

Svetlana Kočovska-Stevović

Institute of Classical Studies, Faculty of Philosophy  
Ss. Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje, Skopje  
[svetlana.kocovska@fzf.ukim.edu.mk](mailto:svetlana.kocovska@fzf.ukim.edu.mk)

## On the Roman Concept of *Natio*

### Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the Roman concept of *natio*: what did the ancient Romans mean by it, in what sense did they use the term and how does the ancient Roman concept of *natio* differ from the modern concept of *nation*? The study is based on a corpus of Latin texts that belong to different periods and different genres. The earliest usages date back to the third century BC and the latest ones to the late second century AD. The texts that form the main source of data derive from the so-called Ciceronian age of Latin literature (81–43 BC).

The study shows that the Roman concept of *natio* differed in many respects from the modern concept of *nation*. For the Romans, *natio* was primarily a collective term for a tribal community of foreigners who were tied together by the place of birth, but who were not organized into a politically recognized entity. The term was also used pejoratively to denigrate communities of people derided for their common values, interests and activities, as well as a term which referred to the place of origin of a product.

**Keywords:** *natio*, Cicero, Roman concept, tribal community, foreigners, entity, place of birth, place of origin.

The English term *nation* and its European cognates – German *Nation*, Dutch *natie*, French *nation*, Italian *nazione*, Russian *нация* or Polish *nacja* – have their *origin* in the Latin noun *natio*. Although the term *nation* is ambiguous, it is usually used as a collective term for a community of people who were born in a particular place and are organized on the basis of common characteristics, such as language, culture, religious rites or traditions. Thus, according to *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, a *nation* is “a large body of people united by common descent, culture, or language, inhabiting a particular state or territory” (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 2011, p. 953). In the same dictionary, the term is treated as a synonym for *state*, which is defined as “a nation or territory considered as an organized political community under one government” (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 2011, p. 1409). The aim of this paper is to examine the Roman concept of *natio*: what did the Romans mean by *natio*, in what sense did they use the term, and how does the ancient Roman concept of *natio* differ from the contemporary concept of *nation*?

This study of the Roman concept of *natio* is based on a corpus of Latin texts that belong to different periods and different literary genres: comedy, historiography, oratory, philosophy and epistolography. Early Latin is represented by the comedies of Plautus. Approximately from the same period are the extant fragments of Cato the Elder’s writings, which along with Plautus’s comedies, date back from the last part of the third and the first part of the second century BC. Given the high frequency of the noun *natio* in Cicero, Caesar, Varro, Sallust and Nepos, the texts that form the main source of data derive from the so-called Ciceronian age of Latin literature, which lasted from around 81 to 43 BC. Among the texts that constitute the corpus are also writings by authors from the Augustan age (43 BC to 18 AD), such as Livy and Vitruvius, and by authors from the Silver Age (18–133 AD), such as Curtius Rufus, Pliny the Elder, Quintilian, Seneca the Younger, Tacitus and Sextus Pompeius Festus. The main criterion for including the texts in the corpus was the relatively high frequency of the word *natio* in them in comparison to other texts contained in PHI Latin Library texts.<sup>1</sup>

The Latin noun *natio*, *-onis f.* derives from *natus* – the past participle of the verb *nascor*, which in *Oxford Latin Dictionary* is defined as: “to be born,” “to come into being,” “to rise,” “to come into existence,” “to have been born,” “to be naturally provided,” “to be produced spontaneously,” “to denote parentage,” “to spring,” “to have its beginning,” “to be naturally endowed (with a specified character)” and “to be naturally suited or destined” (*Oxford*

<sup>1</sup> Packard Humanities Institute (PHI) Latin Library texts is a CD-ROM with full Latin texts and Bible versions up to the second century AD. PHI is a standard research tool, as it is readily available in libraries and departments.

