2020

The Memory Remains: Why the Migration Period and the Fall of Rome Continue to be Mischaracterized as a Barbarian Invasion

Walter Napier
University of Central Florida

Find similar works at: https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd2020

This Masters Thesis (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations, 2020- by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.

STARS Citation
THE MEMORY REMAINS: 
WHY THE MIGRATION PERIOD AND THE FALL OF ROME CONTINUE TO BE 
MISCHARACTERIZED AS A BARBARIAN INVASION

by

WALTER WAYNE NAPIER III
B.A. College of Arts and Humanities, 2020

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of History
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term
2020

Major Professor: Edward Dandrow
ABSTRACT

The Fall of Rome (or more specifically the Western Roman Empire) remains a hotly debated subject in the history of Late Antiquity. The Battle of Adrianople can be argued to be the beginning of Rome’s end, but the cause of the battle lay more with Rome’s imperial mismanagement than any deliberate attempt at war from the barbarians. Rome turned against those who would have defended the empire, and for many centuries had done just that. Despite being forced into an antagonistic relationship with Rome, their reputation as the cause of Rome’s calamity has remained to the present day. This thesis will first argue that the fault lies more with Rome than with the various barbarian tribes. After making that argument, it will investigate why the “barbarian invader” myth has remained in the public consciousness for more than 1500 years after Rome’s fall.
I would like to thank all of those involved in helping me through my academic career, and helped me shape this argument. Dr. Edward Dandrow, Dr. Barbara Gannon, and Dr. Amelia Lyons for giving me the chance to prove myself and supporting me every step of the way. Also, I want to thank my committee members Dr. Duncan Hardy and Dr. Amy Foster, who provided invaluable suggestions and critiques. My future wife Samantha, who put up with hours spent on the table and around the world. My father, who has always pushed me to better myself, been supportive of my endeavors and helped establish my love of learning. My classmate Jim, who helped keep me sane during the process.

A special thanks to Dr. Simon Barton. You will be sorely missed.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES ............................................................................................................................... vi

TIMELINE OF MAJOR EVENTS .......................................................................................................... vii

INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................................... 1

CHAPTER 1- THE COMING STORM: THE ROAD TO ADRIANOPE .................................................. 6

  The Road to Adrianople: The West ................................................................................................. 7

  The Road to Adrianople: The East .................................................................................................. 11

  The Road to Adrianople: The Migration Period Begins .............................................................. 15

  Neighbors or Enemies? .................................................................................................................... 19

  Conclusion .................................................................................................................................... 29

CHAPTER 2- A DIET OF VICTORY: THE INABILITY TO RECOVER FROM ADRIANOPE .............. 31

  The Roman Army of the Late Empire ......................................................................................... 33

  Adrianople, 378 C.E. .................................................................................................................... 41

  Immediate Aftermath ..................................................................................................................... 46

  Decline? ....................................................................................................................................... 53

CHAPTER 3- CEMENTING A FALSE IDENTITY .............................................................................. 60

  Ancient Period ............................................................................................................................. 64

  Early Modern Period .................................................................................................................... 75
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Rome in the 5th Century ........................................................................................................ 4
Figure 2: 2nd Century Certificate Granting Citizenship to a Roman Soldier ................................. 36
Figure 3: Battle map of Adrianople ................................................................................................. 46
Figure 4: World War I propaganda poster relating the German Army to the Huns. ................. 63
Figure 5: Column of Marcus Aurelius. ............................................................................................. 71
TIMELINE OF MAJOR EVENTS

- 753 B.C.E., mythical founding of Rome
- 509 B.C.E., beginning of the Roman Republic
- 390 B.C.E., Battle of the Allia and the Sack of Rome
- 264-241 B.C.E., First Punic War
- 218-201 B.C.E., Second Punic War
  - 216 B.C.E., Battle of Cannae
- 58-50 B.C.E., Caesar’s Gallic Campaign
- 31 B.C.E., Battle of Actium and common date for the start of the Roman Empire
- 9 B.C.E., Battle of Teutoburg Forest
- 376-382 C.E., The Gothic War
  - 376 C.E., Danube Crossing by the Goths
  - 378 C.E., Battle of Adrianople
  - 379 C.E., Theodosius named Augustus
- 395 C.E., Death of Theodosius I
- 406 C.E., Death of Stilicho
- 410 C.E., Sack of Rome by Alaric and the Visigoths
- 451 C.E., Battle of the Catalaunian Fields
- 455 C.E., Sack of Rome by Genseric and the Vandals
- 476 C.E., Romulus Augustulus deposed by Odacer and common date for the end of the Roman Empire
INTRODUCTION

By the fourth century C.E., Rome encompassed the whole of the Mediterranean. It had been the master of the Western world for more than five hundred years, and an estimated fifty to sixty million people lived under Roman law.1 With such a large land mass and population, combined with ancient methods of travel and communication, identity becomes a question worth asking. Because of the trade flow, and the multi-cultural nature of the empire, peoples like the barbarians beyond the Rhine and Danube actually operated on a daily basis in a very Roman way. These individuals were essential to Roman institutions, even the defense of the empire, yet for centuries they have shouldered the blame for Rome’s Fall.

By investigating the period of Late Antiquity, the argument can be made that Rome itself was to blame for its doom, in creating enemies where there were none. Warfare and invasions may have occurred in the fifth century, but it was the failure of Roman policy in the fourth century that caused those events. Most directly, Rome failed to recognize its willing subjects to the north, and instead turned them into enemies.

While Rome failed to incorporate the barbarian tribes into the Roman system, the historical record and popular memory have largely focused on the barbarian’s role in the empire coming to an end. Until recently, the standard understanding of Rome’s final years was one of chaos and destruction brought about by Germanic invaders. This thesis will focus on two aspects

of the Roman and barbarian relationship, how the Romans viewed the barbarians during their time and how that memory has lasted until the present. The period before and after the pivotal battle of Adrianople (378 C.E.) will be the primary setting of the argument, as after the Gothic War in the fourth century, Rome never recovered.

Any discussion on the Fall of Rome is a perilous undertaking for a scholar. The field is rife with opposing positions, painstakingly researched work, and fierce defenses. The discussion on Rome’s collapse has fallen largely into two camps. The first school of thought focuses on a Europe that went through a transformation as Rome’s presence decreased and eventually made an exit from the world stage. Transformation is championed by Lynn White Jr., Peter Brown, and Guy Halsall. The other (led by Peter Heather) argues that while Rome’s fall may have not been the dramatic event it was believed to be in earlier centuries, it nevertheless occurred, was military in nature, and was indeed dramatic for the course of European history.

These two positions need not be so opposed. As Adrian Goldsworthy says, “The Western Roman Empire ceased to exist in the fifth century.”2 There can be no substantial argument to the contrary. Regardless of any transformation within the region, from a military and political viewpoint, the Roman West no longer existed as a political entity. At its end sat a foreign army, with which Rome could not contend. Yet that fact does not mean that discussions and debates on transformation are in error; quite the contrary.

Halsall and Heather hotly disagree with one another, but even Halsall states, “The Roman Empire did come to an end, admittedly at different times in different places, and when it did so

This debate between decline and fall or transformation largely revolves around the place of the various “Germanic” peoples in the narrative (a title that has been hotly argued against, and is most often be replaced with “barbarian” — a term having its own baggage). I agree with Halsall that the barbarian migrations were unintended, and I place the blame squarely at the feet of imperial mismanagement, that if properly implemented could have seen a boom in the Roman population. Instead, it allowed misplaced identity politics to create discord and eventually a dramatic shift in positions on both sides. Even returning to the political and military standpoint, Heather points out that the sack of Rome by Alaric in 410 C.E. was one of the “most civilized sacks of a city ever witnessed.”

Alaric’s sack of Rome was not the end of the Western Empire, but it does show the combination of these two approaches. Foreign militaries were operating within Roman territory, and Rome was unable to stop them. It also shows, however, that these “barbarians” were not so barbarous. The slow transformation and cross-pollination of cultures meant that Alaric was not some wild-haired marauder. He even attempted to avoid sacking the city in the first place, and then ordered his men not to destroy the ancient capital after deciding the attack was necessary.

To make this argument, this first chapter will look at the situation leading to Adrianople, a largely avoidable event. The chapter will look at the role of the barbarian in Roman society, and clarify how the Romans saw themselves as well as the “other.” Chapter two will be a discussion of the Battle of Adrianople and its aftermath. With the death of Valens on the battlefield, was Rome able to recover? Theodosius is viewed as a successful emperor, largely
because he kept the Empire together following the Gothic War, but his reputation is misleading. The period after Adrianople was a gilded one. Going into the fifth century, Rome appeared to be every bit as powerful, but the foundation was crumbling [Figure 1].

![Figure 1: Rome in the 5th Century](image)

After explaining that the barbarians were largely victims of Roman mismanagement and forced into war, the final chapter will discuss why the barbarians have been publicly remembered so differently. Despite the various approaches to Late Antiquity by the likes of Brown, Ward-Perkins, Heather, Halsall, and many others, the stigma of the barbarian invader seems difficult to shake off. While these historians do not always concur, they do align on the point that a barbaric, “Germanic” horde causing the fall of Rome is more myth than fact. By looking at various periods throughout Western history, we will trace the continuation of the barbarian myth in

---

writing, popular culture, and language to uncover why the barbarian tribes of the fourth and fifth centuries cannot shed their undeserved reputations.

It must be pointed out that the questions asked by historians are commonly reflective of their own periods of history and of their own life experiences. Modernity has seen a constant struggle with the questions of identity and ethnicity, with no signs of slowing down. While this work attempts to decipher the role played by barbarian peoples in Roman society, many Western nations are again facing issues of racial conflict, minority rights, and the best way to incorporate (or exclude) immigrants vis-a-vis their societies. A prime example of why these questions should be asked can be seen consistently in the nightly news.

In this thesis I will argue that Rome’s xenophobic attitude towards the northern barbarians created an enemy that should have been an ally. Their memory remains stained until the present day. While I make this argument, western countries are again facing questions of integration. While the United States debates building a wall along its southern border, and how to integrate or expel millions of people, United States Army veteran Miguel Perez is being deported to Mexico after years of service, including multiple combat deployments.7 Similar to Rome, policies and actions that create enemies out of allies cripple the foundations of the country. The issues facing modernity and antiquity will always differ. While no definitive answers to today’s problems can be found in the ancient record, lessons about what actions and policies to avoid are abundantly available. The absurdity of turning against those willing and able to defend your way of life should certainly be one of those lessons.

CHAPTER 1-THE COMING STORM: THE ROAD TO ADRIANOPLE

For scholars who view the period as more of a transition, the Gothic crossing of the Danube in 376 C.E. is seen as the beginning of the Migration Period. For those who see the ensuing period as the Fall of Rome, the Goths crossing into Roman territory was the beginning of the end. Regardless of the scholar’s stand on the historiographical debate, there is no doubt that 376 represents a pivotal period in the history of Ancient Rome.

This chapter will explain the various political and military issues facing Rome leading to the Gothic crossing. In the west, Valentinian focused on the Roman *limes*, and defending the frontier. When Valentinian unexpectedly died, the ensuing power struggle cost the life of one of Rome’s best generals. In the east, the emperor Valens was saddled with the responsibility of dealing with the Sassanid Empire and the fallout from his predecessor Julian’s failed military campaign. In the midst of these struggles, the Goths requested asylum to escape pressure from the Huns.

Once the setting has been suitably established, the chapter will transition to the role of barbarians in late Roman society. It will show that the barbarian request for Roman asylum was consistent with previous interactions between the two groups. It will also examine the mutually beneficial nature of the existing relationship. By explaining the events surrounding the Danube crossing and the existing relationship between Rome and the barbarians, the argument will be made that Rome’s impending disaster was both avoidable and of its own creation.
The Road to Adrianople: The West

The Roman Empire in Late Antiquity stretched from Britain to the Middle East. With so much land mass, command and control became a constant problem for Rome’s emperors. To set the stage, let us look at the multiple pressing situations during the late fourth century, moving us closer to Adrianople. The epoch shows multiple problem areas for imperial rule, and a consistent failure of the imperial court to deal with these issues, starting with senior the senior Augustus Valentinian’s snobbish and irrational dealings along the Rhine, Danube, and North Africa.

A consistent struggle for historians is the period in which to begin the narrative. Events prior to their chosen starting point always affect the circumstances they discuss. This narrative will survey a brief period only, in an effort to be as concise as possible in describing events. The construction of fortifications on the far side of the Rhine in the spring of 369 C.E. seems as good a place as any to begin. Our primary source for this time period is Ammianus Marcellinus. Born in Antioch around 330 C.E., in the twilight years of Constantine the Great, he describes himself as a Greek soldier who wrote a history from Nerva to the Gothic War. His admiration of Julian is palpable, and his mild annoyance with Christianity (and to be fair, of religion in general it seems) must be considered when he condemned the later emperors. In addition, his experience as a soldier and his willingness to discuss social and economic issues should serve as a defense of his knowledge base.

---

8 Marcellinus Introduction. 14.
As Ammianus said, “Valentinian from the very beginning of his reign was burning with a glorious resolve to protect his frontiers.”\textsuperscript{10} The last senior Augustus to rule out of the Western Empire, Valentinian was an interesting character. Heather recounts that Symmachus, a Roman senator who had gone before Valentinian’s court at the Northern Front, praised him to his brother Valens for essentially leaving a relaxing life in the Eastern Empire, to take up the old Roman standard of military conquest in the West.\textsuperscript{11}

The 350’s C.E. had seen Emperor Julian defend the Rhine and Danube against the Alamans and the Burgundians.\textsuperscript{12} Ammianus even had his moment of glory at the Battle of Strasbourg in 357 C.E. while serving under Julian, who was not yet a full Augustus.\textsuperscript{13} Valentinian also fought with the Alamanni, even attempting to convince the Burgundians to attack them with Roman support.\textsuperscript{14}

Valentinian’s Alamannic War lasted from 368–374 C.E., and it saw him endeavor to construct fortifications on the far side of the Rhine and on the Danube’s borders. Each of these attempts proved fruitless, and increased hostilities between the barbarians and the Romans. Largely uneventful, the war was characterized by “one significant (if lucky) victory.”\textsuperscript{15} It is largely remembered more for the peace made in the middle of the river than for any actual battle, and the end of the Alamanni as a threat to Rome.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid 29.6 pg. 383
\textsuperscript{11} Heather, \textit{The Fall of the Roman Empire}. 42.
\textsuperscript{13} Marcellinus, 11.12, 105.
\textsuperscript{14} Halsall, \textit{Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West}. 149.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid. 174.
However, many lessons can be gleaned from these events. First, we see the way Rome dealt with its neighbors: encroaching on foreign soil without regard to boundaries. Valentinian faced opposition for his plan to build on the far side of the Rhine, and subsequently attempting the same across the Danube. The Romans clearly had no issue with using past enemies as current allies, as shown by their use of the Burgundians to attack their Alamannic neighbors. A clear lack of cooperation between the various tribes across the Rhine is also discernable, as the Burgundians considered attacking the tribe with which they had previously allied against Julian.\textsuperscript{16} The final point to be taken from this event is the political deftness of the Burgundians in dealing with the Romans. While willing to attack, they declined to engage without a Roman guarantee.

On a broader front, many issues were facing Rome. Before transitioning to Valens in the East, we must consider the scandals and issues taking place in the West that were not centered around the Northern border. One example is, the absolute failure of Valentinian’s policies to deal with Rome’s difficulties.

Valentinian had an outstanding lieutenant in Theodosius the Elder. His first task was to recover the lands lost in the \textit{barbarica conspiratio} in Roman Britain. While dealing with the traitor Valentinus, Theodosius had to set the province to rights after a rebellion along Hadrian’s Wall that allowed the tribes north of it to move south.\textsuperscript{17} After handling the situation in Britannia, Theodosius was recalled to court and elevated to command the cavalry.\textsuperscript{18} In this position he

\textsuperscript{16} Marcellinus 28.5. Halsall, \textit{Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West}. 149.
\textsuperscript{17} Marcellinus 28.3.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid 28.3.
fought against the Alemanni and the Sarmatians before being sent to deal with conspiracy and treachery in North Africa.

