

COMPETING NARRATIVES BETWEEN NOMADIC PEOPLE AND THEIR
SEDENTARY NEIGHBOURS

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Scythia as the Image of a Nomadic Land on Medieval Maps

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Medieval *mappe mundi*

It is good to be reminded that the majority of medieval monastery maps represent T-O schemes. They are based on depicting a circular Earth with the ocean surrounding it (O). *Orbis terrarum* is divided into three parts: Asia, Europe and Africa, - according to myth, each land belonged to one of Noah's sons. The borders between the parts of the world are the Tanais (the Don), the Nile and the Mediterranean Sea: all together they form a T. However, there was also another type of map in the Middle Ages, based on depicting the four gulfs of the world ocean: the Mediterranean Sea, the Caspian Sea (which was considered to be connected to the ocean), the Red Sea and the Indian Sea. Besides these two main kinds there existed some other types of maps (Bagrow 2004; Chekin 2006 (a publication of *mappe mundi*); Harley & Woodward 1987–2007; Mel'nikova 1998; Podossinov 1999: 313–315, 584–618).

A *mappa mundi* was actually a graphic encyclopedia that reflected the Christian image of the world and contained knowledge not only in the field of geography but also in the domain of history, including mythological data. Evidently on the medieval maps the past was mixed with the present and even with the future through eschatological expectations that were widespread during the Middle Ages. As it is known, medieval *mappe mundi* reflect information taken from antique sources, from the Bible and Christian authors' works. Moreover, the medieval mapmakers were also representing data from their contemporary reality. As for the Scythians, the information about them originated in the works of antique authors, (and should not be crossed out) was applied to the medieval situation and incorporated into the Christian image of the world.

Scythia of Orosius and Isidore

As it is known, Orosius' *Historiae adversum paganos* was one of the most important sources for medieval maps. The author lived in the time when antiquity was ending and the Middle Ages were just beginning (c. 385 – after 418). So he was a man through whom the antique tradition was transferred to the epoch to come.

Orosius described Scythia as stretching from the far eastern shore of the ocean up to the Caspian Sea (1.2.47): “*Igitur a monte Imauo, hoc est ab imo Caucaso et dextra orientis parte qua oceanus Sericus tenditur, usque ad promunturium Boreum et flumen Boreum, inde tenus Scythico mari quod est a septentrione, usque ad mare Caspium quod est ab occasu, et usque ad extentum Caucasi iugum quod est ad meridiem, Hyrcanorum et Scytharum gentes sunt XLII, propter terrarum infecundam diffusionem late oberrantes*”. So Orosius highlighted the infertility of the region as the reason for its inhabitants' nomadic way of life. Orosius described the unified Scytho-Hyrcanian region that was located east of the Caspian Sea; and Hyrcania is always near Scythia on the monastery maps. The author of *Historiae adversum paganos* wrote about forty-two tribes that roamed around a vast territory. Forty-three northern peoples appear on the Anglo-Saxon map. Despite their number being one more, it is very similar to what Orosius says.

The *Etymologiae* of medieval encyclopedist Isidore of Seville (560–636) was a source for the mapmakers of the Middle Ages too. According to him, Scythia had been larger in previous times: it had stretched from India up to Germania. Afterwards it had decreased and acquired the limits described by Orosius. Isidore knew of his work (Dalché 2013: 12) and wrote one of the passages about Scythia (highlighted below) with almost the same words (14.3.31): “*Cuius terra olim ingens fuit; nam ab oriente India, a septentrione per paludes Maeotides inter Danubium et Oceanum usque ad Germaniae fines porrigebatur. Postea vero minor effecta, a dextra orientis parte, qua Oceanus Sericus tenditur, usque ad mare Caspium, quod est ad occasum; dehinc a meridie usque ad Caucasi iugum deducta est, cui subiacet Hyrcania ab occasu habens pariter gentes multas, propter terrarum infecunditatem late vagantes*”.

Lower Scythia

Besides, as Isidore wrote, the first region of Europe was Lower Scythia which lay between the Maeotian Swamp, the Danube, the northern Ocean and Germania (14.4.3): “*Prima Europae regio Scythia inferior, quae a Maeotidis paludibus incipiens inter Danubium et Oceanum septentrionalem usque ad Germaniam porrigitur; quae terra generaliter propter barbaras gentes, quibus inhabitatur, Barbarica dicitur. Huius pars prima Alania est, quae ad Maeotidis paludes pertingit; post hanc Dacia, ubi et Gothia; deinde Germania, ubi plurimam partem Suevi incoluerunt*”. The reason why Isidore of Seville designated the European part of Scythia as Lower may be explained by the fact that the East is on top on the majority of the monastery T-O maps. So the Scythian land located in Asia is above the European one for a viewer (Podossinov 2016: 184–185).