*Latin Dictionary*, 1968, pp. 1179–1180). Etymologically connected with the verb *nascor* are also (*g*)*nātus*, “son” (pl. “children”), (*g*)*nāta* “daughter,” *natālis* “of birth,” *natīvus* “original,” *natū* “of age,” “by birth,” *natūra* “conditions of birth,” “character,” “nature,” *naturālis* “natural,” *praegnātio* “pregnancy” etc.<sup>2</sup> In general, *natio* to the Romans was primarily “something born.” In *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, *natio* is defined as: 1. “the birth of a child”; also, a goddess of birth; 2. “a people,” “race,” “nation”; 3. “a class of people,” “set”; 4. “a race as a characteristic of persons,” “nationality,” and 5. “the place of origin (of natural products)” (*Oxford Latin Dictionary*, 1968, p. 1158).

The first meaning of *natio* listed in *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, “the birth of a child,” is attested to in one inscription, probably from the Etruscan city of Praeneste (modern Palestrina), dating from the third century BC. In the text of the inscription, a mother expresses her gratitude to Fortuna Primigenia for her childbirth:

(1) Orcevia Numeri/ nationu gratia/ Fortuna Divo fileia/ Primogenia/ donom dedi (CIL 14.2863).<sup>3</sup>

Fortuna Primigenia, whose name in the inscription is wrongly spelled as Primogenia, was worshipped in Praeneste as goddess of female fertility, god-mother and protectress of child-bearing, young mothers, and of the newly born (Champeaux, 1982, p. 40). The exact meaning of *nationu gratia* as used here is: “for the sake of the birth (of a child),” “on account of giving birth” or “in gratitude for my giving birth.” There is evidence that *natio* was used not only when referring to the birth of a child, but also when referring to birth in general. For example, Marcus Terentius Varro in his treatise *Res Rusticae* (On Agriculture), speaking of beasts that draw the plough, says that the pregnant females should be spared the work, because working makes the birth (*nationem*) more difficult:

(2) Praegnantes opere levant; venter enim labore nationem reddit deteriorem (Var. R. 2.6.4).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> On other derivatives of the verb *nascor*, see de Vaan (2008, pp. 400–401).

<sup>3</sup> “I, Orcevia, wife of Numerius, gave this gift to Fortuna Primigenia, daughter of Jupiter, for the sake of a (successful) childbirth” (translated by Celia Schultz in: Schultz, 2006, p. 53); *CIL* stands for *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (Corpus of Latin Inscriptions) – a collection and edition of classical Latin inscriptions; *CIL* includes the Latin inscriptions from the entire area of the former Roman empire, arranged by region and by inscription type; since its foundation by Theodor Mommsen in 1853, it has been the standard edition of the epigraphic legacy of Ancient Rome. The meanings and on-line sources of all abbreviated Latin-language references are listed at the end of the article.

<sup>4</sup> “Pregnant jennies are relieved of work, as work makes the womb bear a poorer offspring” (Varro, 1934, p. 381).

In *De Verborum Significatu* (On the Meaning of Words), which is Sextus Pompeius Festus's abridgment of Verrius Flaccus's dictionary, *natio* is defined as *genus hominum, qui non aliunde venerunt, sed ibi nati sunt* "a race of men who did not come from elsewhere, but were born in that place" (Fest. 166). The meaning of *natio* as "a birth of a cattle" is listed as a secondary one and can be traced in the expression *in pecoribus quoque bonus proventus feturae bona natio dicitur* "Furthermore, the successful breeding season in a herd is called *bona natio*" (Fest. 166). Festus's definition is apparently a reflection of a later semantic change. From the inscription from Praeneste it is evident that the original meaning of *natio* was "a birth," usually of a child, but also in general. It is very probable, as Adams has pointed out, that by the time of Plautus, the word *natio* had already undergone this semantic change. It is also very possible that the old meaning was maintained in rural or provincial areas, but lost in Rome (Adams, 2007, p. 19). However, from the time of Plautus on, *natio* was very rarely used in its original meaning. Actually, the passus by Varro above is the only preserved example of the usage of *natio* in the meaning of "a birth."

