MACEDONIANS, GREEKS, AND BARBARIANS IN DIODORUS'S *BIBLIOTHEKE* (BOOKS XVII-XX)

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Abstract: This paper investigates how Diodorus Siculus portrays the Macedonians, Greeks, and barbarians, and how these portrayals reflect the fluid, evolving, and contested nature of ethnic identity in the late Classical and early Hellenistic periods. The study applies a comparative historical approach, analysing selected episodes from four books (XVII-XX) of his colossal work "*Bibliotheke*" bibliographically classified as general history. These volumes represent a valuable testimony to ancient Macedonian history, and specifically document Alexander the Great's rise to power, his reign and conquests (336-323 BCE). When it comes to historical sources in general (in this case, the source refers to Alexander the Great and his successors), scholarly engagement has traditionally prioritizes military and political events: battles, victories, and defeats. Comparatively, less attention has been devoted to the complex relationships between Macedonians, Greeks, and so-called barbarians. The concepts of Greekness, non-Greek people, deeply embedded in Hellenic thought and identity, since at least the 6th century BCE, intensified during the Persian Wars in the 5th century BCE, and were subsequently reformulated during the Peloponnesian War. These concepts evolved further with the eastern expansion of Greek culture in the period after his death, known as the time of the *Diadochoi*, and give rich material for comparative analysis. Macedonian imperialism and the establishment of the Hellenistic monarchies contributed significantly to the transformation of these cultural constructs and established different views towards Hellenism and barbarism. This paper explores Diodorus Siculus's portrayal of Macedonians, Greeks, and so-called "barbarians" in *Bibliotheke*, focusing on how these representations reflect the fluid and contested nature of identity in the Hellenistic world. By analyzing selected episodes related to Alexander the Great's campaigns, conquests, and governance, the study reveals the shifting boundaries and perceptions among these groups. The selected books provide narrative in which ethnic identities and political alliances are, negotiated or redefined. Particular attention is paid to the dynamics of interaction, marked at times by hostility, distrust, and antagonism, which illuminate the complex and evolving construction of ethnic and cultural identities in the late Classical and early Hellenistic periods. Through this lens, Diodorus's narrative emerges not merely as a historical account, but also as a valuable source for understanding the ideological and political implications of identity in antiquity. This paper does not seek to resolve long-standing debates surrounding this issues. Rather it aims to analyse specific examples from Diodorus's *Bibliotheke*, in order to trace the interactions between Macedonian, Greeks and barbarians. These interactions, exibit evolving meanings and intensities across the historical epochs. The study, contributes to the broader scholarly discourse on Hellenism, Macedonian identity, and concepts of barbarism during the Hellenistic period, while also encouraging deeper engagement with the narrative and ideological structures embedded in Diodorus's work.
Keywords: Diodorus Siculus, Alexander the Great, Greeks, ancient Macedonians, barbarism, Diadochi, identity

1. INTRODUCTION

Diodorus's work encourages us to reassess the traditional views on barbarism, which are largely shaped by the ancient concept of historiography, as well as examples found in poetry and rhetoric (Шукарова, А. 2003). Interest in Diodorus as a historical source has grown significantly in recent decades. Nevertheless, the particular themes explored in these specific books (XVII-XX) merit renewed attention and reading, in the context of research into ancient Macedonian history. Diodorus composed his work *Bibliotheke/* "Library" in the 1st century BCE, a time when Greece suffered political and economic collapse and the Roman Empire had established dominance. He thus wrote about events described in these four books (XVII-XX) that took place approximately three centuries before his own time, and this temporal distance undoubtedly influenced his historical outlook (*logos)*. Following the tradition of earlier historiographers, Diodorus explored Greek values in their encounters with other cultures, especially those of dominant political power. Through accounts of military and political events, he also depicted the cultures of the peoples involved in these processes, who are an essential component of his universal history. Moreover, Diodorus was witness to the continued relevance of the idea of uniting East and West, which was vision initiated by Alexander the Great, and later revived as an inspiration for Julius Caesar and his successor Augustus, and other Roman emperors. (Sacks, K., 1990).

