

JEROEN W.P. WIJNENDAELE

Perfidious Rome and Its Barbarian Victims

This essay responds to Alexander Demandt's central contention that *die grenznahen Germanen bildeten eine dauernde Bedrohung für das Reich* (=“the neighbouring Germanic peoples posed an enduring threat to the Empire”). It will especially zoom in on the claim that *[w]enn die römisch-germanischen Grenz- und Friedensverträge ebenso oft wie geschlossen auch gebrochen wurden, war das zumeist die Schuld der Germanen* (=“If Roman-Germanic border and peace treaties were broken as often as they were struck, it was mostly the fault of the Germanic peoples”).¹ It will focus primarily on two cases: the peoples bordering the Danube and Rhine ‘outside the Empire’ from Maximian to the death of Theodosius I (ca. 285-395), and the Goths ‘inside the Empire’ from Valens to Valentinian III (ca. 365-455). The present author will argue the opposite, demonstrating that from the late third to the early fifth century the Roman Empire was just as much – if not even more – at fault for break-downs in relations with its barbarian neighbours.

Keywords: barbarians / frontiers / Goths / Late Roman Empire / treaties

Jeroen W.P. Wijnendaele is a Senior Fellow at the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (Germany).

The Eternal Yet Ever Evolving Barbarian

Alexander Demandt rightly points out the importance of borders, not just in the Ancient World, but also in our contemporary one.² Borders imply neighbours. And, then, as now, one rarely can choose the latter. One can, however, choose *how* to interact with neighbours. A popular saying among contemporary Germanic-speaking descendants of the Franks in the Low

¹ DEMANDT, above, p. 37 and 40.

² The late Mike Clover once told me that “disagreement is the spice of life”. This essay is very much written in this spirit, without forgetting the intellectual debt the scholarly community owes to Professor Demandt, for his myriad studies that have advanced the field of Late Antiquity over more than half a century now. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Universities of Bonn and Düsseldorf and at the Danish Institute in Rome, which led to stimulating debates with the audiences. I also wish to thank Alexander Sarantis, Danuta Shanzer, and Conor Whately for their astute feedback on the current article.

Countries, maintains that *goede afspraken maken goede vrienden* (= “good agreements make for good friends”). The crux here is that agreements matter, and for agreements to matter, both participants have to honour them. The treacherousness of “the barbarian” was a common trope in Late Antique authors. Latin panegyrics for Tetrarchic and Constantinian emperors residing in Trier, repeatedly lambasted neighbouring Frankish communities for their faithlessness.³ This was not an exclusively Frankish trait. Ammianus remarks how three Alamannic *reges*, in the aftermath of Julian’s victory at Strasbourg in 357, struck a treaty with the Empire and actually maintained its terms out of fear, “despite their treacherous disposition”.⁴ Similarly, a fragment attributed to Eunapius’ contemporary history, describes how leaders of the Goths deserted to the Romans in the early years of Theodosius I’s reign. Yet among these, there were several who allegedly had sworn “a most unholy [oath] that went beyond the normal savagery of the barbarians [to] use every treacherous device to harm [the Romans] who had taken them in”.⁵ Writing a century-and-a-half later, Procopius drew attention to the exemplary conduct of the Herulic commander Pharas by pointing out that he was energetic, serious, and virtuous in every way, although for his people “it is hard not to be treacherous and drunk”.⁶

The remarkable thing about attributing faithlessness to barbarians, whether in general or in a specific context, was that the trait had not always been part and parcel of the standard repertoire of ethnographic clichés deployed by Graeco-Roman authors. The concept of the ‘barbarian’, and its significance, constantly evolved from the hapax βαρβαρόφωνος in Homer’s *Iliad* to denote the gobbledygook of the Carians, to Tacitus’ eventual dedication of an entire treatise to the peoples of *Germania*.⁷ Attitudes could vary wildly among individual authors. Plutarch went as far as to denounce Herodotos as a φιλοβάρβαρος for being too sympathetic towards barbarians (in this case the Persians).⁸ Yet a fellow *Graecus*, Ammianus Marcellinus, had plenty to say about all kinds of barbarians, but never designated the Persians as such.⁹ After the transformation of the Roman Empire in the third century, barbarian treachery increasingly became an ingredient that Roman authors sprinkled into their accounts of their neighbours across the border. But when we leave individual authors’ discourses and imperial

³ E.g. *Pan. Lat.* 10.11.4; 7.4.2; 6.11.4.

