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‘Römisch-germanische Grenzpolitik’: Events, Resonances, and Contributions

Introduction¹

The publication history of Alexander Demandt’s work on “Römisch-germanische Grenzpolitik” reflects our continuing fascination with the end of the Roman Empire, a topic with rich literary sources and an inherent capacity to hold up a mirror to its historians. All explanations reflect their authors’ own times and troubles. The original core of Demandt’s contribution became controversial in 2015, but is arguably even more so now in 2024. His “mover” approach emphasized barbarian invasions and the transgression of borders. After invoking a sample of modern literary and scholarly imaginings of the northwestern *limes*, the introduction revisits some of Demandt’s themes, including Roman and the barbarian birthrates, walls, and the role of Christianity. The contributors’ articles are then contextualized and discussed individually. They concentrate on the Upper-Rhine *limes* (Hächler), client kings among the Alemanni (Mathisen), a case for the good faith of barbarians (Wijnendaele), the vulnerabilities of narratives (Liccardo), the quite different situation on the eastern frontier (Sarantis), and the embedding of Demandt’s work in the contemporary politics of migration in Germany (Afsah).

Keywords: end of the Roman Empire / borders / barbarians / historiography / literary reception

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¹ “It takes a village ...” Many people contributed to this themed issue in different ways. I would like to thank Oliver Jens Schmitt for entrusting the original assignment to me. I am grateful to all the contributors for their openness and professionalism and to the colleagues at the ÖAW Verlag and Administration (Thomas Jentzsch, Ingeborg Lux, and our keen-sighted and upbeat hands-on editor Stefan Winterstein) for their patience and helpfulness, especially during the final stages of production. Discussions with friends are one of the great joys of the academic life. I owe special thanks to Ebrahim Afsah, Rainer Bauböck, Giovanni Cecconi, Florin Curta, Carlo Ferrari, and Roger Tomlin. Members of my online *Privatissimum* acted as critical sounding-boards for drafts of my own contributions. And Nikolas Hächler both drew me a map and taught me how to use some of the online resources for historical cartography.

I. Essay, Author, and Themes

This second themed issue of the *Anzeiger Neu* has been built around Alexander Demandt's stimulating essay "Römisch-germanische Grenzpolitik".² Demandt's title undershoots his actual reach – nothing less than the fall and transformation of the Roman Empire, a commanding and perennial historiographical theme. Such a topic can be approached from many angles, and, in this case, the focus is on one key border region that includes the seat of the Austrian Academy itself.

As editor of the volume, I assembled an international team of scholars at different career stages, five Later Roman historians and a specialist in modern constitutional, international, and Islamic law. I use this Foreword first to react critically to selected topics from Professor Demandt's paper and to get the juices flowing. These remarks are in some cases critical. I then summarize and contextualize the responses of the other contributors. As a philologist with interests in literary, cultural, and political history, I use the Afterword to develop some general reflections about walls, boundaries, frontiers, and borders. The poet, teacher, and propagandist Ausonius then serves to flesh out some of these thoughts. They will bring me to rivers, the Rhine and Danube, the northwestern frontier, and eventually to the historiography of the Battle of Adrianople (378 CE). I will provide some new readings of long familiar texts of Ausonius, question the Emperor Gratian's motivation and actions, and argue for a dark interpretation of Ammianus on Adrianople.

Professor Demandt, an authority on the Later Roman Empire,³ takes his readers on a thrilling journey, exploring the history of the Romano-Germanic *limes*, namely the Rhine and the Danube. He covers the many centuries between Rome's legendary foundation on 21 April 753 BCE and the eventual establishment of the barbarian successor kingdoms in the West, when the Western Empire succumbed to different *Germanen* in the 5th c. CE. Hats are elegantly doffed to Austrian local interests when we encounter Marcus Aurelius at Carnuntum or hear of the twilight world of Eugippius' *Vita Severini*. We follow Rome's trajectory from asylum⁴ to alarming neighbor, to world power, and to empire – split, at bay, and disintegrating.

² The text was not delivered orally, but read by title and circulated to the Division of Humanities and Social Sciences of the ÖAW on 2 December 2021 during the COVID pandemic.

³ DEMANDT 2008.

⁴ On the asylum-legend, see DENCH 2005. Versions are to be found in Plutarch, "Romulus" 9; Livy 1.8.5-6 and 2.1.4; seen positively in Augustine *CD* 1.34, where it is read (backhandedly) as a prefiguration of the asylum provided by Christian churches during the Sack of 410, but for a selfish end – manpower.

Professor Demandt has long been interested in borders. He is the author of a penetrating as well as imaginative introduction to *Deutschlands Grenzen in der Geschichte*. In it he problematized the term “Deutschland”, but also provided help with the classical cultural history of the word “Grenze”.⁵ His contribution to the *Anzeiger* seems, at first glance, to be an accessible essay in the area of *Limes-Studien*, focusing on *Grenzpolitik*. It is a tale about one of Rome’s many borders, a fast-paced narrative about expansion, maintenance, breaches, decline, and loss. In the end, the north-western *Limes* would prove undefendable. And divers barbarians, a crude collective whom at least one later Roman had imagined baying like dogs beyond the borders,⁶ became rulers of a hybrid society in the West. But it is also an essay about political and strategic failure.

II. Historiography: Mirroring and Presentism

Debates about change vs. continuity and destruction vs. transformation are endemic in Roman history. Scholars mirror themselves and their times and fall into schools. As Reinhart Herzog memorably reminded us, “Wir leben in der Spätantike.”⁷ This has always been true. No one studies this period without importing subjective baggage from his or her own present and seeing both at once.⁸ Consider Peter Brown on Shapur’s victories and the sites of Naqsh-e Rostam and Bishapur: “I would be at *the ground zero of the explosion of energy* [italics mine] by which the Sasanian Empire came to dominate half of the Middle East throughout late antiquity.”⁹

A built-in presentism haunts the fate of the Roman Empire.¹⁰ Demandt himself quite literally wrote the book on the historiography of its demise.¹¹ The scholarship is inevitably polarized.¹² Guy Halsall, for example, distinguished “movers”, who saw the great migrations as the crucial element in the Western Empire’s fall, from “shakers”, who pointed to internal factors

⁵ DEMANDT 1990, 19-22.

⁶ *Anonymous de rebus bellicis* 6.1 *in primis sciendum est quod imperium Romanum circumlatrantium ubique nationum perstringat insania et omne latus limitum tecta naturalibus locis appetat dolosa barbaries.*

⁷ Alluding to HERZOG 1987.

⁸ COLLINGWOOD 1946, 39 and 202 and GADDIS 2002, 41 on the inseparability of the past from the historian’s present.

⁹ BROWN 2023, 423-424.

¹⁰ See LICCARDO, below, p. 96, n. 26 on TikTok discussions of how often men think about the Roman Empire daily and how the *New York Times* picked up the trend to discuss gendering too.

¹¹ DEMANDT 2014 and 1997.

¹² See LICCARDO, below, p. 92.

that weakened the core and caused it to falter.¹³ At different times different nationalisms emerge. Peter Brown compares Piganiol's assassination of the Roman Empire model¹⁴ with Seeck's decadence theory.¹⁵ Many modern scholars prefer to see transformation, which some intend as a purely neutral term, not as a euphemism.¹⁶ Walter Goffart, ever provocative (or should one say "contrarian?"), would have us see the barbarians as "Rome's final conquest."¹⁷ They wanted *Romanitas* and, in the end, assimilated.