Besides Isidore, other medieval authors mentioned Lower Scythia following him. For example, Honorius Augustodunensis wrote in the chapter *De Schythia* of his work *De imagine mundi* (1.23): “*A Thanai fluvio est Schythia inferior, quae*

versus meridiem, usque ad Danubium porrigitur. In hac sunt istae provinciae, Alania. Dacia. Gothia.” There is also Bartholomaeus Anglicus who mentioned Lower Scythia, referring to Isidore (15.50): “*Prima ergo regio Europe est Scythia inferior quae a Meotidis paludibus incipiens, inter Danubium et oceanum septentrionalem usque ad Germaniam porrigit, ut dicit Isidorus in libro XV*”. Bartholomaeus mentioned Lower Scythia as a part of Europe and Upper Scythia as a part of Asia in the chapter *De Scythia* of his work *Liber de proprietatibus rerum* (15.147): “*Scythia regio est maxima. Cuius pars superior est in Asia. Inferior vero est prima regio in Europa*”. The further description of Scythia is the same as in 15.50. So Bartholomaeus mentioned Upper Scythia in contrast to Lower, as Gervase of Tilbury had done (Chekin 2006: 247). In general Bartholomaeus’ account of Scythia is based on Isidore, so Anglicus’ text is very similar to the *Etymologiae*. Vincent of Beauvais also mentioned Lower Scythia in his *Speculum majus*, 1: *Tota naturalis historia* 32.9 and in *Speculum majus*, 4: *Speculum historiale* 1.71 (the text is the same as Isidore’s in both cases).

Lower Scythia is designated on some of the monastery maps. On the Oxford map *Scythia inferior* is located in Europe (Oxford, Bodleian library, Canon. Misc. 560, fol. 3r) and there is also *Scythia* in Asia. The same situation is observed on the Pseudo-Isidorean Vatican map (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana Vat. Lat. 6018, fols 63v–64r). Only *Scythia inferior* is mentioned on the Copy of the St. Victor map (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, CLM 10058, fol. 154v). *Scythia superior* is depicted as being in Asia on one of the Beatus of Liebana maps and *Scythia inferior* is in Europe on other similar *mappa mundi* (Chekin 2006: 176). Despite the fact that it is better to designate Scotland than Scythia with the name *Scythia*, the position of the both legends, *inferior* and *superior*, is closer to the traditional location of Scythia. Upper Scythia appears in contrast to the Lower on one Psalter map (Chekin 2006: 142). Both are located in Asia, contradicting Isidore’s arrangement. The inscription is: “*In Scythia superiore civitas Gangaria. In Scythia inferiore*”. There is also Scythia in Europe, according to this map. *Scythia superior* is noted on the Ripoll map as being in northern Asia. *Scythia suprema*, Uppermost Scythia, is mentioned on one of the St. Jerome maps (Chekin 2006: 135). So the medieval mapmakers designate not only Lower Scythia on their maps but they also put Upper Scythia in contrast to the first.

There are two groups of Scythians on the St. Emmeram map and some maps similar to it: the plain Scythians, the *Scythi*, and the other Scythians, *Alii Scythi* or *Alii Scythae* (Chekin 2006: 50). Both groups are located in Asia and divided by Hyrcania. *Alii Scythi* could be a corruption of the *Thalii Scythi* mentioned by Pliny (6.17) and Solinus (15.18).

Thus, for Isidore, Scythia was a territory located in both parts of the world, Europe and Asia, while for Orosius it seemed to be only an Asiatic land. Isidore derived the words Scythia and Gothia from the name of Japheth’s son, Magog (XIV, 3, 31): “*Scythia sicut et Gothia a Magog filio Iaphet fertur cognominata*”. These two territories became connected because of the etymological explanation made by

Isidore; and Gothia was considered a European land. Moreover, according to Christian mythology, Noah's son Japheth obtained Europe after the Deluge. These were probably the reasons why Isidore, in contrast to Orosius, located one part of Scythia in Europe. Scythia is located in the both parts of the world, in Asia and in Europe, on the medieval monastery maps (Chekin 2006: 244). However, the maker of one of the largest medieval *mappe mundi*, the Hereford map, indicated on the north-eastern edge of *orbis terrarum* that Scythia stretched from there up to the Maeotian Swamps, i. e. up to the border of Europe and Asia: “*Ab hinc usque ad Meotides paludes generaliter Sithia dicitur*”.

