Caesar, 1979, p. 95; 2.4). When Caesar asked about the Nervii, he was told:

*Traders had no means of access unto them, for they allowed no wine nor any of the other appurtenances of luxury to be imported, because they supposed that their spirit was likely to be enfeebled and their courage relaxed thereby. Fierce men they were, of a great courage, denouncing and accusing the rest of the Belgae for that they had surrendered to Rome and cash away the courage of their sires* (Caesar, 1979, p. 111; 2.15).

And the semi-nomadic Germanic Suebi, who also dwelled far from Rome, "by far the largest and the most warlike nation among the German" likewise banned wine import:

*They suffer no importation of wine whatever, believing that men are thereby rendered soft and womanish for the endurance of hardship* (Caesar, 1979, pp. 181-183; 4.1-4.2).

The Suebi allowed merchants to enter their territory so that merchants could buy booty plundered by the Suebi; they did not allow merchants to come in so the Suebi could meet their cravings for imports of wine and luxuries (Caesar, 1979, p. 183; 4.2; Schadee, 2008, pp. 167-168).

The repeated references to tolls (A. P. Fitzpatrick, 1989, pp. 42-44), to barbarian hostility to merchants encroaching on barbarian lands (Elton, 1996, pp. 80-81), to barbarian ground rules that traders had to follow when working in barbarian lands (Whittaker, 1994, pp. 241-242), and to bans on the imports of wine and luxuries such as "bronzes, glass, and silver bowls" (Nash, 1987, p. 126) into barbarian societies makes one wonder whether tribal trade restrictions with Romans arose from barbarian chiefs trying to curb addiction of villagers with a passion for liquor (Tchernia, 1983, pp. 94-99; Woolf, 1998, p. 177)<sup>viii</sup>, from a wish to check hoarding and the demise of traditional culture, or from tribal military leaders trying to monopolize the distribution of cachet or new markers of status that could push aside traditional positional goods (A. P. Fitzpatrick, 1989, pp. 36-37; Hedeager, 1992, pp. 156, 160). In subtle texts Caesar suggests that villagers and chiefs collaboratively or unilaterally erected barriers on the imports of goods they thought would increase addiction and vitiate traditional markers of social status. As Gruen (2010, pp. 149-150) points out, Caesar makes the barbarians accomplices in their exit from autarky. Romans brought luxuries to the hinterlands, and while some barbarians welcomed the foreigners and gave up their ancient ways to get the baubles of civilization, others – perhaps recognizing their own weaknesses à la Odysseus -- kept foreigners at bay by fighting them, by moving farther into the backlands, or by curbing trade with outsiders (Schadee, 2008).

Put in modern parlance, Caesar was saying that autarky and market exposure are endogenous. People and groups decide how much to trade with outsiders, how far to live from the empire, and will restrict commerce to shield traditional well-being. If Caesar is right, and

people and cultures decide how much to trade with outsiders, then examining the impacts of trade on barbarians becomes harder since barbarians partook in the simultaneous decision of both how much to trade and how traditional to remain.

The account of Tacitus about the impact of Roman trade on Germanic communities parallels but also departs from Caesar's narrative of Gaul. Both narratives use a folk-to-civilization gradient, but Tacitus' account departs by going deeper than Caesar's account into the mechanisms by which trade with the empire affected barbarians. The mechanisms fall into two categories: the human addiction to trade, discussed mainly in *Germania*, and taxation, discussed mainly in *Agricola*. Although each of the two books discusses addiction and taxation, each topic is discussed more fully in one tome<sup>ix</sup>. I begin with the impact of trade on barbarians in *Germania*.

Tacitus too uses an implicit axis of folk and Roman antipodes (Krebs, 2011, p. 45), with more secluded groups leading lives of "well-protected chastity", heroic prowess, and brigandage<sup>x</sup>. They eschewed coins and "feminine luxuries", were unschooled in the use of loans, and were braver than their peers closer to Rome (Gruen, 2010, pp. 166-167; Tacitus, 1999a, pp. 84-87; 18.1-18.3, 19.1-26.1, 5.1). "The nearest tribes," Tacitus wrote,

*... through experience of trade, know the value of gold and silver, and recognize and pick out certain types of our currency; the tribes further in employ the simpler and older practice of bartering goods* (Tacitus, 1999a, p. 79; 5.3).