The world has accelerated. Attitudes change rapidly in response to current events. And things have now gone further: those who write about this period must, as we shall see, worry about where their contemporaries will place them on the historiographical spectrum and what their present and future readers may insinuate about their political motives.

III. Demandt's Empire

Demandt's reading is on the whole a more traditional "mover" one, strongly colored by its Roman literary sources, but he adduces multiple (f)actors that led to the end of Roman rule in the West, including those favored by "shakers". His narrative openly takes sides, namely the Romans', and recounts the rise of the Roman state and the end of the Western Empire through the lens of the Rhine-Danube *limes* and relations with the Germans beyond its borders. His *Pax Romana* clearly was a glorious thing. I might remind us of other perspectives.¹⁸ Matters might look different to people who had been *pacificati* or *debellati*, the other voices that sometimes can be overheard or instrumentalized in ancient literature.¹⁹ Consider the epigram put in the British tribesman, Calgacus' mouth by Tacitus, *Agriicola* 30.3-4: "they create a wasteland and call it 'peace.'"²⁰

¹³ HALSALL 1999.

¹⁴ See BROWN 2023, 173-174.

¹⁵ BROWN (2023, 176-178) finds Seeck and his social Darwinism unacceptable. At p. 177: "I had read enough. Such odious pronouncements were not for me."

¹⁶ For the European Science Foundation's now famous project (1992-1997) see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transformation_of_the_Roman_World

¹⁷ GOFFART 2008.

¹⁸ On the historiography of Romanization see CECCONI 2018.

¹⁹ See PARRY 1963 for a classic Harvard School study of the *Aeneid*.

²⁰ *Nos terrarum ac libertatis extremos recessus ipse ac sinus famae in hunc diem defendit; nunc terminus Britanniae patet, atque polymath omne ignotum pro magnifico est; sed nulla iam ultra gens, nihil nisi fluctus ac saxa, et infestiores Romani, quorum superbiam frustra per obsequium ac modestiam effugias. raptore orbis, postquam cuncta vastantibus defuere terrae, mare scrutantur; si locuples hostis est, avari, si pauper, ambitiosi, quos non Oriens, non Occidens satiaverit; soli omnium opes atque inopiam pari adfectu concupiscunt. auferre trucidare rapere falsis nominibus imperium, atque ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant.*

IV. Demandt’s Narrative

Just as “something there is that doesn’t love a wall”,²¹ so do prosperity and riches (or employment) within a border automatically attract or lure outsiders in.²² One might ask oneself whether modern insiders would have different attitudes towards immigration if their states provided few or no social services.²³ Demandt emphasizes enticements rather than distant push-factors, such as the Huns, that set barbarian peoples in motion.²⁴ Rome’s very success created envy beyond her borders. The *Germanen* lacked good faith.²⁵ Then came internal luxury and moral decline (almost Sallustian).²⁶ Rome’s changed from a society that had conscripted its own citizens to one that was dependent on mercenaries. Demilitarization was thus to blame.²⁷ These are some of the points that would be raised in the Monday morning quarterbacking session.²⁸

From Pomerium to Limes

At the center of Demandt’s piece stands the *limes*, hence a few words on the continuing role of walls, limits, boundaries, and borders in Roman thought and the modern *imaginaire*. Early Rome beheld Remus’ Ur-transgression of Romulus’ wall. Rome’s own *pomerium* is said to have started as a sacral furrow ploughed by Romulus.²⁹ And Rome grew from infant city to an empire whose borders would eventually measure more than 3000 miles.³⁰ The Roman *limes*, a border-line both real and imaginary, took many different forms: a wall in Britain, an earthwork and ditch in Scotland, and the *Pfahlgraben* on the Rhine-Danube frontier. It incorporated great rivers such as the Rhine, Danube, and Euphrates, but in the Sahara in the south

²¹ FROST 1971, 33.

²² ROSTOVITZ (1957, vol. 1, 355) speaks of the Germans’, “Rome’s nearest neighbours”’ reaction to the wealth and prosperity of the provincial cities and how they were “eager to participate in the civilized life of the Empire”. See AFSAH, below, p. 126.

²³ One could also consider the political dilemmas of democratic mayors in the USA. FITZSIMMONS 2023 and WEISMAN & FANDOS 2023; see AFSAH, below, p. 129 on the levels of trust required for integration in a welfare state.

²⁴ This was already picked up on by GOFFART (2002, 27-28), discussing DEMANDT 2014, 588-589.

²⁵ WIJNENDAELE turns the tables on this discourse, below, pp. 78-88.

²⁶ See, for example, *Cat.* 2, 7, 10-13.

²⁷ DEMANDT (2008, 230) says that there has scarcely ever been a state that was as demilitarized as Rome. Fewer than 1% were armed.

²⁸ One can contrast Seeck’s virulent criticism of the Romans for laziness, lack of mental energy, for lopping off or disabling their best heads, and for letting their birthrate slide. Esp. SEECK 1910a, 269-289.

²⁹ *Tac. Ann.* 12.24.1; *Aul. Gell.* 13.14.2.

³⁰ *Amm. Marc.* 14.6.3-6 for Rome’s organic life.

it was an imaginary line in the sand.³¹ It could be policed by series of forts with watchtowers or lie open like modern frontier borders.³²

Borders in the Literary Mind's Eye

Demandt concentrates on one section of this system, the Romano-Germanic *limes*. One could imagine many sorts of responses, including the literary and imaginative, so potent is the symbolism and so pressing the political and military issues. One cannot but be struck by the feelings the *limes* aroused in writers of many stripes. One can easily put together a small collection of ambitious and exciting sentences from both scholars and men of letters.

On the frontier in Britannia, Rudyard Kipling's Parnesius, a fictional centurion of the 30th Legion,³³ told the children Dan and Una about Hadrian's Wall.³⁴ In this description Kipling anticipated some of our contributors who prefer to see the *limes* as a zone of encounter and was anticipated by Jacob Grimm who noted how borders can join.³⁵

But the Wall itself is not more wonderful than the town behind it. Long ago there were great ramparts and ditches on the South side, and no one was allowed to build there. Now the ramparts are partly pulled down and built over, from end to end of the Wall, making a thin town eight miles long! Think of it! One roaring, rioting, cock-fighting, wolf-baiting, horse-racing town, from Ituna on the West to Segedunum on the cold eastern beach! On one side heather, woods and ruins where Picts hide, and on the other, a vast town – long like a snake, and wicked like a snake. Yes, a snake basking beside a warm wall.³⁶

John Matthews hinted at how the *limes* fortifications were themselves signs for what they protected.

³¹ LUTTWAK (2016, 98) mentions the use of rainfall to define borders in arid zones.

³² For an older encyclopedic treatment, see FABRICIUS 1994. "Frontier borders" is my working translation of "Niemandsländergrenzen", for which see MAU 2021, 55. It is the weakest type of border.

³³ *Sic*, for this is an error of Kipling's for the XXth Legion Valeria Victrix. See TOMLIN 2018, xiii.

³⁴ WHITTAKER (1994, 1-3) bounces off *Puck of Pook's Hill* to delineate British Victorian attitudes.

³⁵ GRIMM 1845, 110: "Sie [sc. die Grenze] muß nicht bloß als trennendes, sondern zugleich als einigendes princip behandelt werden, aus welchem neben der nothwendigen scheide ein band der nachbarschaft und gemeinschaft sich entfaltete, dessen heiligung und weihe unserm alterthum aufs höchste angelegen war." Very recently likewise MAU 2021, 33: Borders create neighbors, relations, and exchanges. He emphasises *how* a border goes, rather than *where*. LUTTWAK (2016, 100) notes that terrain around a frontier zone had to be suitable for "self-Romanization". Hadrian's Wall was.

