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Managing Barbarian Clients in the Later Fourth Century (ca. 350-375 CE) The Case of the Alamanni

Grenzen – borders – can be viewed from many perspectives. Alexander Demandt subscribes to a model where borders are well defined geographical entities, with “Römer” on one side and “Germanen” on the other. In this view, Romans and Germans engaged in an epochal conflict in which the Germans eventually broke through and ultimately emerged victorious. This contribution, however, considers another view of the frontier, in which Roman authority was regularly projected into *barbaricum* in many ways – political, military, social, and economic. Based on not only traditional textual sources but also material culture and visual evidence, this study suggests that by utilizing the Roman institution of client kingship, which itself was based on that most characteristic of Roman institutions, *clientela*, the government sponsored massive barbarian immigration into the empire and was able to engage large numbers of barbarians in Roman military service. Barbarian populations on the other side of the *Grenzen* were incorporated into the Roman system in the same way that first Italians and then provincials had been assimilated into the Roman world. As a result, in the late empire, an increasingly homogeneous society was created that encompassed populations on both sides of the “frontier”.

Keywords: client kings / frontiers / barbaricum / Alamanni / barbarian auxiliaries

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“Grenzen dienen dem Frieden”, that is to say, “borders preserve the peace”. Thus Alexander Demandt opens his study of “Römisch-germanische Grenzpolitik”, the point of departure for these collected studies. *Grenzen* – borders – can be viewed from many perspectives, as “lines in the sand” demarcating fixed boundaries separating territory that is laid claim to from foreign territory, as rather fuzzier zones of influence, or as purely notional, to be defined as one saw fit. In the study presented here, Demandt subscribes to the first of these models, where borders are well defined geographical entities, with “Römer”, variations of which word appear in Demandt’s study thirty-five times, on one side, and “Germanen”, a word that appears no fewer than forty times, on the other. In this view of the

frontier, Romans and Germans engaged in an epochal conflict in which the Germans eventually broke through the frontier and ultimately emerged victorious.

But another view of the border is that it was not a line in the sand. Roman influence regularly extended across the notional frontier in many ways – political, military, social, and economic. By sponsoring massive barbarian immigration into the empire and by engaging large numbers of barbarians in Roman military service, barbarian populations on the other side of the border were incorporated into the Roman system in the same way that first Italians and then provincials had been assimilated. In the late empire, an increasingly homogeneous society was created that encompassed populations on both sides of the “border”. These kinds of interactions are admirably illustrated by the Roman institution of client kingship, which itself was based on that most characteristic of Roman traditions, the institution of *clientela*.

Roman emperors had a long tradition of maintaining barbarian clients along the frontier. Doing so allowed Rome’s emperors to project their authority into *barbaricum*, to maintain peace on the frontier, and to gain access to a ready supply of military recruits. Thus, Dexippus reports how in 271 the emperor Aurelian (270-275) made an agreement with the Vandals: “The kings and chieftains of the barbarians gave hostages not inferior to themselves in rank. Two thousand Vandal cavalymen would serve with the Romans, part of them enrolled in the allied force, the rest volunteers undertaking military service of their own accord”.¹ Supplying hostages, auxiliaries, and men in the ranks was a standard provision of such agreements, and resulted in an increasing integration of barbarian populations into Roman military society.

In the fourth century, the Roman government remained very committed to maintaining a system of barbarian clients, especially on the northern frontier (Fig. 1).² Eusebius of Caesarea discussed his personal experiences with the constant negotiations between barbarian chieftains and the emperor Constantine I (306-337): “Ambassadors were continually arriving from all nations. I myself have sometimes stood near the entrance of the imperial palace and observed a noticeable array of barbarians in attendance with shields and long spears, with arrows and bows thereby offering their services and alliance for the emperor’s acceptance. He also honored the noblest among them with Roman offices of dignity”.³ The recruitment of barbarian auxiliaries and the appointment of barbarian clients to positions of command in the Roman army were just a few of the ways in which

¹ Dexippus fr.7: LEWIS & REINHOLD 1990, 394.

² For client rulers, see BRAUND 1984; ROLLER 2003, HEKSTER 2010.

³ Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* 4.6: MCGIFFERT 1890, 820.