According to Isidore (14.4.3), Lower Scythia consisted of Alania, Dacia and Gothia, which was connected with Scythia etymologically. The other authors who described this territory following Isidore mentioned the same lands as components of Lower Scythia. Orosius didn't write that Alania, Dacia and Gothia were Scythian when he described the eastern part of Europe (1.2.52–53): “*Incipit a montibus Riphaeis ac flumine Tanai Maeotidisque paludibus quae sunt ad orientem, per litus septentrionalis oceani usque ad Galliam Belgicam et flumen Rhenum quod est ab occasu descendens, deinde usque ad Danuuuium quem et Histrum uocant, qui est a meridie et ad orientem directus Ponto accipitur. Ab oriente Alania est, in medio Dacia ubi et Gothia, deinde Germania est ubi plurimam partem Suebi tenent, quorum omnium sunt gentes LIIIF*”.

Alania, Dacia and Gothia are indicated on many medieval maps. On some of them (for example, on Anglo-Saxon map) there is a legend “*Dacia ubi et Gothia*”, a word combination used by both Orosius and Isidore. The Pseudo-Isidorean Vatican map shows the position of Scythia according to Isidore. This region is located to the east of the Caspian Sea. Lower Scythia and its three parts: Alania, Dacia and Gothia, - are in Europe. The mapmaker decided to delineate a border between Scythia and Germania and wrote: “*Hucusque Scythia*” (Scythia is up to here). The copy of the St. Victor map shows a similar arrangement.

Furthermore, Isidore (14.4.3) depicted the territories of Lower Scythia as barbarian (*Barbarica*). The barbarians (*barbari*) of the 8th century Albi map (Dan 2017) are located to the west of the Caspian Sea and correspond to such a description very well.

The infertility and riches of the Scythian land

Orosius wrote that the soil was unfertile in the lands of the Scythians and the Hyrcanians (1.2.47). According to Isidore, a lot of the Scythian territories were rich, but many were unpopulated. Some Scythians farmed, the others fed on human flesh (14.3.32): “*Ex quibus quaedam agros incolunt, quaedam portentuosae ac truces carnibus humanis et eorum sanguine vivunt. Scythiae plures terrae sunt locupletes, inhabitabiles tamen plures; nam dum in plerisque locis auro et gemmis affluent, gryphorum inmanitate accessus hominum rarus est. Smaragdis autem optimis haec*

patria est: cyaneus quoque lapis et crystallus purissimus Scythiae est". The description of this place by Solinus (early 3rd century A.D.) is very similar (15.22): "In Asiatica Scythia terrae sunt locupletes, inhabitabiles tamen; nam cum auro et gemmis affluent, grypes tenent uniuersa, alites ferocissimi et ultra omnem rabiem saeuientes. Quorum inmanitate obsistente ad uenas accessus rarus est, quippe uisus discernunt, uelut geniti ad plectendam auaritia temeritatem". So both Isidore and Solinus admired different gemstones of this region but complained that access to them is difficult because of the griffons that were designated and even drawn on some maps: the Anglo-Saxon, Sawley, Ebstorf and Hereford *mappe mundi*. Solinus even tried to find some moral explanation for existence of such monsters as the griffons.

The griffons were mentioned as a barbaric tribe in the 7th/8th century *Cosmographia* of Aethicus Ister (Aethicus 1993: 118–119). According to this work, they lived near the Ocean, *proximam oceani partem*, beside the Hyperborean mountains and the Tanais: "inter alias gentes ad aquilonem iuxta Iperboriis montibus, ubi Tanais amnes exoritur, nimio frigore undique circumvallata inter oceanum et Tanaim gens inquieta, praedones aliarum gentium". Isidore located the Hyperborean mountains in Scythia (14.8.7): "Hyperborei montes Scythiae, dicti quod supra, id est ultra, eos flat Boreas".