Within Alexander's empire, the distinction between Greeks and barbarians took on a specific meaning. In the kingdom of Alexander the Great and the successors kingdoms/states of Seleucus, Ptolemy, and Antigonus), the

Macedonians and the Greeks have different origins, but emerged as a status equal group to the Greek. They gained access to all previously "forbidden zones" of Greek identity, which was not the case for the other populations of the central Balkans or the East. This shift is one of the aspects that clearly and unequivocally are noted in the four books of *Bibliotheke* that are the focus of this study. Alexander's army was primarily composed of Macedonian and Greek soldiers, united in the common Panhellenic mission against the Persians (the archetypal barbarians). The Macedonians had long been within the Greek sphere of influence, and had risen to become leaders of *Hellenismus* (Поповска, 2015, 15-18*)*. By status, they were equal to the Greeks, and under single sceptre, they launched their campaign against the barbarians. This, the once rigid, the black-and-white picture of the world dividing Greeks and barbarians begun to acquire nuances. (Harrison, 2002, 193-210).

2. THE MACEDONIAN POSITION BETWEEN GREEKS AND OTHERS

The conceptual triad of Macedonians, Greeks, and barbarians is a recurring theme of Macedonian ancient history and connects the books XVII-XX of Diodorus's *Bibliotheke*. Barbarism as a historical, political, and sociological phenomenon can be most clearly examined through the analysis of relations between Greeks and the barbarians, between the Macedonians and Greeks, and in that context, Macedonians and barbarians (OCD, 1996, 233). This study draws upon extensive scholarly literature (Anderson, 1983, Gellner, 1983, Hobsbaum, Reinger, ed. 1983, Said. E. 1978), source material, and mature theoretical frameworks (Hall, 2002, 191–198, Landucci, 2024). The *Otherness* of the Macedonians in relation to the Greeks introduces a distinct topic of analysis, that necessarily imposed due to the different historiographical and philosophical perspectives ancient authors. Modern scholarship continues to grapple with the implications of these ancient narratives (Hammond, 1979, ch. 1; Borza,, 2001). However, there is an increasing emphasis on re-evaluating the authentic contribution of ancient peoples, known only through the works of the Greek and Roman authors. Consequently, ancient Macedonian history is no longer viewed as a subset of ancient Greek history.

In the relevant books of the *Bibliotheke*, starting with Book XVII, references to barbarians in opposition to Alexander the Great and the Macedonians, appear approximately thirty five times. Diodorus documents the various tribal communities and peoples with whom Alexander came into contact during his northern campaigns, and throughout his eastern conquests. According to Diodorus, all these groups were labelled as barbarians. That designation, however, no longer applied to the Macedonians (Hammond, 1979, 139-149, Borza, 2001, 192-193. Borza, 1995,125-133) Nevertheless in several passages Diodorus notes behaviors by Macedonians, that, from a Greek perspective, might be deemed "barbaric." These include Alexander's adoption of certain eastern (barbaric) customs as well as similar actions by members of his aristocracy: Hephaestion and Harpalus, (Diod. XVII .108.4–6), and parts of the army. However, these instances reflect imitation of eastern values, rather than fundamental shift in cultural identity as presented by Diodorus. Diodorus himself was not immune to the fascination with Alexander's personal achievements. His portrayal of the young, ambitious king is overwhelmingly positive even when describing Alexander's often unpredictable and brutal actions. Indeed, Diodorus presents Alexander with many faces, constructing an image of a ruler who embodies both Greek heroic ideals and the royal symbols of Persian Empire. Diodorus's depiction of Alexander demonstrates how notions of Hellenism were negotiated, adapted and contested. Alexander's figure, as presented by Diodorus, is a fusion of historical events, mythological elements, and cultural commentaries. This is evident in the introductory section of Book XVII:

..[3]. Alexander accomplished great things in a short space of time, and by his acumen and courage surpassed in the magnitude of his achievements all kings whose memory is recorded from the beginning of time. [4]. In twelve years he conquered no small part of Europe and practically all of Asia, and so acquired a fabulous reputation like that of the heroes and demigods of old. But there is really no need to anticipate in the introduction any of the accomplishments of this king; his deeds reported one by one will attest sufficiently the greatness of his glory… (Diod. XVII 3-4).