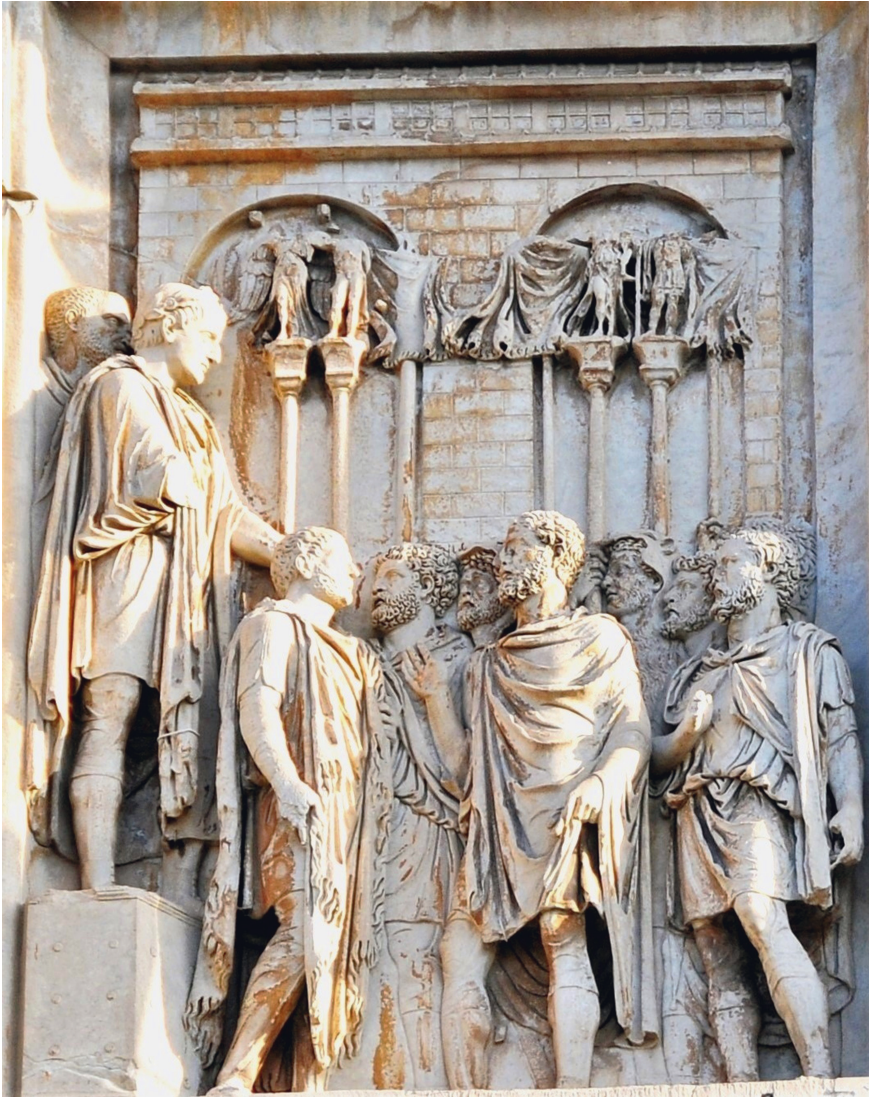


Fig. 1. On a panel from the Arch of Constantine in 315 CE, a second-century emperor at left, perhaps Trajan (98-117), invests a bearded and ceremonially dressed barbarian client king in just the same manner that Constantine managed his own barbarian clients (Photo: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rome_-_Arch_of_Constantine_\(5178424230\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rome_-_Arch_of_Constantine_(5178424230).jpg) licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic license)

emperors and clients interacted with each other.⁴ In this way, the ancient Roman *clientela* system was maintained.

⁴ For barbarian auxiliaries, see MATHISEN 2019.

This is not to say, of course, that the Roman government exercised total control over its clients. Far from it. Barbarian chieftains, known variously as *reges*, *regales*, *reguli*, *subreguli*, *duces*, *primates*, and *optimates*, were ever fractious, always looking to their own advantage.⁵ But what was important was that there was an overarching framework for dealing with one another that both Romans and barbarians acknowledged, a patron-client relationship with the Roman government always the superior partner. In most cases, moreover, Roman agreements were made with individual chieftains, not, as we shall see, with peoples or nations. Dealing with individual chieftains was also a way to ensure that initially small barbarian bands did not merge into even larger coalitions.