In Cicero's treatise *De Natura Deorum* (On the Nature of the Gods) we find *natio* anthropomorphized as the goddess of birth.<sup>5</sup> The goddess Natio was probably not a personified concept, but a genuine goddess, albeit the excerpt below is the only reference to her in Roman literature. In the excerpt, Cicero testifies that Natio was worshiped in the ancient town of Ardea as the goddess of birth, who was believed to watch over married women in labour:

- (3) Quod si tales dei sunt ut rebus humanis intersint, Natio quoque dea putanda est, cui cum fana circumimus in agro Ardeati rem divinam facere solemus; quae quia partus matronarum tueatur a nascentibus Natio nominata est (Cic. *N. D.* 3.47).<sup>6</sup>

The concept of *natio* as an entity or a group of people tied together by place of birth was undoubtedly developed after the establishment of Natio as a goddess. In Plautus's comedies, which are the earliest Latin works to survive complete, in two out of four usages, the noun *natio* is accompanied by the genitive *hominum* "of people." The noun-phrase *natio hominum* in both usages refers not to the human race in general, as one may expect,

<sup>5</sup> The goddess Natio is considered to be the Roman counterpart to the Greek goddess of child-birth - Εἰλειθυία (Eileithyia or Ilithyia). In Greek literature, Eileithyia was depicted as a woman wielding a torch, representing the burning pains of childbirth, or with her arms raised to bring the child to the light. It was believed that she had the power to further the birth, if she was of a kindly disposition, or delay it, if she was angry (see Thibodeaux, 2010, p. 127).

<sup>6</sup> "And if it is the nature of the gods to intervene in man's affairs, the Birth-Spirit also must be deemed divine, to whom it is our custom to offer sacrifice when we make the round of the shrines in the Territory of Ardea: she is named Natio from the word for being born (*nasci*), because she is believed to watch over married women in travail" (Cicero, 1967, p. 331).

but to a particular group of people bound together by their place of birth or to a group of people that share common values, interests or activities. In the excerpt below, Plautus uses the noun-phrase *haec natio hominum* “this breed of people” when speaking about the people from the ancient Greek city of Epidamnos, known later as the Roman Dyrrachium. From the context in which *natio* occurs, it is obvious that the noun is used with a connotation of contempt or dislike:

- (4) nam ita est haec hominum natio: in Epidamnieis  
 voluptarii atque potatores maxumi;  
 tum sycophantae et palpatores plurumi  
 in urbe hac habitant; tum meretrices mulieres  
 nusquam perhibentur blandiores gentium.  
 propterea huic urbi nomen Epidamno inditumst,  
 quia nemo ferme huc sine damno devoritur (Pl. *Men.* 258–264).<sup>7</sup>

A connotation of contempt is also present when Plautus uses *natio* to refer to a group of people that share a common set of values or activities. In the example below (5) the noun-phrase *famelica hominum natio* “hungry breed of people” is used as a label for thieves of the sea, shellfish-gatherers and hook-fishers:

- (5) salvete, fures maritimi, conchitae atque hamiotae, / famelica hominum natio. quid agitis? ut peritis? (Pl. *Rud.* 310–311).<sup>8</sup>

In the other two usages in Plautus (Pl. *Capt.* 887, Pl. *Curc.* 447), *natio* refers to a community of people who come from the same place, region or province, or to a community of people who are tied together by place of birth. For example, in *Captivi* (The Captives) the parasite Ergasilus asks Hegio: *sed Stalagmus quous erat tunc nationis, cum hinc abit?* “Stalagmus, though, – what was his nationality when he disappeared,” to which Hegio responds: *Siculus* “Sicilian” or “man from or born in Sicily” (Pl. *Capt.* 887–889).<sup>9</sup> In the same manner, *natio* is used in *Curculio* (Curculio), where Persians, Paphlagonians, Sinopians, Arabs, Carians, Cretans and Syrians are

<sup>7</sup> “I tell what, the sort of people you find here is this: in Epidamnos are the very worst of rakers and drinkers. And then the swindlers and sharpers that live in this city, no end to ‘em! And then the harlot wenches – nowhere on earth are they more alluring, people say! This city got its name of Epidamnos for just this reason – because almost everyone that stops here gets damaged” (Plautus, 1916, p. 391).

<sup>8</sup> “What ho! ye maritime marauders, ye Shell-and-Hookemites, ye of the starveling brood! How is life going with you? How is death coming to you?” (Plautus, 1980, p. 317).