The author of *Cosmographia* also mentioned the infertility of the soil and the gems from this region: "Ea regio nulla fruge utile gignit, bestiarum multitudinem et pecorum, equorum multitudinem eminentiores et utiliores, quam in alias gentes, simios et pantheras. Gignit plurimum cristallum et sucinum lucidissimum et obdurantem uelut lapides et pulcherrimum". The mention of outstanding horses only accentuates that it is a nomads' region. And the griffons are perhaps considered as a nomadic folk in *Cosmographia*. The legend on the Anglo-Saxon map *Griphorum gens*, as well as the *Grife gentes* of Ebstorf map and the *Griste homines* of the Hereford map reflect considering the griffons as a people.

However, the maker of the Hereford map seems to distinguish between the people and the creatures. He wrote that the people of the griffons make their clothes and horsecloth out of the skin of their enemies: "Hic habitant Griste homines nequissimi: nam inter cetera facinora etiam de cutibus hostium suorum tegumenta sibi et equis suis faciunt". As to the griffons as a kind of creatures that inhabit Scythia, the maker of the Hereford map described them as having an eagle's head and wings and the body of the lion: "Griphes capitibus et alis aquileas, corpore leones imitantur; volando bovem portabunt". Moreover, it is said about the clashes between them and the *Arimaspi*: "Carimaspi cum griphis pro smaragdis dimicant".

The difference made between the *Griste homines* and the griffons can be explained by the fact that the mapmaker based these two cases on different sources. It is most probable that the idea regarding people was taken from the *Cosmographia* of Aethicus. However, it seems there is nothing about making clothes from the skin of the griffons' enemies in this work. Solinus' and Isidore's

works were the source of the idea of the griffons as creatures. Solinus wrote (15.23): “*Arimaspi cum his dimicant ut intercipient lapides, quorum non aspernabimur persequi qualitatem. Smaragdis hic locus patria est, quibus tertiam inter lapides dignitatem Theophrastus dedit; nam licet sint et Aegyptii et Calchedonii et Medici et Laconici, praecipuus est honos Scythicis. Nihil his iucundius, nihil utilius uident oculi*”. Moreover, the text of the Hereford map has some information about the appearance of the griffons that is not described by Solinus. However, Isidore wrote about them and the text of the *mappa mundi* is similar to one of his passages highlighted below (12.2.17): “*Grypes vocatur, quod sit animal pinnatum et quadrupes. Hoc genus ferarum in Hyperboreis nascitur montibus. Omni parte corporis leones sunt; alis et facie aquilis similes; equis vehementer infesti. Nam et homines visos discernunt*”.

The desert of Scythia, *desertum Scitiae*, is designated on the Heidelberg map (Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, Salem IX, 39, fols IV, 91). It corresponds with the statements of Orosius and Isidore about the infertility of Scythia, although the author of *Etymologiae* is ambivalent in this case. However, the Scythian wasteland is depicted in Egypt on the Heidelberg map: this area is in Asia to the south of the Nile. This *mappa mundi* represents a mixed type of scheme based on the four gulfs and T-O. The Nile, in contrast to the usual arrangement, is not a southern part of T, but adjoins the border between the two parts of the world on the eastern side. Along with the Scythian desert the Ethiopians and the desert of Upper Egypt are designated.

The localization of Egypt in Asia is not surprising because in general the Nile was considered as the border between Africa and Asia in the Middle Ages, so Eastern Egypt was in Asia from such a point of view. However, the southern localization of the Scythian lands is very unusual, because the Scythians were associated with the northeastern direction. Probably the confusion took place because in this case the designation *desertum* was considered not only as a wasteland but a land that hermits inhabit. So there is highly likely some kind of mixture of the Scythian wasteland and the early Christian monastic centre of Sketis west of the Nile delta just as it is depicted on the Heidelberg map (Chekin 2006: 245).

Scythia is a northern land

Some maps from the manuscripts of Christian Topography by Cosmas Indicopleustes show the Scythians. Only four peoples appear on such maps: the Indians, the Celts, the Ethiopians and the Scythians. Each of them is connected to one side of the world, so the cardinal directions are associated with different peoples although they are usually associated with winds on other maps. The Scythians occupy the north on Cosmas maps.

Besides the Scythians themselves Orosius mentioned the Scythian Sea (1.2.47), which is marked on the Pseudo-Isidorean Vatican Map and on the Ebstorf map as being in the northeast. As to Isidore, he mentions the Scythian Ocean (14.3.29) that is shown on the copy of the St. Victor Map. So, the Northern waters take the name of the Scythians.