The Alamanni as Roman Clients

Some examples involving the Alamanni from the third quarter of the fourth century illustrate how Roman emperors dealt with and managed barbarian clients. In the Agri Decumates, the portion of Germania Prima and Raetia located on the far side of the Rhine and Danube, Roman life continued until ca. 260.⁶ But after that, silence. As a result of barbarian incursions, the frontier was withdrawn to the Rhine and Danube, urban life collapsed, and the Roman government withdrew from the area.⁷ But Alamannia, as the Agri Decumates came to be called, continued to be a Roman dependency, and Alamannic kings such as Crocus, who as a barbarian auxiliary supported Constantine I in his bid to become emperor in 306, remained Roman clients.⁸

In 354, after the defeat of Magnentius (350-353), Constantius II (337-361) undertook a campaign “to make war upon the brothers Gundomadus and Vadomarius, *reges* of the Alamanni, whose frequent raids were devastating the part of Gaul that adjoined their frontiers”.⁹ In due course, “the barbarians [...] sent *optimates* to seek pardon for their transgressions and sue for peace. Thus, with the legates of both kings detained and with the business weighed secretly for a long time, they thought it best to grant a peace that was sought on fair conditions. After this, an agreement was

⁵ See, e.g., Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae* 17.12.9-11; also FANNING 2011. Translations of Ammianus are sometimes based on YONGE 1887, and sometimes ROLFE 1963, but are frequently tweaked for accuracy.

⁶ Note, e.g., *Corpus inscriptionum latinarum* 13.9111; FISCHER 1962.

⁷ See OKAMURA 1996.

⁸ *Epitome de caesaribus* 41.3: *Cunctis, qui aderant, annitentibus, sed praecipue Croco, Alamannorum rege, auxilii gratia Constantium comitato imperium capit.*

⁹ Amm. 14.10.1: *In Gundomadum et Vadomarium fratres Alamannorum reges arma moturus, quorum crebris excursibus vastabantur confines limitibus terrae Gallorum.* See ENJUTO SÁNCHEZ 2003; also PLRE I, 928.

made according to the rite of the barbarians".¹⁰ The terms of the pact by which Gundomadus and Vadamarius became Roman clients are not specified, and later evidence will show that the "rite of the *gentes*" involved oaths being sworn by the barbarians but not by the Roman emperor.

A year later, Constantius appointed his younger cousin Julian (355-363) as Caesar in Gaul with the responsibility for dealing with the Alamanni. The new emperor's first order of business was to recruit more barbarian auxiliaries: "He enlisted as many more as he could into the ranks and also a great number of volunteers".¹¹ Two years later Julian confronted a coalition of at least seven Alamannic chieftains near Strasbourg.¹² The Roman clients Gundomadus and Vadamarius, however, remained loyal. Ammianus reports, "The two royal brothers, bound by the restrictions of the peace that the year before they had obtained from Constantius, dared neither to undertake a rebellion nor to become stirred up".¹³ But the two paid a price for their loyalty. Ammianus continues, "A little later, Gundomadus, who was more resolute in his good faith, was killed in an ambush when his entire people conspired with our enemies, and the people of Vadamarius, although he himself was unwilling, as he claimed, immediately joined themselves with the columns of barbarians clamoring for war".¹⁴ Being a dutiful client thus could put one at odds with one's own people.

After Julian's ensuing victory, the surviving Alamanni fled across the Rhine. Julian sent Vadamarius to Constantius to report the victory.¹⁵ Ammianus reports that two years later, "King Vadamarius returned with letters of the emperor Constantius, in which he was enthusiastically commended. He was kindly received, as was fitting, having previously been received by the emperor into the *clientela* of the Roman Republic".¹⁶ Meanwhile, Julian followed up on his victory by crossing the Rhine and ravaging Alamannic territory. Soon, three unnamed "most savage kings" appeared, "swearing an oath in words conceived according to their native ritual that

¹⁰ Amm. 14.10.9-16: *Barbari ... optimates misere delictorum veniam petituos et pacem. tentis igitur regis utriusque legatis et negotio tectius diu pensato cum pacem oportere tribui, quae iustis condicionibus petebatur ... icto post haec foedere gentium ritu.*

¹¹ Zos. *HN* 3.3.1-2. Translations from Zosimus based on DAVIS 1814.

¹² Amm. 16.1.