⁴ *Amm.* 17.1.13.

⁵ *Eun. Fr.* 59 (BLOCKLEY 1983).

⁶ *Procop. Bell.* 4.4.29–30.

⁷ ISAAC 2014.

⁸ *Plut. Herod. Malign.* 857a.

⁹ DRIJVERS 2011, 70.

propaganda aside, how treacherous were these neighbours in practice? And more importantly: how dangerous were they?

Barbarians as the Punching Bags of the Late Roman Empire

Together with Alamanni and Goths, the Franks loom large in scholarship on the ‘crisis of the third century’.¹⁰ They conducted some of the most spectacular raids on Roman provinces, as Professor Demandt points out: their alleged piracy affected the Aegean, Sicily, and North Africa. Yet we have to wait until the Tetrarchy to get a clearer picture of their interactions with the Empire. Panegyrics written for Maximian, Constantius I, and Constantine I, reveal that there was no such thing as a unified Frankish people, but rather a collection of individual communities, such as (Ch)Attuatari, Bructeri, Chamavi, Salians, and so on. The record of the Tetrarchic and Constantinian emperors until 350 is highly consistent: every raid that Franks dared to undertake on Roman soil, met with brutal reprisals. These wars were certainly not confined to within Roman borders (“fand längst nahezu ausschließlich innerhalb der Reichsgrenzen statt.”) From Maximian in 286 to Arbogastes in 390, imperial armies regularly conducted campaigns across the Rhine. Accounts of such special operations leave little to the imagination: villages were burned down, cattle and people (including women and children) slaughtered, and survivors deported to Gaul.¹¹ One panegyric went so far as to celebrate how these raids provided valuable human resources for the Empire: “the Franks, admitted to our laws, have cultivated the empty fields of the Arvii and the Treveri, so now through [Constantius I’s] victories, ... whatever land remained abandoned in the territory of [Amiens, Beauvais, Troyes, and Langres] turns green again under the cultivation by the barbarian”.¹² If one wishes to assess the threat the Franks posed from the time of the Tetrarchy to that of Theodosius, then the tally is less than impressive: only once did they ever defeat an imperial army, and that was during Magnus Maximus’ civil war of 388 when some of his Gallic troops ran into an ambush across the Rhine.¹³

This should serve as a needed reminder that the damage the Late Roman Empire was able to inflict on Transrhenan or Transdanubian communities was far greater than what it suffered at barbarian hands. Indeed, it

¹⁰ For the Alamanni see Ralph W. MATHISEN’s contribution in this collection.

¹¹ E.g. *Pan. Lat.* 8.2.1; *Amm.* 16.11.9.

¹² *Pan. Lat.* 8.21.1.

¹³ Greg. Tur. *DLH* 2.9 (based on the contemporary history of Sulpicius Alexander). On this Frankish victory, see WIJNENDAELE 2022, 217-218. DRINKWATER (2007) makes the most exhaustive case for the same lack of threat the Alamanni represented to the Late Roman Empire.

could take an entire generation before raids were recorded again, probably because affected communities needed that much time to recover. When Valens went to war with the Goths in the later 360s, he did so because they had sent auxiliaries to help the usurper Procopius. In their defense, however, the Goths claimed that Procopius had presented himself as a legitimate emperor because of his Constantinian credentials.¹⁴ It is significant that this was the very first time the Goths appeared in the context of a conflict in Ammianus' surviving narrative, despite his having covered the events of the previous twelve years. There would have been ample opportunities to raid Thrace during or after the civil wars between Constantius II and Magnentius (as had happened on the Rhine frontier), or during the showdown between Constantius II and Julian. Even as late as the early 360s, the Goths had probably still not fully recovered from the defeat inflicted and treaty imposed on them by Constantine in 332. Another noteworthy feature is that nearly every Late Roman emperor, from the Tetrarchs to Theodosius, tried to bolster his regime in its early stages through victories over barbarians. The reasons for this could be flimsy at best, and the results mixed, as evidenced by Valens' first Gothic wars, which yielded hardly any victories on the battlefield and ended in a truce (as noted by Professor Demandt). Yet Gratian exploited a raid by the Alamannic Lentienses in 378, to conduct an aggressive campaign on their home territories in order to win laurels.¹⁵ As Ammianus makes clear, this delay would contribute dramatically to Valens' defeat.¹⁶ But for a very young and new emperor such as Gratian, it was an opportunity too tempting not to exploit. Here as well we should note that the Lentienses had not been heard of since 354, after being dealt with by Constantius II.¹⁷ And they must have been properly dealt with, because they did not even contribute forces to the grand Alamannic coalition Julian faced three years later at Strasbourg. Hence the peoples of *Barbaricum* served as punching bags, which new and aspiring emperors could batter as initiatory practice.

