

Introduction

‘The Herules exist for scholars as a nest of intractable, probably insoluble but fascinating problems,’ Walter Goffart writes.¹ This is a rather pessimistic view on the possibility of writing their history. Like many other ancient or early medieval peoples, the Herules are disadvantaged. Vast tracts of their past are unknowable due to lack of evidence. The Herules have not left their own saga to tell more or less truly their ancient beginnings and deeds. Their history, perceptible in Greek and Latin textual evidence, spans only about three centuries. While the situation of the student of the Herulian past is admittedly quite difficult, it is not entirely hopeless.

The first modern Western study of the Herules was written by Joseph Aschbach,² who was professor at the University of Vienna from 1853 (ennobled in 1870) and the renowned author of the multi-volume history of this institution. Aschbach was of the view that although the deeds of lesser-known Germanic nations such as the Herules and the Gepids remained in the shadow of the famous Goths, they still deserved serious scholarly attention. Following many historians who sought a well-grounded justification for their pursuits, he points out that the Herules ‘destroyed’ the Western Roman Empire, while the Gepids were the reason Hunnic barbarity was ejected [from Europe] towards its eastern boundaries.³ Unlike the history of the Gepids, however,

¹ Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, p. 205.

² Aschbach, *Geschichte der Heruler und Gepiden*, pp. 1–62. The author had earlier published a study devoted to Visigoths, *Geschichte der Westgoten*.

³ Aschbach, *Geschichte der Heruler und Gepiden*, p. iii.

Aschbach's Herulian studies did not invite a follow-up.⁴ Though no one questioned the Herules' role in the events of 476⁵ (with Felix Dahn's reservation that Odovacar was not the 'king of Herules'⁶), they once again went into hiding somewhere on the margin of the Migration Period historiography and the historical studies of the 'Deutsche Stämme.' A contribution that remains important to this day was made by Bruno Rappaport in his elaborate article for *Paulys-Wissowa Realencyclopädie*,⁷ and of course by Ludwig Schmidt.⁸ In 1978, the Hungarian scholar Pál Lakatos collated Greek and Latin sources for the history of the Herules,⁹ thus facilitating subsequent research at least in this respect. When, in 1999, Günther Neumann and Marvin Taylor were writing an article on the Herules for *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, they were able to quote very few studies devoted specifically to this tribe,¹⁰ though the source basis for this history had extended considerably from the times of Aschbach.¹¹ However, while earlier teaching found the basic research problem to be focused on the existence of two or (for some) even three different groups of Herules, since Alvar Ellegård's publication¹² the opposite possibility has been considered: that the Herules did not have a separate ethnic identity, but were just bands of wandering warriors like mediaeval Vikings or Varangians.

4 With the exception of little-known dissertation of Gustavus Bolze, *De rebus Herulorum*, now outdated.

5 Unless otherwise specified, all dates herein refer to the Christian era.

6 Dahn, *Könige der Germanen*, p. 2 and n. 8: 'Er [sc. Odovacar] wird fälschlicherweise sogar Herulerkönig genannt.'

7 *RE* VIII.1, 1898, cols. 1150–1167, s.v. 'Heruli'. The article by Rudolf Much, 'Heruler', *RGA* 2, 1913–1915, pp. 517–519 was less informative.

8 Schmidt, *Die Heruler*, 1927, pp. 103–107, and above all id., *Ostgermanen*, pp. 548–564.

9 Lakatos, *Quellenbuch*.

10 *RGA* 14, 1999, pp. 468–474, s.v. 'Heruler'. Marvin Taylor's, 'the first part of a survey of the state of research on the Eruli', 'Etymology', pp. 108–125, is very impressive, but it only concerns the etymology of their name. As far as I know, the next part was not published.

11 The epigraphs related to the Herules were published by Otto Fiebiger and Ludwig Schmidt, *Inscriptionensammlung*.

12 Ellegård, 'Who Were the Eruli?', pp. 5–34. Also Steinacher, 'Rex oder Räuberhauptmann', p. 323, is of the opinion that scattered fourth- to sixth-century mentions of the Herules cannot be related to the tribe but to various groups of soldiers.