¹³ Amm. 16.12.17: *Regii duo fratres vinculo pacis adstricti, quam anno praeterito impe-traverant a Constantio, nec tumultuare nec commoveri sunt ausi.*

¹⁴ Amm. 16.12.17: *Paulo postea uno ex his Gundomado, qui potior erat fideique firmioris, per insidias inerempto omnis eius populus cum nostris hostibus conspiravit et confestim Vadamarii plebs ipso invito, ut adserebat, agminibus bella cientium barbarorum sese coniunxit.*

¹⁵ Zosimus, *Historia nova* 3.4.3.

¹⁶ Amm. 18.2.16 (Julian, 359): *Rex quoque Vadamarius venit ... scriptisque Constanti principis, quibus commendatus est artius, allegatis leniter susceptus est, ut decebat, olim ab Augusto in clientelam rei Romanae susceptus.*

they would do nothing unpeaceful but would preserve the agreements and would transport grain on their shoulders”.¹⁷ This account illustrates again the personal, verbal, and informal nature of *foedera* struck with northern barbarian chieftains. It also introduces a new twist, with the Alamanni providing supplies for the Roman army, almost as if they were taxpaying provincials.

A similar agreement obtained a year later, in 358, when the Alamannic *rex* Suomarius was granted similar terms:

His appearance and gait indicated that he was a suppliant [...] he begged for peace on bended knee. And he was granted pardon for his past crimes on this condition, that he return our captives, and that, however often was necessary, he would provide supplies for the soldiers, receiving *securitates* [that is, “receipts”] for what he brought in the manner of ordinary military contractors.¹⁸

In this case, the supplies that the client Suomarius provided were to be purchased from the military budget.

Later the same year, the *rex* Hortarius “also begged for pardon and promised, swearing a solemn oath, that he would do all that he was ordered and that he would restore all the captives”.¹⁹ Julian also specified that Hortarius “should furnish carts and timber from his own supplies and those of his subjects. And, when he had promised this and invoked sanctions upon himself, he was allowed to return to his own domains”.²⁰ But, ever the dealmaker, Hortarius also was able to negotiate an exemption: “As for paying the *annona*, as Suomarius did, he could not be compelled to do this given that his territory had been devastated to the point of extermination and nothing could be found to give”.²¹ The reference to payment of the *annona* could suggest that these barbarian clients were being treated like provincials. Ammianus concludes this section, “Thus those *reges* put their necks, now bowed down, under the yoke of Roman dominion, and ungrudgingly

¹⁷ Amm. 17.1.13: *Hac fiducia tres inmanissimi reges venerunt tandem... iurantes conceptis ritu patrio verbis nihil inquietum acturos sed foedera ... frugesque portaturos humeris.*

¹⁸ Amm. 17.10.3-4: *Quia vultus incessusque supplicem indicabat ... pacem genibus curvatis oravit. et eam cum concessione praeteritorum sub hac meruit lege, ut captivos redderet nostros et, quotiens sit necesse, militibus alimenta praeberet, susceptorum vilium more securitates accipiens pro inlatis.*

¹⁹ Amm. 17.10.5-7: *Hortari nomine petendus erat regis alterius pagus ... vicorumque reliquias cerneret exustorum ... oravit ipse quoque veniam, facturum se imperanda iurandi execratione restituere universos promisit, id enim cura agebatur in pensiore.*

²⁰ Amm. 17.10.9: *Carpenta et materias ex opibus suis suorumque praeberet: et haec pollicitus inprecatusque si perfidum quicquam egisset, luenda sibi cruore supplicia, ad propria remeare permissus est.*

²¹ Amm. 17.10.9: *Annonam enim transferre, ita ut Suomarius, ea re compelli non potuit, quod ad internicionem regione eius vastata nihil inveniri poterat quod daretur.*

obeyed our commander, as if born and brought up among our tax payers [*tributarii*].”²²

In general, these *ad hoc* agreements, even if sometimes called “treaties” (*foedera*) in the sources, were personal agreements made between individual emperors and individual barbarian chieftains, and should not be envisaged as being the same as the formal mutual-defense treaties crafted between the Romans and independent foreign states during the Roman Republic. They followed a fairly standard pattern. After a raid or just a threat of a raid by the Alamanni, the emperor would mount a punitive expedition across the river, either the Rhine or the Danube, in which the Alamanni would be soundly defeated, their villages burned, and captives taken.²³ Then, after the defeated chieftains had demonstrated sufficient servility in a ritualized submission performance, they swore oaths “in the barbarian manner” to remain loyal and preserve the peace, to provide hostages, to return Roman captives, and to provide supplies, including foodstuffs, building materials and labor, and army recruits. This, we are rather dubiously told in the *Augustan History*, had been going on as early as the reign of Probus (276-282), who was said to have recruited 16,000 Alamannic auxiliaries into the Roman army.²⁴