Exposure to Roman trade, whether directly through billets, fortresses, towns, and wandering Roman traders, or indirectly through barbarian brokers (Rivers, 1999, p. 32) abraded folk cultures. As in Gaul, so too in Germania: archaic Germans abetted Roman interlopers. Romans offered wine, luxuries, manufactured goods carefully crafted to meet the "tastes and financial resources" of barbarians, subsidies, gifts (Cherry, 2007, p. 735), and military assistance (Burns, 2003, pp. 227-228); barbarians accepted the offers (Gruen, 2010, p. 167), repaying Roman encroachers with slaves, furs, hide, minerals (perhaps), and amber (A. P. Fitzpatrick, 1989, pp. 39, 41; Goodman, 2007; Tchernia, 1983, pp. 96-99). Settlers in Roman colonies needed workers, and the army sometimes needed additional warriors or food; barbarians responded to both demands by selling crops and their labor, as workers or as mercenaries (Burns, 2003, pp. 187-188, 232, 289-290). Trade being so profitable, occasional restrictions on trade imposed by Romans for security reasons (Cherry, 2007, p. 738) disgruntled barbarians (Elton, 1996, pp. 87-88).

Although the autarkic Germans excelled in probity, they had a dark side pre-dating Roman arrival. They loved gambling, drinking, and brawling, and abhorred quiet idleness (Krebs, 2011, pp. 47-48). When the Romans arrived, the ancient Germans stopped brewing home potations and switched to imported wine. Like Caesar, but more explicitly than Caesar, Tacitus notes that ancient Germans had a weakness for deluxe Roman goods:

*A liquor for drinking is made out of barley or other grain and fermented into a certain resemblance to wine.....If you indulge their love of drinking by supplying them with as much as they desire, they will be overcome by their own vices as easily as by the arms of an enemy* (Tacitus *Germania* quoted in Goodman, 2007, p. 122).

The Germanic Aestii on the Baltic resembled the Germanic Suebi in that they lived far from Rome, but, unlike the Suebi, they were "the most peaceable race of men" according to

Jordanes, a sixth-century historian (Bliujiene, 2011, p. 204; Rivers, 1999, p. 137). Tacitus says that the Aestii worshiped the boar, did not know iron, relied on farming and sea fishing, and occupied a land “exuding” in prodigal deposits of fossilized tree resin or amber, which they foraged to trade:

*As usual with barbarians, they have neither asked nor ascertained [i.e., amber’s] nature or the principle that produces it; quite the contrary, it long lay unnoticed amidst the other jetsam of the sea, until our extravagance gave it a name. To them it is utterly useless; they collect it crude, pass it on un-worked, and gape at the price they are paid* (Tacitus, 1999a, p. 96; 45.2-45.4).

Gruen (2010) and Rivers (1999, p. 320) have read the passage as an example of Tacitus’ view that the reach of Roman trade corrupted Elysian people, and go on to point to another passage in Germania where Tacitus says of the German landscape that “silver and gold the gods have denied, whether in kindness or anger I cannot say” (Tacitus, 1999a, p. 79; 5.2). Tacitus implies that barbarians might be simultaneously cursed and blessed from having valuable, tradeable natural resources in their lands. Here, as elsewhere, Tacitus (1999a, p. 83; 15.2) implies that Romans had to teach barbarians how to “take money” so barbarians could import Roman goods and remain loyal to the empire<sup>xi</sup>.