Such an approach to the Herules' origins was upheld by Walter Goffart, who rejected the reliability of the hypothesis proposing the tribe's Scandinavian ancestry on the basis of Procopius' account.¹³ His suggestions, though in fact disputable, are still quite popular.

An important contribution was made by Norbert Wagner, concerning Herulian names.¹⁴

The articles published by Andreas Schwarcz¹⁵ are substantial, but the first, concerning the Herules' stay on the Azov Sea, appeared almost simultaneously with the excellent source analysis by Erich Kettenhofen, devoted to the Azov Herules' incursions into the Imperium Romanum,¹⁶ and that factor detracted some of its value.

A new and broad research impulse appeared with the volume on *Neglected Barbarians*, edited by Florin Curta, where Roland Steinacher¹⁷ and Alexander Sarantis¹⁸ prepared a critical summary of our knowledge concerning this Germanic ethnos (but not without some misinterpretations, as I show in this book). But a real scientific sensation came in 2008, in Vienna, when Jana Grusková found the unknown fragments of Dexippus (?) in the manuscript (palimpsest) *Cod. Vind. Hist. Gr. 73*, fol. 192r–195v. At first the editors suggested the new fragments refer to the Herules' invasion in 267/268,¹⁹ but the debate which flared up shortly after the publication showed that given the mention of the Gothic king, Cniva, both the Goths and another chronology must be taken into con-

13 Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, p. 206.

14 Wagner, 'Herulische Namenprobleme', pp. 406–421; id., 'Sindval, Fritigil und der „westgermanische“ Auslaut', pp. 300–308; id., 'Der Name des Herulers Faniqeos und ähnliche', pp. 379–384.

15 Schwarcz, 'Die gotische Seezüge des 3. Jahrhunderts', pp. 47–57; id., 'Die Heruler an der Donau', pp. 504–512; id., 'Gotische und herulische maritime Einfälle', pp. 389–401.

16 Kettenhofen, 'Die Einfälle der Heruler', pp. 291–313. Currently partially supplemented and replaced by the brilliant article on the invasion of 267, by Mihail Zahariade, 'A Crux in Bellum Scythicum', pp. 163–183.

17 Steinacher, 'The Herules', pp. 319–360; id., *Rom und die Barbaren*, pp. 54–74, 77–81, 87, 97–99, 117–120, 139–161 et passim.

18 Sarantis, 'The Justinianic Heruls', pp. 361–402. The narrative was repeated and expanded in id., *Justinian's Balkan Wars*. My review of the book in BMCR 2016.

19 Martin and Grusková, 'Dexippus Vindobonensis (?)', pp. 101–120.

sideration.²⁰ As specialized, high-tech examination of the palimpsest continues to show new, better visible fragments of the text (sometimes only new letters),²¹ the interpretation of the data of *Scythica Vindobonensia* must be delayed to the final establishing of the text of *Cod. Vind. Hist. Gr.* 73, fol. 192r–195v itself. This has become the responsibility of a special research team led by Fritz Mitthof from the University of Vienna (FWF Project P 28112 G25: 01.08.2015–31.12.2019).²² The results are to be published soon.

It should be assumed that archaeologists have not yet been able to identify such artefacts or other material remnants that could exclusively be attributed to the Herules.²³

Unexpectedly, the material remnants of what, according to some Polish archaeologists, may be traces of the Herules' re-migration to Scandinavia, as narrated by Procopius of Caesarea, have been found in Poland—at the site in Ulów, near Tomaszów Lubelski (the site has been excavated from 2002).²⁴ I have published elsewhere²⁵ a critical evaluation of the possibility of ascribing the 2002 findings²⁶ precisely to the Herules. In July 2018, I visited the Archaeological Museum in Tomaszów Lubelski. Thanks to the courtesy of its management and employees, for which I am sincerely grateful, I was able to become acquainted with a part of the material from the Ulów site. Unfortunately, some artefacts were (and still are) the object of Dr Barbara Niezabitowska's (Lublin) study, and so at the time were unavailable to me. Nevertheless, the chances of the remnants being connected with the Herules' repatriation to Scandinavia are close to zero, because the tribe's route did not cross the territory of present-day Poland.