<sup>9</sup> See Plautus, 1918, p. 549.

listed, among others, as “a good half of all the nations on earth” – *dimidiam partem nationum usque omnium* (Pl. *Curc.* 443–449).<sup>10</sup> The way that Plautus uses the noun shows that in the last part of the third and the first part of the second century BC, *natio* was used to refer mainly, but not exclusively, to a community of people who came from or who were born in the same city or region. At the same time, as it is obvious from example (5), *natio* was used to refer to a group of people that shared a common set of values or activities. A connotation of contempt is apparent in some of the examples for both usages. However, in some of them it cannot be established whether the noun is used with a negative or neutral connotation.

The meanings of *natio* as (a) an entity or a group of people tied together by place of birth, and (b) as a group of people that share a common set of values or activity, are well attested to in the literature from the classical and postclassical periods. In one passage from Cicero’s treatise *De officiis* (On duties), the concept of *natio* as an entity or a group of people tied together by place of birth is listed as one of several levels or degrees of human fellowship (*gradus societatis hominum*). The first degree of fellowship, according to Cicero, is the general bond which joins humanity as a whole, the second one is a fellowship based on sharing of the same *gens*, *natio* or *lingua*, and the third one – a fellowship based on belonging to the same *civitas*:

(6) Gradus autem plures sunt societatis hominum. Ut enim ab illa infinita discedatur, proprius est eiusdem gentis, nationis, linguae, qua maxime homines coniunguntur. Interius etiam est eiusdem esse civitatis; multa enim sunt civibus inter se communia, forum, fana, porticus, viae, leges, iura, iudicia, suffragia, consuetudines praeterea et familiaritates multisque cum multis res rationesque contractae. Artior vero colligatio est societatis propinquorum; ab illa enim immensa societate humani generis in exiguum angustumque concluditur (Cic. *Off.* 1.53).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *quia enim Persas, Paphlagones, / Sinopes, Arabes, Cares, Cretanos, Syros, / Rhodiam atque Lyciam, Perediam et Perbibesiam, / Centauromachiam et Classiam Vnomammiam, / Libyamque oram, omnem Conterebromniam, / dimidiam partem nationum usque omnium / subegit solus intra viginti dies*” (Pl. *Curc.* 443–9) – “Why, because the Persians, Paphlagonians, Sinopians, Arabs, Carians, Cretans, Syrians, Rhodes and Lycia, Gobbleonia and Guzzleania, Centaurbattaglia and Onenipplearmia, the whole coast of Lybia and the whole of Grapejusqueezia, in fact, a good half of all the nations on earth, have been subdued by him single-handed inside of twenty days” (Plautus, 1916, pp. 236–237).

<sup>11</sup> “There are indeed several degrees of fellowship among humans. To move from the one that is unlimited, next there is a closer one of the same race, tribe and tongue, through which men are bound strongly to one another. More intimate still is that of the same city, as citizens have many things that are shared with one another: the forum, temples, porticoes and roads, laws and legal rights, law-courts and political elections; and besides these acquaintances and companionship, and those business and commercial transactions that many of them make with many others. A tie narrower still is that of the fellowship between relations: moving from that vast fellowship of the human race we end up with a confined and limited one” (Cicero, 2003, pp. 22–23).

The principal source for Cicero's *De officiis* was Panaetius's treatise of the same name (Greek: Περὶ τοῦ καθήκοντος), which referred to a Greek context. The nouns *gens*, *natio* and *lingua* were most likely a translation of Greek nouns γένος, ἔθνος and γλῶσσα, and *civitas* was a translation of πόλις. The question that arises from the passage is about the difference between *gens* and *natio*. In existing dictionaries of Latin synonyms, *natio* is cited as a near-synonym of *gens* (Gardin Dumesnil, 1809, p. 323; Ramshorn, 1841, pp. 229–230; Döderlein, 1858, p. 92), albeit with a more limited meaning. *Natio* probably referred to people that were born in the same tract of land, while *gens* referred more broadly to people of same descent. This assumption is in line with Zernatto's remark that *natio* denoted a smaller group than *gens* (Zernatto, 1944, p. 352). However, the fellowship based on sharing of the same *gens*, *natio* or *lingua*, defined by Cicero as a second degree of fellowship among humans, here apparently refers to tribal communities which were not integrated in the form of a state organization. The term *civitas*, on the other hand, refers to a politically integrated community, that is, a community whose members walk the same streets and forum, worship at the same temples, share the same porticoes and roads, abide by the same laws, practice same legal rights, cast their votes in the same ballot urns, etc. In the Roman context, as Walbank has suggested, the communities based on sharing of the same *gens*, *natio* or *lingua* were Latins, Sabines, Volscians, Samnites, and Etruscans (Walbank, 1972, p. 145), and the *civitas* was Rome, the city-state which advanced to a world empire (Walbank, 1972, p. 168). Sharing the same *natio*, in Cicero's view, was an intimate bond, but the bond of *civitas* was a more intimate one. The passage clearly shows that the community denoted by the term *natio* in the time of Cicero had no political dimension.