True, but the passage lends itself to another interpretation about the impact of trade on barbarians that Tacitus leaves unexplored. First, he remains silent about the form or quantity of payment the Aestii received for supplying traders with unprocessed amber. He hints that more civilized people would have traded processed rather than unprocessed amber, but he does not take into account that perhaps it was more profitable for barbarians to sell unprocessed amber owing to the additional costs needed to add value to amber. He accepts a Lévi-Straussian canonical analogy -- civilized is to processed, as uncivilized is to raw – forgetting the half-baked. Second, why would the Aestii “gape at the price”? High prices in the hinterlands imply competition between traders, hinting that the bargaining power rested with the Aestii rather than with the traders. Seen this way, trade was good for barbarians, not bad for them, as Tacitus suggests. Here, as in Agricola, Tacitus portrays Roman trade in an unfavorable light (K. Clarke, 2001, p. 105). At least one other reason might explain why the Aestii and other far-away groups in barbaricum might have had the upper hand over Romans in trade. When Romans or tribal elites needed wildlife resources randomly distributed across time and space, such as game, wild plants, seal oils and skins (Nash, 1987, pp. 83, 85), furs, precious stones (Elton, 1996, pp. 84-85), gold, ivory (Nash, 1987, p. 101), or amber (Bliujienè, 2011, pp. 5-13; Burns, 2003, pp. 212-214), they had no option – initially at least – but to rely on the local knowledge of the common rural folk to prospect and find the feral resources. Tacitus says that the Aestii prospected for amber, rummaging and ransacking the sea to collect it (Bliujienè, 2011, pp. 41, 43). Romans or tribal elites could chain their slaves and workers to dig, cut, row, and build; they could kill, rape, and loot if all they wanted were cattle, sheep, women, land, crops, trophies, or slaves. But when Romans wanted goods with a helter-skelter distribution over time and place they had to treat Lilliputian prospectors with deference to allow them the freedom to move untrammelled to fetch the desultory goods coveted by the empire. A procurator of Nero was asked to bring amber for the gladiatorial games. The knight trolled “up and down the Baltic region to carry out his task, finally gathering enough to encrust the nets, armor, and even the litters for removing the dead with ambers” (Lao, 2011, pp. 49-50). Call it natural resource primordialism if you will. If this

line of thinking is right, then the type of resource demanded by the ancients – fixed or feral -- had much to do in shaping the quality of Roman-barbarian trade deals, at least in the more secluded lands and during the initial stages of cultural contact. Since feral sources in demand by the empire were lodged at the ragged penumbra of the empire it would be hard to untwine the properties of the resource from the remoteness of barbarians in assessing how each influenced the quality of trade relations.

Where Tacitus breaks new ground and complements Caesar's explanation about the impact of trade on barbarians is in his description of the ambiguous effects of trade on barbarians. Whereas Herodotus implied that trade produced different effects depending on the viewpoint of the observer (Lydians suffer, Persians gain), and whereas Caesar said that the prime movers of trade were hard to untwine and that the outcome (Civilization) was best viewed as an attribute a group had in degrees, Tacitus was saying that unregulated trade had different effects within barbarian society. In examining trade this way, Tacitus had to unbundle the outcome and bring it down to something meaningful to the individual barbarian.

A man of the principate who valued the contributions of those who had come before him (Martin, 1981, p. 234), Tacitus, like his peers and predecessors, thought that trade weakened hardy people, but then went on to ask whether economically self-sufficient German barbarians were better off than barbarians closer to Rome in other dimensions besides bravery and uprightness, and here his answer was unequivocal (Gruen, 2010, p. 167). True, remote barbarians were more courageous, virtuous, and hard-working than their more sedentary, effeminate kin closer to Rome, but they also had less freedom. At the end of Germania Tacitus (1999a, p. 95; 44.1-44.3) describes the freedom of different groups in relation to their autarky. Among the more self-sufficient groups, such as the Gotones, Rugii, and Lemovii he found tyrants ruling without checks (Tacitus, 1999a, p. 95; 44.1). Far from Rome one found the Suione confederacy, bossed by a king who kept all weapons "shut up" under the guardianship of a slave. His "band of armed men at leisure readily run riot" (Tacitus, 1999a, p. 95; 44.3). And then there were the Sitones, the most secluded group. They resembled the nearby Suione in all but one way: A woman ruled over them. Of the Sitones, Tacitus (1999a, p. 96; 45.6) laments with contempt that "they sink not merely below freedom but even below slavery". No weasel words. Autarky had autarchy as a companion.