³⁶ KIPLING 1964, 128.

The Rhine-Danube frontier, the so-called ‘Pfahlgraben’ or ‘palisaded ditches’ [*sic*], which enclosed Agri Decumates on their eastern side, could hardly match the ruins of Bath or the great walls of northern Britain for monumental grandeur, but must still have been an imposing and mysterious physical feature to barbarian onlookers, implying resources and techniques beyond their imaginations, as it sped on its direct line across the Odenwald and south, before swinging east to reach the Danube at Eining.³⁷

And most exuberant and exciting of all was “the polymath” at the Inn at Persenbeug (Lower Austria) who lectured the young Patrick Leigh Fermor on the history of the Roman Empire in 1933. He improvised this war-game on a table with a piece of paper and buns (“Semmeln”, I assume). Fermor narrated this unforgettable encounter in flashback from the heights of the citadel at Aggstein on the Danube:

An enormous arrow entered the picture on the right, and bore down on the river-side buns. “The Huns arrive! Everything starts changing place at full speed!” His pencil leaped feverishly into action. The buns put forth their own arrows of migration and began coiling sinuously about the paper till Mitteleuropa and the Balkans were alive with demons’ tails. “Chaos! The Visigoths take shelter south of the lower Danube, and defeat the Emperor Valens at Adrianople, *here!*,” he twisted the lead on the paper – “in 476 [*sic*]. Then – in only a couple of decades” – a great loop of pencil swept round the tip of the Adriatic and descended a swiftly-outlined Italy “– we get Alaric! Rome is captured! The Empire splits in two –” the pace of his delivery reminded me of a sports commentator “– and the West totters on for half a century or so. But the Visigoths are heading westwards,” an arrow curved to the left and looped into France, which rapidly took shape, followed by the Iberian peninsula. “Go West, young Goth!,” he murmured as his pencil threw off Visigothic kingdoms across France and Spain at a dizzy speed. “There we are!” he said; then, as an afterthought, he absentmindedly pencilled in an oval across northern Portugal and Galicia, and I asked him what it was. “The Suevi, same as the Swabians, more or less: part of the whole movement. But *now*,” he went on, “*here go the Vandals!*” A few vague lines from what looked like Slovakia and Hungary joined together and then swept west in a broad bar that mounted the Danube and advanced into Germany. “Over the Rhine in 406: then clean across Gaul –” here the speed of his pencil tore a ragged furrow across the paper “– through the Pyrenees three years later – here they come! – then down into Andalusia – hence the name – and *hop!* –” the pencil skipped the imaginary straits of Gibraltar and began rippling eastwards again “– along the north African coast to” – he improvised the coast as he went, then stopped with a large black blob – “*Carthage!* And all in thirty-three years from start to finish!” His pencil was busy again, so I asked him the meaning of all the dotted lines he had started sending out from Carthage into the Mediterranean. “Those are Genseric’s fleets, making a nuisance of themselves. Here he goes, sacking Rome in 455!”³⁸

Such dramatic visualizations with animated and agitating arrows originated in the early 19th c. and, according to Walter Goffart, did much to

³⁷ MATTHEWS 1989, 309.

³⁸ FERMOR 1977, 160-161.

promote classic “mover” hypotheses.³⁹ They proved quite as effective as computer animations in capturing imaginations past.⁴⁰ But fashions have changed, and we should now move beyond relishing bloodlust or quaking like alarmed jellies.

V. Presentism and Resonances

This brings me to presentism, the plight of the public intellectual, and the back-story of Professor Demandt’s essay. We have seen how all who study Roman history inevitably mirror and reflect upon their own present and must also reckon with such reflections among their readers. The end of the Roman Empire echoes down to the present.⁴¹ Themes in Demandt’s paper, as we shall see, have uncomfortable resonances in contemporary Europe. This is no surprise, when we consider its publication history.

L’Affaire Demandt: Syria

The Fall of the Roman Empire resonates in the collective and individual *imaginaire*. Male humans think about it daily,⁴² but likewise – on occasion – modern think-tanks. Professor Demandt had been asked by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung to look for *comparanda* and wisdom in the past, when mass migration from Syria in 2015 (the *Flüchtlingskrise*) was making headlines in Germany and Europe. In his submission, he mentioned failure of integration as a factor.⁴³ Bernd Löhmann, then editor of the Christian Democratic Party’s official organ, *Die politische Meinung*, subsequently rejected Demandt’s essay on the grounds that it could be “subject to misinterpretation”⁴⁴ in the contemporary political situation. It nonetheless saw the light of day – but in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.⁴⁵

A contemporary periodical retroactively decided not to print work it had itself commissioned because it was concerned about its political image at points further left on the political spectrum, Demandt being perceived

³⁹ GOFFART 2013, 1-3.

⁴⁰ GOFFART 2002, 27 on outward pointing arrows radiating from the Pripet Marshes. “The silliness of the image does not keep it from being unforgettable.”

⁴¹ DEMANDT 1997.

⁴² See LICCARDO, below, p. 96, n. 26.

⁴³ https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Demandt.

⁴⁴ https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Demandt. See AFSAH, below, pp. 123-124 on the political strategy.

⁴⁵ DEMANDT 2016; sections of it are related to this paper, e.g. the lead-up to the Battle of Adrianople.

as an author who represented more right-wing conservative politics.⁴⁶ This *affaire* shows us clearly how, as Collingwood and Gaddis note, current events vibrate in the historian’s mind,⁴⁷ but it also provides us with an opportunity to take another snapshot of similar material several years later.

Newer Topicalities?

The piece on which Demandt’s lecture is based thus seemed urgently topical in 2015. It may have subsequently developed a different topicality after the war in Ukraine of February 2022 left many thinking hard about buffers⁴⁸ and neutrality in addition to hard boundaries. Caesar credited the Germans with liking deep uninhabited borders as testimony to their might.⁴⁹ Demandt wrote of Marcus Aurelius’ desire to create a new province on the left bank of the Danube, by extending the boundary, creating a bulge into *barbaricum*.⁵⁰ He notes that scholars have often denied that such a level-headed emperor could have supported such a project, but connects an inscription from Trenčín.⁵¹ There follows one of Demandt’s most amusing and bitter *obiter dicta* – that a senseless project doesn’t *ipso facto* have to be unhistorical! This double perspective is nothing new for Demandt. His work on borders of the late 1980s was likewise caught up in living history, for the Berlin Wall fell between the time the paper was presented and its publication.⁵²

⁴⁶ https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Demandt. “Auch darüber hinaus betätigt er sich als politisch-historischer Kommentator für rechtskonservative Medien.” DEMANDT (2016) cites the words “fremdenfreundlich” and “integrieren” and mentions the need to keep an eye on the long-term consequences of immigration and limit influx. At the end he notes that the Roman Empire must have reached a tipping-point.

⁴⁷ See above, p. 7, n. 8 on the inseparability of the past from the historian’s present.

⁴⁸ DEMANDT, below, p. 37: “Man kennt das.”