Especially striking is the extent to which Alamannic clients were put to work providing provisions and building materials. The latter practices are attested by stone quarries in Alamannia that continued to operate in the fourth century: large granite columns used for Constantine’s cathedral in Trier came from the Felsenmeer in Alamannia, and one remains in situ (Fig. 2).²⁵ Moreover, Libanius reports that in 358 the Alamanni were required to supply not only timber but also iron for the reconstruction of destroyed Roman towns.²⁶ The Alamanni even constructed Roman fortifications. In 369, Symmachus reported, “Hear what marvels I tell of, the barbarian freely offered the things to be torn down and assisted in the creation of new construction”.²⁷ One of these fortifications was built at Lopodunum (Fig. 3). Originally constructed by Julian, it later was restored by Valentin-

²² Amm. 17.10.10: *Ita reges ... adsueta nostrorum Romanae potentiae iugo subdidere colla iam domita et velut inter tributarios nati et educati obsecundabant imperiis ingravate*. The same word, *tributarii*, was used to describe the Limigantes (Amm. 19.11.6).

²³ E.g., Amm. 17.1.1-7.

²⁴ *Historia Augusta*, ‘Probus’ 14.7: *Accepit praeterea sedecim milia tyronum ... cum auxiliariis barbaris*.

²⁵ See GÖLDNER & WEYRAUCH 1989.

²⁶ Libanius, *Oratio* 18.78.

²⁷ Symmachus, *Laudatio in Valentinianum* 2.15 (*Monumenta Germaniae Historica* 6.1.326): *Audite, quam mira adseram ... sponte obtulit barbarus diruenda et novae constructionis adiuvit effectum*.



Fig. 2. An unfinished column lies in the Alamannic stone quarry in the Felsenmeer in Germany (Photo: author)

ian I (364-375), attesting to the Roman desire to retain a physical presence in the territory of their Alamannic clients.²⁸

The conditions imposed on Alamannic clients thus often were rather more demanding than those the Romans imposed on other barbarian clients, which usually involved no more than protestations of loyalty, provision of hostages, and the return of any Roman captives.²⁹ Indeed, it is difficult to think of any foreign territory that was so tightly bound to Rome. Alamannia was closer than a client-kingdom, almost a pseudo-province, a term that acknowledges on the one hand its former status as a full-fledged province and on the other its new quasi-independent status.³⁰ But this dynamic in fact was nothing new. Nearly two centuries earlier, Roman relations with some barbarian clients were so close, and the Roman govern-

²⁸ Amm. 17.1.11 (Julian): *Et dum nullus obsisteret, munimentum, quod in Alamannorum solo conditum Traianus, suo nomine voluit appellari, dudum violentius oppugnatum, tumultuario studio reparatum est; locatisque ibi pro tempore defensoribus, ex barbarorum visceribus alimenta congesta sunt*; Ausonius, Mosella 422-4: *Hostibus exactis Nicrum super et Lupodunum / et fontem ... Histri*; see HEUKEMES 1981.

²⁹ See, e.g., Amm. 17.12.11-20.

³⁰ See MATHISEN 2012.

ment so intrusive, that client kingdoms could be treated as virtual proxy provinces. Thus, Dio Cassius reported with regard to the Danubian campaigns of Marcus Aurelius (161-180), “Marcus gave audience to those who came as envoys from outside nations, but did not receive them all on the same footing; for this varied according as the several states were worthy to receive citizenship, or freedom from taxes, or perpetual or temporary exemption from the tribute, or even to enjoy permanent support”.³¹ These privileges, ranging from grants of citizenship to tax exemptions were precisely the kinds of privileges available to Roman provincials.