Building on an intellectual pedigree going back to the Stoics through Strabo, Tacitus implies that trade engenders muddle effects on barbarians (Dueck, 2000, pp. 115-122). Autarky goes along virility and bondage, virtue and drunkenness, innocence and brawling. In contrast, trade corrupts and softens the rural folk, but also brings freedom from tyrants and more choices in consumption. Roman cash payments, subsidies, and bribes could even embolden the martial spirit of barbarians (Gruen, 2010, pp. 166-167). Beyond the obvious point that trade brings curses and blessing, Tacitus intimates that trade engenders no deep changes; it merely eases the way barbarians consume and express status. The Celtic Marcomani and the Quadi tribes gave up receiving tributes in horses, luxuries, and weapons and instead accepted cash payments from the Romans (Pitts, 1989, p. 53), with the implication that not much had changed, only the currency of exchange (Cherry, 2007, p. 735; Tacitus, 1999a, pp. 83, 94; 42.2, 15.2).

In sum, in Germania Tacitus suggests that barbarians' proclivity to trade with Romans stemmed from an entrenched desire to increase and diversify flamboyant and unnoticeable consumption. Some barbarians sidled to Romans to avoid internecine conflicts with peers in the backlands; in those cases trade with the empire resulted from political moves by barbarians. In either case, Roman coercion played no large role in barbarians' decision to enter the Roman

economy. Trade simply lured barbarians. In Agricola, Tacitus focuses on a second mechanism by which barbarians are pushed – rather than pulled – to trade with Romans: taxation (Hopkins, 1980). If in Germania barbarians are partners in the decision to join the market, in Agricola they are peremptorily told to enter the market.

To subdue obdurate barbarians in Britain, Agricola, Tacitus’s father-in-law and Roman governor of Britain, tried grafting pragmatic policies with economic and political carrots and sticks. Tacitus says that:

*[Agricola’s] intention was...that people who lived in widely dispersed and primitive settlements and hence were naturally inclined to war should become accustomed to peace and quiet by the provision of amenities. Hence he gave encouragement to individuals and assistant communities to build temples, market-places, and town houses. He praised those that responded promptly and censured the dilatory. As a result they began to compete with one another for his approval, instead of having to be compelled. Further, he educated the sons of the leading men in the liberal arts....*  
(Tacitus, 1999b, p. 17; Agricola, 21; my emphasis).

Romans drew barbarians into civilization’s catchment through the enticement of the marketplace and the supply of “amenities”. Agricola (and perhaps Tacitus as well) assumes that barbarians in Britain, like barbarians in mainland Europe, had a penchant to truck and would drift to a Roman lifestyle once Romans brought goods and built safe trading places (Millett, 1990, p. 74)<sup>xii</sup>.

Whereas in Germania trade affects willing barbarians, in Agricola trade becomes -- in addition and in more blatant fashion -- a weapon of conquest. Baited by bibelots, barbarians might settle next to Romans to trade with them, but Romans had to use taxation, tax breaks, bribes, and threats to keep barbarians in the trading zone (Millett, 1990, pp. 44, 72). Tacitus modulates his message from the ambiguous effects that Roman trade had on barbarians in Gaul, to policies used to handcuff barbarians to trade.

The barbarians in mainland Europe begrudged Roman taxation, but we hear almost nothing about it in Germania<sup>xiii</sup>, whereas in Agricola Tacitus stresses that Roman abuses in taxation and corvée labor – “taxes, mines, and the other punishments imposed on slaves” --- contributed to barbarian contumacy (Tacitus, 1999b, pp. 11, 23; Agricola, 13, 32). Before a battle in the Graupian Mountain the barbarian leader Calgacus acknowledged the benefits of trade with Romans, but comments on the burden of taxation:

*Goods and possessions are consumed by taxation, the fields and their harvests by the grain-requisition, men’s very bodies and hands by building roads through forests and marshes, under the lash and subject to insults* (Tacitus, 1999b, p. 22; Agricola 31).