Furthermore, emperors were not above arbitrary behaviour in dealing with individual communities of 'Goths', 'Franks' or 'Alamanni'. When Julian campaigned in Gaul, he briefly resided in Cologne and immediately came to a peaceful agreement with the neighbouring Frankish kings.¹⁸ However, he was later approached by envoys of Salian Franks, who had

¹⁴ It is interesting that the Goths had also supported Licinius during his final stance against Constantine (Anon. Vales. I.5.27). While Licinius was later branded a usurper, he was unquestionably an emperor who had been legitimately appointed by the senior Augustus Galerius.

¹⁵ Amm. 31.10. Discussed by SHANZER, below, pp. 169-171.

¹⁶ DRIJVERS & TEITLER 2019.

¹⁷ Amm. 15.4.

¹⁸ Amm. 16.3.

settled in Toxandria and now also asked the emperor to come to a peaceful agreement.¹⁹ As Professor Demandt acknowledges, Julian pretended to accept this proposal only to have his cavalry subsequently charge into the Salians until they were brutally subdued. Why the Salians were less worthy of Julian's magnanimity than the transrhenan Franks in the vicinity of Cologne is unclear. It is here that we are justified in asking whether treachery was just as much a standard weapon in the empire's arsenal for dealing with its neighbours. Sometimes, as we shall see, Romans even admitted as much.

When a group of Saxons raided northern Gaul in 370, the regional commander Nannienus first tried halting them in battle, but eventually came to a parley.²⁰ It was agreed that the Saxons could retreat on condition that they supplied recruits for the Imperial army. After this exchange, however, Nannienus organized an ambush – that nearly went awry – but he eventually succeeded in slaughtering the rest of the Saxon host. Ammianus himself admitted that this entire affair could have “been condemned as treacherous and hateful”, but concluded that it would have been a shame not to exploit the opportunity. None other than Julian, when delivering his first panegyric for Constantius II, claimed that Constantine I had worked towards peace with neighbouring barbarian communities because he was concerned about the youth of his sons. Yet he then sowed strife among them so they would wage war upon one another.²¹ To these verdicts, we could add other examples of the Empire pre-emptively orchestrating the elimination of barbarian leaders, such as Julian having the Alamannic *rex* Vadomarius abducted, or the Imperial commander Marcellianus having the Quadian king Gabinius assassinated. Both events took place during banquets in times of peace.²² There is a correlation here that is too neat to be coincidence: precisely when Roman authors started attributing more and more perfidy to barbarians, Roman leaders also increased their own use of subterfuge when dealing with aforesaid peoples.²³ It would be naïve to suppose that the peoples of *Barbaricum* were unaware of this. If anything, the case of the Goths inside the Empire suggests that it was best to be vigilant when dealing with Imperial authorities.

¹⁹ Amm. 17.8. For the mechanisms of such ‘agreements’, see Ralph W. MATHISEN’s contribution in this collection.

²⁰ Amm. 28.5.1-7.

²¹ Jul. *Orat.* I.12-13.

²² LEE 2009 for more cases and analysis.

²³ For a similar analysis of sixth-century interactions between the Empire and barbarians, see SARANTIS 2018. Tang China, which has recently been incorporated in global studies of Late Antiquity, also witnessed the same dichotomy between discourse and praxis, see YANG 2013.

The Aquitanian Goths: From Betrayal to Betrayal to People

There is no need – nor space – to reiterate the road from Adrianople in the late 370s to Aquitaine in the late 410s, that led to the accidental creation of a regional army with substantial political autonomy that became known by the sixth century as ‘the Visigoths’. It was a tragedy, at times even a farce, that could have been avoided at many junctures. Let us look instead at various moments when it was the Empire that either violated agreements with Gothic groups, or deceived them. Between 376 and 410, the original Gothic communities of 376 and those subsequently associated with their leaders suffered indignity after indignity, betrayal after betrayal. The most conspicuous and extreme manifestation of this were, as we shall see, the massacres of 378 in *Oriens*, 400 in Constantinople, and 408 in Italy. Just as before, in all of this we should remember that we only hear the Roman perspective – Jordanes hardly counts as an authentic Gothic voice, let alone a contemporary one.