⁴⁹ Caesar, *BG* 4.3.1-3 *Publice maximam putant esse laudem quam latissime a suis finibus vacare agros. hac re significari magnum numerum civitatum suam vim sustinere non potuisse. itaque una ex parte a Suebis circiter milia passuum sescenta agri vacare dicuntur. ad alteram partem succedunt Ubii, quorum fuit civitas ampla atque florens, ut est captus Germanorum. et paulo sunt quam eiusdem generis ceteri humaniores, propterea quod Rhenum attingunt multum que ad eos mercatores ventitant et ipsi propter propinquitatem [quod] Gallicis sunt moribus adsuefacti.*

⁵⁰ HA “Marcus Aurelius” 24.5 *Voluit Marcomanniam provinciam, voluit etiam Sarmatiam facere, et fecisset, nisi Avidius Cassius rebellasset sub eodem in oriente* (in 171 CE); also 27.10. MOMMSEN 1968, 247.

⁵¹ CIL iii 13439 = ILS 9122: VICTORIAE/AVGVSTORV(M)/EXERCITVS/CVI (i.e. QVI) LAV-/GARI-CIONE SEDIT MIL(ITES)/L(EGIONARI) II (milia) DCCCLV/[M(ARCVS) VAL(ERIVS) MAXIMI] AN(V)S LEG(ATVS) LEG(IONIS) II AD(IVTRICIS) CVR(AVIT). See: [https://db.edcs.eu/epigr/bilder.php?s_language=de&bild=\\$CIL_03_13439.jpg;\\$D_09122.jpg;PH0000153;pp](https://db.edcs.eu/epigr/bilder.php?s_language=de&bild=$CIL_03_13439.jpg;$D_09122.jpg;PH0000153;pp)

⁵² DEMANDT 1990, 7.

VI. Unmentionable Resonances: Birthrates and Walls

Birthrates

Demandt neutrally mentions German “Kinderreichtum” and Roman “Kinderlosigkeit” with reference to ancient authors.⁵³ Roman sources supposedly contrasted the fertility of the Germans with the falling birthrate of the Romans.⁵⁴ Otto Seeck warmed to this theme,⁵⁵ as would German authors of the 1940s.⁵⁶ Looking back, however, Kudlien noted the logical contradiction between Nazi worries about depopulation and their alleged need for more *Lebensraum*.⁵⁷ These demographic worries have not gone away, for Renaud Camus now speaks of the “grand replacement” in Europe.⁵⁸ Ancient sources attest problems with the Roman birthrate and with manpower.⁵⁹

But what was the actual situation? The economic historian and demographer Walter Scheidel did not discuss the population of the Western Empire in Late Antiquity, aside from saying that there was no reason to see it as significantly smaller in the 4th c. than in the 2nd c. In addition, he did not think it obvious that any population crisis contributed to its fall in the 5th c.⁶⁰ He discussed some of the modern historiography on the problem and the reach of the ancient testimonia that underpin it, particularly on questions of fertility and birthrate.⁶¹ “We would do well to stop discovering the present in the past”, he warned in 2001. A generation ago he presciently

⁵³ DEMANDT, below, p. 37.

⁵⁴ SEECK 1910a, 352: a falling birthrate forced the Romans to recruit from “kinderreiche Germanen”. For an example from F.J. Dölger, see SHANZER 2009, 354-355. The passage discussed there is DÖLGER 1934, 1-2.

⁵⁵ SEECK 1910a, 337-390.

⁵⁶ See for example LUND 1995, 12 who cites work from the 1940s stating that purely peasant societies, such as the Slavs have the most children, whereas Romans and Germans had a lower birthrate the more urbanized and industrialized they became. The Germans up to the middle of the 19th c. emerge as a “kinderfrohes” and “kinderreiches” people. At pp. 56-57 he introduces us to Rose Woldstedt-Lauth’s (inaccurate) paraphrastic cadenzas on the *Germania* and how the German *Mädel* wanted to give children to her people to be heirs to her health, strength, and life-force, to propagate it across time.

⁵⁷ KUDLIEN 1990.

⁵⁸ CAMUS 2011.

⁵⁹ See BRUNT 1971, 5; also ROSTOVITZ 1957, vol. 2. In the latter work one needs to search the index for terms such as “depopulation”.

⁶⁰ SCHEIDEL 2001, 69.

⁶¹ See SCHEIDEL 2001, 3, 5, 13 and 37-44. SEECK (1910b, 559-575) cites a great many Latin testimonia about depopulation and birthrate. Oddly enough Scheidel does not mention Seeck’s (partially demented, but immensely learned) book at all.

suggested that western population decline might trigger antipathy to fertility control.⁶²

But when one tries to track down classical sources on the alleged high birthrate and love of children (in a positive sense) of barbarians (as one does), one runs into trouble. There is a lack-luster example in Tacitus, *Germania* 19.2 *numerus liberorum finire ... flagitium habetur* that alludes to the prohibition of abortion and exposure.⁶³ This is the foundational passage cited by Dölger in 1934.⁶⁴ In the 6th c., however, one can find what is perhaps too readily seen as a very negative formulation in Jordanes, *Get.* 3.26 on *Scandia insula, quasi officina (“workshop”) gentium* and *certe velut vagina (“conduit”, “sheath”, “womb”) nationum*.⁶⁵ In the 8th c. Paul the Deacon saw a question of *clima* (latitude) and health: the north was better for producing people than the torrid and disease-ridden south.⁶⁶ The ebullient and imaginative Herwig Wolfram emphasized the contribution of long winter nights to production.⁶⁷ Could this supposed attribute of the Germans be an ancient urban legend, its other darker side being a probably universal human fear about others proliferating? Here the Judeo-Christian tradition must have helped.⁶⁸ Jews were unusually concerned about bloodlineage as a criterion for membership in the community. One has only to consider the provisions for the levirate.⁶⁹ In the Old Testament, the Israelites had been threatened by their prophets with an increase among the num-

⁶² SCHEIDEL 2001, 43. The USA Supreme Court’s overturning of *Roe v. Wade* on 24 June, 2022 is an example. I say “might”, because it is not completely clear to me that the main motivation is a concern about falling birth-rates.

⁶³ LUND (1988, 166) claims that Tacitus was, in fact, wrong about this. Tacitus’ eye is, of course, at all points trained on Rome’s sins. The Germans are a stick with which to beat the Romans.

⁶⁴ DÖLGER 1934, 1.

⁶⁵ Jordanes seems to be thinking aloud about made vs. born. I note that there is no pejorative vocabulary in the passage’s neighborhood. One can contrast *Get.* 5.37 on the Huns who *pullularunt*. Also, Gildas, *De excidio* 19 for the hated worm-like Picts and Scots. Paulus Diaconus, *History Langobardorum* 2 also uses *pullulassent* for demographic pressure to migrate.

⁶⁶ *Historia Langobardorum* 1.1 *Septemtrionalis plaga quanto magis ab aestu solis remota est et nivali frigore gelida, tanto salubrior corporibus hominum et propagandis est gentibus coaptata; sicut econtra omnis meridiana regio, quo solis est fervori vicinior, eo semper morbis habundat et educandis minus est apta mortalibus*. It all was *populosa Germania* and a source of captives and slaves for Romans.

⁶⁷ WOLFRAM 1994, 27: “The northern climate of the barbarians’ native land, with its long winter nights, favours their fantastic urge to procreate. And where is the very best place for such activity, with the longest winter nights or even a single winter night that lasts almost half a year? Naturally, in Scandinavia.”

⁶⁸ See KLEJWEGT 2001, esp. 893-895 on children and sons in Judaism.

⁶⁹ Deut. 25.5-10. 25.6 specifies the purpose, that the dead man’s name not be erased from Israel.

bers of their enemies.⁷⁰ Nothing, however, prevented such worries from underpinning the ideology of the Third Reich or of conservative Christians (*Kinder, Küche, [Kirche]*)⁷¹ or from generating both conspiracy-theories and anxieties about western cultural continuity today.

