



## Galatians in Asia Minor

### Summary :

The Galatians were tribal groups of Celtic origin, which had originated in western and central Europe and migrated in the course of the fourth and the early third centuries BC through the Balkans to the boundaries of Greece and Asia Minor.

### Date

Hellenistic period, Roman period

### Geographical Location

Asia Minor

## 1. Introduction

The collapse of Macedonian power caused by the death of Ptolemy Keraunus in 280 BC allowed bands of Galatians to invade Macedonia, Thrace and in particular Greece. A large force led by Brennos made an unsuccessful attack on Delphi in 279 BC. Delphi was saved by the intervention of the Aitolians, who from this date exercised a dominant political role at the sanctuary. The Greeks in general attributed their safety from the barbarian menace to the divine protection of Apollo. Two groups of Galatians crossed into Asia Minor in 278/7 BC at the invitation of [Nicomedes I](#) of Bithynia, and they fought as his allies firstly against his brother Zipoitias, and thereafter in his struggles with the Seleucids. During the 270s [Galatian forces](#) ranged widely in western Asia Minor, plundering sanctuaries and cities, and taking hostages to exchange for ransom payments. Inscriptions and other sources record the threat they posed at Kyzikos, Ilion, Thyateira, [Erythrai](#), Ephesus, Priene, Miletus, Didyma, and inland as far as the valley of Lycus. The Greek cities for the most part had to defend themselves as best they could, but they looked to protection to the Seleucid Antiochus I, who defeated the Galatians around 270 BC at the so-called Battle of the Elephants, and thereafter took the title *Soter*. [Antigonus I Gonatas](#) had already been honoured as *Soter* in 277 BC for his victory over Galatian forces at Lysimacheia in the Thracian Chersonesus. Around 240 BC Attalus I of Pergamon achieved the same title after defeating a large Galatian force at the sources of the river Kaikos in Mysia. Thus it is clear that to a significant extent the hellenistic kings of the third century BC acquired legitimate status and recognition from the Greek cities of Asia Minor in acknowledgment of the protection they gave them against the Celtic barbarians.

## 2. The Galatian settlements

Although the ancient sources emphasise their interest in raiding and plunder, the main goal of the Galatians was to acquire good land for permanent homes, and they settled in central Anatolia around Ancyra, to the south-east of Bithynia. The region, previously part of Phrygia, was now generally called [Galatia](#). Literary and archaeological evidence shows that the newcomers settled in villages, dominated by the hill-top forts of their local chieftains, and became a powerful, settled agricultural population. The population grew rapidly and Galatian groups gradually spread to other neighbouring regions of central Asia Minor including [Cappadocia](#) and Lycaonia. There were three tribes, the Tolistobogii in the west, whose territory adjoined Bithynia, the Tectosages who settled around Ancyra, and the Trocmi, who occupied the area east of the river Halys. The ancient traveller Strabo provides a concise account of their constitution (see parathema 1).

The term *Drynemetos* -mentioned in Strabo-is Celtic and this tribal organization is similar to the political structure of Celtic tribes in western Europe. The Galatians used their own Celtic language, which continued to be spoken in the region until late antiquity. Many Celtic personal and place names are attested by the literary sources and inscriptions found in Galatia. Galatians also occur in other cities of Asia Minor as they were widely used by Hellenistic kings as mercenary soldiers.

## 3. Galatians and Seleucids



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Between 240 and 220 BC the Galatians, often in alliance with the Seleucids, threatened the newly founded Attalid kingdom. [Attalus I](#) commemorated a series of victories against these opponents with a series of victory monuments, which were erected in the sanctuary of Athena on the acropolis at Pergamon. These included the famous sculptures of the Dying Gaul and of the Gaul committing suicide after killing his wife, which are known from Roman marble copies of the bronze originals. Attalus in his victory propaganda stressed the barbarian nature of his opponents, and made dedications to celebrate his victories at other centers of the Greek world, including Delos, Athens and probably Delphi. He thus established his claim to be a champion of Hellenic civilization in Asia Minor and in the Greek world as a whole.