In Africa, Theodosius was sent to address an uprising by Firmus, against the Roman regent Romanus. Valentinian tried to decipher the situation, at which point Ammianus stated that Romanus “misled Valentinian by a wicked lie.”19 Valentinian was deceived into believing others to be at fault, and he ordered their execution. When the situation persisted, Valentinian sent Theodosius to ascertain what was going on with Romanus and Firmus. Theodosius found Firmus willing to negotiate, as he had acted only against the treacherous Romanus. Romanus was found to be guilty after Theodosius’s investigation. Yet Firmus was not allowed to return to the fold. Reasonable cause or not, Valentinian would not allow discord or rebellion. Further throwing salt in the wound, and despite all he had done for the Empire, Theodosius was executed during the power vacuum following Valentinian’s death.20

The final drama for the Western Empire came from the sudden and unexpected death of Valentinian. The Quadi petitioned him for an audience, requesting amnesty for past transgressions and being willing to offer service to the Roman state if their request was granted.21 While it was not in Valentinian’s nature or custom to grant personal audiences, he acquiesced at the prospect of new allies. At the meeting, the Quadi acted humbly, but they essentially explained to the emperor that they felt their hostilities had been reasonable, due to the building of fortifications in their territory. They further pointed out that they would uphold the peace, although they were a confederation of peoples and did not speak for the entire group.

19 Ibid 28.6.
20 Heather, The Fall of the Roman Empire. 254.
21 Marcellinus 30.6.
Valentinian’s enraged response cost him his life, as he fell dead from a stroke in the middle of his tirade.

Valentinian was succeeded to the purple by his son Gratian, who had already been made Augustus by Valentinian I. The general Merobaudes, however, decided to install Gratian’s four-year-old brother, Valentinian II, as emperor.\(^{22}\) In the ensuing power grab, Theodosius the Elder met his fate. There was certainly fear of a civil war to contest the appointment, but Gratian, realizing his position, acquiesced easily to the concept of shared rule. Killing a general of Theodosius’ caliber would haunt the empire after Adrianople. His death indicates that power hungry administrators were far more interested in securing their own place of power, than doing what was best for Rome as a whole.

So stood the position of the Western Empire. War on the Rhine and Danube had occurred off and on for the better part of two decades, constantly plugging up the gaps of rebellion and treachery in Britannia, in Africa, and in the heart of the Western Empire itself. Allies rebelled against corrupt administrators and then were punished for doing so, even after the corruption was proven. An emperor died in his prime, succeeded by a weak son and a near infant. To top it off, the greatest champion of the West had been executed during the transition. In the Eastern Empire, the situation was no better.

The Road to Adrianople: The East

In the Eastern Roman Empire, the Emperor Valens faced a situation not much better than his brother in the West. Having been appointed the Eastern Emperor in 364 C.E. by his brother,

\(^{22}\) Ibid 30.10
Valentinian I, Valens inherited the turmoil with Rome’s Sassanid rival, Shapur II, left by Julian the Apostate’s failed invasion of 363 C.E.\textsuperscript{23} Before he could face his eastern rival, however, Valens had to deal with an early revolt by Procopius.

Born in Cilicia, Procopius was a relative of the Emperor Julian.\textsuperscript{24} Ammianus believed that the elevation of Jovian following Julian’s death in the east, combined with a rumor that on his deathbed Julian had stated his wish for Procopius to take his place, caused concern for Procopius.\textsuperscript{25} Procopius went into hiding to avoid execution. Jovian died on his way to Constantinople, which elevated Valentinian, and subsequently Valens, to the purple. Hearing that Gothic tribes were crossing into Thrace, Valens sent two legions ahead to quell the situation. While the legions were passing through Constantinople, Procopius entreated them to join his cause of usurpation.

With his claim made public, and a small force to back him up, Procopius began to consider how best to deal with Valens when he came to squash this little rebellion. He decided to ask the Goths to assist him in his goal. Procopius saw this as a chance to gain the upper hand against Valens, and the Goths saw an opportunity to gain an ally on the imperial throne, hoping to reverse some of the harsher restrictions placed on them by the treaty with Constantine in 332 C.E.\textsuperscript{26}

Neither group was successful in their goal. Procopius was defeated at Thyatira (366 C.E.) near Nacoleia, before being betrayed from within and handed over to Valens. Procopius

\begin{flushright}
\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{23} Marcellinus 25.3 for the death of Julian, 26.1-2 for the accession of Valentinian, and 26.4 for the choosing of Valens as the co-emperor.
\textsuperscript{24} Marcellinus 26.6.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid 26.6.
\end{footnotesize}
\end{flushright}
was immediately beheaded, and then the men who had brought him before the Emperor were also put to the sword.\footnote{Marcellinus 26.9 pg. 331} The Goths, specifically the Tervingi, were then wrapped up in a war with Valens, from 367-369 C.E. While Valens did find some success, the Tervingi were able to avoid a decisive defeat, and the matter ended when Valens once again faced trouble in the East.\footnote{Heather, \textit{The Goths}. 62.}

For a while the Goths had been quiet. Upon returning to the stage, however, they would never again leave the Roman narrative. Peace was made with the Gothic Chieftain Athanaric, after “the interruption of trade had reduced the barbarians to such want that they sent a number of delegations to beg for pardon and peace.”\footnote{Marcellinus 27.9.} Amusingly, when Valens agreed, Athanaric refused to enter Roman territory because of an oath he had previously taken not to enter Roman territory; therefore, a mid-river peace agreement was made between Valens and the chief. This is an example of the the cross-pollination between the Roman and Gothic cultures. Roman trade had become so integral to Gothic society that the extension of a war was thought to be too damaging. Even without a clear and decisive victory, the barbarians could not sustain the strain on their economy. We also see the Roman nature of Athanaric’s political maneuvering, in not being willing to cross the river and attempting to convince Valens to be the lesser sovereign and cross over to him. Even though a neutral ground was established, it is hard to imagine an earlier Augustus being willing to make a similar gesture.

Part of the reason Valens had allowed this peace to take place was a growing dispute over Armenia. Shapur had faced pressing matters in the eastern section of his own kingdom, and to free himself from western worry, he had come to a settlement with Valens on the Armenian
question. The main problem centered around the appointed king of Armenia, Pap. According to Ammianus, some men in the region had created exaggerated claims about the young Pap. The discontent was enough for Valens to hatch a plot to capture and kill him. Although the first attempt was botched, Valens eventually had the young royal assassinated.

This event did not sit well with Shapur. While he had agreed to allow Armenia to remain neutral with a Roman slant, he saw the recent assassination of the king as an excuse to initiate conflict with his rivals again. Valens responded by sending an envoy with a message essentially chastising Shapur, stating that “it was criminal in a king who prided himself on being upright and content with his own possessions to covet Armenia.” To make matters worse, the envoys also took into their protection a number of Armenian areas who had requested it. Naturally, the message did not go over smoothly, and Valens once again prepared for war with the East.

The preparations for war meant taking men from the Danube region (which, as previously noted, had been a hot spot of activity). At this time, the Goths requested asylum in Roman territory because of the threat of the Huns. While more events took place in the Eastern Empire, these demonstrate the strain placed on the purple since Valens had taken the throne. He was constantly crossing from one side of his territory to the other. He first fought a usurpation, conducted a punitive campaign against a portion of the Goths, dealt with the question of Armenia, and his rival in Persia more than once (not to mention the events of the West which he had dealt with as well). The request of the Goths for asylum was at first seen as a golden opportunity by Valens, as it offered the ability to close the gap in the frontier that the transfer of

30 Marcellinus 30.1.
31 Ibid 30.2.
troops to the East had created. The new Gothic immigrants would be a strong source of troop recruitment. As we shall see, however, the situation quickly turned sour.

The Road to Adrianople: The Migration Period Begins

When the request for resettlement was made Valens looked at the various sub-tribes to ascertain which of the groups would be most beneficial to his purposes. The *Tervingi* were chosen specifically, their leader; Fritigern had been a rival of Athanaric, and had previously allied with Valens against him.\(^{32}\) This event was a somewhat common practice. Heather cites records of 100,000 people migrating from North of the Danube into Thrace under Nero, and a later example of Dacians being settled in the empire around 300 C.E.\(^{33}\) Halsall posits that the situation may not have been as necessary as other scholars have argued. It was true that Valens was preparing for a campaign in the east, and that his best troops were stationed there. It is also true that the Goths were currently under friendly terms with the Romans, and that the Danube defenses “were strong and well manned.”\(^{34}\) This was a desired outcome, encompassing troop levies, new taxes, and the incorporation into the empire of an old enemy. Heather even points out that the majority of ancient sources approve of Valens’ actions, with such agreement being an anomaly.\(^{35}\) Even the more critical tongue of Ammianus stated with the knowledge of events to come, “None of those destined to overthrow the Roman Empire should be left behind.”\(^{36}\)

\(^{32}\) Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West*, 174-175.

\(^{33}\) Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*. 159.

\(^{34}\) Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West*. 176.

\(^{35}\) Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*. 158.

\(^{36}\) Marcellinus 31.4. Of further note, even with his critical tongue, Marcellinus at first points out the possibilities of such a union. Having heard constant rumors of a terrible people to the North, he thought the combination of the Gothic immigrants would provide substantial help. He states that the matter seemed one for “rejoicing,” recognizing the new recruiting pool combined with a levy of gold to be paid to the emperor when such troops could not be mustered. Having written towards the end of the 4th century, it should be noted, however, how he viewed the
Events turned sour solely due to Imperial mismanagement of the situation. The two men in charge of the Gothic crossing were Lupicinus and Maximus. Lupicinus was the commander in Thrace, with his headquarters in Marcianopolis, and Ammianus describes Maximus as “a disastrous general” and condemned them both for being “equally reckless.” Valens had ordered that the Goths be given safe passage and food. Either through underestimation of the size of the group or a purposeful refusal to follow these orders, the food supply for the barbarians began to run short. The Goths were forced to sell themselves and their children into slavery just for the prospect of food. Halsall says the supposed rate for dog meat was “one child for one dog.” Lupicinus both profited from this situation and decided to escalate it even more.

Lupicinus next used his forces to push the unsettled Goths to a second camp. Since Valens had only permitted the Tervingi to cross, the Greuthungi had been forced to watch and wait. The expectation was likely that Valens knew Fritigern, and due to the friendly nature of the two, the Tervingi would be brought into the empire, separated, and brought into the Roman fold. Then the Romans, now supplied with fresh troops, would return for the second group. Watching the situation unfold, however, the Greuthungi decided to cross on their own while the Romans attention was occupied with the first settlers.

ensuing events. He argued that they “led to the destruction of the Roman World.” Being a military man, he likely defined events around battles won and lost, but this is an important note to be remembered in the argument of decline or transition. We will return to this point in Chapter 2.

37 Marcellinus 31.4
39 Halsall, Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West. 177.
40 Marcellinus 31.5. How Romans managed immigration is covered in Thomas Burns’ Barbarians Within the Gates of Rome: A Study of the Roman Military Policy and the Barbarians, CA. 375-425 A.D. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), (see pgs. 304-305) How immigrants were settled in the Empire will be a key discussion brought up again in Chapter 2. It discusses the aftereffects of Adrianople and how Theodosius I dealt with the crisis, which will go on to haunt Rome.
In this difficult situation, Lupicinus decided to make a move against the Gothic leadership. He invited the Gothic chiefs to a banquet in their honor, and then seized them while there. The attempt was botched, but some of the leaders were taken and others killed. Among those captured was Fritigern.

As one could expect, when people already distraught are pushed even further, they erupt. Reading the situation well, Fritigern offered to go outside to the people and calm them. Lupicinus thought this to be a good idea, and in an astonishing move, he allowed him to do so, at which point Fritigern fled and began to plan for military action.

Halsall’s determination is that the Danube force was strong enough to keep out the Goths but was not strong enough to deal with the multi-layered situation of allowing some in and keeping others out, along with disarmament and resettlement. It appears that the Roman army on the Danube was strong enough for friendly operations, but not for direct action. The Roman force appears to be the only one in the region as well. After the Goths defeated Lupicinus and began to roam the countryside freely, it was nearly two years before Valens could respond to the issue in 378 C.E. (a fact that his people were sure to remind him of, and a likely reason he decided against waiting for Gratian at Adrianople). To be fair to Valens, his concern for his eastern border after renewed aggression towards the Sassanids was reasonable, but Lupicinus should have shown restraint. Even if for no other reason than the lack of reinforcements.

The Roman official may be scorned for his misconduct and could arguably be as responsible for the later fate of the empire as any single individual, but recall that in North Africa

41 Heather, *Fall of the Roman Empire*. 159.
42 Marcellinus 31.5.
43 Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West*. 177.
Romanus had acted in a similar fashion. He had mistreated his people, abused his office, and lied to Valentinian. Yet when Theodosius the Elder was sent to deal with the crisis, the rebel Firmus, who was willing to come to terms if Romanus’s abuses were handled, was condemned regardless of circumstance.

Even if we extend this analysis to Lupicinus’s attempt to assassinate the Gothic leadership, we see that it holds steady for imperial policy. Was not the reason for renewed hostility with the Sassanids the assassination of the Armenian Prince Pap? Heather even postulates that Lupicinus’s actions may have been imperial policy. Valens would have been well aware of the situation and may not have been as excited about the recent Gothic arrivals as first believed. Heather also mentions that this may have been the reason for the assassination attempt being so botched. Perhaps Lupicinus lost his nerve, realizing the forces he had at his disposal and knowing the large number of potential enemies he was about to make. This would also help explain why he allowed Fritigern to be released, perhaps hoping that such an act would calm the storm to which he was not yet willing to commit. It may even show how disconnected from the situation the Romans on the scene, and particularly Lupicinus, were from the realities of the situation.

Before looking at the battle of Adrianople, the next section will expand on the interactions between the Romans and their northern neighbors. It will show that the barbarian

45 Ibid. 132-133. It is an interesting take that Valens was not thrilled about the immigration of the Goths. Heather himself points out on a number of occasions (one already quoted above) that the ancient sources seem to be in unison in praising such actions. Valens was susceptible to public opinion, which was made clear when he was questioned at Constantinople about his slow response to the crisis, and then after two years of waiting rushed into battle at Adrianople. Heather postulates that it was this prevailing public opinion of the Gothic immigrants being a blessing that may have pushed him to accept the situation; not to mention that the sizeable force of Goths was on the banks of the Danube already, so what exactly could he do about it? Perhaps he was forced to make the best of a situation he was unhappy about.
request for Roman asylum was consistent with previous interactions between the two groups. It will examine the mutually beneficial nature of the relationship, to further highlight the point that Rome’s impending disaster was its own creation.

**Neighbors or Enemies?**

Before moving on to the battle of Adrianople, it is important to examine the relationship that existed between the barbarians and the Romans prior to the events of 376 C.E. How the two groups saw themselves and each other is complex. As with all cases of identity and ethnicity, the answer is much deeper than surface level. As citizenship was expanded, Roman identity in Late Antiquity was largely defined by the ways of the Roman ancestors.\(^{46}\) This would imply that “the other,” integral to the definition of self, would be those whose ancestors and customs were not Roman.

Rome has long been painted as a society that welcomed outsiders, and from the city’s earliest stories it was portrayed as a melting pot of cultures. Mythical descendant of the Trojan exile Aeneas, Romulus founded Rome in 753 B.C.E. In an effort to expand its population, the new city welcomed all comers, becoming a sort of “asylum” for outcasts.\(^ {47}\) In another legend, the Sabine women were stolen by the Romans because no women would migrate to a city of villains, and they eventually intervened in the war between their husbands and fathers.\(^ {48}\) During Rome’s expansion, its citizens would entreat their enemies’ deities to abandon their devotees and

---


\(^{47}\) Beard, *SPQR*. 60.

\(^{48}\) Beard, *SPQR*. 63.
join the Roman pantheon. Even after Rome became the supreme Mediterranean authority, ancient enemies such as the Gauls began to be absorbed into its fold.

For every example of Roman inclusion, however, there are two examples for exclusion. As Cicero said in the first century B.C.E, Cato “talks as if he were in the Republic of Plato, when in fact he is in the crap of Romulus.” The asylum for outsiders was created because no other groups of men would willingly join Romulus. The Sabine women were forced into marriage after being abducted and realized the difficulties they faced if their husbands, fathers, and brothers killed each other. Foreign deities were entreated to help ensure victory. Carthage was purposely crippled for its’ rivalry with Rome in the Punic Wars (264-146 B.C.E). The Social War (91-88 B.C.E.) was fought due to Rome’s refusal to grant Italians, Roman citizenship. Even Caracalla’s gift of citizenship (the Constitutio Antoniniana 212 C.E.) to all free men of the Empire was more about political advantage and expanded taxation than any high-minded concept of inclusion. Much like the United States’ own claim to be a melting pot, while having a history littered with policies of exclusion, Rome’s mythical portrayal does not hold up.

How then were the barbarian tribes across the Danube and Rhine rivers defined? Were they viewed as being similar to the Romans, with whom they traded, fought in armies, and served in governmental systems? Or were they viewed as being different because of a lack of shared history, common language, or a variance in belief systems? The answer is both.