Britons’ participation in the market was not entirely voluntary (Cherry, 2007, pp. 730-731). Barbarians had to contribute with crops and labor. If they lacked money or crops to pay taxes, they had to buy crops from Romans, re-sell it to Romans, and deliver it to distant locations, in the process enriching equestrian procurators (Hanson, 1987, pp. 71-72, 168-173; Tacitus, 1999b, p. 16; Agricola, 19).

A weapon of the empire, trade had to go with Romanization and a “fair” way of taxing barbarians to produce lasting results for Rome (Tacitus, 1999b, p. 16; Agricola, 19), but here, as

in Germania, Tacitus probes further and asks about the ultimate effect of all the transformations on barbarian society, and once again he finds blurry results:

*....those who just lately had been rejecting the Roman tongue now conceived a desire for eloquence. Thus even our style of dress came into favor and the toga was everywhere to be seen. Gradually, too, they went astray into the allurements of evil ways, colonnades and warm baths and elegant banquets. The Britons, who had had no experience of this, called it 'civilization', although it was a part of their enslavement (Tacitus, 1999b, p. 17; Agricola 21).*

Trade lured and spawned short-run benefits, but also brought about unforeseen results. The short-sightedness of barbarians, their myopia, took them to the Romans and, eventually, to the loss of tribal culture. Trade made it possible for barbarian to express their impulsivity in new forms. The effects of trade on barbarians grew from a blend of barbarian myopia, goods and services supplied by Romans, and imperial policies to push barbarians into the market.

### **Speculations on the silence**

I have no fulfilling answer for why the ancients wrote so sparingly about the effects of trade on barbarians despite their interest in barbarians, the economy, and causality (Sahlins, 2004; van der Hoven, 1996, p. 64). We know from the archaeological record that the presence of army garrisons in frontier zones sparked additional consumption and production in barbarian societies, and affected land ownership and inequality in barbaricum (Cherry, 2007), and we know from literary sources of the East that trade with Rome fueled clashes between barbarians trying to monopolize trade with the Romans (M. P. Fitzpatrick, 2011, p. 49; Millett, 1990, pp. 30-31), yet we hear nothing about the topics in the Western literary record. If anything, we hear more about how trade with barbarians affected the Roman economy and society, than about how trade with Romans affected barbarians. In much of Roman history we hear from the gilded aristocracy about the enfeeblement of Roman society from the imports of Eastern luxuries (M. P. Fitzpatrick, 2011). I next discuss several overlapping explanations for the thin record.

Some might say the question is flawed, for it suggests that we can find in antiquity something that maybe never “clumped neatly in antiquity (Dench, 2013, p. 257; Veyne, 1993, pp. 357-358). We should not search for ethnography, trade, frontier lines, price-setting markets, or universal human rights in ancient times because we it is who invented those constructs. Far-flung trade entwined too tightly with imperial expansion, and perhaps remained too shaded by a stronger local economy to reveal itself with clarity (Duncan-Jones, 1990). This line of thinking might explain why the parents of history and ethnography elided the topic, but would not explain the anomaly of why writers such as Tacitus and Caesar commented on the impact of trade on barbarians.

A second reason for the silence has to do with the drivers of territorial expansion. Veyne (1993, p. 354) and Fitzpatrick (1989, p. 30) say that when looking beyond their borders the ancient Greeks and Romans viewed domination as natural, with superior masters ruling over inferior vassals (Woodman, 2014, p. 17). Ancient Greeks and Romans wanted to torch, erase, and forever “crush” barbarians to strengthen the empire (Briant, 2002, p. 205; Polybius, 2010, p. 13; 3.4; Whittaker, 1994, pp. 16-17). Caesar allowed the vanquished Nervii of Brabant to continue, but he sold as slaves or killed most other barbarians in Germania and Gaul. Polybius