3. BARBARISM AND HELLENISM IN DIODORUS'S ACCOUNT OF ALEXANDER'S CAMPAIGNS

In support of this depiction, I will highlight several examples, beginning with Diodorus's account of Alexander's actions during the destruction of Thebes in 335 BCE. In the second year of his reign over Macedonia, Thebes, one of the most powerful Greek city-states, revolted against Alexander. The Thebans attacked the military garrison stationed there by his father Philip II (382-336 BCE) after the Battle of Chaeronea (338 BCE). During the uprising, two Macedonian officers were killed. In revenge, Alexander crashed the renowned Theban army, entered the city, and completely razed and burned it. It was a brief but decisive Macedonian assault. Few ancient authors write about the devastation of Thebes (Plut. Al., 11. Arr., Diod., XVII, 12-14). When they do mention the destruction of Thebes, their reports are often concise, softened in tone, and insufficiently precise. Diodorus notes the massacre of 6,000 Theban citizens and the enslavement of over 30,000. Despite his reputation for moralizing and his usual sensitivity

toward human suffering, Diodorus refrains from commenting on the cruelty inflicted by Alexander's army upon the Theban population. On the contrary, his narrative suggests that the Thebans brought their faith upon themselves through rush and "íll-considered" resistance. In fact, this is a rare example when Diodorus comments on the senseless courage in reference with Thebes's resistance against Alexander:

...[1]. Elsewhere in Greece, as people learned the seriousness of the danger hanging over the Thebans, they were distressed at their expected disaster but had no heart to help them, feeling that the city by precipitate and ill-considered action had consigned itself to evident annihilation… (Diod., XVII 10 1).

From a modern perspective, this event undoubtedly constitutes a serious war crime. Yet it remains uncommented upon by the ancient authors, and Diodorus in particular tends to relativize the violence. The city of Thebes was reduced to ruins by Alexander and his troops. Only the temples and the house of the poet Pindar were spared. The method of Thebes destruction is not typical for inter *poleis* warfare in the Greek world, even though instances of brutality did occur during internal conflicts. Never before the rice of the Macedonian dominance had such thorough devastation been inflicted upon of Greek city. (Diod. XVI 53.2-3, Str. X 1, 8.) (Robinson, 1941, 382-383; 418-443. Borza 1992. 218- 219, 245, 337. Griffith, 1979, 321 -328). The level of cruelty suggests that Macedonians did not perceive the Greeks as close kin, when they could bring them to such a state of suffering and punishing them with such a severity. The reason why ancient historical sources often treat these episodes from Alexander's reign so briefly, likely lies in the desire to relativize the animosity and fraught relations by Macedonian kings upon Greek subjects. Alexander, following the example of his predecessors, disregarded Greek ideal of autonomy and pride. He insisted on his singular authority and sought to make it clear how he will respond to rebellion and disloyalty. This narrative framing ultimately serves to normalize Macedonian brutality, presenting it in context of imperial rule, even as it diverges from traditional Hellenic standards of warfare. After this devastating event, and before continuing his eastern campaign, Alexander organized a nine-day festival to allow his army to rest and to boost morale. Diodorus notes that this festival was originally established by the Macedonian king Archelaus I (413-399 BCE):

" [1] He made lavish sacrifices to the gods at Dium in Macedonia and held the dramatic contests in honour of Zeus and the Muses which Archelaus, one of his predecessors, had instituted." (Diod. XVII, 16, 1.).