When the noun *natio* is used in a context in which there is a reference to a specific member of a *natio*, the noun is in ablative case (*natione*) and it is followed or preceded by an individual noun or a substantive adjective in masculine or feminine gender that denotes a person belonging to a specific tribe or an inhabitant of a certain city, region or province:

(7) *duae fuerunt Ariovisti uxores, una Sueba natione, quam domo secum duxerat, altera Norica regis Voccionis soror, quam in Gallia duxerat a fratre missam (Caes. Gal. 1.53.4).<sup>12</sup>*

*Natione* in this kind of usage is an ablative of respect or ablative of specification. It is used to indicate the special point with respect to which

<sup>12</sup> "There were two wives of Ariovistus, one of Suebian nationality, whom he had brought with him from home; the other a woman of Noricum, sister to King Voccio, and sent by him to be married to Ariovistus in Gaul" (Caesar, 1919, p. 85).



a statement is made. In the example above, the statement refers to the fact that one of the two wives of Ariovistus was *Sueba*, a woman from the German tribe Suebi, and the other – *Norica*, a woman from Noricum, a territory in the Alps, south of the Danube river. The ablative *natione* answers the question “in what respect” or “with respect to what” the wives of Ariovistus were characterized as *Sueba* or *Norica*: they were identified as such with respect to belonging to a specific tribe or with respect to their place of birth. An analysis of collocations of *natione* with individual nouns or substantive adjectives shows that it formed phrases used to characterise an individual:

- (a) as a person belonging to a specific tribe: *Medus* – Median, a person belonging to the Medes, a people living to the south of the Caspian Sea (Curt. 7.4.8; Nep. *Paus.* 1.2), *Mardus* – a person belonging to the Mardians, a tribe living in the mountainous region bordering the Caspian Sea (Curt. 3.13.2), *Canninefas* – a person belonging to the Canninefates, a Germanic tribe that lived in the Rhine delta in the western part of the Batavian Island (Tac. *Ann.* 11.18), *Cimber* – one of the Cimbri, a German tribe (V. Max. 2.10.6) etc.;
- (b) as an inhabitant of a specific geographical region or country: *Care* – Carian, a person from Caria, a country in the south-west of Asia Minor (Nep. *Dat.* 1.1), *Acarman* – a native or inhabitant of Acarnania, a region in the north-west of Greece (Curt. 3.6.1), *Syrus* – a native of Syria (Suet. *Rhet.* 8.1), *Germanus* – a native of Germania (Vell. 2.19.3), *Hispanus* – a Spaniard, i.e. a native of Hispania (Suet. *Rhet.* 20), *Numida* – Numidian, a native of Numidia in northern Africa (Tac. *Ann.* 2.52), *Samius* – an inhabitant of the Greek island of Samos (Plin. *Nat.* 8.57); and,
- (c) as an inhabitant of a specific city: *Ephesius* – an inhabitant of the city of Ephesus (Plin. *Nat.* 34.91), *Argeus* – a citizen of Peloponnesian Argos (Hyg. *Astr.* 2.13), *Alexandrinus* – a citizen of Alexandria (Tac. *Ann.* 14.60) etc.