Walls

So far fertility, procreation, and proliferation. Now a word or two about disgust and walls. One, initially dominant ancient prophetic tradition in Judaism localized evil in the north: Jeremiah 1.14 is the most explicit. “Out of the north the evil shall break forth.”⁷² Christian apocalyptic sought to identify Ezechiel 38.2’s Gog and Magog with contemporary threats.⁷³ Chapter 8 of the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* told how Alexander the Great walled off the “unclean and ugly” peoples behind the Caspian Gates. The Lord helped by moving two mountains, “the breasts of the North”,⁷⁴ closer together, so that Alexander could erect a gate of adamant to span it.⁷⁵ In Chapter 13.19 however, all hell breaks loose as the force of the nations is unleashed. These are the Ishmaelites or Arabs.⁷⁶ This ultimately Syriac Christian tradition then jumped host onto the Byzantine Alexander-Romances.⁷⁷ OT prophetic passages such as Joel 1.4 had described contemporary horrors: “That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten.” Pseudo-Methodius knew his OT plagues and entomology and liberally used its discourse of disgust to describe what worried him.⁷⁸ Benjamin Garstad

⁷⁰ E.g. Isaiah 2.6: “They teem with the children of foreigners.” See BLENKINSOPP 2000, 7 and 193.

⁷¹ Rainer Bauböck kindly reminds me that the full slogan was generally not associated with Nazi ideology (because the “Kirche” component would not fit). It was occasionally used in the early 20th c. by Christian conservatives but became popular only in the 1970s as a target for feminist critique.

⁷² See SARIG 2016, 4-7 and 11-12 on various passages, including Ezechiel 38.

⁷³ Pseudo-Methodius, *Apoc.* 8.10.

⁷⁴ Pseudo-Methodius, *Apoc.* 8.7 Μαζοὶ τοῦ Βορρᾶ or the *ubera Aquilonis*. Is the North, whence bad things come, here envisaged as having not just a womb (see above, p. 15), but also breasts?

⁷⁵ GARSTAD 2012, 22-25.

⁷⁶ They would later be re-identified as the Mongols. See GARSTAD 2012, x.

⁷⁷ GARSTAD 2012, xii. For the passage in question, see PARTHE 1969, 402-408. See STONE-MAN 1991, 28-29 for a helpful stemma of the recensions, including γ. He translates our passage at *ibid.*, 185-187.

⁷⁸ For locusts and grasshoppers, see e.g. Pseudo-Methodius, *Apocalypse* 5.3 Ishmaelites like locusts “And [the land] was filled with them and with their encampment. They were like locusts” and 11.13 “And the Promised Land will be filled by men from the four winds which are under heaven and they will be ‘like locusts for multitude’” (ὥς

noted how Alexander’s image changed in the 7th c. at the time of the Arab invasions and how he became a wall-builder.⁷⁹ Walls are now a very real and divisive topic in the USA and in Europe.⁸⁰

VII. Christianity

Demandt mentioned the initially distanced stance of Christians towards the *Pax Romana* and their refusal to swear oaths of loyalty to the emperor. These would have obtained in the period prior to the Peace of the Church of the 4th c. He ended his piece by saying that the Church Fathers had no problems with barbarians, for Christians after all were also strangers on earth.⁸¹ He cited Orosius, Salvian, and Augustine. Here I would introduce a nuance. All three of these figures either *had* to engage in special pleading (Augustine, a bishop), *wanted* to (Salvian, an ascetic), or were *commissioned* to (Orosius, a priest). Augustine’s problem was both to defend Christianity against pagan accusations that Rome fell because the *pax deorum* had been neglected under the Christian Empire *and* to justify God’s theodicy to an audience whose world had come apart with the Sack of Rome in 410, *in temporibus Christianis*.⁸² He handed on the baton in the relay to the Spanish priest Orosius. The Lord had not allowed Rome to be taken by the pagan Radagaisus.⁸³ Augustine said nothing about Alaric I’s religion,⁸⁴ Orosius did not say explicitly that he was an Arian.⁸⁵ The Sack had its positive sides (the merciful barbarians),⁸⁶ if nuns were raped and committed suicide, they must have “wanted it” or “assented to it” and been overcome by guilt, or been *about* to be proud of their chastity.⁸⁷ In short, no big deal. Salvian’s *De gubernatione* dates from after 439 and, like Tacitus, used barbarians as foils for Roman decadence. It represents an extreme and strategically oikophobic view of the Romans – they had it coming, they

ἀκρις τὸ πλῆθος). French has the wonderful verb “fourmiller” for “to crawl with” or “to swarm”.

⁷⁹ GARSTAD 2016, 9 on Alexander the integrator vs. Alexander the wall builder. See *ibid.*, 11 on the Other as a threat of contamination and subversion.

⁸⁰ See Afterword, below, p. 160.

⁸¹ The formulation made me smile, for I couldn’t help thinking of the advice for dealing with obscene callers. “Are you alone?” – A clerically colored, “Aren’t we *all* alone?”

⁸² BARNES 1982.

⁸³ CD 5.23 discusses his quasi-miraculous almost bloodless defeat in what is virtually a pagan-Christian ordeal-by-battle. Stilicho might have viewed matters differently.

⁸⁴ He alluded to him in *Retract.* 2.43.1 alone.

⁸⁵ Orosius, *Historia* 7.37.9: *unus Christianus propriorque Romano et, ut res docuit, timore dei mitis in caede, alius paganus barbarous et vere Scythia.*

⁸⁶ CLARK 2011.

⁸⁷ Augustine at his worst in CD 1.16-28. I discuss this question in SHANZER 2025a.

only had themselves to blame.⁸⁸ Salvian wrote as an ascetic from Lérins, but came from Trier. His views are not representative and highly unlikely to be accurate: his is a “shaker” thesis of a people who earned an invasion, whose “movers” put them to rights.⁸⁹ His is ugly Christian *Schadenfreude*.

All of these three authors are disingenuous in different ways. One would get a more balanced impression from the texts and voices used by Pierre Courcelle in his *Histoire littéraire des grandes invasions germaniques*.⁹⁰ Orientius was every inch the Christian moralist, yet his description of conditions in Gaul under the barbarians ends with the unforgettable tragic pentameter: *uno fumavit Gallia tota rogo*.⁹¹

It might be interesting to compare Demandt’s trio of Christian apologists with modern left-wing intellectuals functioning like fifth columnists.⁹² More conventionally, of course, the barbarians were souls to gain for orthodoxy or for Christ. But that drive would come *later*, at the beginning of the 6th c. Avitus, *Ep.* 46, may be the first documentary expression of outward-bound missionary theology.⁹³ The aristocratic bishops who stepped in to fill a political vacuum by cooperating with barbarians as best they could and, by eventually assimilating them, carried on the business of the earlier firms in the early Middle Ages.⁹⁴

VIII. Overview of the Contributions

Our respondents come from different countries and are almost all ancient historians. Three of them, Hächler, Mathisen, and Wijnendaele, all concentrate on roughly the same geographical territory covered by Demandt. Liccardo is interested in historiography and mentions the Eastern Empire too. Sarantis, as was important, focuses on the Eastern Empire, to show how things were different there. Our topic’s reach extends to the present, so one contributor, Afsah’s expertise is contemporary and legal and relevant to the original commissioning of Demandt’s piece. His response, *fachfremd* as it is, is particularly important for analysing presentist perspectives.

⁸⁸ At *Gub.* 6.8.39 he rejoices at the edifying destruction of Roman cities by barbarians.