50 Emma Dench, *Romulus’ Asylum*. 135-136. An interesting discussion on the concept of “universal” citizenship is discussed by Dench. Essentially, there wasn’t anything universal about it. While it did increase the number of citizens, it still maintained separation, dividing the Christian from the non-Christian.
The concept of the Germanic tribes and how they are represented are defined by the Romans, as the written sources that remain are only Roman. One must return to the concept of the “other.” With a vast Empire covering so many types of people, it was difficult to have a clearly defined “other” to reflect against. In its history, Rome had always created an “other” to contend with, in the form of an enemy to unite against. The early Romans faced the Etruscans, the Samnites, and other Latin tribes, and the mid-Republic saw the great rivalry with Carthage. The late Republic and early Empire created a situation pitting Romans against each other, establishing the “other” based on distinct political differences. When Augustus established the Principate, however, many of Rome’s old enemies had vanished. This is not to argue that the Romans became peaceful, only that they needed to discover new enemies to fight. No longer imminent threats to Roman survival, these enemies were isolated “threats” on the far-flung frontiers of the empire (in Britannia or across the Rhine and Danube) or posed no immediate threat to Rome’s survival (Parthian Empire).

Despite the lack of an immediate threat, the northern frontiers would consistently remain a thorn in Rome’s side. The name “Germania” was given to the region by Rome, and the largest lens in which to view these peoples of Northern Europe comes from Roman authors. Tacitus wrote an ethnography about the peoples across the Rhine and Danube. The men of “wild blue eyes, reddish hair and huge frames” who “excel only in violent effort” has become the distinctive vision of the barbarians of the north. Tacitus was inspired by Pliny the Elder’s *Naturalis*

---

Historia (Natural History) and a twenty-volume series on the Wars in Germany. According to Goffart, however, no other contemporary author paints the barbarians the way Tacitus did. Pliny’s encyclopedic account of the land beyond the Danube is mythological as he described a race called the “Hyperboreans,” who lived in a utopian society where “all disharmony and sorrow are unknown.”

While Tacitus’ account appears more grounded, an important distinction is the difference between Tacitus’ Germani and the various tribes across the Rhine and Danube in Late Antiquity. As Halsall points out, “Any similarities between Ammianus’ brief accounts of the trans-Rhenan barbarians and those of Tacitus must be seen in the context of the former’s desire to be seen as the latter’s continuator.”

“Barbarian” was a term for a large variety of tribes and peoples living beyond the realm of Roman control. While the term is used liberally in both ancient and modern sources, it cannot be overstated that it largely represents the “other.” Identity of self, and the self’s relation to the other appears to be a crucial point of interest to the Romans. Dench points out that “few ‘Roman’ myths do not relate directly to issues of origins between Rome and her neighbors.”


54 Goffart, Barbarian Tides. 41.


56 Guy Halsall “Beyond the Northern Frontiers” found in, A Companion to Late Antiquity. Edited by Philip Rousseau (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2012). 409-425. 413. Halsall points out in this essay that much of the history on the period has relied on written records. The difficulty when discussing the barbarians is the lack of them. This naturally forces the historian into a Roman-centric view of events, due to source availability. It is nonetheless important to recognize that, in their interaction with the Romans, the barbarians would have used this mirror in their own variation of self-identity.

57 Dench, Romulus’ Asylum, 13.
At first a Greek concept, the idea of the barbarian passed to the Romans with their obsessive fascination of all things Greek.

The Greek term can be traced as far back as Homer, and it essentially means “speaking barbarian” or “babbling.” The trouble comes with the flexibility of the word’s definition depending on who and why it was being used. Within ancient sources, the term could be used malleably and did not necessarily represent the core expression of an individual or a people. A tribesperson from across the border may be a barbarian, but he could also be a Frank known for ferocity (in a negative context) or for fortitude (in a positive one).

Much like the Gallic menace that had threatened the early Romans, the tribes beyond the Rhine and Danube became the new bogeymen of the empire. As is so often the case, the first real interactions between Rome and the barbarians of the north were military in nature. The first mention of the German tribes in the sources are when the Cimbri and Teutones began moving south into Gallic lands, causing massive Roman defeats at the battles of Noreia (112 B.C.E) and of Arausio (105 B.C.E). Gaius Marius was then given the task of dealing with the Cimbri, due to his victory over Jugurtha.

During Caesar’s campaign in Gaul (58-50 B.C.E), he gives our next glimpse at the barbarians across the Rhine. In Book VI of his Gallic Campaign, Caesar gave a brief description of the Germans: “Their whole life is spent on hunting and military pursuits.” The largest

58 Andrew Gillett “Mirror of Jordanes: Concepts of the Barbarian” A Companion to Late Antiquity (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell 392-409). 397. Gillett does point out that the term “barbarian,” however, is not precisely the same as stating “the other.” The term was full of meaning, some of which has endured to the modern day. In the section on the Roman army we will return to this term, as it became intertwined with the concept of a soldier as well, for various reasons.

59 Ibid. 393

60 Plutarch, Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans (Oxford: Benediction Classics, 2015). 389

defeat of the early Empire was that of the Teutoburg Forest (9 B.C.E). After the disaster, Augustus would cry out for his lost legions, and Tiberius would have to redirect his efforts back to Germania. The empire never fully conquered the region, even after the extended period of warfare in the Marcomannic Wars in the second century C.E. Throughout the entire history of the empire, the northern menace continued to plague Rome. But was there ever really a menace at all?

The primary reason for not conquering the territory we know as Germany was that it simply was not worth it. To the Romans, two concerns were always uppermost in their minds, grain and manpower. The Empire’s massive population demanded a proportionally massive amount of food. Any army would similarly require abundant provisions to maintain their effectiveness. As Procopius observed, “The outcome of war depends largely on provisions.”

Germania, however, was not a well-established region during the time of the empire, it would not have been able to supply a reasonable amount of grain, and the lack of communities meant that little material wealth existed. What then would a Roman conqueror have to gain? The cost of war would be higher than the potential returns.

By the third century, offensive warfare for Roman conquest had largely died, when “it became all too apparent that the fruits of conquest—usually measured in terms of the glory generated for individual rulers rather than any rational, strategically minded cost-benefit equation—ceased to be worth the effort.” In the Rhine and the Danube regions (and far beyond) clan chieftains were more than willing to trade German men for Roman goods,

currency, tools, and other objects. Even in regions traditionally not thought of as having Roman
interaction were flooded with such methods of payment.

The ever-present need for manpower was the one aspect of the Roman system that the
barbarian tribes could readily assist with. Barbarian warriors consistently proved their martial
value in contests with Rome. Highly valued as recruits for Roman armies throughout the
duration of the Empire, they were employed at every level of Roman military service. We have
already seen that Valens reacted favorably to the initial request by the Goths seeking aid. Could
it then be argued that it was worth expanding Roman dominion into Germania to gain access to
increased levies? Why waste manpower, materials, and effort using force if you can gain soldiers
through negotiations? Conscription, especially in the later Empire, represented “literally a form
of taxation.”

This is an important aspect for understanding how a barbarian serving within the army
might see themselves. Would such a recruit be more likely to identify with other Germanic
peoples? Or would they identify themselves more with their Roman brothers in arms? Feucht
conducted an in-depth analysis on the similarities and differences in Roman funerary epitaphs
throughout the Empire. She specifies a number of similar aspects found in funerary inscriptions;
of note is the *tribus*, which she states is a “signal word for Roman citizenship.”

Feucht looked at seven major regions: Britannia, Germania, Gaul, Spain, Italy, Danube,
and Dalmatia. We see that in Germania, 66.7% (the largest percentage of all the regions) notated
their *tribus* on their funerary inscription, and in the Danube region 35.8% did so. In comparison,

64 Lee, *War in Late Antiquity*, 80.
65 Birgit Feucht, "Uniformity Up to the Grave? Funerary Inscriptions of Roman Legionaries in Western
Britannia and Italy were around 27%, while in Gaul only 6.7% of the inscriptions included their *tribus*.\(^{66}\) This breakdown would indicate that in these regions it was either more common for the soldiers to be Roman citizens, or, more likely, that they felt it was important to ensure their Roman identity was known due to the intertwined nature of the province.

Besides military ties, the reliance on the Roman coinage system indicates another factor that would imply the barbarians of Central Europe were far more invested in a Roman identity than in that of a mythical Germanic nation. In the first century C.E., the barbarians across Roman borders had no coinage or literacy, nor had they produced any substantial settlements.\(^{67}\) By the fourth century, there had been a substantial influx of coinage, and the various tribes across the Rhine and Danube had created semi-monetized communities. In a discussion on Roman coinage in Northern Europe, Bursche says, “Coins, excepting perhaps glass beads, are the most frequent category of Roman imports encountered in *Barbaricum* i.e. the territory north of the Danube and east of the Rhine.”\(^{68}\) He further states that Roman coinage existed in such numbers in the region that it actually outnumbered medieval coinage.

Coins would have entered circulation in any number of ways, but the two most prominent would be trade and lump sum payments to barbarian leaders by the empire. In the fourth century (prior to the massive peace stipends of the fifth century) the majority of coinage would have come into *Barbaricum* through trade. Commerce was of pressing importance to both sides of the border. We have already seen that Valen’s crippling of the Goth’s trade was the reason for peace in 369 C.E., not a decisive Roman victory. In discussing the campaigns of the Emperor Valens

\(^{66}\) Ibid. pg. 155
\(^{67}\) Heather, *Fall of the Roman Empire*. 57.
\(^{68}\) Aleksander Bursche, "Circulation of Roman Coinage in Northern Europe in Late Antiquity," *Histoire & Mesure* 17, no. 3/4 (2002): 121-141. 122
along the Danube in 367–369 C.E., Ammianus stated, “The interruption of trade had reduced the barbarians to such want that they sent a number of delegations to beg for pardon and peace.” 69

While the need for trade was not as pressing for the Romans, it was a pressing concern placed on their military leaders. Moisil points out that prior to 369 C.E., the Roman leader Themistios complained that his military command revolved more around trade than military activity. 70

Other evidence for trade being the primary method of currency exchange in the fourth century is the lack of gold coins, which were rare prior to the final decade of the fourth century. Moisil says that large periods of the fourth century do not have a single example of gold coinage. 71 The later increase is due to the control of the region by the Huns, and to the Roman stipends paid to them and other hostile tribes. 72 Further evidence of the amount of trade with the Empire lies in the various items found in graves around the fourth century. These include Roman silverware, metalwork, and jewelry, 73 all of which would require Roman coins to purchase.

The propagandistic nature of those coins is also an important aspect to the currency being spread throughout barbarian lands. Not only where the barbarians adapting to the usage of coins, but those coins would explain to them their place in the Roman world. The first example is the “Barbarian/Hut” imagery. This coin has the inscription “FEL TEMP REPARATIO” or Felicium

---

71 Ibid. 84.
72 Ibid. 84-85.
73 Halsall, Barbarian Migrations. 58.
Temporum Reparatio ("The restoration of happy times").\textsuperscript{74} The imagery shows the Roman soldier leading the small barbarian from his hut towards a better future. The Soldier is off to future glories and takes the young barbarian with him to Romanize him. The small stature of the barbarian implies both the taking of the youth, and the much larger and more powerful Roman Empire in comparison to the barbarian tribe.\textsuperscript{75}

After Adrianople, we see far higher-value coins, the golden \textit{solidus}, as the Roman practice of bribery and payoffs being liberally used to avoid engaging in direct conflict. Substantial sums were commonly paid to maintain peace, in response to various foreign threats. A. D. Lee discusses payments in the fifth century C.E. to Alaric, Attila, and Theodoric, which ranged from 1000 to 5000 lbs. of gold.\textsuperscript{76} They were made to ensure security, and in hopes of not having to gamble on warfare, which could cost far more (an exaggerated amount of seven million \textit{solidi} was given for an aborted effort to retake North Africa in 468 C.E., although it is agreed that the losses were substantial).\textsuperscript{77}

This form of policy had the added benefit of restricting any effort to unite the various peoples of the region against the Romans. The adage of divide and conquer is well represented here, as the Romans maintained separate relations with varying tribes and chiefs, which they used as political and economic leverage to keep communities separate. This strategy forced the more ambitious members of the northern tribes to take note of their economic concerns before attempting any form of unification.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid. 92-93.
\textsuperscript{76} Lee, \textit{War in Late Antiquity}. 121
\textsuperscript{77} Lee, \textit{War in Late Antiquity}. 106
Conclusion

The cultural flexibility brought on by manpower exchange and trade is key to understanding the frontier and border regions, as well as the adaptability of two peoples in constant interaction. Halsall points out that there are virtually no instances of barbarian recruits betraying the Roman army.\textsuperscript{78} Those mentioned in sources are almost always due to the betrayers’ homes being attacked. It is reasonable to expect a soldier of any time period to question attacking his own family and neighbors. The fact that these soldiers, however, almost never balk at attacking other Germanic tribes in the region would strongly indicate a lack of connectivity among the tribes and strong incentives from the Romans to side with them on any given issue.

The various tribes of northern barbarians in Late Antiquity: Franks, Goths (Visigoths and Ostrogoths), Vandals, Huns, Saxons, etc., all had their own chiefs, histories, and cultural differences. The unifying factor between these tribes (possibly the only factor) was not their Germanic bloodlines or shared history, but their interactions with the Roman Empire. The actions of Lupicinus provide a sterling example of the problems in imperial management during the late Empire, including deviation from standard practice and exploitation of any given situation for personal gain. This is the road to Adrianople. In the argument of decline or transition, we again see elements of both. Clearly there was a decline of command and control over the empire’s borders. The Gothic arrival on the Danube followed a decline of control in Britannia, in North Africa, and on the eastern frontier. The mismanagement of the situation

\textsuperscript{78} Halsall, \textit{Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West}. 148
meant that the problems facing the Empire would soon be exponentially worse, and, for the first time in Roman history, they would not be able to recover.

I believe it to be reasonably certain, however, that the road leading into and out of Adrianople is a clear period of transition. The shift from a Roman world to a non-Roman one began with the events in 376–378 C.E. Halsall says that he likes to imagine the Romans dealing with the Goths from a position of strength.79 In the coming decades, this approach would become less and less the standard. The fifth century would be the final chapter of the Western Empire’s story. And it began with Adrianople.

79 Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West*. 177 (see footnote 48).
CHAPTER 2- A DIET OF VICTORY: THE INABILITY TO RECOVER FROM ADRIANOPLE

It is impossible to discuss nearly any subject on Rome without looking at the Roman military system. This most Roman of institutions touches nearly every aspect of discovery or discourse in the Roman world. Before returning to the narrative and the battle of Adrianople, this chapter will look at the Roman army of Late Antiquity. One of the key reasons to include a discussion on the military in this argument is the role it played in bringing various barbarian tribes into the Roman fold. At first through auxiliaries, and followed by inclusion into the army as a whole, the Roman military was the primary avenue for a barbarian to enter the Empire.

By the time the Roman Empire was reaching its twilight years, it had legions defending borders from Britannia to Persia. The military made up the largest amount of imperial expenditure, employing an estimated 600,000 men under arms.80 The consistent need for recruits was dealt with in many ways, but one of the most popular was to require allied or conquered peoples to pay tribute with manpower.

As we have seen, the initial reasoning to allow the Goths under Fritigern to cross into Roman lands was the potential for new recruits. This practice was common before and after Adrianople. Perkins states that before any major campaign, the Roman army would swell with barbarian recruits.81 After the events of Adrianople, the practice of barbarian recruitment into

the army not only continued, but greatly expanded. Barbarians often joined the army to fight other barbarian tribes, and if a tribe was defeated its members would be recruited directly into the victor’s force. For example, after defeating a Gothic army in 406 C.E., the Roman army directly recruited many of the defeated Goths pushing them into military service.\textsuperscript{82}

Because Roman policy on barbarian recruitment continued after Adrianople, the importance of the battle can be overstated. The battle, however, stands as a point of separation. While on the surface, the policy of recruiting barbarians appears to be the same, there are some key differences. In this chapter, we will begin by looking at the barbarians serving in the Roman military and Rome’s various methods of recruitment. From there, the chapter will return to Adrianople and discuss the aftermath as the new emperor Theodosius was appointed to end the Gothic War. As Theodosius attempted to deal with the crisis, those key differences (and weaknesses) in Roman policy will be explained.

With so many barbarians within its ranks, the Roman army represents the largest single factor in the cultural blending that took place between Romans and the barbarians. A failure to either integrate the various tribes into the Roman system fully or to defeat them on the battlefield- created a crisis of legitimacy for Roman emperors. For centuries the strongest way to secure an emperor’s position on the throne had been through conquest and victory. This “diet of victory”\textsuperscript{83} created an expectation for achievement, and when it did not come, a military and political decline followed.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid pg. 25. The leaders of the army and those who stayed loyal to those leaders, however, were sold in large groups for low prices.
The Roman Army of the Late Empire

The third century C.E. saw the Roman Empire face one crisis after another. To adapt to these calamities, the Roman army went through a number of changes. By the fourth century C.E., it was essentially divided into two distinctive parts, the comitatenses and the limitanei. Broadly, the comitatenses was made up of the soldiers who accompanied the Emperor. They represented the mobile field armies which fought the emperor’s wars. The limitanei, on the other hand, were more localized troops. Somewhat similar to a national guard or militia, they were often made up of troops from the surrounding regions. They were designed as a reactionary force, to hold the line until the arrival of a larger and more capable imperial force.