notes that after defeating the Romans, the Carthaginians “regarded their position in Spain as undisputed and treated the natives in an overbearing manner”. In a reversal of fortune, when the Romans later defeated the Carthaginians they abused the vanquished Carthaginians. Although the Carthaginians “had been guilty of no immediate offense” and had agreed to obey all conditions imposed by Rome, they were treated by Rome with “irremediable severity” (Polybius, 2010, pp. 411, 213; 36.9.5, 10.36.1). If this line of thinking is right, then it would not have occurred to the ancients to write about the impact of trade on barbarians for the point of expansion was to sweep away barbarians. To write about the impact of trade on barbarians would have required that barbarians retain some agency. If fruitful long-distance trade could only come after *Pax Romana*, as implied in the writings of some of the ancient Roman writers (Woolf, 1998, pp. 52-54), then examining the impact of trade on barbarians was a topic too far in the future for immediate concern. The problem with this interpretation is that ancient writers like Strabo, Tacitus, and Pliny wrote about how exposure to Greco-Roman ways civilized barbarians (Goodman, 2007, p. 118). They wrote about Romanization (Woolf, 1998), about how “We” affected “Them”, but did not explicitly write much about the impact of trade on barbarians. Furthermore, despite their imperial drive, even Caesar and Tacitus were able to see that trade with Rome affected barbarians. Perhaps the question should be rephrased as: “Why didn’t the ancients write more than they did about the impact of trade on barbarians?” As noted, patricians demeaned long-distance trade, which often metics and foreign skippers and merchants carried out on behalf of citizens (Hansen, 1984, pp. 76-77; Woolf, 1998, p. 45). And although surreptitiously the aristocracy might have engaged in cabotage, they could not show off by writing about it. Writing about the history of battles, political events, and royal decisions drew a wider audience than writing about prosaic trade (Murray, 1972).

A third possible reason for the silence has to do with the mutualism of barbarians and conquerors. If, as argued by the new orthodoxy, the relation between the Greco-Roman empires and barbarians had much random syncretism (Momigliano, 1975, p. 7), then assessing the one-way impact of trade on barbarians becomes harder. Today we would think nothing of estimating the one-way impact of contemporary trade on the well-being of hunter-gatherers in the Amazon, but we would never think of asking: “What is the impact of contemporary native Amazonian cultures on Western trade?” In ancient times the gap separating the people of the empires from their barbarian trading partners was narrower, and crossovers more common, making it harder to spot unidirectional impacts (Whittaker, 1989, p. 68; 1994, pp. 228, 231-232).

As a coda we mention one final reason that probably applies to Greek writers more than to Roman writers. Redfield (1985) argues that in Herodotus’ time, the Greeks viewed the cultures of the north and the south as immutable; only the cultures in the middle such as the Lydians changed with the arrival of outsiders. Ptolemy’s astrological geography associated certain groups with the penchant to “trade and exchange; they are more unscrupulous, and despicable crowds, and treacherous...and totally fickle...on account of the stars ...standing in mutual opposition” (quoted in Goodman, 2007, p. 149). If stars, geography, culture, and trade were fastened to each other and stonewalled in a sessile box, then, again, perhaps there was nothing to write about since nothing could change in response to trade.

### **Discussion and conclusions: Lingering themes from the ancients**

Although the ancient Greco-Romans did not put the analysis of trade’s impact on barbarians at the center stage of their ethnographies or histories, some of what they said

foreshadows how we view the topic today. By way of conclusion, I summarize the main points raised by the ancient writers and their relevance to the contemporary understanding of trade with indigenous peoples. I start with methods. The ancients wrestled with three topics: the unit of observation and analysis, the endogeneity of trade, and the outcomes of choice.

As Sahlins (2004) points out, the ancients saw the collective as the unit of observation and analysis. Trade affected the Lydians or the Suebi as a collective of people. The ancients were not much interested in writing about how trade affected smaller units of observation, such as households, individuals, tribal chiefs, or villages. Because they aggregated up, they had a small sample of observations when making inferences. Caesar and Tacitus probably encountered hundred of villages in Gaul, Britain, and Germania but because they focused on the collective, they collapsed barbarian heterogeneity into a handful of groups.