As it may be seen from the examples above, *natione* collocates only with individual nouns or substantive adjectives that refer to distant communities: Medians, Mardians, Cimbri, Carians, Gauls, Spaniards, Numidians, Syrians etc. An analysis of collocations of *natio* with evaluative adjectives shows that Romans often regarded members of a *natio* as: *feris barbarisque* “uncivilized and barbarous” (Caes. *Gal.* 4.10.5), *inimicissimis atque immanissimis* “very hostile and very savage” (Cic. *Font.* 41), *natis servituti* “born to servitude” (Cic. *Prov.* 10), *ferae* “rude” (Sal. *Cat.* 10.1; Plin. *Nat.* 6.15) etc. The conclusion that can be drawn from all these collocations is that *natio* was applied exclusively to non-Roman populations, or, as it has already been pointed out by Zernatto (Zernatto, 1944, p. 352), only to “a native community of foreigners.” These foreigners lived in the big cities of the empire, in colonial settlements or neighbourhoods and in busy ports. They banded together in order to be able to speak their own language and



to maintain their inherited customs and traditions. As it usually happens with foreigners, their cultural distinctiveness in all facets of life turned them into a laughing stock. They seemed comical to Romans because they were different: they did not understand Latin, or spoke it incorrectly, they were dressed differently, they maintained different customs, had different eating habits, believed in different gods, etc. The practice of regarding these communities as strange and comical is reflected very clearly in the derogatory and contemptuous sense the word *natio* assumed: it became a synonym for a group of people which was to be derided for their common values and activities. The passage below from Cicero's speech *Pro Sestio* (On Behalf of Sestius) is the orator's reply to the remark made by the prosecutor, in which the latter described the senatorial conservatives, with whom Cicero was aligned, with the term *natio optimatum* "the breed of optimates." From Cicero's reply it is apparent that the prosecutor used the noun as a derogatory term for his political opponents – the optimates:

- (8) Nimirum hoc illud est quod de me potissimum tu in accusatione quaesisti, quae esset nostra 'natio optimatum'; sic enim dixisti. [...] Esto igitur ut ii sint, quam tu 'nationem' appellasti, qui et integri sunt et sani et bene de rebus domesticis constituti. [...] Habes igitur quod ex me quaesisti, qui essent optimates. Non est 'natio,' ut dixisti; quod ego verbum agnovi; est enim illius a quo uno maxime P. Sestius se oppugnari videt, hominis eius qui hanc 'nationem' deleri et concidi cupivit, qui C. Caesarem, mitem hominem et a caede abhorrentem, saepe increpuit, saepe accusavit, cum adfirmaret illum numquam, dum haec *natio* viveret, sine cura futurum (Cic. *Sest.* 96; 97; 132).<sup>13</sup>

The contemptuous sense *natio* assumed is apparent in other instances as well. In the passage below from the second book of Cicero's philosophical dialogue *De natura Deorum* (On the Nature of the Gods), the Stoic Quintus Lucius Balbus is criticizing Epicurus and his followers for ridiculing the Stoic idea of providence. The phrase *vestra natio* "your tribe" is used by Balbus as a derogatory term for the school of Epicureanism:

- (9) Ita salem istum, quo caret vestra natio, in inridendis nobis nolitote consumere, et mercule si me audiatis ne experiamini quidem; non decet non datum est non

<sup>13</sup> "No doubt this is the point of the question that you addressed to me, in particular, in your speech of prosecution, when you asked what our 'breed of the Best Sort' is – for that's the phrase you used. [...] The fact of the matter, then, is that those whom you called a 'breed' are just those who are sound and sane and have their domestic affairs in good order. [...] So you have the answer to your question, who are the 'Best Sort.' They are not a 'breed,' as you put it, though I recognize the word: it's a favourite of the person by whom Publius Sestius sees himself chiefly attacked, who has longed for the destruction and dissolution of this 'breed,' who has often assailed and slandered Gaius Caesar – a gentle person to whom bloodshed is alien – by asserting that Caesar will never draw an easy breath as long as this 'breed' remains alive" (Cicero, 2006, pp. 83–99).

potestis. nec vero hoc in te unum convenit moribus domesticis ac nostrorum hominum urbanitate limatum, sed cum in reliquos vestros tum in eum maxime qui ista peperit, hominem sine arte sine litteris, insultantem in omnes, sine acumine ullo sine auctoritate sine lepore (Cic. *N. D.* 2.74).<sup>14</sup>

