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**JAN PROSTKO-PROSTYŃSKI, *A History of the Herules*,
Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu,
Poznań 2020 [= *Historia*, 244], pp. 196.**

In his latest book, Jan Prostko-Prostyński traces the history of the Herules, which back in 2006, Walter Goffart¹ described as a collection of difficult, probably unsolvable, yet fascinating problems. Thus, the author undertook the study of a subject that is extremely complicated and interesting, and he accomplished this task brilliantly.

After an extensive survey and meticulous analysis of the sources, including those where researchers espied traces left by the Herules, Jan Prostko-Prostyński proved that the aforementioned sources document only the existence of this people from the 3rd to the 6th century AD, and there is no evidence of the Herules' survival as an ethnos in later periods, such as the Middle Ages or the Renaissance. He also demonstrated that, although we can speak of their Germanic and Scandinavian origins, the suggestions of researchers – especially Scandinavian – to connect various archaeological artifacts or runic inscriptions with the Herules have no source basis. Moreover, the author illustrated that the starting point of the few Herules' pirate raids on the northern Iberian coastal zones recorded in the 5th century may have been Jutland. Ultimately, he refuted Alvar Ellegård's hypothesis which denied the distinctiveness of the Herules as an ethnic group, arguing that this thesis is contradicted by the terminology used in the source texts. Jan Prostko-Prostyński also evidenced that there was no kingdom of the "western Herules" on the coast of today's

Netherlands, or anywhere along the Rhine; the source texts which supposedly indicated this actually refer to the *Heruli proprie dicti*, a group of the "Azov" Herules led by their own king, who had been moving west for decades. The author also proved that after the Battle of the Nedao River in Pannonia, when the Herules fought against the sons of Attila alongside the Gepids, neither the entire tribe of the Herules nor even part of it was resettled to the Roman Balkans. In Jan Prostko-Prostyński's view, they also did not settle in Moravia or Slovakia, as some researchers suggest, but most likely, after the breakup of Attila's empire, the Herules anchored themselves in Lower Austria or Bohemia. In addition, the author illustrated that during Stotzas' Revolt in 536 in post-Vandal Africa, the entire Herules' military contingent brought from the Balkans by Belisarius sided with the rebels and was completely destroyed after their defeat the following year.

Jan Prostko-Prostyński rightly dates the peak of the power of the Herule Kingdom, after the defeat of the Huns, to the second half of the 5th century. According to him, in the same century, the tribe began to disintegrate. The author points out that this process, which ended already in the 6th century, was the result of political circumstances that were unfavorable for the Herules and contributed to their eventual disappearance from the historical arena as a separate ethno-political entity. Furthermore, the disintegration of the Herules as an ethnos was sharply accelerated by the defeat inflicted on them by the Lombards. Subsequent efforts to secure their independent existence proved

¹ W. GOFFART, *Barbarian Tides. The Migration Age and the Later Roman Empire*, Philadelphia PA 2006, p. 205.

futile, and involved their encroachment on Roman territory under Anastasius I (491–518), their Christianization under Justinian I, and the establishment in Italy in 566 of the last independent kingdom under Sinduald. In the end, the Herules disappeared into the mass of Slavs and Avars.

Finally, the *prosopografia herulica*, appended to the monograph and compiled by Jan Prostko-Prostyński, deserves attention as it is a novelty among the existing outlines devoted to the history of this people. It includes not only profiles of kings and noble-born Herules, but also of commanders of various levels and regular soldiers serving in the Roman army.


The author researched the history of the Herules with great care, using widely existing literature on the subject. He analyzed the sources with particular acerbity, producing a work that is original, erudite, and worthy of the reader's attention.

Translated by Katarzyna Szuster-Tardi

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