Recruitment of Client Peoples

Barbarian clients were key to Roman military recruitment.³² Zosimus, for example, reports that in 367, after settling affairs with the Alamanni, Valentinian “made provisions for the future security of the Celtic peoples”.³³ In the process of doing so, “having mustered as many young men as possible from among the barbarians near the Rhine and the peasants among the Roman peoples, he incorporated them among the legionary soldiers and made them so war ready that for nine years, none of those across the Rhine troubled the Roman cities”.³⁴ In this case, barbarians were recruited into the Roman military not just as temporary auxiliaries but also as members of the standing army.

At the same time, Alamannic client chieftains were appointed to high-ranking positions in the Roman army. In the mid 360s, the aforementioned Vadomarius continued to serve as a Roman client under Jovian (363-364) and Valens (364-378) as *Dux Foenicis*, in which capacity he may have commanded units of Alamannic auxiliaries.³⁵ And Valentinian named a certain Fraomarius as client king of the Bucinobantes, a separate warband of the Alamanni.³⁶ Fraomarius then, having been “transferred to Britain with the power of a Tribune, was put in command of a unit (*numerus*) of Alamanni that at that time was outstanding in its numbers and its strength”.³⁷ One

³¹ Cassius Dio, *Historia romana* 72.19.2 Translation from CARY 1924, 59.

³² See HOFFMANN 1978.

³³ Zos. *HN* 4.12.1, dated to 367.

³⁴ Zos. *HN* 4.12.1.

³⁵ Amm. 21.3.5: *Obtemperans Vadomarius haec et similia perpetrabat, ad perstringendum fallendumque miris modis ab aetatis primitiis callens, ut postea quoque ducatum per Phoenicem regens ostendit; Notitia dignitatum orientis 33: Dux Foenicis. Ala prima Alamannorum, Neia. Cohors quinta pacta Alamannorum, Onevatha; PLRE I, 928.*

³⁶ Amm 29.4.7: *Dum hostium disiecta frangeret timor, in Macriani locum Bucinobantibus, quae contra Mogontiacum gens est Alamanna, regem Fraomarium ordinavit.*

³⁷ Amm 29.4.7: *In Brittannos translatus potestate tribuni Alamannorum praefecerat numero, multitudine viribusque ea tempestate florenti.* In the *Notitia dignitatum*, a unit of

wonders whether these Alamanni comprised Fraomarius' own warband. Valentinian also "promoted Bitheridus and Hortarius, *primates* of this same nation, to military command".³⁸ These examples provide some rare occasions when insight is provided into the process by which so many barbarian chieftains came to be appointed to commands in the Roman army.

Other Alamanni also served as Roman military officers, although their status in their homeland is unknown.³⁹ In 354, for example, during an attempt by Constantius II to make a secret attack on the Alamanni, "a few from the same people, to whom the care of a senior military rank had been committed, informed their countrymen through secret messengers. Suspicion fell upon Latinus, Count of the Domestics; Agilo, Tribune of the Stable; and Scudilo, *Rector* ('Tribune') of the Scutarii, who then guarded the Republic as if they bore it in their right hands".⁴⁰ An investigation was only averted by the surrender of the Alamannic optimates, and Agilo went on to be promoted to *Magister peditum* ("Master of Foot") in 360.⁴¹ Five years later, a *Tribunus vacans* ("Tribune without Posting") Hariobaudus, apparently not the same as the Alamannic king, was sent as envoy to king Hortarius because "he was thoroughly familiar with barbarian speech", indicating that he was himself of barbarian origin.⁴²

Managing Barbarian Clients: General Principles

The institution of client rulership was one of the primary means by which Roman authority was projected beyond the frontiers, and these accounts of the Alamanni reveal a standard pattern for how the Roman government managed barbarian clients writ large. A military encounter in which the Romans were victorious would be followed by a ceremonial gathering in

Bucinobantes appears among the "Auxilia palatina", elite troops under the command of the eastern *Magister militum praesentalis* (*Not.dig.or.* 6).

³⁸ Amm 29.4.7: *Bitheridum vero et Hortarium nationis eiusdem primates item regere milites iussit*. Bitheridus: *PLRE* I, 162, s.v. "Bitheridus", "possibly a tribune"; otherwise unknown. Hortarius: *PLRE* I, 444, s.v. "Hortarius 2", "possibly a son of Hortarius 1".

³⁹ See STROHEKER 1963. Here, when attributing barbarian identity to Roman officers, only explicit statements in the sources are used, not assumptions made on the basis of nomenclature, as often done, e.g., in *PLRE*.