In Cicero's speeches *In Pisonem* (Against Piso) and *Pro Murena* (For Lucius Murena) *natio* is part of the nominal phrase *natio candidatorum* "breed of candidates for office" (Cic. *Pis.* 55.3; Cic. *Mur.* 69). *Natio* here refers to a group of people that at the time Cicero delivered the two speeches shared a common activity – they were trying to attain a public office. Although the context of both utterances does not provide enough clues, it seems that here too *natio* bears a connotation of contempt. This supposition is based on the fact that *natio* has a contemptuous sense in all other similar instances, which makes it hard to believe that this particular use is an exception, and that in both speeches it is modified by the ironical use of the superlative *officiosissima* "the most dutiful"/ "the most watchful," which is as an additional indication that the word is not used with a neutral connotation.

In Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia* (Natural History) *natio* denotes the place of origin of a product, that is, the country, region or district where a product was created. In these utterances, the noun is frequently followed by an adjective of origin, such as *Pontica* "Pontic" or "of the Black Sea" (Plin. *Nat.* 21.83), *Cretica* "Cretan" or "belonging to Crete" (Plin. *Nat.* 21.83), *Cypria* "Cyprian" or "belonging to Cyprus" (Plin. *Nat.* 24.34), *Syriaca* "Syrian" or "connected with, found in, or produced in Syria" (Plin. *Nat.* 24.34), *Galatica* "of or belonging to Galatia" (Plin. *Nat.* 29.33), *Tarentina* "of Tarentum" (Plin. *Nat.* 29.33), etc. In the example below (10), *natione Pontica* "made/produced in Pontus" is an identification tag used for wax, while in the example under (11), *natione Galatica, Tarentina, Attica, Milesia* "made/produced in Galatia, Tarentum, Attica and Miletus" are identification tags used for wool:

- (10) optima quae Punica vocatur, proxima quam maxime fulva odorisque mellei, pura, natione autem Pontica, quod constare equidem miror inter venenata mella, dein Cretica, plurimum enim ex propoli habet, de qua diximus in natura apium (Plin. *Nat.* 21.83).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> "So do not you and your friends waste your wit on making fun of us, – your tribe is none too well off for that commodity. Indeed if your school would take my advice you would give up all attempts at humour; it sits ill upon you, for it is not your forte and you can't bring it off. This does not, it is true, apply to you in particular (sc. Velleius), – you have the polished manners of your family and the urbanity of a Roman; but it does apply to all the rest of you, and especially to the parent of the system, an uncultivated, illiterate person, who tilts at everybody and is entirely devoid of penetration, authority or charm" (Cicero, 1967, p. 195).

<sup>15</sup> "The best is that called Punic wax; the next best is very yellow indeed, with the smell of honey,

(11) *laudatissima omnis e collo, natione vero Galatica, Tarentina, Attica, Milesia* (Plin. *Nat.* 29.33).<sup>16</sup>

The use of *natio* as “an entity or a group of people tied together by place of birth” is also attested in Pliny the Elder’s *Naturalis Historia*.<sup>17</sup> This clearly shows that at the beginning of the first century AD, *natio* was used at the same time as “a place of origin of a product” and as “an entity or a group of people tied together by place of birth.”

\* \* \*

The original meaning of the Latin noun *natio*, attested in one inscription dating from third century BC and in Marcus Terentius Varro’s *On Agriculture*, was “a birth” (of children or cattle). *Natio* was also the name of the Roman goddess of childbirth, who was believed to watch over married women in labour. By Plautus’s time, i.e. by the end of the third and the beginning of the second century BC, *natio* had undergone a semantic change, and it began to be used as a collective term for a community of people who shared common descent and culture, but who were not organized in a state or some other politically recognized entity. In this sense, the term was applied exclusively to non-Roman populations. Romans never referred to themselves as *natio*, but as *populus Romanus* “people of Rome” or *cives Romani* “Roman citizens.” The fact that the use of *natio* as “a birth” is attested in Varro, an ancient Roman scholar from the first century BC, suggests that the original meaning was probably maintained in rural and provincial areas. However, from the time of Plautus on, the most common was the use of *natio* as a collective term for a tribal community of foreigners. A near-synonym of *natio* was the term *gens*, which was also used to describe tribal communities but had a more comprehensive sense than *natio*: *natio* probably referred to people that were born in the same tract of land, while *gens* referred to people of the same origin. The fellowship based on sharing the same *gens*, *natio* and *lingua*, according to Cicero, was the second level of human fellowship, following the first level, which consisted in the general bond that ties together all human beings. To share the same *natio* was thus considered to be an intimate bond, but the bond between the members of politically organized community (*civitas*) was considered a more intimate one.