⁸⁹ Fine overview at COURCELLE 1964, 146-155.

⁹⁰ COURCELLE 1964b.

⁹¹ That epigram crowns *Comm.* 2.165-84.

⁹² I hint at this in SHANZER 2025a.

⁹³ SHANZER & WOOD 2002, 362-369.

⁹⁴ HEINZELMANN 1976.

The Upper Rhine Limes

Nikolas Hächler starts us off with a case study of the Upper Rhine *limes*, between Basel and Lake Konstanz in modern Switzerland. He takes us from its development in the later 3rd c. to its Christian future in the early Middle Ages. Steering clear of “hot spots” and “grand strategies”, his viewpoint is that of the provincials. Different *limites* had different characters. No Hadrian’s Wall, Hächler’s *limes* had a quite deep inhabited zone on the Roman side. This border was also a showplace for those inside it: it could both pacify them and reassure, keep them feeling appreciated and protected. It contributed to Roman resilience in the region. Hächler emphasizes Roman construction and evidence that is archaeologically visible, such as the fort at Kaiseraugst. He contrasts the respective defensive and aggressive stances of Constantius II and Julian, the latter of whom both campaigned against the Alemanni from this *limes* and launched a defiant civil war against Constantius II. Hächler, interestingly, sees Kaiseraugst as the venue for Julian’s launch in Amm. Marc. 21.5.⁹⁵ The Upper Rhine *limes* was an area of interest to Julian’s successor, the similarly warlike Valentinian I, who developed it and strengthened it, with an eye pointed very much downstream to the whole length of the Rhine.⁹⁶ Hächler uses the spectacular finds from Kaiseraugst to flesh out a highpoint of a *limes* culture that was ethnically mixed. After 375, the Upper Rhine *limes* ceased to function. We see the rise of *castra* in Basel and Windisch that were inhabited by barbarian *foederati*. Eventually *hospitalitas* (“quartering”) for barbarians would assure the establishment of the Second Burgundian Kingdom as of 443. At the end, Hächler points to the rise of a new power in the region, the Christian Church. Even if material well-being declined, barbarian-Roman-Christian interchange led to the emergence of the early Middle Ages. This was not a desolation or a landscape of ruins (contrast northern Britain), but one with new centers of power dedicated to the saints.

Client Kingship among the Alemanni

Ralph Mathisen’s contribution can be linked directly to Hächler’s for its regional focus. He investigates client kingship, a politico-military topic that is mentioned in Demandt’s contribution, but not discussed in detail.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ This is not entirely clear to me since the last place that Kaiseraugst was mentioned was Amm. Marc. 20.10.3, where Julian headed back to winter at Vienne. Amm. Marc. 21.8.1 has him setting out from Kaiseraugst. Libanius, *Or.* 18.108 has him on a high tribunal in the middle of *barbaricum*: ἐπὶ βῆμα ὑψηλὸν ἐν μέσῃ τῇ βαρβάρῳ.

⁹⁶ On his activities and propagandistic discourse, see SHANZER 1998a and 1998b.

⁹⁷ DEMANDT, below, p. 37: “Durch Verträge mit den germanischen Grenznachbarn suchten die Kaiser den Frieden und den Wohlstand im Reich zu sichern” and “durch [...] enorme

Demandt concentrated on the Romans as makers of puppet-kings rather than as politicians who pacified defeated enemies by singling them out for employment and a closer relationship. Mathisen works within Demandt's geographical purview and discusses client kings in the later 4th c. and among the Alemanni in particular. He shows how the Romans' policy – and policy it was – of client kingship worked. We hear of how the *foedera* (always with individuals) were struck and what kind of work the (defeated) barbarians were expected to do and what they were expected to provide (e.g. provender, building materials, labor, recruits). Much, it is clear, was expected of the Alemanni. Mathisen emphasizes how client kingship projected Roman power across the *limes* through diplomatic protocols. Confession of delicts was involved, remission, connection, and, in the end, special status, which could be conveyed by gifts of valuable jewelry. The Alemanni were offered subsidies and recompensed for restraining yet other chieftains. All of this eventually became normalized, a relationship that made such barbarians eventually (so Mathisen) more “us” than “them”. Mathisen emphasizes that the agreements were always made with individual leaders not with a whole people, suggesting that the Romans were thereby using a “divide and rule” strategy.⁹⁸

Roman Perfidia

Jeroen Wijnendaele explores a modern Belgian adage, that “good agreements make for good friends”, and invites us to use the word “neighbours” for Romans and barbarians. His contribution studies good faith in Roman-Barbarian relations, taking issue with Demandt's view that it was generally the *Germanen* who broke treaties rather than the Romans. Now even ancient historians who are not nationalistic often end up being Romanocentric, as naturally happens when one is dependent on Roman sources. Reading sources against the grain is thus important, for what they don't say and for what is not foregrounded, but there to be seen by those who look. Wijnendaele highlights details in plain sight from within the Roman sources. These he carefully assembles to show us a different cumulative picture. He re-litigates various questions and re-assigns blame. His Romans emerge as less sinned against than sinning in their interactions with their barbarian neighbours, and, as Wijnendaele would eventually see them, allies. His two case-studies involve the Danube and the Rhine in ca. 285-395 and the Goths inside the empire after the Battle of Adrianople in 378.

Wijnendaele sees the faithlessness of the barbarian as a trope that developed in Late Antiquity and not as a standard and age-old complaint or ste-

Subsidien in Gold” on the Danube *limes*.

⁹⁸ The “homeopathic medicine” of DEMANDT 2016.

reotype that was regularly applied to one’s enemies (including Romans).⁹⁹ His Romans blame *barbarica fides* precisely when their own was questionable. Wijnendaele aims to set the record straight. We are reminded that barbarians were far from the only perfidious actors and that they too were maltreated and let down by treacherous Romans.¹⁰⁰ He provides us with an interesting Goth’s eye view of, among other events, the Sack of Rome. He shows how atrocities against Gainas’ Goths in asylum at Constantinople can be paralleled in Italy by pogroms of Stilicho’s barbarian auxiliaries’ families. One is, inevitably, left wondering whether there could have been different, good outcomes. Wijnendaele suggests a model like Roman *socii* in the Italian peninsula during the Republic. Nonetheless, one is left fearing that the wounds cut too deep, and that barbarians like the Aquitainian Goths in the 5th c. would have been unable to set aside their mistrust of *fides Romana*.

Narratives and Agency

Salvatore Liccardo begins with an historiographical point, emphasizing both the power of a sequential narrative and the vulnerability of any lecture to accusations of oversimplification, e.g. lumping different barbarian peoples as “Germanen”. He takes selective issue with Professor Demandt about the latter’s emphasis on the damaging effects of wealth and ease that led to moral failure and on a monochromatic representation of barbarians as violent.¹⁰¹ Rather than seeing barbarians as either enemies or conquered subjects, he seeks to reclaim agency for them, even if as bad actors. Like Wijnendaele, he reminds us of Roman treachery. Liccardo notes that if one reads many narrative sources and directs one’s eye away from the main rhetorical focus, one cannot help noticing that barbarians are fully integrated players.¹⁰² He draws attention to what imitation Roman coinage has to tell us about how the barbarians got ideas from Rome. Like other contributors, he contests Demandt’s view of the northwestern *limes* as a linear border. Like Sarantis,¹⁰³ he notes that it is the eastern *limes* that provides the better analogy to the modern border intended to regulate.¹⁰⁴ He discusses a

⁹⁹ ISAAC 2013, 328-332 discusses *Punica fides*. At p. 331, esp. with n. 44 he notes that there is no fixed term *Germanica fides*, but that *Germani* emerge in sources as untrustworthy in the wake of the battle of the Teutoburger Wald (9 CE).