This is not to imply the limitanei were incapable. Much ink has been spilled on the issue of whether these forces were “second rate” troops, or if placing them in the cities made them less effective.84 The term comes from the soldiers on the limes, designating soldiers to “defend and cultivate their lands.”85 The local nature of the limitanei meant that peoples were policing their neighbors, and both soldier and civilian comingled far more than the mobile field armies. It also indicates that these soldiers were expected to cultivate the area, and be self-sufficient at least to some level.86

84 A. D. Lee, *War in Late Antiquity*. 10-11. An excellent description of this argument is found in Lee’s work. He points out that the criticism largely stems from the sixth-century historian Zosimus, who was critical of Constantine for placing the troops in cities, saying that doing so undermined their discipline and capabilities. Lee points out, however, that Zosimus was critical of Christianity and thus of Constantine. Furthermore, he points out that the limitanei does not occur in the Theodosian code until 363 C.E. After discussing the argument, he believes that defining these troops as second class is unjustified.
86 Lee, *War in Late Antiquity*. 87.
The other evident difference in the late Roman military is the rising importance of cavalry. The Romans had never been known as a cavalry power, relying historically on their infantry. By the time of Adrianople, however, cavalry had become a larger and larger component of the army. As early as the third century, the Romans began to expand their cavalry arm, employing *clibanarii*, a form of lancer.\(^{87}\) Their rising importance is also indicated by the military posts created by the military reforms under Constantine.

After ridding himself of the Praetorian Guard, Constantine separated the army into two pieces (distinct from the *comitatenses* and the *limitanei* mentioned above), dividing the cavalry from the infantry.\(^{88}\) He then created two new posts to lead the separate sections of the army: the *magister equitum* (commander of the cavalry) and the *magister peditum* (commander of the infantry).\(^{89}\) Constantine likely intended these two officers to be of equal rank.\(^{90}\) As the new division was put into practice, however, it is telling that the *magister equitum* began to take precedence over his infantry-leading counterpart. As Burns observed, “By the end of the century the command of the Imperial cavalry was the highest honor in the Roman army.”\(^{91}\)

The increased importance of cavalry meant a more mobile field army, and a soldier who was well trained and adapted to mounted combat. The cost and availability of horses, and the time needed to train new mounted soldiers, meant considerable resources and time were required to refit a depleted force. After Adrianople, Theodosius encountered just such an issue.

---

\(^{87}\) Whitby, “Army and Society in the Late Roman World.” 522.

\(^{88}\) While the military reforms are most often attributed to Constantine, Diocletian is sometimes credited as being responsible for the various reforms. See Lee, *War in Late Antiquity*, 10.

\(^{89}\) Dixon and Southern. *The Late Roman Army*. 19.

\(^{90}\) Ibid pg. 57

Even when no major disaster had occurred, such a large network of both local and mobile military forces meant that a constant stream of recruits and horses were needed. By the fourth century, the Roman system regularly enlisted 30,000 men annually (a staggering number that it is roughly equivalent to the annual recruiting goal of the United States Marine Corps). The peacetime army was typically able to meet their recruiting goals. In times of crisis, however, that number could double. Horses were gathered through taxation in kind, stud farms, and direct purchase by the imperial government. With Roman military concerns representing the most pressing need to an emperor, and an increasing disinterest in military service by the Roman population, the emperors of Late Antiquity sought recruits wherever they could find them.

The late Roman army has been accused of “barbarization” for as long as histories have been written on the subject. As noted previously, however, foreign soldiers in Roman military service were certainly nothing new. In the surviving fragments of Rome’s first historian Quintis Fabius Pictor (280-180 B.C.E) he describes a Gallic invasion (225 B.C.E) and the Roman military response:

There are said to be eight hundred thousand armed men in the army of the two consuls…. Of these, three hundred and forty-eight thousand two hundred were foot soldiers of the Romans and Campanians, and twenty-six thousand six hundred were cavalry; the rest of this large number was made up of allies.

93 Lee, War in Late Antiquity. 85.
94 Q. Fabius Pictor, "Oros." In The Fragments of the Roman Historians: Volume II Texts and Translations, edited by T. J. Cornell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). 97. Q. Fabius Pictor was a senator and general in the 3rd century B.C.E. He fought against the Gauls and took part in the Second Punic War (and possibly the first as well). He is considered to be the oldest and first of the Roman history writers. His age is uncertain but estimated to be at least 100 at the time of death. Much of his work is now lost, but he is often cited and used by later historians, such
While the numbers quoted here are exaggerated, it is clear that at least as far back as the third century B.C.E. when Romans began recording their history, the Roman army had incorporated foreign soldiers. Often, as is the case in the example above, the army contained more “allies” than Roman soldiers. For the soldiers themselves, the life was not easy, but there were incentives for serving the Empire. Those attached to the Roman army could earn citizenship when their service was completed. Figure 2 depicts a plaque granting citizenship to a soldier who had reached his twenty-fifth year. Its level of detail indicates a systematic process. The plaque would not be common, due to the requirement for the soldier to survive long enough to earn it, but the process itself was not unusual.

![Figure 2: 2nd Century Certificate Granting Citizenship to a Roman Soldier](image)

as Polybius and Livy. The point of quoting him here is to indicate that as far back as Romans were writing their own history they had a well-established system of using foreign soldiers in their military campaigns.

95 Photograph taken by the author at the British Museum in London
If anything, by Late Antiquity, that reliance on and need for non-Roman recruits had increased. Around the period of Constantine, barbarians were no longer admitted to auxiliary units only; they began to be recruited directly into Roman armies.96 Looking back on the fourth century Jordanes says, “It had long been a hard matter for the Roman army to fight any nations whatsoever without them. This is evident from the way in which the Goths were so frequently called upon.”97 If we look at the Roman treatise of Vegetius (likely written during the reign of Theodosius I, 378-395 C.E.), it appears that barbarians fit the mold of what was expected from a soldier. According to Vegetius, “Peasants are the most fit to carry arms” and “smiths, carpenters, butchers, and huntsman” make the best recruits.98 He further stated that city dwellers should only be used as a matter of necessity, and when that was the case they should be made to endure harsh weather, hard work, and dull meals to quickly prepare them for the rigors of warfare.99

Taking Vegetius’s account as valid, the barbarians across the Rhine and Danube made far better warriors than the local Romans, and many of them were prepared to join. In the fourth and fifth centuries C.E., 75% of soldiers with a non-Roman name came from various Germanic tribes.100 The trade with Rome had caused the majority of the barbarians to live very close to the border. Ammianus said that after Strasbourg the Romans entered “enemy country,” which was

96 James, Europe’s Barbarians AD 200-600. 161.
98 Flavius Vegetius Renatus. De Re Militari: The Classic Treatis on Warfare at the Pinnacle of the Roman Empire's Power (Yorkshire: Leonaur, 2012). 16-18. It should be noted that despite De Re Militari’s enduring presence, Vegetius himself was not a soldier and had no active military experience. The source here is used to show what a non-military Roman thought a soldier should be.
99 Ibid pg. 16
100 Hugh Elton, Warfare in Roman Europe, AD 350-425 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). 136. Lee points out, however, that a name is just a name providing examples of individuals who have non-Roman names but were far more Roman than not. Lee, War in Late Antiquity, 84.
about “ten miles” past the river.\textsuperscript{101} Burns agrees with his assessment, believing the majority of the barbarian population to be close to the frontier border.\textsuperscript{102} The barbarian chiefs were also extremely willing to provide men for the Roman army. A large portion of their income revolved around providing men for their Roman allies, in auxiliaries or as special units. It was integral to a barbarian chief’s power to receive Roman gold, as these payments were divided among his supporters, all of whom wanted their share.\textsuperscript{103}

Combined with the capability of the barbarian recruits for war, and the willingness of the chief to provide men, was the fact that the individual barbarian recruit was often more interested in joining the army than his Roman counterpart. By Late Antiquity, it was far more difficult to convince the average Roman citizen of the merits in joining the military. As Adrian Goldsworthy says, there was difficulty recruiting citizens into the army as early as “the first century” C.E.\textsuperscript{104}

Life in the army was difficult, and the discipline was harsh. To be sure, there were benefits to serving in the army such as enlistment bonuses and tax exemptions, but by the fourth century C.E., the Roman citizenry appears to have felt that these rewards were not worth the cost. Under Diocletian’s reforms, sons inherited their father’s profession, which included military service.\textsuperscript{105} Much of the reason Diocletian enacted that law was to ensure a consistent flow of Roman recruits to the legions. Further evidence that indicates the difficulty in recruiting

\begin{footnotes}

\footnote{Marcellinus, 17.1.}
\footnote{Burns, \textit{Rome and Barbarians}. 326. This thought is further expanded in footnote 15. He points out that in Marcellinus, 29.4, Ammianus states that near Trier the population lives around 50 miles from the frontier. This is obvious because of the expanded size of the city and the ability for the barbarians to trade.}
\footnote{Burns, \textit{Rome and the Barbarians}. 324.}
\footnote{Goldsworthy, \textit{How Rome Fell}. 61.}
\footnote{Lee, \textit{War in Late Antiquity}. 81.}

\end{footnotes}
from the citizenry can be seen in the branding of recruits and the willingness for potential levies to mutilate themselves to avoid service, while the majority of barbarian recruits were volunteers.106

Requiring sons to join the army was one way to prevent shortfalls in recruitment efforts. Another was taxing large landowners by forcing them to supply recruits based on the size of their estate. By the time of Adrianople, one could avoid military service by paying a tax to the empire directly, the *adaeratio*. Because of the vast number of willing barbarian men prepared to serve in the army, this became the preferred way of finding new recruits. Citizens and landowners paid a direct tax to avoid either military service or sending the men who worked the fields (and not the best men) into the army. The income then funded the army, with several barbarian tribes providing the actual bodies that to the ranks.107

The professionalization of the Roman army also meant that its strength relied on the strength of the treasury. It required vast amounts of food, forage, pack animals, armor, and pay. Therefore, it relied on gold.108 And these were just the typical expenditures; bonuses, payouts, bribes, and donatives were extra. For the year 400 C.E., for example, it is estimated the army represented half of the imperial budget.109 Perhaps this is another reason for the desire to enlist barbarians. For these recruits, war was a just and normal way of life, a manly pursuit.110 imperial politics were perhaps less important to these men (at least until later on in the century).

106 Ibid. 82-84.
108 For an excellent breakdown of military expenditure, see Peter Hertz, “Finances and Costs of the Roman Army.” While the point to be made here is that the Roman command structure gladly took a tax and hired a barbarian recruit, this would be a good place to start if one is interested in more precise details of soldiers’ pay, army expenditures, etc.
We have already seen that the Gothic forces that crossed the Danube in 376 C.E. were allowed to do so because Valens saw them as potential soldiers for his upcoming war in the East. The fourth century saw a steady rise in numbers and influence of barbarians in the Roman army. By the latter half of the fourth century, barbarians made up a substantial percentage of recruits and were well represented in the officer corps, and by the turn of the century barbarians were present in all levels of command. Whittaker mentions that ultimately it was unclear who were barbarians and who were Romans. To the Roman public of the fourth century, the words “barbarian” and “soldier” were becoming interchangeable.

The largest distinction that can be made before and after Adrianople is how barbarians were placed in the military, and under what officers these soldiers would serve. The common practice of barbarian incorporation, whether in the army or just as settlers in Roman lands, had always been to break up the groups and scatter them. By separating recruits from their various tribal origins, they would be unable to confer within the ranks, thus ensuring a healthy dose of Romanization in military service. Furthermore, they would not serve under barbarian officers, in an attempt to maintain the same forms of division.

In the late Roman army, however, the opposite began to occur. Instead of being a vehicle for Romanization, the Roman army began to adopt barbarian ways. Considering the length of service of a Roman soldier and the fact that the majority of the men remained on the frontiers for

111 Burns, Rome and the Barbarians. 322.
112 Whittaker, Frontiers of the Roman Empire. 133.
113 Burns, Rome and the Barbarians. 325.
114 Lee (85) and Elton (272-277) estimate that by the fourth century around a third of the officers were foreign, and held steady till the end of the empire. Although, as we will see later on, foreign officers in charge of their own people was a far larger problem than officers leading a multi-national force.
most of this time, it is hard to fathom that such an influence would not take place. While this
transformation appears to have no impact on the martial effectiveness of the army, as this
separation from traditional Roman ways occurred, conservative Roman citizens began to notice.
Halsall says this shift was likely caused by the separation of civic and military duties under the
reforms of Diocletian and Constantine. It can then be surmised that the Roman Empire,
already facing recruitment difficulties among citizens, would have driven potential Roman
recruits away with the increasing separation of civic and military goals.

Adrianople, 378 C.E.

In the first chapter, an extensive discussion on the road to Adrianople was examined. The
Roman General Lupicinus had treated the Goths crossing into the empire harshly, forcing those
entering to sell themselves and/or their families into slavery just to eat. As a result of the rising
tension, Lupicinus made a botched attempt to assassinate the Gothic leaders. To quiet the
situation, he released Fritigern, who then took command of the soldiers at his disposal and
defeated Lupicinus. The Goths then took to the countryside, operating largely unchecked for the
next two years.

Finally, in August of 378 C.E., Valens arrived with an Imperial army to handle the
situation. He faced a substantial public relations problem during this period, as he had allowed
the Goths to cross the border in the first place. His generals had botched the situation, and now it
had taken him an inexplicably long time to respond. To make matters worse, Valens was being

115 Depending on the type of unit the recruit was assigned to, the length of service was typically 20-24 years in Late
Antiquity to gain veteran status. Lee. 60.
116 Halsall, Barbarian Migrations in the Roman West. 103.
embarrassed by his nephew Gratian, who was winning victories against the Alamanni on the Rhine frontier.

To be sure, Valens did not just sit in the East while the Goths raided the countryside. Ammianus stated that Valens immediately sent his master of cavalry to Persia to arrange a settlement on the Armenian question. Simultaneously, he headed to Constantinople while dispatching two of his generals, Profuturus and Trajan, to stem the Gothic flood. But Ammianus acknowledged that the generals were of poor quality. Although the best course of action would have been to wear down the enemy, they decided to attack the Goths directly (a far more Roman approach), resulting in a number of inconclusive battles resulted.

Meanwhile, Gratian was unable to assist in the East. The Lentienses, a sub-tribe of the Alamanni, recognized that the Romans were preoccupied with dealing with the Gothic crisis. They decided to take advantage of the situation and attack in the west across the Rhine. The situation was spiraling out of control. Preoccupied with the Lentienses, Gratian was unable to move east; the generals Valens had appointed were seemingly making the situation worse, and the Roman people were beginning to question why the Emperor was failing to deal with the barbarians. With the Persian frontier safe for the moment, Valens decided to proceed to Thrace and deal with the Fritigern and the Goths himself.

As he arrived, however, he was greeted with the news that Gratian had defeated the Lentienses, pushing them back across the Rhine. Gratian wrote that he was headed to meet with his uncle and unite their armies, and he urged Valens to await his arrival. At the city of

[118] Ibid 31.7.
[119] Ibid 31.10,11.
Hadrianopolis, the name that would be given to the battle, Valens asked his advisors about the best move to make. The large majority of the war council pushed for Valens to attack the Gothic force immediately. Remembering the unhappy mob at Constantinople, combined with the embarrassment of Gratian’s recent victories and a council that believed the battle would be easily won even without Gratian’s forces, Valens decided on battle.\textsuperscript{120}

Valens was cautioned by his master of cavalry, Victor, to await Gratian. Ammianus said, however, that the emperor’s “fatal obstinacy” made him decided on battle.\textsuperscript{121} To be fair to Valens, the council was operating on bad intelligence. Their information placed the size of the Gothic army at around 10,000 men, far less than the emperor expected.\textsuperscript{122} To further Valens’ perception that he was holding the superior force, a Christian priest was sent by Fritigern to discuss peace. The emissary requested an end to hostilities and permission for the Goths to settle in Thrace.\textsuperscript{123} So a combination of pride, faulty intelligence, and misreading of the reasons for a peace proposal led Valens to decide on a confrontation.