### 4. Rome against the Galatians

After the treaty of Apamea in 189 BC, which excluded the Seleucids from Asia Minor north of the Taurus, and established Roman authority over western Anatolia, the Roman consul Cn. Manlius Vulso undertook an expedition through southern and central Asia Minor, which culminated in two battles with the Galatians. In the first he defeated the Tolistobogii on Mount Olympus near Gordium. In the second he defeated the Trocmi and the Tectosages on Mount Magaba, east of Ancyra. The Galatians now fell within the Roman sphere of influence for the first time, but were allowed to remain independent of Pergamon. Between 185 and 166 BC they came in conflict with the Attalid kingdom again until they suffered a major defeat in Synnada in Phrygia at the hands of [Eumenes II](#) and his brother Attalus II. The victory was celebrated with major festivals in honour of Eumenes and may have been the occasion for the building of the [Great Altar at Pergamon](#). The [frieze](#) of the Great Altar, which depicts the Battle of the Gods against the Giants, appears to be a metaphorical representation of the triumph of Hellenism over the barbarian enemies of civilisation, especially the Galatians.

### 5. The Galatians allies of Rome

In the first century BC the Galatians fought as allies of the Romans against [Mithridates VI Eupator](#), whose powerful kingdom lay east of Galatia in northern Cappadocia towards Pontus. In 86 BC Mithridates tricked the Galatian chieftains into attending a meeting with him at Pergamon, and killed all but three of them. The survivors, in particular Deiotarus of the Tolistobogii, expelled Mithridates' satrap from Galatia and consolidated their grip on central Anatolia. By the time of his death in 43 BC Deiotarus acquired control of all Galatia, and he was succeeded first by Castor and then by the last Galatian king, Amyntas. Amyntas, who was Rome's most powerful ally in Asia Minor in the triumviral and early Augustan periods, controlled a vast area of central Anatolia from Paphlagonia in the north to the Taurus mountains in the south, even reaching as far as Side in Pamphylia.

After Amyntas's death in 25 BC his kingdom was annexed and became the Roman [province of Galatia](#). Many of the old Galatian tribal structures were preserved in the new province. The three tribes of the Tolistobogii, Tectosages and Trocmi provided the basis for regional organization in the northern part of the province, based on the cities of Pessinus, Ancyra and Tavium. A Galatian *koinon* was created which promoted the [imperial cult](#) in Galatia. Temples dedicated to the cult of Rome and the divine Augustus were built at [Pessinus](#) and Ancyra, and the fullest surviving copy of the *Res Gestae* of Augustus was carved on the walls of the Ancyra building. Another important inscription on this temple recorded the high priests of the imperial cult, many being Galatians with Celtic names, and the services and benefactions they gave to their tribal communities. These included communal feasts, which had always been characteristic of Celtic society.

Galatian cultural influence remained strong under the Roman Empire, although it was gradually diluted as the inhabitants of the region became first hellenised and later Romanised. However, even in the sixth century AD evidence from saints' lives suggests that inhabitants of the region were still conscious of their Celtic descent and heritage.

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### Bibliography :



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	<b>Mitchell S.</b> , <i>Anatolia: Land, Men and Gods in Asia Minor, 1: The Celts in Anatolia and the Impact of Roman Rule</i> , Clarendon Press, Oxford 1993
	<b>Strobel K.</b> , <i>Die Galater. Geschichte und Eigenart der keltischen Staatenbildung auf dem Boden des hellenistischen Kleinasien I</i> , Berlin 1996
	<b>Mitchell S., Darbyshire G., Vardar L.</b> , "The Galatian Settlement in Asia Minor", <i>Anatolian Studies</i> , 50, 2000, 75-97

### Webliography :

	Ancient coinage of Galatia <a href="http://www.snible.org/coins/hn/galatia.html">http://www.snible.org/coins/hn/galatia.html</a>
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### Quotations

1. Strabo, XII.5.1, 567

'The three tribes used the same language and differed from one another in no other respect; they were divided each into four section called tetrarchies, each having its own tetrarch, one judge, and one military commander, subordinate to the tetrarch, and two junior commanders. The council of the twelve tetrarchs consisted of three hundred men, and they assembled at the so-called *Drynemetos*. The council decided murder cases, the tetrarchs and the judges all others.'