¹⁰⁰ DEMANDT (2016) is not unaware of the Roman’s “homeopathy”, in playing barbarians off against one another.

¹⁰¹ For an instructive counterweight showing how they had no monopoly, see VOISIN 1984.

¹⁰² As a different example, I could mention the principals in the Silvanus affair, for which see SHANZER 2022, 86-89.

¹⁰³ See below, p. 107.

¹⁰⁴ MAU 2021.

series of relevant travelers' case-studies and draws attention to the explicit demarcation of the eastern frontier in the *Tabula Peutingeriana*. Liccardo concludes with some of the historiographical recursions to the immortal question. These range from the European to the American, and from the sublime (the humanists and Gibbon) to the ridiculous (TikTok and X).

The Eastern Frontier

The story that seems fated in the West looks different in the East. Rome was a multi-ethnic empire with many different (and differently trying) neighbors on its borders. Many, but not all, were unfriendly. Their cultural *niveaux* varied considerably. Roman sources however regularly blur them into a collective outgroup (what was not Roman) viewed from some imagined center.

Alexander Sarantis discusses the diversity of borders and outcomes. Demandt emphasized the economic disparity between *Germania* and the Roman provinces. Sarantis sets the balance straight by concentrating on how the barbarians were a resource for the Romans (as slaves and *coloni*), but also eventually as trading-partners. They provided not just manpower, but also commodities such as fur and amber. Demandt's barbarians break in or flood in or, at the very least, have their metaphorical noses to the window. Sarantis notes that "Not all barbarians would necessarily have been desperate to emigrate." He explores the eastern border with the Sassanids for there the economic imbalance would not have been paramount. Political prestige depended on raiding and showing who was whose boss. And barbarian politics played a role on the northwestern frontier too: the Huns' followers were sustained with Roman booty. Sarantis emphasizes the agency and also moral responsibility of emperors who practiced "Divide and Rule" politics. Some borders could be truly open or easily crossed. In the East, the *limes* is now often conceptualized as a "deep zone" policed from a distance. And in such areas distinctive *Mischkulturen* developed. Sarantis distinguishes between intended migration, raiding, and conquest with a view to annexation. He concludes that the Western Empire lost the northwestern *limes* because its center collapsed and it could no longer provide what the outsiders required to keep them under control. External peoples on the *limes*, when forced to look out for themselves, crossed into the empire. The Eastern Empire was famously different. It was able to absorb migrants and also sometimes pack hot potatoes off to the West. However, it suffered worse raiding than the West since its dangerous neighbors did not want in.

21st C. Problems

Bernd Löhmann had been worried about how Demandt’s essay could be interpreted by presentists, namely that Muslim immigrants from the Middle East might be seen as playing the role associated with the barbarians of the Later Roman Empire.¹⁰⁵ Like Tacitus’ *Germania*, Demandt’s writing could be dangerous, if abused.¹⁰⁶ Was modern Europe, in part a successor of the Roman Empire, now endangered not by invasion but by immigration and migration? Was Angela Merkel mistaken in thinking that Germany could handle mass migration? Demandt had spoken out against her unilateral decision to leave Germany’s internal Schengen borders open.

To what extent can the Fall of the Roman Empire elucidate the present or suggest remedies? Or is it just a Menetekel? Our one modernist, **Ebrahim Afsah**, examines Demandt’s original assignment, the current essay, and their embedding in contemporary European politics and shows us some ways – primarily by contrast-imitation – how the Fall of the Roman Empire may still be “good to think with”.¹⁰⁷

Only limited comparisons are possible, because the situation in contemporary Europe emerges as very different from that in the Later Roman Empire.¹⁰⁸ Afsah carefully compares five main areas: first, demography, second, economics, third, the politics of failed states in the migrants’ homelands, fourth, environmental factors, and fifth, culture. He begins by emphasizing that current migration is not an isolated episode, one single *Krise*, but a situation that could continue indefinitely. Furthermore, there is no longer a demographical need to populate tracts of underused land with settlers; modern workers need to be qualified and literate; welfare states may require an unrealistically altruistic degree of solidarity of care; the military is not a viable destination or path of promotion for immigrants;¹⁰⁹ and the zones of contact are not just organic ones of mixed culture at borders,¹¹⁰ but Europe’s major urban centers and capitals. One could imagine what Rutilius Namatianus would have said about modern Europe, given that he saw in Stilicho’s (loyal) barbarian auxiliaries a Trojan Horse in Rome.¹¹¹ But the Romans arguably had it easier, according to Afsah.

¹⁰⁵ See above, p. 7.

¹⁰⁶ KREBS 2011.

¹⁰⁷ LÉVI-STRAUSS 1963, 89 of animals. The French had “bons à penser”, which is often cited as “good to think with”.

¹⁰⁸ See ISAAC 1992, 1-2 for some of the obvious differences between the entities involved.

¹⁰⁹ Contrast Rome’s practice and the road to citizenship: BALSDON 1979, 85-86. The famous Francus inscription commemorates a man who identified himself as a Frank, a Roman citizen, and a Roman soldier: RIGSBY 1999.

¹¹⁰ The zones of contact of pp. 10, 17 and 10.

¹¹¹ Rut. Nam. *De reditu* 2.41-60.

Living According to Common Host Norms

At the Roman end, I would like to mention two radically different cultural artefacts: the first a moral commonplace mentioned by a famous philosopher, the second an archaeological site in Gaul. I'll begin with Late Antique conventional wisdom. In Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, first Lady Fortune rebuked the Boethius, who had been imprisoned by the Ostrogothic King Theoderic, for (figuratively) longing to live independently according to his own law in a kingdom common to all.¹¹² One could not pick and choose. Then Lady Philosophy rebuked him (Cons. 2.4.17) for complaining: *hic ipse locus quem tu exsilium vocas incolentibus patria est*. "This very place that you call exile is a homeland to its inhabitants." How might these ancient saws apply to our modern context? One might be compelled to live somewhere where one did not want to live, but should remember how that place is home to its natives. One should also remember that one should not want or expect to live abroad under one's native land's terms.

Living According to the Norms of One's Own Identity

This situation would change in the early Middle Ages when eventually personality of the law could apply to different communities, depending on whether one was a Roman or a barbarian. Agobard of Lyon, a Visigoth in Francia, would eventually condemn Burgundian trial by combat.¹¹³ And the question of parallel Sharia law was raised in the United Kingdom and supported (if one can call it that) by a former Archbishop of Canterbury.¹¹⁴ That may sound outré, but, as Rainer Bauböck kindly reminds me, was implemented by the Ottomans and is known from other modern democracies.¹¹⁵ Law was the written, hard, normative, top-down side of things.

¹¹² Cons. 2.2.14. *Quid si uberius de bonorum parte sumpsisti? Quid si a te non tota discessi? Quid si haec ipsa mei mutabilitas iusta tibi causa est sperandi Meliora? Tamen – ne animo contabescas et intra commune omnibus regnum locatus proprio uiuere iure desideres*. "What if you have received more of my favors? What if I haven't completely abandoned you? What if my very changeability is a sound reason for you to hope for better things? Nonetheless – don't eat your heart out and, since you dwell in a kingdom that is common to all, don't long to live under your own jurisdiction." My own punctuation and translation. Those who want to read *tamenne* run afoul of the subjunctives, *tabescas* and *desideres*, which must be jussive. See GRUBER 2006, 182–183 for sources.