A second methodological hurdle they wrestled with had to do with the endogeneity of trade. Early writers viewed long-distance trade as exogenous; the propensity to trade was a random event determined by the stars, distance, or geography. But later writers such as Caesar, Tacitus, and Strabo viewed trade as endogenous. As we have seen, barbarian groups decided how much to trade with the empire, how far or near from the empire to settle, and how deep to dig the trading moats. And the empire too thought with whom to trade. Strabo ruled out trading with “complete savages” leading “a miserable existence” in frozen lands to the north because those barbarians had nothing of value for the Romans (Strabo, 1923, p. 263; IV.5.5; 1949, pp. 443-447; II.5.8). The simultaneous decision by barbarians of how much to trade and what aspects of barbarian society to change and protect as trade unfolded made it hard to assess the one-way impact of trade on barbarians since the impact would be mediated by unobserved preferences and choices of barbarians. Imperial preferences and their perception of the abundance of natural resources in the hands of barbarians added even more complexity to the endogeneity of trade. Ultimately, trade took place between self-selected trading partners in selected places around a narrow range of goods.

The third methodological topic has to do with the outcome of choice, and here the ancients highlighted two points. First, conquerors decided what outcome merited discussion when assessing the impacts of trade. Masculine virtues being stressed in the cultures of the ancient world, it came natural to them to comment on how trade affected the effeminacy of the barbarians. The second point has to do with the range of outcomes worthy of analysis. King Cyrus was interested in the effects of trade on meekness. Tacitus broadened the outcomes and described the impact of trade not only on the manliness of barbarians, but also on barbarians’ conspicuous consumption and freedom. Whether they considered one or whether they considered many outcomes, the ancient writers were influenced by their culture on the outcomes of choice. Culture guided them (and us) on what to focus when examining the impact of trade. Today only a lunatic would venture to estimate the impact of international trade on the masculinity of indigenous people; to the ancients this seemed like a sensible undertaking. Today we care about the impact of trade on the health and poverty of indigenous peoples; the ancients, in turn, would have thought us mad for such an interest.

On the substantive side the ancients made three points. First, they noted that trade produced winner and losers. Lydians lost, Persians won. Their categories of winners and losers overlapped with their categories of winners and loser in war, and do not overlap with the categories contemporary economist would use to describe winner and losers from international trade, but the ancients deserve credit for noting the ambiguous effects of trade.

Second, the ancients were ambivalent about the benefits of trade. Markets eroded freedom, bred Veblenian consumption, prompted false needs, and enfeebled the spirit. Many of the ancients loathed the emollient effects of trade, yet later writers put a positive spin on these soothing effects. Pliny wrote approvingly about the causal link from trade to peace:

*Who would not admit that, now that the intercommunication has been established throughout the world, life has been advanced by the interchange of commodities and by partnership in the blessings of peace, and that even things that had previously lain concealed have all now been established in general use?* (Pliny, *Natural History*, xiv. 2, xxvii. 3 quoted in Millar, 1984, p. 17).

Like Pliny, the champions of capitalism centuries later would encourage free trade to foster “perpetual peace”, cooperation, and harmony (Fourcade & Healy, 2007; Hirschman, 1977; Kant, 1980 [orig. 1795], p. 32; McCloskey, 2006).

Third, strong barbarian societies imposed trade barriers. The Egyptians did it, so did the more secluded tribes in Germania, and so did Arabian and Eastern trading partners, whom Pliny, Tacitus, and Strabo reproached for building a trade surplus at the expense of Romans (M. P. Fitzpatrick, 2011, pp. 31, 33, 51). One could speculate about the reasons for the trade barriers, but what seems clear is that the impact of imperial trade on barbarians got filtered through a mesh of barbarian trade regulations. Strong barbarians as far back as Herodotus’ time made trade work on their behalf. Much in the same way the ancient empires had ideals about where markets should take place (far from temples and palaces), how market transactions should take place (ethically, generously, to cover basic needs with a small margin of profit re-invested in the commonwealth), and about what items to exclude from trade (frivolities such as luxuries and incense), so too barbarians had their cultural norms about what foreign goods and services could enter into their village economy.