⁴⁰ Amm. 14.10.7-8: *Pauci ex eadem gente, quibus erat honoratoris militiae cura commissa, populares suos haec per nuntios docuissent occultos, ut quidam existimabant. infamabat autem haec suspicio Latinum domesticorum comitem et Agilonem tribunum stabuli atque Scudilonem Scutariorum rectorem, qui tunc ut dextris suis gestantes rem publicam colebantur*.

⁴¹ Amm. 20.2.5: *Agilone ad eius [sc. Ursicini] locum inmodico saltu promotus ex Gentilium et Scutariorum tribunus*.

⁴² Amm 18.2.2: *Hariobaudem vacantem tribunum ... ad Hortarium miserat regem iam pacatum ... sermonis barbarici perquam gnarus*.



Fig. 3. A surviving wall of the fort built in Alamannia at Lopodunum (Ladenburg) by Julian and then expanded ca. 370 by Valentinian I, probably with the assistance of the Alamanni (Photo: author)

which barbarian chieftains acknowledged their delicts. Their client status then was renewed contingent on the performance of certain standard *munera*, or duties, such as providing hostages and, in particular, returning any Roman captives. In the case of the Alamanni, the duties also extended to providing foodstuffs, building supplies, and labor. In most cases, moreover, agreements negotiated between emperors and barbarian chieftains were very personal, *mano a mano*, meaning that whenever there was a leadership change on either side, an agreement would need to be renewed. These clients, such as the Alamans Fraomarius and Vadomarius, then often appeared in Roman service, in the same leadership capacity that they exercised back home, exemplifying the intertwined relationships that united barbarian clients with Rome.

Roman agendas were further pursued by actively encouraging a fragmentation of barbarian leadership, which prevented the formation of larger coalitions, something that the Roman government feared but was profi-



Fig. 4. Prestigious items of jewelry, such as this elaborate gold and onyx fibula from the Ostrovany (Slovakia) Hoard, were lavished on barbarian clients. Now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (Photo: author)

cient at preventing.⁴³ Peoples such as the Alamanni, not to mention the Franks and Goths, actually comprised many smaller groups let by individual chieftains (referred to variously as *reges*, *regales*, *reguli*,⁴⁴ *subreguli*,

⁴³ For a threat from coalitions of Franks, Alamanni, and Goths as of the third century, see, e.g., MAIER 2018.

⁴⁴ See FANNING 2011.

duces,⁴⁵ *optimates*) who might have represented no more than a single *pagus*. Indeed, the great variety in the nomenclature indicates the largely ad hoc nature of these local leaders.

Barbarian clients were kept tractable by the provision of subsidies, gifts, and rewards; the use of military force to keep barbarian clients in line was a last resort. Thus, Tacitus reports that the Germans “rarely are assisted with our arms, more often with money”.⁴⁶ Cassius Dio notes that Domitian (81-96) “had given large sums of money to Decebalus [...] and had promised to keep on giving large sums in the future”.⁴⁷ And, regarding Hadrian (117-138), Dio relates, “He lived for the most part at peace with foreign nations; for as they were themselves not only free from Roman aggression but received money besides, they made no uprising”.⁴⁸ The *Augustan History* adds, “He gave much to many kings; he even purchased peace from some”. Marcus Aurelius likewise made deals with barbarian clients: Dio also reports, “The Astingi, led by their chieftains Raüs and Raptus, came into Dacia with their entire households, hoping to secure both money and land in return for their alliance. They received from Marcus both money and the privilege of asking for land should they succeed in inflicting some injury upon those who then were fighting against him”.⁴⁹

This last account shows how emperors were adept at using barbarian clients to restrain other yet more problematic barbarian chieftains. Dio also recounted, “Marcus Antoninus remained in Pannonia in order to give audience to the embassies of the barbarians. Some of them, under the leadership of Battarius, a boy twelve years old, promised an alliance; these received a gift of money and succeeded in restraining Tarbus, a neighbouring chieftain, who had come into Dacia and was demanding money and threatening to make war if he should fail to get it”.⁵⁰

In the third century, barbarian peoples continued to importune emperors for subsidies. When Caracalla was campaigning on the upper Rhine in 213, Dio recounts, “Many also of the people living near the mouths of the Albis [Elbe] sent envoys to him asking for his friendship, though their real purpose was to get money. Even though the terms proposed were contrary to their wishes, yet when they saw the gold pieces they were captivated”.⁵¹

⁴⁵ As noted by Gregory of Tours, *DLH* 2.9: *Nam cum multa de eis Sulpicii Alexandri narret Historia, non tamen regem primum eorum ullatenus nominat, sed duces eos habuisse dicit.*

⁴⁶ Tacitus, *Germania* 42: *Raro armis nostris, saepius pecunia iuvantur.*

⁴⁷ Cass. Dio, *Hist.Rom.* 67.7; tr. CARY 1924, 8.333.