In the scholarly literature, the establishment of this festival is interpreted as a response by Archelaus to Greek exclusion concerning the Olympic Games, at that prestigious Panhellenic festival. As a Macedonian, non-Greek and a barbarian, Archelaus was not permitted, unless his Greek origin was "recognized, a status that was later fabricated and promoted through claims about the mythological ancestry of the Macedonian kings. We should have in mind that Macedonian elite's use of Greek dress, language, and art did not fundamentally alter the cultural identity of the Macedonians. The kings were acutely aware how to exploit *philhellenism* for their military and political objectives. (Hammond, 1979, 148-149, Borza, 2001, 192-193. Borza, 1995,125-133). This kind of cultural hybridity does not elicit explicit critique from Diodorus but it is noted as a deviation from normative Greek practices. That is how I understand this passage, that is, Diodorus's digression, as a subtile commentary on the underlying tension and mutual intolerance between Macedonians and Greeks (Hammond, 1979, 139-148. Borza, 2001, 185-186).

4. CULTURAL STRATEGY AND SYMBOLIC POWER IN DIODORUS ACCOUNT OF ALEXANDER

Throughout his campaigns and conquests from the Mediterranean to the Himalayas, Alexander III strove to be remembered. He undertook numerous risky and ambitious expeditions, conquered almost the entire known world of his time, claimed a wide array of honours and titles (king, hegemon, pharaoh, son of God), founded cities across the conquered territories and named them after himself, and elevated himself to a cult status during his lifetime, and that legacy only grew after his death,. He engraved himself in the collective memory and in the history of the world. His mystical journey to the Siwa Oasis served to affirm his "divine origin."(Diod. XVII 49, 6; 50, 2-4.) Yet Diodorus does not describe this "non-Greek act" as "barbaric," which reveals something about his cultural and social matrix. This perspective is likely influenced by the polytheistic religious structure of ancient Rome. The act of deification (Beard, 2023, 346, 348,349, 350) was a common practice that belonged to the imperial cult, starting from the time of the early empire, a period when Diodorus was both a witness and participant. This conception refers to the proclamation of the Roman emperor as God, and signifies the giving of exceptional honour both for his deeds and personal character, confirms the greatness of the emperor. It also means confirmation of the preservation of the traditional religion and moral code in the empire. Within these frameworks, Diodorus's reporting on this act could be understood. Seen through his lens, Diodorus's treatment of Alexader's self-deification aligns with the values and practices of his own time. He may have recognized in Alexander's actions a parallel to the Roman tradition of emperor worship. This stands in stark contrast to the Greek ideals of rulership, in which the ruler could be likened to a god, or posseses divine qualities, but could not claim literal devine descent or status. Thus I understand and interpret this report, and Diodorus's digression, not just as historical commentary, but as subtile subtext revealing the deep -seated cultural tensions and mutual perceptions between Macedonians and Greeks. After Alexander, in

the royal house of the Antigonids, this phenomenon did not take root. As an exception, we should mention the behaviour of Demetrius (337-283 BCE) after the conquest of Athens. He demanded divine honors, but this was an isolated case, which is not found later in the Macedonian royal house. The story is different in the Seleucid, and especially the Ptolemaic kingdom. They absolutely accepted the values of the old, relatively speaking barbarian kingdoms, on whose soil they built the new dynasties (Erskine, A. ed. Chaniotis, A. 2003, 431-435). The reason is that *apotheosis* (lat. *deificatio*) convays the idea of victory over death. The notion of triumph carries sublime, cosmic or universal dimensions. Since sublimity is closely tied to the concept of of indestructibility, and, by extension, divinity, the act of deifying emperors represents a striving for recognition of divine attributes as historical figures. They govern in order to maintain cosmic order, and through deification after death, they symbolically ensure the preservation of harmony. The aspiration to become *divi fillius* is also deeply rooted in humanity's fear of being forgotten or of failing out of alignment with the cosmic order. Thus, divinity is understood as an eternal attribute of the desire for enduring presence in collective memory and history." (Grandakovska, S. 2009, I-II).