The Scythian barbarity

The Scythians were described as wild, cruel and vicious savages on the most detailed monastery maps. The exceptions are rare. Many examples of such descriptions are on the Hereford map. There is a legend about the customs of the Scythian tribe Issedones to sing during their parents' funerals and to eat the flesh of the dead: "*Essedones Sithe hic habitant, quorum mos est parentum funera cantibus prosequi et congregatis amicorum cetibus corpora ipsa dentibus laniare ac pecudum mixtis carnibus dapes facere, pulcrius a se quam a tineis hec absumi credentes*" (cf. Solinus 15.13, the text is almost the same). One more legend is about another Scythian tribe, their passion for battles and their custom of making cups out of their enemies' skulls: "*Scitharum gens interius habitantium; asperior ritus. Specus incolunt, pocula non ut Essedones de amicis, sed de inimicorum capitibus sumentes. Amant prelia, occisorum cruorem ex vulneribus ipsis bibunt. Numero tedium honor crescit, quarum expertum esse apud eos prophanum est*" (cf. Solinus 15.15). Moreover, another inscription is about the hostility of another Scythian tribe towards foreigners: "*Scitotauri Sithe pro hostiis cedunt advenas*" (cf. Solinus 15.14).

However, it is said that one Scythian tribe refused avarice, using neither gold nor silver: "*Catharum Sithe usu auri argentique dampnato, in eternum a puplica se avaricia dampnaverunt*" (cf. Solinus 15.14). This name can be interpreted as a corruption of the *Satarchae* (mentioned by Solinus *ibid.*) that inhabited northern Crimea in antiquity. However, it could also be a mixture of the *Satarchae* and the Cathars, the heretical sect that believed all the material world to be a creation of the devil (Chekin 2006: 217).

All these legends about the Scythians have their origins in classical antiquity. The Scythians became some kind of symbol of ferocity and barbarism. Such a cliché was based on the image of the historic Scythians and then was applied to other nomadic peoples that came after them (Podossinov 2016).

The correlation between the Scythians and various nomadic tribes

The medieval maps show various tribes as Scythian. In particular, one of the maps from a copy of St. Jerome's works demonstrates very well that many nomadic tribes were united in the Middle Ages under the name of Scythians (Chekin 2006: 135). It lists *Huni Scite, Enochi Scite, Thalii Scite, Robasci Scite, Geloni Scite, Euri Scite*

(the Neuri), *Allipodes Scite* (the Callipides), and *Alani Scite*. All these peoples have their traditional location from the Ocean in the East up to Eastern Europe in the West, according to the map.

This map preserves the memory of the tribes that were considered as Scythian in antiquity. Moreover, it is very logical that the Alans were mentioned as Scythian folk because Alania was a part of Lower Scythia, according to Isidore. Josephus Flavius in his work *The Jewish War* described the raids of the Alans whom he considered to be Scythians (7.7.4): “Now there was a nation of the Alans, which we have formerly mentioned some where as being Scythians and inhabiting at the lake Meotis. This nation about this time laid a design of falling upon Media, and the parts beyond it, in order to plunder them; with which intention they treated with the king of Hyrcania; for he was master of that passage which king Alexander [the Great] shut up with iron gates. This king gave them leave to come through them; so they came in great multitudes, and fell upon the Medes unexpectedly, and plundered their country, which they found full of people, and replenished with abundance of cattle, while nobody durst make any resistance against them ... These Alans therefore plundered the country without opposition, and with great ease, and proceeded as far as Armenia, laying all waste before them. ... So the Alans, being still more provoked by this sight, laid waste the country, and drove a great multitude of the men, and a great quantity of the other prey they had gotten out of both kingdoms, along with them, and then retreated back to their own country”.

The idea of the closing of the passage for some tribes by Alexander the Great existed in connection to biblical Gog and Magog. This myth is told in the *Cosmographia* of Aethicus (Aethicus 1993: 137–141) and reflected on many medieval maps, first of all the Hereford, Ebstorf and Vercelli ones, on which the biblical tribes are located near the Caspian Sea. According to this eschatological concept, Gog and Magog would break free in the end times and would bring devastation to all peoples as comrades of the Antichrist. Understandably hordes of nomadic invaders coming from the East were often considered as Gog and Magog.

Many people in the Early Middle Ages thought that the Hungarians were these biblical tribes (Bloch 2003: 62). However, the Hungarians and Gog and Magog are always separated on *mappe mundi*: the Hungarians (*Hungari, Ungari*) or Hungary (*Hungaria, Ungaria*) are located in Europe near the Danube and the designation of Pannonia where they had settled down.