In sum, the ancient Greco-Roman writers contributed to our understanding of how trade affects barbarians or those whom today we would call indigenous peoples. On the methodological front, they wrestled with the endogeneity of trade exposure and with the outcomes worthy of analysis. On the substantive side, they pointed out that impacts depended on the outcome, with trade allowing for increased consumption and unpredictable expressions of myopia, but at the same time being associated with greater freedom. They equated trade with peace, a line of thought that would be picked up with vigor centuries later.

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<sup>i</sup> For examples of how Romans viewed barbarians see Dench (1995, pp. 72-80) and Goodman (2007, pp. 148-149).

<sup>ii</sup> Morris (1986, pp. 5-6) notes that ancient writers like Homer and Hesiod inveighed “against non-aristocrats becoming involved in inter-community trade, and particularly against the rise of professional traders....” and viewed with contempt professional traders. Aristocrats engaged in gift exchange might have felt threatened by demotic trade in useful goods, particularly if traders were foreigners. See Cartledge (1983, pp. 9-10) on Hesiod’s invectives against trade and Dover (1974, pp. 40, 173) on popular Greek attitudes against commerce.

<sup>iii</sup> See also Athenaeus (1928, pp. 183-184; 149e-f, 150) for a discussion of food taboos in Naucratis.

<sup>iv</sup> In Cyropaedia Xenophon repeats the story of King Cyrus (1891, p. 4; 1.2.3). See also Gruen (2010, pp. 34, 56).

<sup>v</sup> Hesiod viewed ideal trade as trade in the service of autarky. Through trade a community would flush out its surplus. One person would oversee and carry out trade during a window of 50 days in the agricultural inert season (Cartledge, 1983, p. 9).

<sup>vi</sup> They did write about the benefits of Greek civilization on barbarians (Millar, 1998). See also Plutarch’s Moralia, (1936, p. 393) for how Alexander the Great civilized barbarians.

<sup>vii</sup> The ancients equated the sea with avarice, darkness, treachery, impiety, danger, and in clash with the earth, which nourished the opposite traits (Beagon, 1992, p. 160). If so, then the shift in the geographical focus of imperialism from ancient Greek times, based on seafaring, to Roman times, based increasingly on continental conquest of adjacent neighbors in places like Gaul and Germania, might have bestowed a more positive attitude to distant trade.

<sup>viii</sup> Diodorus (Diodorus V. 26.3 quoted in 1983, p. 97) commented on the propensity of Gauls to consume wine.. See also Sulimani (2011, p. 245).

<sup>ix</sup> In The Annals, Tacitus (2004; e.g., I.11, 33, II.5-6, 43, XIII.50) discusses taxation in Gaul, but does so inconsistently (G. W. Clarke, 1965). Similarly, Caesar mentions taxation in Gaul, but he does not view it as a reason for why barbarians engaged in trade (Dyck, 2012, p. 43)

<sup>x</sup> About three centuries after Tacitus, Ammianus Marcellinus (320-390AD) echoed the virtues stressed by Tacitus and other earlier Roman historians about European and Asian barbarians (Burns, 2003, p. 422; Marcellinus, 1950; p. 289, Vol I, 16.12.46-47; pp. 381-395, Vol III, 31.2) . Unlike his predecessors, Marcellinus has little to say about trade and markets with the barbarians.

<sup>xi</sup> Roman writers said that Romans taught barbarians how to use money and operate in markets, but Romans might have had little power to impose their economy or culture on faraway barbarians (Goodman, 2007, p. 148; Millett, 1990, pp. 7-8). For the inability of the Roman

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empire to control trade with the East, see Fitzpatrick (2011, p. 48). More broadly, ancient writers such as Tacitus, Strabo, and Polybius believed that imperial conquest brought peace to “brutish nations” (Strabo, 1923, pp. 71, 79, 247III.3.5, III.3.8, IV.4.5; Veyne, 1993, p. 359; Whittaker, 1994, pp. 16-17, 37).

<sup>xii</sup> For Briton’s penchant for luxuries see Strabo (1923, p. 259; IV.5.3).

<sup>xiii</sup> Tacitus (1999b, p. 52; Germany, 29) says that the Batavians are not “humiliated by tribute, nor does the tax-farmer grind them down”.