On the morning of August 9, the Romans set out to meet their foe, marching until about two in the afternoon. As Zosimus wrote, “(As ill fortune would have it) the Emperor drew forth his whole army without any order at all.”\textsuperscript{124} Parched from the summer heat and exhausted, the

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid, 31.12.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid, 31.12.
\textsuperscript{122} Heather, \textit{The Fall of the Roman Empire}. 178-179 Ammianus gives the number as 10,000 men (31.12). Heather believes this number was due to the false perception of the army being made up of Fritigern’s \textit{Tervingi} only, and not the combined force of \textit{Tervingi} and Greuthungi. Ammianus does not provide an estimate of the actual size of the force with which Valens had to contend.
\textsuperscript{123} Marcellinus, 31.12.
\end{flushright}
Romans got into formation slowly,\textsuperscript{125} while the Goths stalled for time.\textsuperscript{126} Fritigern decided to send two more peace envoys to suggest a hostage swap. While the two sides were negotiating the exchange, the battle suddenly began. Before the Roman lines were fully drawn up, the commanders Cassio and Bacurius started the attack. They began by firing arrows at the enemy, rashly engaging them, and they were quickly pushed back.\textsuperscript{127}

The unexpected start to the battle forced the unformed wings into action [Figure 3]. These were a mixture of cavalry and infantry, with the heavy infantry forming the center. Placing their baggage and families in the circle, the Goths had formed a defensive position by circling the wagons, trying to hold off the Roman onslaught long enough for reinforcements to arrive. As the left wing of the Roman force neared a breakthrough, the Gothic cavalry and a supporting party of Alans suddenly appeared.\textsuperscript{128}

The unexpected arrival of the superior Gothic cavalry created a panic on the Roman left wing. The Roman cavalry broke, abandoning the accompanying infantry. The Goths then pressed the heavy infantry in the middle on both sides. The core of the Roman army was now surrounded and forced so tightly together that they could barely move, let alone fight.\textsuperscript{129} Exhausted, hungry, surrounded, and outnumbered, it was completely destroyed, with somewhere between 10,000 and 20,000 men being killed.\textsuperscript{130} Emperor Valens likely fell on the field, possibly by an arrow wound. In the account of Zosimus, Valens retreated from the field with

\textsuperscript{125} Heather, \textit{The Fall of the Roman Empire}. 178.
\textsuperscript{126} Halsall, \textit{Barbarian Migrations in the Roman West}. 178.
\textsuperscript{127} Marcellinus, 31.12.
\textsuperscript{128} Heather, \textit{The Fall of the Roman Empire}. 179.
\textsuperscript{129} Marcellinus, 31.13.
\textsuperscript{130} Halsall, \textit{Barbarian Migrations in the Roman West}. 179.
the few survivors from his army and took refuge in an unwalled village (no name given), which the Goths surrounded and torched.\textsuperscript{131}

Regardless of how Valens met his end, he and the majority of this army died at Adrianople. The battle is a primary example of Murphy’s Law. Everything that could have gone wrong did. If Valens had known the full size of the Gothic army, had not rushed his men into combat, and had allowed the men to rest and to form up properly, the battle would still have been difficult and favored the Goths. When none of these things happened, and a surprise force of superior Gothic cavalry hit the exposed flank of the Roman wing, they had little chance of victory.

Valens’ defeat placed him on the short list of emperors who died in battle. Adrianople joined the list of great Roman military disasters, and it was arguably the worst. Whatever the actual number of Roman casualties, no substantial force existed in the Eastern Empire immediately afterwards. Not only were the Goths able to move east completely unchecked, but if any of the Empire’s eastern enemies decided to attack, nothing could stop them. Knowing full well that this was the case, Fritigern headed east towards Constantinople.

\textsuperscript{131} Zosimus, Book IV pg. 245-246
Immediate Aftermath

In the midst of the discussion of this overwhelming defeat, it should be stated again that Adrianople was not the cause of Rome’s fall. Had not Rome, in the days of the Republic, survived not one, but three such defeats, by Hannibal at Trebia, Lake Trasimene, and Cannae? Was there not still a Roman emperor in charge of an Imperial army in the West, with a string of recent victories? Were not the Roman walls still too formidable for the Gothic army to overcome? The Romans had survived and dealt with defeats such as these many times, but the battle of Adrianople stands as a watershed for Ancient Rome. Yet, if we look at the results of the battle, it becomes clear that this defeat cannot shoulder the blame for Rome’s end.

---

The immediate aftermath of Adrianople was anticlimactic. Fritigern and the Goths had just destroyed an imperial army, killed the Eastern (and senior) Roman emperor, and were free to operate unmolested in the East. The forces under Gratian knew that the Goths greatly outnumbered them, and with the momentum going against the Romans they were unlikely to commit to a battle. Despite this, the Goths were unable to capitalize on their victory.

Arriving at the city of Adrianople, the Goths were unable to take it. Valens had left enough of a defense force there that the Goths could not overcome it. Moving east after their victory, they came upon Constantinople. It goes without saying that if the Goths could not overcome the walls and defenses of Adrianople, they had no hope of taking Constantinople. Ammianus comments that the Gothic spirit was dampened when they contemplated the long circuit of walls that made up the city.133

The two sides settled into a stalemate, with the Goths unable to capitalize on their victory and the Romans unable to counter it. Halsall states that Ammianus relates Adrianople to Cannae because, as in the third century B.C.E., Rome was able to recover once again.134 I disagree with Halsall on this point. It is in the next decade that the blueprint for the military and political fall of Rome was created. The Roman response to the Gothic crisis, in the fancifully named Gothic War, would be what doomed the Empire. As Jordanes says, “From this time the Visigoths, in consequence of their glorious victory, possessed Thrace and Dacia as if it were their native land.”135 This doom did not occur immediately, but the Roman West certainly never recovered.

133 (Marcellinus 1986) Marcellinus, 31.16.
134 Halsall, Barbarian Migrations in the Roman West. 179.
135 Jordanes. The Gothic History, 52.
in the way Halsall alludes to. That responsibility lies at the feet of Gratian and the man he
appointed to handle the problem, Theodosius I.

We have discussed the role that Theodosius the Elder played in the road to Adrianople.
Despite the execution of his father, Theodosius answered Gratian’s call for assistance in this time
of crisis. Gratian, however, did not allow Theodosius to take the purple immediately. He was
initially made *magister equitum*, in what appears to be a test run of his capabilities. Feeling out
the general and his loyalties (to see if he harbored any lasting resentment) was a wise move by
Gratian. After this short trial run, Theodosius was appointed Augustus on January 19, 379
C.E. His primary charge as emperor was to handle the Gothic crisis.

Jordanes praises Theodosius as a leader, recognizing him for his “acuteness and
discretion,” and that through “stern commands,” “generosity,” and “kindness” he was able
to push a demoralized army into action. Ammianus relates Adrianople to Cannae, and discusses
the temporary setback to the Romans. Halsall believes that this comparison to Cannae creates
an indirect comparison of Theodosius to Scipio Africanus, although a more apt one would
have been to the consul Quintus Fabius Maximus Cunctator, the delayer.

Theodosius was responsible for rebuilding a defeated and demoralized army. The task of
rebuilding the army would have meant acquiring new recruits, without the reliability of the
typical barbarian (at least Gothic) men to fill the ranks, and once these men were recruited they

136 Remember that, after Cannae, Rome went on to defeat the Carthaginians in Iberia and Africa, and within the next
50 years they were essentially the masters of the Mediterranean. To counter that with the events of the late fourth
century, Theodosius was the last capable ruler, and by his death in 395 C.E. there can be no doubt of a steady
decline.
139 Marcellinus, 31.13
would have been raw and green. They were certainly not soldiers one would want to send into battle against a hardened and victorious opponent. The likely course of action, as opposed to Halsall’s “three years of hard campaigning,” would have been the delaying tactics used by Fabius.\textsuperscript{141} Like Fabius, Theodosius knew he could not risk another defeat. He moved, countered, and checked the Goths as he could, but he would have attempted to avoid direct action with his untested army. Theodosius’s leadership style seems to be represented by level-headed thinking, in contrast to the rash actions of Africanus.

Little is known about the period between the ascension of Theodosius and the end of the Gothic War. What we do know is that for the majority of the period there were few battles. No clear victor emerged by the time a peace settlement was reached. In 382 C.E., the two sides came to an agreement. The negotiations took place from a position of “compromised strength.”\textsuperscript{142} The Goths would be allowed to settle in Roman lands in exchange for military service. The land grant was a necessity to strengthen the depleted strength of the Roman army. As Jordanes recounts about the Goths in service to the Emperor Theodosius, “Now when Athanaric was dead, his whole army continued in the service of the Emperor Theodosius and submitted to Roman rule, forming as it were one body with the Imperial soldiery.”\textsuperscript{143}

The difference from past practices, however, was that the Goths would now be settled in the Empire in unbroken groups. The new soldiers would serve with their native brothers, and they would be led by native commanders. The policy of divide and dilute was put aside for an

\textsuperscript{141} Halsall, \textit{Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West}. 179; to be fair to Halsall, “campaigning” does not necessarily mean direct action, despite the allusion to it.


\textsuperscript{143}Jordanes. \textit{The Gothic History}, 54.
expedited peace agreement. As Harper says, “For half a millennium, the Roman army had been one of the most effective means of assimilating foreigners into the Empire. Now, the barbarization of the army would begin in earnest.”

From a military standpoint, the soldiers responsible for the death of an emperor, the defeat of an imperial army, and the sheer panic of the last six years were now brothers in arms. This new army was designed to protect the Roman citizenry they had just spent the better part of a decade attacking. We have discussed at length that barbarian recruits were nothing new or extraordinary. Now, however, they were operating under their own officers and in a force made up of their kin. They were essentially a force within a force, which may or may not be depended on in times of crisis.

Finally, the social and cultural aspect must be addressed. Roman emperors raised the Roman population on what Peter Heather and John Mathews called “a diet of victory.” The people were told how superior their army was, how superior their emperors were, and how superior they themselves were. How many Roman generals and emperors had taken the title “Germanicus?” They were told incessantly how much better they were than their barbarian counterparts. One of the most commonly circulated coins in the fourth century was that of the barbarian at the end of a Roman spear.

This attitude created a problem of legitimacy. The so called “barracks emperors” of the third century had made their names with the army and victory. The army under Theodosius in

147 “Barracks Emperors” was a descriptive name given to Emperors beginning with Maximinus Thrax (235-238 C.E.). The principate style of ruling had focused on a balance of pleasing the military, the people, and the Senate. Starting with Thrax, the main form of support and legitimacy revolved around the army; hence, the name.
the late fourth century was weak, and he achieved neither victory nor vengeance for Valens. Not that Theodosius should shoulder all the responsibility. He inherited an impossible situation. It was not even Theodosius who made the first peace: Gratian was the first to do so, with the Goths, in 380 C.E.\textsuperscript{148} Theodosius had taken ill, and Gratian was unsure if he would survive (not that Theodosius would fail to approve; quite the contrary — according to Jordanes, Theodosius wanted the same thing).

When the Emperor Theodosius afterwards recovered and learned that the Emperor Gratian had made a compact between the Goths and the Romans, as he had himself desired, he took it very graciously and gave his assent. He gave gifts to King Athanaric, who had succeeded Fritigern, made an alliance with him and in the most gracious manner invited him to visit him at Constantinople.\textsuperscript{149}

The remaining years of the Gothic War, and its eventual conclusion, are difficult to decipher clearly. An agreement seems to have been made that the Goths would be brought into the Roman fold in 381 C.E., when Athanaric died (as mentioned by Jordanes). The following year, however, the Goths appear to have elected Alaric as their new king and rejected the recent treaty of inclusion.\textsuperscript{150} In 382 C.E., another agreement was reached, and the traditional view is the Gothic settlement mentioned above.

Too further muddy the waters, however, there is little evidence of what that treaty entailed. As Halsall points out, “Unfortunately, as even those who argue for the dramatic

\textsuperscript{148} Burns, \textit{Barbarians Within the Gates of Rome} pg. 52. Burns indicates that since Gratian was the senior Augustus, this was likely due to the illness of Theodosius. If Theodosius died or was unable to recover, once again the center of the empire would have been exposed. Jordanes is very favorable to Theodosius, and so despite the latter’s military reputation both before and after his ascent, Jordanes often talks of him as being being peace-loving.

\textsuperscript{149} Jordanes. \textit{The Gothic History}, 54.

\textsuperscript{150} Burns, \textit{Barbarians Within the Gates of Rome}. 80.
significance of the ‘foedus of 382’ admit, we know nothing about this ‘treaty.’”\textsuperscript{151} What historians have pieced together is largely a reflection of the character of Gothic interactions following 382 C.E. This supposition seems reasonable, but the precise nature of the Gothic relationship to Rome after the war is not clear.

What is clear is that Adrianople changed the game, and that Theodosius embraced the new relationship (in whatever form it took), either from natural desire or from necessity. As Heather says, “Hadrianople stands as a uniquely decisive military confrontation in the history of Gothic-Roman relations after 376. On no other occasion did one side destroy the other so thoroughly.”\textsuperscript{152} Being unable to produce military strength, Theodosius instead made himself a friend and ally of the Goths. Even Halsall acknowledges the unusual elements to the new relationship with the Goths: “Rather than being sold off into slavery, or made tenants, they appear to have been granted land, probably in deserted areas, and to have paid taxes.”\textsuperscript{153} Jordanes recounts that Theodosius “took from their number more than twenty thousand warriors to serve against the tyrant Eugenius, who had slain Gratian and seized Gaul.”\textsuperscript{154} Thousands of Goths would die defending Theodosius.\textsuperscript{155}

We also know that Theodosius was not afraid to bring barbarians into the highest ranks of the Empire. He married his favorite niece, Serena, to Stilicho, the son of a Vandal officer.\textsuperscript{156} Stilicho, went on to be the supreme general of Honorius after the death of Theodosius, and was

\textsuperscript{151}Halsall, \textit{Barbarian Migration and the Roman West}. 180.
\textsuperscript{152}Heather, \textit{Goths and Romans 332-489}. 178
\textsuperscript{153}Halsall, \textit{Barbarian Migration and the Roman West}. 184.
\textsuperscript{154}Jordanes. 55
\textsuperscript{155}Ward-Perkins, \textit{The Fall of Rome}. 24.
\textsuperscript{156}Goffart, \textit{Barbarian Tides}. 191.
essentially the *de facto* emperor for a time.\textsuperscript{157} It has been pointed out many times that barbarians serving in the military was nothing new. The character of involvement, however, clearly changed after the peace of 382 C.E.

**Decline?**

The issue becomes whether this any real evidence of a decline. If so, can the responsibility be placed on the barbarians? From the appearance of things, Rome remained strong through the end of the fourth century. Theodosius ruled over a larger Empire than Augustus.\textsuperscript{158} Even if the relationship had shifted (dramatically or not) between the Romans and the barbarians (at this point, specifically the Goths), was it enough to alter the empire? The Western Empire would continue on into the Fifth Century. Under Stilicho, victories against the Goths were achieved. Even after Stilicho’s removal and the sack of Rome in 410 C.E., the West did not fall.

I again conclude that it was imperial mismanagement that eventually caused the end of the Empire in the West. The political ambitions of Roman leaders did not abate because of the Gothic crisis. In 383 C.E., Magnus Maximus usurped the purple in Britain, and after crossing into Gaul, he had Gratian assassinated.\textsuperscript{159} He then pushed into Italy and ousted Valentinian II from his seat, before Theodosius finally brought him to heel. Defeating Maximus at Aquileia,

\textsuperscript{157} Burns, *Rome and the Barbarians, 100 B.C-A.D. 400*. 323. Unfortunately for Stilicho, his ties to the barbarians would also be his undoing. We will discuss him, and the terrible Roman responses to a number of his policies, more deeply in Chapter 3. The importance of introducing him here is to indicate the level that Theodosius was willing to go to in order to incorporate barbarians into the empire.

\textsuperscript{158} Harper, *The Fate of Rome*. 161.

\textsuperscript{159} Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West*. 186.
Theodosius reinstated Valentinian II as the Western Emperor, under the tutelage of the Frankish General Arbogast.\footnote{Burns, \textit{Barbarians Within the Gates of Rome}. 98.}

This new relationship did not last long. Valentinian II died in 392 C.E., with Arbogast claiming to have killed him and appointing Eugenius to replace him.\footnote{Halsall, \textit{Barbarian Migrations and the Roman}. 187.} Theodosius then rode West to defeat the forces of Eugenius and Arbogast in battle in 394 C.E. (with a large contingent of Gothic troops, as we have seen from Jordanes’ account\footnote{See footnote 153}). After putting down two civil wars and becoming the last emperor to rule over a combined empire, Theodosius died four months later, leaving the empire split between his two sons, Honorius in the West and Arcadius in the East. Neither was of age (they were ten and seventeen, respectively).\footnote{Ibid pg. 188.}

Before Theodosius had time to consolidate control, the empire was again thrown into chaos due to new leadership. Likely even more destructive was the lack of time the emperor had to cultivate a new and evolving relationship with the various barbarians in his service. Jordanes states that when he died he was remembered as “the lover of peace and of the Gothic race,”\footnote{Jordanes. 55.} but it appears that the only relationship Theodosius and the Goths had was that of war (rather fighting each other or on the same side). Alaric soon capitalized on the imperial instability and revolted.\footnote{Heather, \textit{Goths and Romans}. 193.} Jordanes appears to be critical of both the Roman and Gothic sides as we move into the fifth century. On the sons of Theodosius, he says that they “began to ruin both Empires by their luxurious living and to deprive their allies.” Of the Goths he declared, “The contempt of the
Goths for the Romans soon increased, and for fear their valor would be destroyed by long peace, they appointed Alaric king over them.”