⁴⁸ *HA* ‘Hadrian’ 17.10: *Regibus multis plurimum detulit, a plerisque vero etiam pacem redemit;* Cass. Dio, *Hist.Rom.* 69.9.5.

⁴⁹ Cass. Dio, *Hist.Rom.* 72.12.1; tr. CARY 1924, 9.15.

⁵⁰ Cass. Dio, *Hist.Rom.* 72.11.1; tr. CARY 1924, 9.13.

⁵¹ Cass. Dio, *Hist.Rom.* 78.14.3; tr. CARY 1924, 9.315.

By the middle of the century, the Goths were receiving annual stipends. According to Peter the Patrician, ca. 240, the Carpi “envied the subsidies paid annually to the Goths”,⁵² and the Gothic historian Jordanes notes, “Although they lived far away under their own kings, nevertheless they were allied to the Roman Republic and received annual gifts”.⁵³ Eusebius of Caesarea likewise acknowledged that in the third century, “the emperors had actually rendered tribute to the Scythians [Goths] by an annual payment”.⁵⁴ Very often, moreover, the personal tie between a barbarian client and an emperor was cemented by the provision of lavish gifts, ranging from massive gold medallions to elaborate golden fibulae (Fig. 4).⁵⁵

The failure to provide sufficient rewards could lead to pushback from barbarian chieftains. In 358, a reduction in the subsidies paid to the Alamanni by Julian had unfortunate but not unexpected consequences: “The Alamanni broke through the frontier of Germany, aroused to hostility solely for this reason: when their legates were sent to the court and they ought to have been offered fixed and established subsidies according to custom, lesser and baser ones were bestowed”.⁵⁶ Regardless of how one spun the nature and significance of the subsidies, Roman emperors clearly saw large regular payments as an effective means of influencing client rulers in *barbaricum* and as a sound alternative to risking the use of military force.

Barbarian clients thus had an established place in the Roman military, administrative, and social system. But there always was give-and-take, an underlying tension, between the Roman government and its barbarian clients. The clients constantly attempted to get better deals, or resented it when subsidies were not forthcoming. They continually tested the limits of the relationship to see how far they could go before they elicited a government response. When diplomacy failed as a means of extracting suitable remuneration for their services, the only means that barbarian clients had of making up the difference was to conduct raids into the Roman Empire. But that was all part of the standardized ritual performance of bilateral, one-on-one creations or renewals of clientship ties between individual chieftains and Roman emperors that spawned a barbarian leadership struc-

⁵² Peter the Patrician fr.170 = fr.8 in *FHG* 4.186-187.

⁵³ Jordanes, *Getica* 16 (89): *Quamvis remoti sub regibus viverent suis, rei publicae tamen Romanae foederati erant et annua munera percipiebant.*

⁵⁴ Eus. *Vit. Const.* 4.5.

⁵⁵ Note BURSCHÉ 2000.

⁵⁶ Amm. 26.5.7: *Alamanni enim perrupere Germaniae limites, hac ex causa solito infestius moti. cum legatis eorum missis ad comitatum certa et praestituta ex more munera praebere deberent, minora et vilia sunt adtributa, quae illi suscepta furenter agentes ut indignissima proiecere.*

ture that by the late fourth century had gained a life of its own and was intimately intertwined with the Roman government.⁵⁷

Barbarian warlords, as the leaders of autonomous mercenary brigades seeking service with the Roman military, were an integral and accepted part of the Roman military establishment. But this was a tradition of very long standing, and was not seen as anything to fear by the Roman government. Indeed, it was something to be sought and perpetuated. The leaders of barbarian contingents had an accepted place at the Roman military table. They were not “raiders”, “invaders”, or “the others”, but they were part of “us”.

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⁵⁷ For examples of early fifth-century Roman and barbarian warlords, note WIJNENDAELE 2016 and 2019.

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