In the context of Alexander III's renowned generosity towards defeated enemies, which impressed his contemporaries and later generations who contributed to shaping his image, Diodorus gives the exemplary case of the capture of the Darius III family, following the Battle of Issus (Diod. XVII, 37, 5-6 ,Curt.III, 12, Plut., Alex., 21 Arr. II, 12, 7). Alexander treated them in accordance with their royal status, ensured they were unharmed, and allowed them to continue living in royal splendor. He personally addressed them with words of compassion and benevolence:

[4].In general I would say that of many good deeds done by Alexander there is none that is greater or more worthy of record and mention in history than this.[5].Sieges and battles and the other victories scored in war are due for the most part either to Fortune or valour, but when one in a position of power shows pity for those who have been overthrown, this is an action due only to wisdom; [6].Most people are made proud by their successes because of their good fortune and becoming arrogant in their success, are forgetful of the common weakness of mankind. You can see how very many are unable to bear success, just as if it were a heavy burden. Although Alexander lived many generations before our time, let him continue to receive in future ages also the just and proper praise for his good qualities… (Diod. XVII, 38 4-7).

These episodes foregrounds Diodorus's philosophy of history, which holds that virtous individuals are brave and just, and compassionate, towards those under their authority. The previous and the next examples show that Diodorus does not treat Alexander's conduct in terms of good versus evil, and right versus wrong. Even acts of brutality, which often associated with barbarism, are not consistently condemned. Diodorus's praise of Alexander's clemency toward the captured family of Darius III, reveals another dimension of cultural performance. Alexander's magnanimity is framed as evidence of his philosophical wisdom, not merely military prowess. This rhetorical positioning constructs Alexander as a paradigm for Hellenistic ruler who, though brutal when necessary, embodies virtues appropriate to Greek and Roman political ideals. Such an approach reflects Diodorus's historiographical context under Roman imperial rule, where imperial ideology privileged conquest and political order over ethical consistency. The underlying logic of the narrative echoes Roman rationalization for imperial expansion and power consolidation, projecting these values retrospectively onto Alexander's legacy.

5. THE POLITICS OF MACEDONIAN SUPREMACY AND VIOLENCE

Diodorus recounts instances of extreme violence towards the barbarians during the military operations on the territory of India in 328-327 BC. One notable example is the massacre of the Kossaeans who were settled in Media. He says that Alexander "*wiped out the barbarians*". After receiving their promised obedience, allowed them to leave the city. Unexpectedly, after they had moved away, he attacked them, massacred them and expressed unprecedented hatred and brutality. Diodorus comments:

" [2]At first they kept shouting that this attack was in contravention of the treaty and they called to witness the gods against whom he had transgressed. Alexander shouted back that he had granted them the right to leave the city but not that of being friends of the Macedonians forever." (Diod, XVII, 84,2).

In the explicit scenes of bloodshed, Diodorus adds that the Macedonians slaughtered the barbarians with their sarissa spears (Diod. XVII, 84,4), phalanx's specific weapons which were the main military identification of the Macedonian military leaders throughout the Hellenistic period. Yet, he offers no moral juggment, suggesting a tacit acceptance of imperial violence as a political necessity. It appears that the author's fascination with the glory of Alexander ultimately overshadows the slaughter of the barbarians. As a result, his accounts of brutal acts against the barbarians remained without comment on the moral dimension. This tendency again aligns with the values of Roman imperial ideology, under which Diodorus was writing, and in his narrative the order, expansion and authority are often privileged at the expanse of ethical consistency. The narrative's underlying logic echoes Roman

justifications for expansion and power consolidation, projecting these values backward onto Alexander's legacy. (Eckstein, A.M. 1995, 89–92, Beard, M. 2023).

Furthermore, Diodorus also notes the reactions of the Greeks who had long been settled around Bactria and Sogdiana. Unwilling to live among barbarians, they rebelled against Alexander, i.e. against the Macedonian army. Their rage was fueled by false rumors that Alexander has been wounded or dead after the battle for one of the cities in India. (Diod. XVII, 99,5). The reaction once again underlines the subordinate role of the Greeks in the eastern campaign. The Macedonians as dominant force, effectively asserted control over both the barbarians and the Greeks.