Moreover, it seems that some Turkic peoples, *Turchi*, were considered descendants of Gog and Magog (Aethicus 1993: 120): “*Gens ignominiosa et incognita, monstruosa, idolatria, fornicaria, in cunctis stupris et lupanariis truculenta, a qua et nomen accepit, de stirpe Gog et Magog*”. *Turchi* are designated on the monastery maps; the data about them on the Ebstorf and Hereford *mappe mundi* are based on the *Cosmographia* of Aethicus.

Moreover, the Tartars, who were always confused with the Mongols, were associated with Gog and Magog by Mathew Paris. On his maps, the Tartars were one of the peoples of Gog and Magog and were considered as the lost Jewish

tribes: “*Ceste terre est loing vers Bise. Ci mainent les nefz lignees ke li rois Alisandre enclot. Gog et Magot. De ci vindrent celes gentz k'em apele Tartarins, co dit hon ki tant unt les muntaines, tut soient eles de dure roche, cicelle e tranche a force, ke issue unt cunquis, e mut unt grant terres cunquis e destrut Inde numeement*” (the account of Mathew Paris about the Tartars in Matuzova 1979: 107–171, about the Jews: 120–122; see also Le Goff 2001: 37–39). The Tartars and the Cumans appear on portolan charts, for example on the Dalorto and Dulcert maps, as well as in the Catalan Atlas of Abraham Cresques (Fomenko 2011: 71–104).

As for other nomadic tribes, the map from St. Jerome's works shows the Massageteans, *Massagete*, as do some other maps. They were considered a Scythian tribe (Isidore 9.2.63): “*Massagetae ex Scytharum origine sunt. Et dicti Massagetae quasi graves, id est fortes Getae. Nam sic Livius argentum grave dicit, id est massas. Hi sunt, qui inter Scythas atque Albanos septentrionalibus locis inhabitant*”.

The Sauromate are designated as a Scythian tribe on the Hereford map: *Sauromate Sithe*. The Sauromate tribes are usually located in Asiatic Scythia on the monastery maps in contrast to the Sarmatian tribes who were considered as inhabitants of Europe. The Roman scholar Pliny the Elder, who mentions them among the Scythian tribes, explains that Sauromatae is a Greek form of the name of the Sarmatians (4.80): “*Sarmatae, Graecis Sauromatae*”.

As Pliny the Elder said, there was an attempt to apply the name of Scythians to the Sarmatians and the Germans but, according to his words, it remained only as a designation of the most remote and unknown tribes (4.81): “*Scytharum nomen usquequaque transiit in Sarmatas atque Germanos. Nec aliis prisca illa duravit appellatio quam qui extremi gentium harum, ignoti prope ceteris mortalibus, degunt*”. So in fact this ethnonym started to designate the most distant barbarians from the North East in general. Even the maker of the Hereford map highlighted this general sense: “*generaliter Sithia dicitur*”. Likewise on the Ebstorf map: “*et generaliter omnes Scithe dicuntur*”. The name of the Scythians was applied widely to ethnically and temporally unrelated groups in the Middle Ages. Moreover, the Scythians were regarded as one of the most ancient peoples (Chekin 2006: 243–244).

Conclusion

The concept of Scythia was very widespread among the mapmakers. The denomination Scythia was applied to vast territories of the Great Steppe. This designation overcame the boundaries of one people and became a generic designation for different nomads. On the one hand, the mention of Scythia reflects the memory of the historical nomadic people who inhabited the Eurasian Steppe from the 9th B.C. up until the 4th century A.D. and spoke mostly Eastern Iranian languages. On the other hand, the sense of such a concept as Scythia was enlarged. It became a symbol of a nomadic way of life. The scholars of the Middle Ages tried

to apply the ancient designations to the current situation, to match the knowledge from the texts with a new reality (Dalché 2013: 11). The Scythians, i. e. the nomads, the people of the Northeast, were considered as savages and as a destructive power. It is not surprising because they raided the Roman empire and the Christian peoples of Europe. The depictions of their barbarism and cruelty indicate the fear in the face of invaders, the fear of uncertainty in relation to poorly known lands, which brought forth and supported terrible and disgusting images of nomads' area in people's minds. Furthermore, the monastery *mappe mundi* reflected the Christian image of the world: unbaptized nomadic people are shown having bloody and impious customs, and their unholy lands are deserts, full of beasts and monsters. The church could claim the civilizing role of Christianity through such concepts, motivating the propagation of the religion and augmenting its influence.

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