The more problematic aspect of imperial mismanagement was that the Roman people, especially the conservative element, did not want the barbarians to be so involved in empire or represent their interests. For the conservative Roman, the best barbarian was a dead one. Whittaker says that despite an increased level of assimilation, frontier ideology “became more extreme in its praise of traditional Roman values and superiority.” Yet by the fifth century, the majority of Limitanei were of recent barbarian ancestry, and in some areas an entire portion of the frontier was under barbarian control. Instead of embracing this new relationship, the average Roman despised it.

A further problem in deciphering the Roman/barbarian relationship in the final century of the Western Empire is that all of the sources are Roman and are extremely hostile towards the barbarians. As Whittaker says, “Treachery of the barbarian who served in the army is taken for granted by almost every contemporary source.” The accounts that became available in the sixth century can be unreliable. Halsall says of Jordanes, “Jordanes’ whole work is aimed at portraying the Goths as a unified people.”

166 Jordanes. 55
167 Ward-Perkins, The Fall of Rome. 25.
168 Whittaker, Frontiers of the Roman Empire. 197-198.
169 Burns, Rome and the Barbarians. 321
170 Whittaker, Frontiers of the Roman Empire. 199.
171 Halsall, Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West. 184. footnote 79. This footnote is criticizing the quote by Jordanes describing the Goths serving in the Roman army as one full body. He believes far too much is pulled from this one quote, and due to Jordanes’ desire to portray the Goths as a single people, it is unreliable in this regard. A counter note to this point, however, is that prior to this he argues that the number of sources for the period are few. So, it is hard to make a counterpoint beyond Jordanes’ bias.
We know as the emperors transitioned from the Principate to the Dominant they separated themselves more and more from the public eye. When Eusebius describes Constantine, he is hailed as being nearly divine and is judged to be superior to both Cyrus and Alexander. While there is no question of the religious bias within Eusebius’s writing, it is still a far cry from the description of earlier emperors. Tacitus writes the following of Augustus:

But when old age incapacitated him, his approaching end brought hopes of change. A few people started idly talking of the blessings of freedom. Some, more numerous, feared civil war; others wanted it. The great majority, however, exchanged critical gossip about candidates for succession.

It is plain to see the difference in relationship the emperors had to their subjects by Late Antiquity. The Principate model by this time was long gone. As a near divine character, the emperor of Late Antiquity had more in common with the ancient Persian model of kingship. Yet, when this godlike leader was unable to defeat barbarian rabble, how were the Romans expected to respond?

While the difference in ruling style from early to late Empire is of no surprise to any scholar, the point is in the separation between the emperor and Roman society. The people of Rome did not keep up with the many changes made in the empire. According to Harper, “There was more structural change in the administration of the Empire in the hundred years between

---

172 Eusebius 1.6 & 1.7.
Diocletian (r. AD 284-305) and Theodosius (r.379-395) than there had been in the first three centuries of Empire, combined.”¹⁷⁴

Rome revolved around the emperor, and in the fourth century, those emperors were not up to the task at hand. Diocletian, Constantine, Julian, Theodosius; these emperors of the third and fourth century provided strong leadership and made changes within the empire to secure Rome’s future. The emperors of the fifth century, however, were not up to the monumental task they faced. The inept Honorius allowed Stilicho, his greatest general, to be killed in 408 C.E., while a seven-year-old Theodosius II was ascending to the Eastern Imperial seat.¹⁷⁵ Two years later, Alaric, the enemy Stilicho had spent much of his time countering, sacked Rome.

Honorius’ successor in the west, Valentinian III also ascended to the purple as a child ruler in 425 C.E. Between Honorius and Valentinian III, Spain, Gaul, and North Africa were lost to the Roman west. Valentinian’s murder would be arranged by his successor Petronius Maximus in 455 C.E., Petronius rule would last less than three months.¹⁷⁶ Petronius’ death occurred while fleeing Rome in the face of another invading army. The Vandals under Geiseric were allowed into the eternal city without any resistance, and they systematically looted the city.¹⁷⁷ Between the assassination of Valentinian III and the deposition of Romulus Augustulus in 476 C.E, nine different emperors ruled the Western Roman Empire. Most never reached a second year in the purple.

Before Adrianople, Rome was the clear power in the region. It dominated the ancient world from Britannia to the border with Persia. After Adrianople, Rome maintained its position

¹⁷⁵ Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*. 222-223.
¹⁷⁷ Ibid.
as the largest power, but was clearly weaker and now faced increased levels of competition. By
the dawning of the fifth century, Rome in the West was just one power competing with various
others. By the end of the century, it was gone. The inept Roman emperors of the fifth century
proved unable to contend with the numerous problems facing Rome, and were far more
interested in maneuvering for their year in the purple than finding solutions to Rome’s increasing
troubles.

Culturally, Rome lived on in the West, even as it transitioned from Roman Emperors to
Barbarian Kings. In his campaign against Rome, Alaric seemed more Roman in his actions than
Gothic. These new barbarian kings inherited the Roman way of doing business (of course, as
defined in their own manner). They were not unlike Charlemagne, who painted himself in the
brush of Rome three centuries later, styling himself the Roman Emperor. Medieval kings,
counts, and commanders were even known to carry a copy of Vegetius with them on
campaign.178

I have tried to show the barbarians as individuals who were more or less forced into
conflict with Rome. Before the battle, barbarians again attempted peace negotiations to settle in
Roman land.179 Once the war ended and the barbarians were settled, the Roman people pushed
back against these new settlers incessantly. Whatever fall or transition took place should not be
placed on the shoulders of the barbarians. As quoted above, Heather points out that the key
military event between the Goths and the Romans was at Adrianople, nearly a century before the
Western Empire had truly collapsed.

178 Vegetius, Introduction. 7.
179 While these are traditionally painted as stalling tactics, that description is given to them by hostile Roman
authors. That is not to say they were not stalling, it is just to say that there is every potential that the peace talks
were legitimate.
Yet, with the many volumes of scholarly research on the subject, why is the popular image of the dramatic barbarian invasion that led to Rome’s collapse still alive and well? In the following chapter we will discuss social and historical memory, and examine why this false image remains.
CHAPTER 3- CEMENTING A FALSE IDENTITY

The discussion so far has revolved around the events of the late fourth century, the Goth’s crossing of the Danube, the Battle of Adrianople, and the aftermath of the military disaster. We have seen that the Goths were responding to a crisis created by Roman ineptness and disregard. The conclusion to the Gothic War signified a changing of the guard. The Gothic tribes, however, represent only a portion of the problem faced by the waning Roman Empire. As the calendar moves to a new century, the Franks, Saxons, Vandals, and Huns provided ample problems for the empire.

While it is true that each of these groups took a nibble from the Romans, it must also be remembered that the future had yet to be written. The Goths who had fought the Romans during the Gothic War (376-382 C.E.) settled in Roman lands after making peace with Theodosius. The peace was short lived. In 410 C.E., following renewed hostilities, Alaric led an army into Rome and sacked the city for the first time in nearly 800 years. Yet in 451 C.E., only 41 years later, the Goths were working alongside the Romans against the Huns (not to mention the various other tribes, with their own complicated and shifting alliances with or against Rome) at the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains (451 C.E.). Franks, Visigoths, Burgundians, and others fought with the Roman General Flavius Aetius against Attila and his Huns. On the other side of the field, the ranks of Attila’s army also incorporated the Franks, Goths, and Burgundians. This complex relationship has failed to be remembered in popular discourse.

[180] Jordanes, 79
The focus of this final chapter will be on collective and popular memory. Popular memory is defined as including all the ways in which a sense of the past is constructed, not just literary scholarship. In this “social production” of memory, everyone participates. Everyone is a historian if not a scholar, because as Cubitt says, “the sense of the past, and the complex processes of memory that sustain and develop it, make a contribution to the historical process that is not peripheral, but integral and often crucial.” Memory, however, is only half of the equation. When investigating what is remembered, the scholar must also ask what is being forgotten? Often the collective and social memory do not tell the full story. As Reiff says, “collective historical memory is no respecter of the past.”

The question this final chapter addresses, and the point of this thesis as a whole, is to ask why, with all the rich scholarly work done on this period, does the popular memory of these tribes continue to identify them as the Germans who caused the Fall of Rome? The barbarian’s role in Rome’s fall has been remembered, but their supportive role within the empire has been largely forgotten. By looking at popular imagery, monuments, art, literature, and language I argue that the barbarian image has been largely fabricated, and that inaccurate representation continues to the present day, clouding their historical memory and true past. The largest problem is that there is little popular disagreement on the false presentation of the barbarians, and even the Germans themselves have come to embrace it.

---

183 Ibid. 254.
Imagine if the “Lost Cause” myth of the Southern States in the American Civil War had never been countered. This war ended only 154 years ago. While racial struggles no doubt continue in the United States, “Separate but Equal” was both established and abolished in that period of time. African Americans have been able to rise through adversity to establish themselves in all realms of society, and they even reached the Presidency for the first time under Barack Obama. Confederate monuments are being torn down, and the “Lost Cause” story has lost the majority of its followers. There is no doubt that more needs to be done, but the winds of change are in motion.

Compare that timetable to the popular myth of German invaders destroying the Roman Empire. In 1937, the National Socialist Party held a parade to commemorate the “Two Thousand Years of German Culture,” and had numerous floats dedicated to the “Germanic Age.” The Germanic barbarians are thus represented as the precursors to the German state and are praised for their actions, 1,461 years after the fall of the Western Empire. Not only is it telling that the Nazi movement was trying to tie itself to the Germanic barbarians of the past, but of the seven sections of the parade, the “Germanic Age” represented the second largest, with 480 participants.

The Nazi party was of course trying to recreate their history, propagating a German national identity that first found footing in the nineteenth century. Yet, they are not the only ones responsible of using the Germanic tribes in their propaganda. While Adolf Hitler was trying to make a name for himself in the trenches of France, the allies were painting the German

---

187 Ibid. 365.
Army as an invading group of Huns [Figure 4]. This is the crux of the problem. Very little dissent to the portrayal of the barbarian have existed, and therefore the historian faces the challenge of convincing the public that this multi-millennium notion is incorrect.

Figure 4: World War I propaganda poster relating the German Army to the Huns.\textsuperscript{188}

It should be noted that this is not an argument or discussion on the creation of German national identity. As the argument moves closer to modernity, however, it will no doubt have to be addressed. A full explanation of German identity is beyond the scope of this work, but it is important in the discussion on why the “Germanic” nature of the barbarians remains a powerful social idea. This chapter aims to investigate ancient, early modern, and modern sources to trace

\textsuperscript{188} Photograph taken by the author at Les Invalides Military History Museum, Paris.
the continuation and propagation of the myth of Germans destroying Rome. By considering the most popular sample of “Germanic invaders,” the Goths of the late fourth century, the first two chapters have shown that there was no united German front attacking the Roman boundaries. This was a loosely united tribal society that was pushed into combat by Roman cruelty, disregard, and mismanagement. As the ripples of time grew larger, however, and the historian sought answers to explain the destruction of the Rome, the barbarian invasion provided an easy explanation.

This chapter is by no means a comprehensive list of the variety of ways the myth has been proliferated. Examples of sources range from Caesar’s first explanation of the people across from the Rhine to modern aggrandizement of barbarian leaders. In this way, the argument can be made while fitting within the scope of this thesis.

Ancient Period

The beginning of the problem starts long before the Goths crossed the Danube in 376 C.E. The Romans had a deeply rooted fear of barbarian invasions. After the sack of Rome by the Gauls in 390 B.C.E., the famous words recorded by Livy provide a summation of Roman feelings: “Woe to the Vanquished.” 189 The sack of Rome became ingrained in the Roman memory, even if the event itself was largely exaggerated and expanded upon by Livy and the other Roman historians when retelling it.

While the Gauls have their own history, the Roman fear of barbarian invasion can certainly be traced to them. They also are the subject of Caesar’s commentaries, in which the

“Germans” were first described. Marius had fought the Cimbri and the Teutones long before Caesar was campaigning in Gaul, yet it was Caesar’s up-close experience and decision to discuss their ethnography that stands as the genesis for the Roman view of the various Germanic tribes.

In the first book of Caesar’s commentaries, he states, “He could also see that it posed a danger to the Roman people that the Germans were gradually becoming accustomed to crossing the Rhine River,” and he continues by calling the Germans “a wild and barbarous people.”\textsuperscript{190} Caesar’s book six goes into a digression on his perception of the ethnography of the Gauls, which he contrasts with that of the Germans. He states, “The German way of life is very different…Their whole life is spent on hunting and military pursuits.”\textsuperscript{191}

The importance of Caesar’s description should not be understated. While he speaks largely in generalities (he even says as much), the popularity of his works in Rome was substantial.\textsuperscript{192} Caesar’s intention in writing his commentaries was to maintain his prominence in the public’s mind while being out on campaign. Remember that Caesar was a politician, and the quote above from Book One was used in his argument for why the Gallic Wars were necessary in the first place. By the end of the wars, Caesar “was wealthier, had a more extensive network of friends and clients, and could boast of greater and more glorious achievements than any other senator except for Pompey.”\textsuperscript{193}

As his popularity grew, so would the number of readers who kept up with his campaign. Soon Caesar could state that the dreaded Gauls had “gradually become accustomed to losing in war and, having been beaten in many battles, no longer even compare their own courage with

\textsuperscript{190} Caesar, 1.33.
\textsuperscript{191} Caesar, 6.21.
\textsuperscript{192} Cynthia Damon and Kurt A. Raaflaub, Caesar, \textit{The Landmark Julius Caesar}, Introduction. L.
\textsuperscript{193} Goldsworthy, \textit{How Rome Fell: Death of a Superpower}
that of the Germans.”¹⁹⁴ When one of Rome’s most monumental figures told his readers that the Germans were even more ferocious than their ancient Gallic enemy, they would doubtless give such statements considerable notice.

If the Gauls represented the boogeyman of the Republic, the Germans would come to represent the same for the Empire. Seventeen different emperors took upon themselves one of the various honorifics that indicate a victory over the Germans. At the time of the next ancient writer, Cornelius Tacitus in the first century C.E., this transition was well under way.

Caesar may have introduced the Roman world to the threat of the Germans, but Tacitus dedicated a book (even if small) to their existence. On the Origin and Location of the Germani, or simply Germania, was lost until the Early Modern Period, but in the ancient world it would certainly have garnered a large readership. Possibly written as a companion piece to the Agricola at the end of the first century C.E., Germania continued many of the themes seen in Caesar’s description of the Germanic tribes.¹⁹⁵ Seemingly, its primary point was to remind the Romans that Germania remained unconquered, and that they were a group not to be taken lightly. As Tacitus wrote, “The Germani have no taste for peace; renown is more easily won among perils, and you cannot maintain a large body of companions except by violence and war.”¹⁹⁶ He continues, “They think it is spiritless and slack to gain by sweat what they can buy with blood.”¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ Caesar, 6.25. Caesar states, “As for the other Gauls” in talking about those whose communities existed near the Rhine river. Caesar would of course not want to diminish the ferocity of the Gauls he was fighting; nevertheless, his statement would have been interpreted by Romans as a warning about this new, ferocious enemy.
¹⁹⁵ The Agricola was written as a defense for Tacitus’ father-in-law, the titular Agricola (Gnaeus Julius Agricola 40-93 C.E.). Both works focus on a certain aspect of the empire Britannia in Agricola and Germania in Germany. They are similar in showing the enemies of the empire, and their distaste for the emperor Domitian. One, however, is a work focusing on the titular character, while the other deals with a foreign enemy.
¹⁹⁶ Tacitus 1.14
¹⁹⁷ Ibid. 1.14
Unlike the *Agricola* or Tacitus’s later works, there is little structure or attention to detail. Some believe Tacitus was trying to entice the new emperor, Trajan, to finish the work of Augustus and to finally conquer the stubborn tribes across the Rhine and Danube. The disaster in the Teutoburg Forest (9 C.E.), the worst Roman military defeat since Cannae, would have been fresh in his mind. Despite its being nearly a century prior, the legions had not avenged themselves for this disaster. After Cannae, the Romans continued to fight, and Scipio defeated Hannibal. Germania, however, remained unconquered after its decisive victory over the Romans. As Tacitus says, “Neither the Samnites nor the Carthaginians, neither Hispania nor Gaul, not even the Parthians have taught us more painful lessons.”