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pure, but produced in Pontus, the region of the poisonous honies, which makes me surprised at its established reputation; next is Cretan wax, consisting in very great part of bee-glue, about which we have spoken in treating of the nature of bees” (Pliny, 1961, p. 221).

<sup>16</sup> “The most highly esteemed wool is: all from the neck, and that from the districts of Galatia, Tarentum, Attica, and Miletus” (Pliny, 1963, p. 205).

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Plin. *Nat.* 34.91.

The practice of regarding the members of communities denoted by the term *natio* as strange and comical is reflected in the derogatory and contemptuous sense the term had assumed: *natio* began to be used as a derogatory term for a community of people whose members share common values, interests or activities. In the Roman literature, the groups for which the term was used included maritime marauders, shellfish-gatherers, hook-fishers, political opponents, followers of rival philosophical schools etc. The meaning of *natio* as a collective term for a tribal community of foreigners tied together by place of birth was, nevertheless, still in use. Indeed, this use of the term was the most frequent one in all periods of Roman literature.

In Pliny the Elder's *Historia Naturalis*, *natio* is repeatedly used to refer to "a place of origin of a product." In these utterances, the noun, which is often in ablative case, is followed by an adjective of origin: *natione Pontica* "made/produced in Pontus," *natione Cretica* "made/produced in Crete" etc. Since the use of *natio* in this meaning is not attested in earlier Latin, it cannot be established with certainty whether this meaning was a secondary semantic development or whether *natio* has been used in this sense before first century AD. In view of the fact that this sense is very closely related to the etymology of *natio*, it seems that this use of the term was current before the time of Pliny the Elder.

As is evident, the Roman concept of *natio* differs in many aspects from the modern concept of *nation*. Like many other abstract terms that we have inherited from the past, today's term only recalls its ancient subtext, but it is used with connotations quite different from those that were attributed to the Latin term from which it has derived.

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## O rzymskim pojęciu *natio*

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest analiza pojęcia *natio* w ujęciu starożytnych Rzymian. Spróbuję zastanowić się, jak rozumieli ten termin starożytni Rzymianie, jak go używali i czym różni się ich koncepcja *natio* od nowoczesnego rozumienia narodu? Swoje badanie opieram na korpusie tekstów łacińskich należących do różnych okresów i reprezentujących różne gatunki. Najstarsze użycia terminu są datowane na trzeci wiek przed narodzeniem Chrystusa, a najnowsze pochodzą z drugiego wieku naszej ery. Główny korpus tekstów powstał w tak zwanym cycerońskim okresie literatury łacińskiej (81–43 rok przed naszą erą).

Analiza potwierdza istotną różnicę między rzymską koncepcją *natio* a nowoczesnym rozumieniem narodu. Dla starożytnych Rzymian *natio* był

przede wszystkim terminem zbiorczym opisującym plemienną społeczność cudzoziemców powiązanych wspólnym miejscem urodzenia, ale nie zorganizowanych w politycznie uznaną całość. Termin był także używany w znaczeniu pejoratywnym, degradującym wspólnoty wyśmiewane z powodu ich wartości, zainteresowań i działań, jak również jako termin, który odnosił się do miejsca pochodzenia produktu.

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## Note

Svetlana Kočovska-Stevović [Светлана Кочовска-Стевовиќ], Faculty of Philosophy, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje, bul. Gotse Delchev br. 9, 1000, Skopje, Macedonia

[svetlana.kocovska@fzf.ukim.edu.mk](mailto:svetlana.kocovska@fzf.ukim.edu.mk)

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