The seventeenth book concludes with the unexpected death of Alexander. Despite the suddenness of his death, Macedonians retained supremacy over the Greeks and over the barbarians, meaning the conquered territories, and persisted until the Roman invasion and conquest during Macedonian wars (214-168 BCE). The Athenians previously fought the barbarians at sea and repelled them from their territory. However, the time came when they sought to liberate themselves from Macedonian domination. (Diod., XVIII, 10, 2). In this tendency, in Athens rised neutral, pro-Macedonian and anti-Macedonian political fractions, and that internal dynamic is noted in almost all Greek authors, especially those writing in the Hellenistic period. (Шукарова, А., 2003, 183-184).

Diodorus's later books (especially XIX and XX) continue to draw on ethnographic tropes to delineate the boundaries of civilization and barbarism. Another telling episode involves the Nabataeans, a tribal community, inhabiting Arabia. Living in a land with limited water and resources,(Diod.XIX, 100,1)they managed, through diplomacy and gifts, to convince the Macedonian ruler Demetrius (337-283 BC) not to launch a war against them, and explained he would do more harm than good. Demetrius evaluated the situation, and reached peaceful agreement with them. However, according to Diodorus, this decision angered his father Antigonus (382-301 BC). He allegedly rebuked him, with the following words:

"[1]for the treaty with the Nabataeans, saying that he had made the barbarians much bolder by leaving them unpunished, since it would seem to them that they had gained pardon not through his kindness but through his inability to overcome them e encouraged the barbarians by not punishing them, and they would not think that his pardon was due to his virtue, but to his inability to subdue them." (Diod., XIX, 101.1.).

With centuries of civilizational dust layered over the sources, it is difficult to determine what of this sentence are the actual words of Antigonus, what may have been derived from older sources, and what constitutes is Diodorus's own interpretation. What is clear, however, is that the situation was not at all a matter of victory or defeat, but calculated military assessment by Demetrius. Antigonus's alleged anger, if we accept account as accurate, is a reflection of his pride as a Macedonian, who regarded himself as culturally and civilizationally superior to the barbarians. Diodorus uses this moment to reveal the underlying assumption that failure to dominate barbarians invites further resistance. Such sentiments reinforce the ideology of cultural and military superiority often projected onto Macedonian rulers. Yet, as with earlier episodes, Diodorus's tone remains ambivalent, reporting the events without endorsing or condemning the ideological assumptions embedded in them.

6. CONCLUSION

Diodorus Siculus's depiction of Macedonians, Greeks, and barbarians in Books XVII–XX of the *Bibliotheke* provides a compelling framework for examining the fluid and contested nature of identity in the Hellenistic world. Diodorus's narrative reveals that the ideological boundaries between Greeks and Macedonians remained complex. Throughout these narratives, the Macedonians are frequently distinguished from both Greeks and barbarians. Although Diodorus does not always emphasize this distinction explicitly, his narrative structure and terminological choices suggest a deliberate differentiation. By emphasizing themes such as ruler deification and Macedonian supremacy, Diodorus seems less interested in establishing strict ethnocultural boundaries than in legitimizing imperial authority. His historiographical choices reflect contemporary anxieties surrounding identity, power, and cultural legitimacy. The Macedonians occupy a liminal space: culturally aligned with Hellenism, yet often portrayed as outsiders by Greek sources. Their leadership over the Greeks during Alexander's campaigns, as well as during the subsequent conflicts between his successors, is acknowledged but never celebrated, reflecting the uneasy accommodation of Macedonian dominance within a historiographical tradition rooted in classical Greek civic ideals.

The study contributes to the broader scholarly discourse on Hellenism, Macedonian identity, and concepts of barbarism during the Hellenistic period, while also encouraging deeper engagement with the narrative and ideological structures embedded in Diodorus's historiography.

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