Whatever Tacitus’s goal for the work may have been, *Germania’s* survival would establish it as a mythical explanation of who the ancient Germans were. After its rediscovery, it would become a textbook for an ideological version of Germanness, from the Renaissance to the Third Reich. The irony, of course, is that Tacitus never set foot in the lands across the Rhine. He was working largely from existing descriptions, some of which were dated and did not properly describe the current tribal makeup in the region. The account is short and generalized. It is almost a tragedy that the work survived, while so many others did not.

Arnoldo Momigliano stated that *Germania* was one of the most dangerous books ever written. Christopher Krebs, in his book titled after Momigliano’s statement, observes, “In the formation of the core concepts of the National Socialist ideology—racism, the ideology of the

---

199 Tacitus 1.37.
Tacitus’s later *Histories* and his *Annals* would become key manuscripts in our understanding of the first century of the Empire. For his contemporary audience, he no doubt reinforced the existing stereotypes of the Germanic tribes. Caesar had warned the Romans about the Germans. Varus and his legions had been destroyed by the Germans. Despite the successes of Tiberius, he had failed to bring the Germans to heel. Now yet another description of these people as a threat to Rome appeared to reinforce the concept of a northern barbaric tribe to be feared.

The breadth of Tacitus’s contemporary readership cannot be known. *Germania* is more important to study for the fictitious concept of the ancient Germans that nationalistic thinkers latched on to, as part of the drive to dissect or reconstruct German identity. Despite this unknown factor, the book reinforced the Romans’ xenophobia towards their northern neighbors. It reinforced what the Roman people expected, which “was what conventional wisdom about northern barbarians had led them to expect.”

When compared to the writings of Caesar, we see the transition in the Roman mind that has taken place. The Gauls have been defeated; it is the Germans who are the new Northern threat.

Whether Tacitus was deliberately trying to convince Trajan to attack the Germanic tribes, we do know that Trajan campaigned in Dacia. It is completely reasonable to assume that Tacitus, recognizing Trajan’s military acumen and seeing the future emperor inspecting the

---

Rhine, was trying to win favor by discussing the situation along the Rhine and Danube. The Dacians situated across the Danube were not likely the group Tacitus had in mind (he does not mention them). Trajan did, however, institute a return to Roman offensive expansion, and was the opposite of Domitian, for whom Tacitus certainly had no love.

While Tacitus’ writings would have been enjoyed by the elite, the average Roman would have been more familiar with the Arch of Tiberius mentioned by Tacitus.\(^{203}\) Construction on the arch finished in 16 C.E. and was built to celebrate the return of two out of the three eagles lost by the Legions at the Teutoburg Forest in 9 C.E.\(^{204}\) While the lost arch bears the name of Tiberius, Tacitus clearly places the victory at the feet of Germanicus, stating the recapture was accomplished “under the leadership of Germanicus and the auspices of Tiberius.”\(^{205}\) Germanicus would celebrate a triumph at the arch, the last non-emperor to do so, but the arch would represent a symbol of power and victory over the Germanic barbarians in the north present for all Romans to see. These victory monuments represented newsreels and highlights of victorious campaigns for the Roman citizenry, and many (although unfortunately not the Tiberius Arch) are still standing today. They would also be instrumental in reinforcing the xenophobic world view of the barbarians, as Roman citizens would constantly be reminded of their victories over lesser people.

Later in the empire, we see Cassius Dio characterizing the Germanic barbarians using similar patterns. When describing the wars of Marcus Aurelius, he cites many aspects that make them uncivilized. He comments on the number of women wearing armor among the dead

\(^{203}\) Tacitus, Annals, 2.41.
\(^{204}\) Ibid 2.41
\(^{205}\) Ibid 2.41
barbarians\textsuperscript{206} and discusses a number of them being led by a twelve-year-old boy.\textsuperscript{207} He points to their inefficient tactics, which tire them out and cause defeat, despite their larger numbers.\textsuperscript{208} We see a clear continuation of the dislike for Rome’s northern neighbors. The severity of the Marcomannic wars would cause Ammianus to compare the events of Adrianople to the difficulties suffered by Marcus Aurelius.\textsuperscript{209}

The sheer amount of bias involved in the accounts of the various tribes are also part of the problem. Rohrbacher points out that, to any observer, the prevalence of barbarians within and without the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity provides its most striking feature.\textsuperscript{210} Barbarians are prevalent in the ancient sources that remain, and by Late Antiquity they had expanded to represent all those who were non-Roman. The various tribes placed under this description, however, have no voice. We rely on the biased version of Roman events and archeological discovery to give barbarians a voice. Meanwhile, the influence of the Romans, even today, represents a resilient cultural attachment. As Beard puts it, “Rome still helps to define the way we understand our world and think about ourselves.”\textsuperscript{211}

For the public, the column of Marcus Aurelius [figure 5] would have been the main source of information on the Marcomannic Wars (166-180 C.E.). Built in a similar fashion to the earlier Trajan’s Column (celebrating Trajan’s victories in Dacia in 101-102 C.E. and 105-106 C.E.), it provided the public visual storytelling similar to the afore mentioned Arch of Tiberius,

\textsuperscript{207} Ibid 71.11
\textsuperscript{208} Ibid 72.7
\textsuperscript{209} Marcellinus 31.5
\textsuperscript{210} David Rohrbacher, \textit{The Historians of Late Antiquity} (New York: Routledge, 2002). 207.
\textsuperscript{211} Beard, \textit{SPQR}. 15
detailing the campaigns and victories of Marcus’ war in the north. Scenes of destruction, depopulation, battle, the abduction and maltreatment of barbarians are prevalent throughout the column. These grisly scenes are designed to reinforce to the populace the power of Rome. The corpses lying on the ground, men being judged, victory in battle are all intended to show the futility of resistance to Rome.

The monument glorified the emperor and his legions, but it also glorified the citizenry themselves. The column would show Rome’s domination of the barbarian, and they could find their place, as Romans, in that dominion, reinforcing a sense of superiority. Victory over the barbarians depicted in Marcus’ column echoed the victory of Trajan’s column. Nearly a century after Trajan’s wars, Rome is still victorious over the barbarians.

Figure 5: Column of Marcus Aurelius.

213 Ibid. 147
214 Authors photo
Another powerful image of Rome’s ability to deal with the barbarians is seen on a number of battle sarcophagi, such as the Ludovisi Battle sarcophagus. These sarcophagi were inspired by the battle reliefs on the column of Marcus Aurelius.\textsuperscript{215} Such imitation would imply the powerful effect the column had, as wealthier Romans tried to reproduce its effects. On the lid of the sarcophagus is another powerful image, that of the non-Roman children being handed to the victorious general. This image symbolized Rome’s paternalistic view of themselves over the barbarian (similar to the image of barbarians being led away from their hut discussed in chapter one). The additional fact that it is a barbarian man (not a woman) handing over the child, indicates the submission to Rome’s political authority by the conquered.\textsuperscript{216}

When it was Rome who had ceded political power, we see an account by Gregory of Tours (538-594 C.E.) a bishop who wrote several books discussing the situation of Europe following the end of Roman dominion. His best-known work is called the \textit{Histories} or more commonly the \textit{Historia Francorum} (\textit{History of the Franks}). The book takes the Roman model of tracing their history to the founding of Rome and adds a religious dimension to it. Gregory begins his account with Adam and Eve, which would become common for Christian histories.

The important aspect here is the discussion on the new barbarian kings. While he is less critical of the Frankish leaders (it is called \textit{History of the Franks}), he does have harsh descriptions of the various other tribes dispersed throughout Europe. Book II begins with the Vandals moving through Gaul into Spain. Upon their arrival, they attempt to force a wealthy Christian to recant

her beliefs and to be re-baptized under the Arian banner.\textsuperscript{217} She refuses, and Gregory describes
the torture she was put through by her Vandal masters.\textsuperscript{218}

The following three chapters follow a similar discourse. Chapter three discusses further
attacks on Catholics by the Vandals in Africa. Chapter four discusses the similarity of the Gothic
king Athanaric in his persecution of Catholics, and chapter five discusses the Huns in similar terms.

While modern historians question the accuracy of labeling the period the “Dark Ages,” it
is clear that to Gregory it was very real. His belief system was being attacked by these new
barbarian kings. The light of Rome no longer burned bright as a protection; it was now only embers
— only a memory of a golden age now over. As Goffart says, “He certifies to modern men that
the Dark Ages were, at least for the moment, authentically dark.”\textsuperscript{219}

Gregory recognizes the variation between tribes. His bias is in favor of the Frankish
people, and more importantly, the doctrine of the Catholic Church, but each of these groups is
separated out. For the Vandals, the Goths, and the Franks, this is now their time. They are
expanding beyond their ancient borders and establishing new kingdoms. More important than
these tribes’ heritages or ancestral homelands to Gregory, however, were their views on religion.

The Roman Catholic Church and her clergy became the dominating feature of medieval
Europe, and the writings of a prominent priest would carry significant weight. Gregory would be
sanctified for his contributions to the church. If an opposing barbarian voice existed to argue for

\textsuperscript{217} The Arian belief system had been a thorn in the Church’s side for some time. The disagreement centered around
whether Christ was divine or human. The purpose of the Council of Nicaea had been to put an end to Arianism.
Despite Constantine’s support, his successors would go back and forth on which brand of Christianity to follow.
Many barbarian tribes also took to the Arian belief system. For more, see Eusebius. \textit{The Life of the Blessed Emperor
\textsuperscript{218} Gregory of Tours, \textit{History of the Franks} (New York City: Fordham University, 2016). Sourcebooks.fordham.edu
\textsuperscript{22}
\textsuperscript{219} Goffart, \textit{Barbarian Tides}. 231.
Their world view, it would have been squashed, as the Universal Church’s hold on Europe became tighter. Gregory’s account, no doubt real to his own experience, would give credibility to the evil barbarian legend. Goffart says, “This idea of early medieval gloom resulting from Rome’s fall,” shows no sign of losing its appeal, and Gregory still, “stars as witness” for this interpretation.  

Gregory is still revered in modern times. He has been called the Herodotus of his time, and his history, according to Buchner “rank among the most indispensable sources of our European development.” The myth would have been continued by the sheer weight of its author’s clout. What learned medieval scholar would question the ferocity of the Vandals when St. Gregory had so clearly put their savagery on display? Recognizing the Vandals or the Goths in other ancient sources would have reaffirmed the Roman world view of their barbarity.

As the Medieval period continues, many of the great figures of the period would continue to define themselves by the spectre of Rome. The memory of the empire remained crucial to the validation of power and authority. Charlemagne, with some possible reluctance, was named Emperor of the Romans in 800 C.E., by the Pope in Rome. Despite being a Frankish King, the title gave weight to his position, and was understood as being something beyond typical kingship. Likewise, Otto I was named the first Holy Roman Emperor due to the weight such a title granted. Ladner gives three reasons for the decision to outline Otto’s rule in the terms of ancient Rome: the first revolved around the strength and importance of the religious context now associated with Rome, second having an ordained Roman Emperor countered the claim of the

220 Ibid. 231.
Byzantine Emperors to the rights of universal rule over the territory belonging to the Ancient
Empire, and finally it was rooted in the Carolingian concept of the emperor being the protector
of the Roman Church. Despite Medieval Europe being a very different world to that of
Ancient Rome, the memory of Rome remained relevant, and that memory would be contorted to
fit the present need.

**Early Modern Period**

As we move into the Early Modern Period, there are innumerable volumes that can be discussed
and debated. The majority of ancient sources have been lost, and those of medieval scholars tended
to focus on religion. Towards the end of the Middle Ages, however, the rise of the Italian
humanists saw a revived interest in the works of classical authors. Ancient Greece and Rome were
once again a major area of study. This period coincided with many of the philosophies and ideas
that would evolve into today’s culture.

The period is often referred to as the Renaissance (or “rebirth”), because the period saw a
large interest in and investment into classical literature and style, a rebirth of classical learning.
While the movement began in Italy, by the fifteenth century a number of “wandering poets” began
to cross north into German lands, and spread the ideas of the Italian humanists. By the end of
the century, humanism and an emphasis on classical learning had taken root in Germany, with
every German university containing humanist instructors, as well as many smaller local schools.

223 Gerhart B. Ladner, “The Holy Roman Empire of the Tenth Century and East Central Europe.” *The Polish
225 Ibid, 115.
The revival of classical learning, brought up the issue of connecting one’s population to the ancient past.

One of the growing ideas of the Early Modern Period was the importance of identity and belonging. As Axer says, “For the people of this time the point was to define one’s place in the world history,” and “include local states and peoples on the map of ancient Mediterranean space-time… consolidating their internal integration and international position.”\(^{226}\) Throughout the Early Modern period, many of the nation-states we know today began defining and consolidating their borders, and the people within them began to view themselves along national lines. Germany, for a number of reasons, was delayed in their implementation of this concept (although not for lack of trying, or of an early start).

While the Italian humanists were tying themselves to their Roman past, the Germans had more difficulty in defining their past. Germans began reaching for a connection to an ancient Germanic past. Jakob Wimpheling’s *Germania* (1501) and *Epitome rerum Germanicarum* (1505), for instance, argued for a consistent history of Germany. *Germania* posited that Alsace had been inhabited by Germans for centuries and therefore was German, not French, while *Epitome rerum Germanicarum* was a flawed attempt at arguing for an ancient and continuous German history.\(^{227}\)

The sixteenth-century state of Germany was a loosely connected but largely divided grouping of principalities that carried the title of the Holy Roman Empire. The Medieval kingdom established by Charlemagne lasted until its final dissolution by Napoleon after his victorious campaign of Austerlitz. At its zenith the empire incorporated the majority of Central Europe, as

well as parts of France and Italy. But it had never been a very stable kingdom, changing borders often and with a number of powerful princes that the emperor, more often than not, could not control. Part of this was the lack of connectivity to a Roman past (at least in the sense of an accepted role in that past). Fleming points out the struggle in the relationship with Germany and Rome stating, “No German could, of course, claim to be a ‘citizen of Rome’…and Germany had no such smooth relationship with the classical past.”

While Germans may not have been able to call themselves a citizen of Rome, this was not always a negative. In many humanists, Rome inspired reverence. The ancient Germans held off the empire, and maintained their liberty. Krebs says, “German humanists took great and oft-repeated pride that the rule of Germanic people had always been free from any outside rule.”

The problem in this approach was that by embracing the ancient Germanic myth, that the Early Modern Germans were claiming to be the continuers of the ancient Germanic people, they not only perpetuated the barbarian legend, but also set themselves up as a people apart from the Europe that was tied to Rome.

While early modern Germans were trying to embrace a Germanic past as a positive, others were reminding the world of the negative aspects of the connection. For example, the naming of Gothic architecture. Famously, Giorgio Vasari stated the style was, “monstrous and barbarous, and lacking everything that can be called order.” Considered the first art historian, Vasari is notably one of the first individuals who recorded his observations on art, architecture, and style.

---

228 Fleming, Fascism. 347.
Once again, we see a highly influential voice tearing down something he considered “German” and relating it to barbarism. He echoes the tone and theme seen so many times already. After voicing his disdain, he goes on to say that “the manner was invented by the Goths,” after “they had ruined the ancient buildings, and killed the architects in the wars” (hence, the genesis of the term “Gothic architecture”). It was a style sneered at by Italian artists, who still bristled one thousand years later over the Germans who had felled Rome. It makes sense that individuals like Vasari, who praised the Greco-Roman past, would look down on anything to do with the “barbarians” who destroyed the beloved golden age. Vasari’s view reinforces an adversarial relationship with a style he views as Germanic, continuing the narrative of Roman and barbaric hostility.