20 Publications which appear on the subject are collated by Grusková and Martin, 'Zum Angriff der Goten', p. 35 n. 2, and in Mitthof, Martin, and Grusková (eds.), *Empire in Crisis*, pp. 565–570. Here ought to be added Suski, 'Dexippus and the Repelling of the Gothic Invasion', pp. 303–316.

21 See Grusková and Martin, 'Neugelesener Text', pp. 40–46.

22 The *Tagung*-papers on Dexippus Vindobonensis from 2017 have been published, Mitthof, Martin and Grusková (eds.), *Empire in Crisis*. Here is also preliminary transcription of Dexippus Vindobonensis, pp. 543–548.

23 See Gruber, 'Heruler', col. 2185.

24 Kokowski, *Goci*, pp. 257–259; Niezabitowska, 'Herulowie', pp. 271–274.

25 Prostko-Prostyński, 'Herulowie między Wisłą i Bugiem w VI wieku?', pp. 155–161.

26 The findings catalogue Niezabitowska, 'Herulowie', pp. 284–286. See ead., 'Archaeology, History and the Herules', pp. 195–239.

A serious incentive to study the Scandinavian period of the Herules' history was given in 1924 with the work of the Swedish philologist Otto von Friesen, who in the separate chapter 'Herulerna och runorna' ('The Herules and the runes') argued that the noun *erilaR*, *eirilaR*, known from numerous Scandinavian runic inscriptions, contains a hidden Herule tribe name.²⁷ Especially Scandinavian scholars have been encouraged to link various aspects (linguistic, religious, legal, archaeological²⁸) directly with the Herules. An example of such an approach is the study published by a Dane, Troels Brandt, *The Heruls in Scandinavia*.²⁹ The author, while not being a professional university historian, has good knowledge of the matter, but is still somewhat helpless in situations where, after quoting a number of contradictory scholarly opinions, he really needs to take

27 Friesen, *Rö-stenen i Bohuslän och runorna*, pp. 45–81. Further discussion: Elgqvist, 'Erulernas bosättning i Varend', pp. 1–131; id., *Studier rörande Njordkultens spridning bland*, pp. 133–134; Wikman, *Järul. En utlöpare av sydsvensk varulvstro*; Sahlgren, 'Järular och heruler', pp. 83–90; Lid, 'Til varulvens historia', pp. 3–25. Von Friesen's reaction, 'Virdar och Varend', pp. 298–324.

28 The fifth-century traces of nomadic Euroasiatic mounted culture in the Swedish province of Scania (the finds of Sösdala, Fulltofta and Vennebo) are connected with re-emigration of the Herules, Fabeck, *Neue Perspektiven zu den Funden von Sösdala und Fulltofta*, pp. 121–135; Haggman, 'Eruli Influence in South Scandinavia', pp. 215, 219–221. The remnants have clear parallels in Central Europe and may come from the peoples that had been incorporated into Attila the Hun's empire, which would be chronologically justified: the first half of the fifth century. The Herules came to Scandinavia at the beginning of the sixth century, so the findings cannot be related to them. The Herules settled among the Geats, thus not in Scania, but on the river Götaälv (Svennung, *Jordanes und Scandia*, pp. 69–72) where the Geats probably dwelled. See also *ibid.*, pp. 179–180. The archaeological remnants that Haggman points to must have been left by other migrants or they are just some traces of the trade exchange (not necessarily direct exchange) between Scandinavia and the peoples of Central Europe. Equally useless are speculations on the assault of 'Heruli remigrants?' on the local population of Öland island between 480 and 490, Haggman, 'Eruli Influence in South Scandinavia', p. 221. The discussion about finds in Sösdala continues, but, as Dieter Quast points out: 'A critical assessment of the archaeological sources demonstrates how difficult it is to fix the emergence of Sösdala objects and the "Sösdala style" somewhere in the borderlands of the late Roman Empire,' Quast, 'Sösdala in a Western Perspective', p. 279. The book of Helmersson and Røndahl, *Herulerna*, is for a general audience.