¹¹³ Agobard of Lyon, *Contra iudicium dei* and *Adversus legem Gundobadi*.

¹¹⁴ BUTT 2008.

¹¹⁵ He drew my attention to, as he put it, "the legal pluralism perfected by the late Ottoman millet system and to some degree still present in today's Israel and India where religious authorities enjoy powers of adjudication in matters of family law that are recognized by the state. Another way in which legal pluralism is now widely recognized in western democracies is through private international law, which requires courts to take into ac-

Geographical boundaries and laws are well and good, but other *limites*, those of *tolerance*, also come into play: what went on, how it was received, and how change could occur from the bottom up – in short, what the market could bear or what could be normalized in a given context. Boethius presents us with the moral regulations for those living abroad.

A Surprising Site

But an archaeological find promises a different story. In the later 4th c. at a Roman legionary castrum in Gallo-Roman Nemetacum (Arras in Northern France),¹¹⁶ almost 500 km away from the Rhine *limes*, Germanic auxiliaries engaged in rituals that involved excarnation of humans (including children) and animals in the ground, collection and manipulation of their bones, and re-interment. The site had previously been used for the cult of Cybele and would soon be re-purposed as cavalry barracks in the 390s through the early 5th c.¹¹⁷

Carlo Ferrari devotes a chapter of his recent book on Later Roman Gaul to the ritual at Arras.¹¹⁸ He carefully points out certain parallels to rather gruesome pre-Roman Gallic practices attested at Gournay and Ribemont.¹¹⁹ He ends up positing a three-way encounter between a Celtic substrate and a Germanic adstrate on Roman territory.¹²⁰ Human sacrifice may have been involved, but did not have to be.¹²¹ But even without that sensational practice,¹²² what the site reveals is astonishing in light of Roman (intramural) burial customs, let alone Christian norms. Relevant to our discussion about toleration is the following key point of Ferrari's. The victims or deceased may have died natural deaths, but the un-Roman manipulation of their remains shows that the practice was non-negotiable for a group that *was granted considerable autonomy in return for military service*.¹²³

The archaeological record cannot provide a narrative or commentary, so one must imagine the cohabitation of different communities in the Roman military. Many armies, even modern ones, use quaintly archaic guards

count the law of immigrants' countries of nationality, especially in matters of family law."

¹¹⁶ JACQUES 1993 and 2007; PÉRIN & KAZANSKI 2011, 312-313.

¹¹⁷ The horsemen probably came from Northern Germany. For the details, see JACQUES 1993, 195-198.

¹¹⁸ FERRARI 2022, 49-91.

¹¹⁹ FERRARI 2022, 73-78.

¹²⁰ FERRARI 2022, 90.

¹²¹ While there is no evidence of violence on the skeletons, suffocation, strangling, or poison cannot be ruled out.

¹²² See BALSDON 1979, 245-248 for Roman views about ritual murder.

¹²³ FERRARI 2022, 89.

or exotic mercenaries.¹²⁴ Such warriors made a good show or shamed the locals with their valor and professionalism (or ruthlessness). Now, while there is no textual evidence that the Roman army intended its auxiliaries for any sort of multi-cultural theater, one can be forgiven for imagining the (homesick?) Syrians and the Batavians who served together on Hadrian's Wall, or for wondering about what was happening in Arras and what sort of negotiations went on behind the scenes.

I have pointed to some extremely divergent evidence for behavior expected from hosts and guests in the Later Roman Empire. Afsah sees the greatest difficulties in modern political attitudes that must balance both freedom ("to" or "of action") and concerns about security (Aunt Lydia's "freedom from" in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*).¹²⁵ These clash when "freedoms to" for migrants come into conflict with broadly held European societal norms and even laws, e.g. French *laïcité*. Rome, at Arras at least, emerges as very unaware, very tolerant or very intimidated. The level of *convivencia* required at Arras puts modern debates about pronouns and headscarves into perspective.

Afsah's other major topic is assimilation and integration, for the American melting-pot is out of fashion, and multi-cultural parallel societies seem to be emerging in Europe.¹²⁶ In antiquity, geography mattered, and most mortals could only be in one place at a time: most were perforce *Somewheres*.¹²⁷ At the same time, the Roman intellectual classes shared a *lingua franca* and a common culture that permitted them to exchange ideas and eventually made them indispensable for their new barbarian masters. They lived in an interchangeable *Anywhere* of letters.

Now, by contrast, we are in a situation where the internet and social media permit immigrants never, in some intellectual sense, to leave their homelands, and to be in constant contact with their mother-tongues and home politics. This of course impedes the organic assimilation that used simply to happen of necessity when one could not yet engage in mental bilocation in quite the way one now can.

Afsah emphasizes Böckenförde's point that the modern constitutional state cannot itself guarantee the prerequisites for its own existence and survival, to wit: broad communal consensus and trust in an open society. None of this can be legislated or enforced. It must be elicited. Demandt had noted how in many areas of the Mediterranean assimilation had worked

¹²⁴ KEEGAN 1994, 230-231: Gurkhas, Swiss Guards, and Zouaves, for example.

¹²⁵ ATWOOD 1986, 33: "There is more than one kind of freedom, said Aunt Lydia. Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it."

¹²⁶ BAWER 2006.

¹²⁷ Terminology borrowed from GOODHART 2017.

to produce rich, “hyphenated” Roman cultures. Syria, North Africa, Gaul, and Egypt all come to mind. The later integration of the Germanic peoples did not go quite so smoothly. They were not able to sustain the culture that they had joined at its former level.¹²⁸ But there is no doubt that they wanted to. Things may be different now.

Islam, according to Afsah, poses special difficulties for Europe. Western Europe has not had a long-lasting historical co-habitation with Muslims inside its borders, the way the Romans had with the Gauls and Germans. Neither have Muslims lived as ordinary citizens there. Initially they were conquerors. Since the 1960s, they have largely consisted of (to some undesirable) citizens of former colonies, guest-workers, and refugees. This may explain some aspects of Western hostility. There is also the question of mental furniture. It is clear that ancient barbarians on the whole “wanted in” and were eager to accommodate and to assimilate.¹²⁹ At the moment trends indicate failure to integrate, demands for different regulations, and resulting parallel societies among many Muslim immigrants. The current social polarization has eroded the European *Sicherheitsgemeinschaft*, and the politics of social justice have rendered it politically toxic to ask, for example, in what sense Islam belongs to Germany. Scholars such as Ralf Michaels find any discussion of “we’s” abhorrent. On the other side are those such as Tilman Nagel who presumably feel that Europe is behaving like the Biedermanns in Max Frisch’s *Biedermann und die Brandstifter* (1958).¹³⁰ While reminding us that history cannot provide answers like a scientific experiment with clear independent variables,¹³¹ Afsah hopes that studying history and the history of scholarship can at the least help relieve some of our cognitive distaste for, and inhibitions about, discussing migration.

¹²⁸ Whatever that level was, of course. While things were always either being reborn or going to the dogs in Roman literature, there is no doubt that there was tremendous cultural loss between the late 5th and the 8th c. See my forthcoming chapters: SHANZER 2025b and 2025c.

¹²⁹ See MATHISEN 1997.

¹³⁰ For a fine Austrian film version from 1963, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jrGmNXjjDNk&t=111s> (last access: 2 May 2024). Both the semi-popular BAWER (2006) and MURRAY (2017) channel this anxiety. HANSON (2024) warns us with various ancient and early modern military annihilations that ended the conquered’s political existence.

¹³¹ GADDIS 2002.

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