As renewed interest in classical literature and deference to classical thought took root, we see the spread of humanism throughout Europe. By focusing on classical sources, the humanists stirred change within the academic community. As the influence of humanism faded, we can see similar themes in the Enlightenment, which grew out of the expanded education system produced by the humanists. The Enlightenment presented new ideas, not necessarily derivatives of classical motifs, but in many ways inspired by them. In 1748, for example, Montesquieu delivered De l’esprit des lois, a political treatise arguing against absolutism and for increased civil liberties. Here he embraced the idea of the ancient Germans. He praised their institutions and love of freedom, congratulating the modern Germans on “their forbears on having fought off military forces and foreign words.” The work, unsurprisingly, was praised as a masterpiece in Germany,

231 Ibid 83.
232 Gothic letters and writing appear to be named so by Horace Walpole, which used the Gothic architecture as a setting and then added the name in the second edition of The Castle of Otranto as a subtitle.
and incited a number of debates on the idea of German nationalism and identity. In 1767, Nicholas Vazsonyi noted that no other works were as widely known in Germany, as those that addressed the question of the German national spirit.\textsuperscript{234}

While Germany was debating national identity, in England Edward Gibbon was working on his sweeping epic \textit{The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire}. For better or worse, Gibbon is responsible for the modern perception of the Fall of Rome. He said, “the vigor of the military government was relaxed and finally dissolved by the partial institutions of Constantine; and the Roman world was overwhelmed by a deluge of Barbarians.”\textsuperscript{235} His six-volume work traced the Roman Empire from Augustus to the fall of the Byzantine Empire to the Ottomans in the fifteenth century. Well researched and expertly crafted, it has survived to the present day as a seminal work on the empire. Like all histories, however, it was a product of the author’s age.

For Gibbon, the Germans were a connected and militaristic people. He introduced them as “the warlike Germans, who first resisted, then invaded and at length overturned, the western monarchy of Rome.”\textsuperscript{236} He also said ancient Germany represented over a third of Europe, and “were peopled by the various tribes of one great nation.”\textsuperscript{237} He said their ignorance rendered them, “incapable of conceiving or embracing the useful restraints of laws,” and their primary desire was war.\textsuperscript{238} He said, “All agreed that a life spent in arms, and a glorious death in battle, were the best

\textsuperscript{235} Edward Gibbon, \textit{The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire} (New York: The Modern Library, 2003). 681
\textsuperscript{236} Edward Gibbon, \textit{The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire Volume 1} (New York: Everyman’s Library, 1993). 237.
\textsuperscript{237} Ibid. 238.
\textsuperscript{238} Ibid. 255
preparations for a happy futurity either in this or in another world.”  239  Gibbon’s explanation of the ancient German is largely inspired and sourced from the ancient writers previously discussed. The majority of Gibbon’s citations in chapter nine are either Tacitus Germania or Caesar’s Gallic Wars.  240

While Gibbon placed blame for Rome’s fall on his version of the Germans, the conversion to Christianity played as large a part in the fall of the West as the barbarian tribes did. He contrasted the warlike Germans with more pacified Romans, neutered by their conversion to Christianity. He said, “We may hear without surprise or scandal that the introduction, or at least the abuse, of Christianity had some influence on the decline and fall of the Roman Empire.”  241  He continued, “The attention of the emperors was diverted from camps to synods.”  242  The effects of the Reformation and the Enlightenment are clearly felt in his writing. Christianity may or may not be one of the many factors in the fall, but he counters his own argument by noting that many of the barbarian tribes also converted, which blunted their use of force against the Romans.  243

Gibbon felt that the death of the Romans’ martial spirit led to their defeat, and that this spirit was killed by the Church.  244  This perspective fails to explain the wars against the East under Julian  245  or the planned campaigns of Valens, in addition to the ability to defeat the Huns at the battle of the Catalaunian Plains or the continued spirit shown by Justinian as he campaigned to

239  Ibid. 256
240  The chapter is dedicated to a discussion on Germans. He does have other sources, of course. Strabo, Diodorus, Lucan, etc. but the majority come from Tacitus. For example, on the page cited for their warlike attitudes three of the six sources are Tacitus, and one other is Caeser.
241  Ibid 682.
242  Ibid 682.
243  Ibid 683.
244  Ibid 681.
245  To be fair to Gibbon, Julian of course being the Apostate would not have fallen under the Christian banner. My argument here is that there was no absence of wars to fight. The martial spirit continues through Constantine, a very war-like emperor, and well past him.
reunite the Empire. The lack of wars to fight or the valor of the legions is not a reasonable analysis of the final century of the Empire. How those wars were managed, and how the conquered or the willing allies were treated, is far more the issue from a military sense.

Gibbon’s evaluation echoes the voice of many who have bemoaned a more respectable time or sought a return to a golden age. When we consider that Gibbon was writing at the end of the Enlightenment, as Great Britain was emerging as one of the world’s major players, his story is better understood. His first volume was published the year the United States declared independence, and his final volume was published in the same year the French Revolution exploded onto the scene. Many of Gibbon’s themes would be similar to those pressed by the third estate against Louis XVI, including corruption by the nobility, failure of leadership, and distrust of the clergy.

To this day, however, no student of Late Antiquity can fail to reference Gibbon. It is hard to imagine that any modern historian, including the well-regarded scholars in this work, could have his reach. Sadly, this means that Gibbon’s interpretation of events will endure, including his ideas about the barbarian horde and the dampening of the martial spirit.\textsuperscript{246} This will not come as a shock to historians, but it represents a true issue of popular memory. A nearly three-hundred-year-old work of history remains the most accessible to the public.

\textsuperscript{246} Anecdotally, when visiting Barnes and Noble to see if Halsall’s \textit{Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568} was in stock for this work, there were four copies of Gibbon and none of Halsall. The only other work on the shelf dealing with the fall of the West was Peter Heather’s \textit{The Fall of the Roman Empire}. 
The Modern Period

In 1789, what was designed to be a meeting of France’s Estates General to solve Louis XVI’s debt crisis, exploded into the French Revolution. The epoch designates the transition from the Early Modern to Modern periods. The revolution saw an explosion of popular movements, and attempted enlightenment ideas. One of the early revolutionaries was the Abbe Henri Grégoire. Grégoire was an early defector from the first estate, member of the Jacobin club, and is represented in Jacques-Louis David’s famous drawing The Tennis Court Oath.247

As the revolution took a number of turns toward radicalism, however, Grégoire became disheartened with the attempts to de-Christianize France. The Revolutionary mobs destroyed statues of saints, damaged churches, and made every effort to demolish the sacred symbols they related with the ancient regime.248 After the fall of Robespierre and the return of a more moderate government, Grégoire was asked to write a report in 1794 on the damage the de-Christianization attempts had caused. In his report, Grégoire related the damage to the ancient Vandals and coined the term vandalisme or vandalism.249 The modern definition of vandal is “a person who willfully mars or destroys property.”250 The other definition describes the Germanic people who sacked Rome in 455 C.E., apparently their defining feature.

248 Ibid, see the chapter on “De-Christianization,” 479-502.
249 Peter McPhee, Liberty or Death: The French Revolution (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016). 243. Just for fun, while writing this paper, I polled thirty people on what comes to mind when they hear “Vandal.” Not a single individual thought of the tribe from Late Antiquity first, and only seven (23.3%) brought them up at all.
250 Merriam-Webster Dictionary, term “vandal.”
Around the same time that Grégoire was writing his report, a young Corsican officer was making a name for himself in the French Army. Napoleon Bonaparte rose to prominence during the revolution, and went on to rule much of Europe and the First French Empire. The Napoleonic Wars that followed Bonaparte’s rise, included a number of military campaigns and political shifts in the various Germanic principalities. French control caused an increase in the nationalistic interest, and the period helped shape Germany’s quest for an identity in the nineteenth century. German novels from 1815-1830 saw an abundance of attempts to cope with three important developments within the culture: the redrawing of borders, national resistance to foreign invaders, and continual demands for German unity.251

Like German national identity, the reaction to Napoleon was hard to pin down. While the French Emperor was in power, he was hated. After being deposed, he was praised. The emperor, who had been termed variously the Incarnation of Evil, the Prince of Hell, and the Scourge of God, was increasingly seen as a tragic symbol of their lost liberty.252 In whatever way the German people remembered their time under Napoleon, the desire for unity and a driving force of nationalism was awakened within the country.253

As the desire for a German nation and identity expanded, the German people began looking into the past for their heroes. After a humiliating defeat in 1807, the Bavarian Prince Ludwig I decided to build a grand monument to celebrate German-speaking heroes of the past, which he

253 Not to imply that this had been the first time.
hoped would stand as an inspiration to the nation. After taking the throne of Bavaria, Ludwig began building the monument.

The Walhalla monument, named after the Norse myth (despite the Greek-inspired architecture), the building contains sixty-five plaques and one hundred and thirty busts. Included as Germanic heroes to be honored are Arminius, the victor of the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest; Fritigern, the victor of the Adrianople; Alaric I, the Visigothic King who sacked Rome; Odoacer, the barbarian king who deposed Romulus Augustus (and gives us our 476 C.E. date for the end of the Roman West); and Clovis I, King of the Franks and the founder of the Merovingian dynasty. They stand alongside medieval and modern German heroes like Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I, Ludwig van Beethoven, and Otto von Bismarck.

This German pantheon critically represents why the barbarian myth prevails over modern scholarship. How can a historian’s argument compete with its imposing architecture? Fritigern is on a plaque in the same building where busts of Beethoven, Einstein and Frederick the Great reside. It also indicates the fact that there is no side of the argument (other than the lonely voice of the historian) that disputes the German nature of these individuals. Germany, in the period it was working to unify the nation, was calling back to the Germanic heroes of the past. Among those were the barbarian kings.

The nineteenth century also saw the rise of one of the greatest German composers, Richard Wagner. Wagner was the cultural embodiment of German romantic idealism. As Nicholas Vazsonyi wrote, “Whichever way one approaches the issue, the connection between Wagner and

254 (Bavarian Palace Administration n.d.)
things German is inescapable." Many of his operas revolved around ancient German and Norse mythology. These include arguably his most famous work, Der Ring des Nibelungen, a cycle of four operas romanticizing the myths of the past.

Frederick Nietzsche, a contemporary of Wagner, was also very active at this time. Nietzsche compares Tacitus to Thucydides, as representing a Roman author whom he appears to admire. He describes him as writing in the style of immortality. Is it any wonder why a German nationalistic movement such as National Socialism was completely enamored with Germania? Every social force that surrounded them drove them to understand this as their past. Their operas were filled with Germanic heroes, while their monuments honored the barbarian leaders of the past.

It is easy to understand, with so many centuries of Germans being snubbed, why their push for a nation was so strong in the nineteenth century. It is for this very purpose that the Monuments Germaniae Historica (MGH) was started. The MGH was designed to collect all things German, and the first volume was published in 1826. With hundreds of thousands of sources, this has become a generational project collecting all things German.

This brings us full circle to the twentieth century. The National Socialist party had a particular obsession with tying the modern German people to the ancient Germanic Barbarians. There was, as Krebs puts it, “an actual attempt” by Himmler and the S.S. “to turn the Roman’s

---

description into German reality, the past into the future, *Deutsche* into *Germanen*.258 Looking at the area Hitler claimed to have German ancestry, it roughly equates to the borders of Greater Germany, or *Barbaricum*, of the Roman world.

The defeat of the Nazi’s in World War II did not stop the barbarian myth. New forms of media in the twentieth century like film and interactive media continued to present the barbarian in ways that reflect the themes present in earlier centuries. For example, the computer game *Age of Empires II* (1999) is a real time strategy simulator allowing an individual to choose a civilization and build it from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period. Within the game options, there are short semi-historical descriptions of each civilization, and the Goths are described as bringing Rome to its knees and bringing destruction with them as they traveled throughout Europe.259 In the game itself, the Goths are presented as having only one chance of survival, create an unstoppable horde. The civilization is purposely hindered from creating defense structures, and is forced to create infantry units which are given bonuses that make them cheap and quick to make simulating an unstoppable horde.

In the 2000 film, *Gladiator*, Ridley Scott presents the German barbarians during the wars of Marcus Aurelius. In a scene taken straight from Tacitus, the fur clad barbarians make a stand against the Roman army. They are presented as savages after killing the Roman messenger and carrying his head to the battlefield. Only the protagonist of the film, Maximus, shows an

---

259 *Age of Empires II*, Personal Computer, 1999. Ensemble Studios and Microsoft. Anecdotally this is the first time I ran into the Goths as a people or concept in 1999 when I first purchased the game.
emotion other than contempt for the tribes in a moment of foreshadowing when he recognizes that he would also continue to fight if facing similar odds.\(^{260}\)

Older forms of media continue to perpetuate the myth as well. In 2012, Robert Reich penned an article for Business Insider titled, “The Barbarians Are at the Gates of Washington.”\(^{261}\) Reich’s article harnesses the imagery of the barbarian at the gates to warn of the potential disaster of the Republican party’s influence. He concludes with, “Washington can already sense the barbarians at the gates.”\(^{262}\) While the imagery is powerful, he fails to correctly present the analogy. He relates Rome to Washington, but he calls the barbarians (in his analogy the Republicans) anti-immigrant natives. While this may or may not be an accurate description of any given Republican politician, what Reich fails to recognize is that Rome would have been the anti-immigrant natives in his analogy.

This is the real problem, the barbarian image can represent the other, any other, that does not fit into the artists, writer, or journalist’s worldview. The Germanic barbarians of Late Antiquity’s image has been cemented, with the exception of a few scholars who work on the period, no real dispute on the barbaric nature of these ancient “Germans” exists. The Romans clearly established the Germans as the Empire’s boogeymen. The fall of Rome was placed at their feet. Early modern philosophers, writers and artists accepted the German nature as fact, and even the German people themselves embraced the barbarian past as their own. A past that is

\(^{262}\) Ibid.
now being perpetuated in film, art, interactive media, and politics. With no real dissent from the myth, there is no wonder why it continues.
CONCLUSION

The goal of this argument was first to introduce one of the most studied Germanic tribes during the period surrounding the catastrophic Roman defeat of Adrianople. The various barbaric people traded with the Roman Empire, fought in their armies, relied on their wealth, and even saw Rome as a protector. By focusing on the Goths around the time of Adrianople, we see Rome on the precipice of disaster, yet there are no real signs that a fall is coming.

Rome was pursuing wars in the east and troubles in Egypt, and the request of aid by the Goths was seen at the time as a good thing. The event even echoed the southern push of the Goths that led to the Marcomannic Wars, so it was not a new event for the Romans. The subsequent complete mishandling and mistreatment of those willing to provide the empire with the resources they needed shows that the Romans were at least as involved in their own defeat as the Goths were.

Following the discussion of Adrianople, it was shown that Rome never truly recovered. Despite claims that Theodosius put the empire back on track, the reality was that he was in constant warfare with either the Goths or Roman rebels. He may have survived the rebellions and ended the Gothic War, but the Rome that came out on the other side was a straw house, waiting for a big bad wolf to blow it down. Instead of consolidating his new allies into the empire, Theodosius was forced to face two

That discussion expanded into a broader look at the memory of the barbarians throughout Western civilization. Adrianople is remembered as a disastrous defeat, comparable to that of
Cannae or Teutoburg Forest, yet far fewer remember forcing Gothic families to sell their children into slavery for food. The subsequent sackings of Rome are remembered, but the killing of legionnaires’ families for their supposed Germanic heritage is not as commonly spoken of. As time progressed, those who glorified Rome chose to champion its triumphs and look past its failures.

Each major historical epoch since the Fall of Rome has pushed forward this concept of Germanic barbarism, whether it was Church fathers like Gregory, writing down in detail the malicious acts of the new barbaric kings that brought on a dark age, or humanists like Giorgio Vasari, who criticized the ugly German style. The story has been so engrained that even modern language reflects this past. It is a delicate line to walk. The various tribes certainly had a hand in Rome’s downfall. There can be no doubt that Valen’s army was destroyed at Adrianople, that Alaric sacked Rome in 410 C.E., or that after the Western Empire had truly fallen it was the Franks, Vandals, Goths, et al. that benefited most. But as Adrian Goldsworthy says, “In the end, it may well have been ‘murdered’ by barbarian invaders, but these struck at a body made vulnerable by prolonged decay.”

It was not one event, but many. Militarily, it was not just the Goths: it was the Franks moving into Gaul, the Sassanid Empire to the East, or the Huns. Economically, it was paying barbarian chiefs for peace and refitting armies after losses on the various frontiers, while having to provide for a population that for centuries had relied on the Roman government for subsistence. It was all these things and more. Rome at the end of the fourth century was the

263 Goldsworthy, How Rome Fell. 415.
cartoon character that had more leaks than it had fingers and toes to plug the holes. By the fifth century, those holes had ruptured the dam, and recovery was impossible.

With all of these events happening simultaneously, only a bias against the barbarians could explain the continuation of the barbarian legend. Rome has often been glorified, perhaps more than any Empire or governmental system of the past. Therefore, history is full of people who want to think the best of their Rome, and who fail to analyze or internalize its weaknesses. As the United States government debates about how to handle its southern border, and Europe decides how to deal with recent arrivals from the war-torn Middle East, similar events are being played out. If history is good at one thing, it is showing those who read it the paths that do not work. Perhaps the Roman dealings with its northern neighbors can help enlighten those in power today to take a different path.
REFERENCES


S., Alen “Emperor Theodosius and Final Division of the Roman Empire.” ShortHistory.org.