29 *Detailed version*, at <http://www.Gedevasen.dk/heruleng.html> (accessed 24 September 2018).

a stand based on his own critical analysis of the sources. Furthermore, Brandt's text remains *in statu nascendi*, and has been expanding since at least 2005. As for the connection between the *erilaR* runic inscriptions with the Herules ethnic name, my opinion is negative, and I have justified it in this work. Then, with regard to the majority of other Scandinavian aspects of the Herules' history discussed by Brandt, after a critical study which cost me a great deal of time, I must say they cannot be the subject of a serious debate, and so they did not find their place in this book.³⁰

One of the aims of this project was to critically research the materials on the 'afterlife' history of the Herules—primarily in order to extract all the data genuinely useful for the reconstruction of the historical past of this tribe, as older authors suggested. The most comprehensive work rooted in such way of thinking was written by Joachim Lelewel. To back up his thesis that the Herules were no 'Teutons', but rather the forefathers of Latvians and Estonians, Lelewel drew both from sources on the real history of the nation, and from much later records that passed on a distorted picture to the totally indiscriminating literature of the Renaissance period.³¹ His primary point was an allegedly Herulo-Mecklenburgian *Our Father* prayer, showing some linguistic affinities with the Latvian language. This 'Herulian' prayer has proved to be the *Our Father* plagiarized from Latvian language by Wolfgang Lazius, which was established beyond doubt by Carl Schirren.³² Lelewel's work has remained unknown to Western scholars.

Equally unproductive for critical research would be searching for a Herulian archetype (allegedly King Rodulf, before 512) in the thirteenth-century German epic of Rüdiger von Bechelaren.³³

30 Also the name 'iririlasa' on the famous votive inscription on the cave temple in Junnar (Ponna, India), has nothing to do with the name of the Herules, and probably nothing to do with the Goths either, see Wüst, 'Goten in Indien?', pp. 141–189. Contra: Arntz and Zeiss, *Die einheimischen Runendenkmäler des Festlandes*, p. 7.

31 Lelewel, 'Lettonowie i Czudowie', pp. 252–354, esp. p. 350. (First published in 1808 in Vilnius, revised and republished 1853 Poznań.) For 'Herules' in Mecklenburg, see Sasse, 'Die Gräber der Obetriten und Heruler des Nikolaus Marschalk (um 1470–1525)', pp. 247–266.

32 Schirren, 'Das Vaterunser der Heruler', pp. 659–674.

33 In spite of the efforts of Matthaei, 'Rüdiger von Bechelaren und die Harlungensage', pp. 305–332. The eponymous Rüdiger has been interpreted in many various ways,

The objective of this project was to write a critical study of Herulian history. To achieve this aim, the elimination of the pseudo-sources was necessary, as well as gathering those data that had never been collated and analysed together. While concentrating on the well-established events from organized social life of the Herules, I have, in fact, reduced their contribution to the history of ancient and medieval Europe, which had been indiscriminately expanded by some scholars. My analysis has been based primarily on written sources. Given the geographic extent of the tribe's history (Scandinavia, Ukraine, Greece, Austria, Germany, France, Spain, Bohemia, the Balkans, Italy, Asia and Africa), the subject literature partly or even marginally concerning the Herules might be quoted *ad infinitum*.

see, e.g. Banaszkiewicz, 'Rüdiger von Bechelaren, którego nie chciała Wanda', pp. 239–247, but the author was not acquainted with Matthaei's article.