Ammianus’ final book highlights several incidents that show that Imperial authorities were either corrupt or incompetent, if not both, in their dealing with the Goths who had requested asylum in 376.²⁴ The great historian loathed the Goths, but even he disapproved of the inadequate provisioning of the new recruits, with the damning allegation that they were forced to sell their own children into slavery in return for dogs as food.²⁵ When the Goths finally revolted, it happened after the regional commander Lupicinus had ordered the bodyguards of two Gothic leaders whom he had invited for a dinner to be murdered.²⁶ Again it speaks volumes about Roman ineptitude that they managed to drive Goths serving in the Imperial army to defect to the cause of the rebels, such as the troops of Colias and Sueridus at Adrianople, despite the fact that they had not originally been affiliated with them.²⁷ Yet on the very eve of the battle of Adrianople, Fritigern sought to negotiate an agreement with Valens.²⁸ It was not to be, and the result was an omnishambles of epic proportions.

It is telling, however, that it was not with Adrianople that Ammianus decided to end his history. His final passage recounts how Julius (*magister*

²⁴ Much harder to gauge is the question whether those Goths who were allowed to cross the Danube should have been disarmed (Eunap. *Fr.* 42). This was standard practice for surrendered barbarians. But in this case the sheer scale of the operation, combined with the fact that those Goths would soon depart for Oriens to fight the Persians, may have inspired local Imperial commanders to let the matter rest. This certainly added a lethal ingredient to an already volatile cocktail once the abuse kicked in.

²⁵ Amm. 31.4.11.

²⁶ Amm. 31.5.6

²⁷ Amm. 31.6.

²⁸ Amm. 31.12.8

militum per Orientem) sent messengers to all the local commanders under his jurisdiction when news came to him of the defeat at Adrianople.²⁹ On one and the same day, they were to gather all their Gothic recruits under the pretext of having their salaries paid. Once these had gathered from everywhere, they were slaughtered on the spot. Ammianus himself made little effort to conceal his approval and saw this slaughter as the salvation of the eastern provinces. The most striking aspect of this incident, however, is that these were not adult soldiers, but young prisoners of war who had been retained as hostages.³⁰ On the eastern side of the Taurus Mountains, they could not possibly have posed a threat, let alone supported the Gothic rebels in Thrace. That day of the long knives was nothing less than pure revenge for the Roman defeat. A similar incident may have occurred in 386. A few sources report how the *magister militum* Promotus scored a victory over Goths under the command of a certain Odetheus.³¹ Yet it happened at a river crossing, in a context where it is unclear whether Odetheus' men would have been assembled for a *receptio* as future recruits and run into an organized massacre, rather than attempting a straightforward raid.³²

It is important here to remind ourselves that this did not mean that Emperors – at least the more astute ones – were hellbent on trying to eradicate every Goth on Imperial soil. Yet many authors believed that they should. The Goths who remained in Eastern Roman service contributed decisively to Theodosius' victory over Eugenius at the Frigidus in 394, yet suffered severe casualties in the process. Orosius infamously claimed that the emperor had needlessly expended 10,000 of them as, in effect, ballista-folder on the first day's assaults against Arbogastes's defenses, thus ensuring a double victory for the Empire.³³ As is often the case, we should think twice before believing Orosius. Among those left on the battlefield will have been many veterans of Adrianople, good soldiers whom Theodosius did not wish to squander but had employed to break his opponent's battle-formation. Even his own commander Bacurius had gone down with them.³⁴ Yet Orosius' sentiments were widely shared by contemporary peers. They resonate in Synesius' writings about "solving" the Gothic question that dominated Constantinopolitan politics in the late 390s, and they are fundamental for understanding Alaric's constraints.

²⁹ Amm. 31.16.8.

³⁰ SPEIDEL 1998.

³¹ Claud. *IV cons. Hon.*, 619-637; Zos. IV.35.1.

³² BURNS 1994, 89-91.

³³ Oros. 7.5.19. Not much credence should be given to the number, given Orosius uses it liberally as a number for war-casualties throughout his history (e.g. 3.16.7; 4.20.15; 5.20.8; 5.23.11).

³⁴ Zos. 5.38.3.

There is no need to play devil's advocate when analyzing Alaric's career, which was marked by a willingness to use (the threat) of violence to advance his goals. Whether it was the inhabitants of the Greek provinces in 395-397, or various Italic communities in 408-410, ordinary people suffered the consequences of his warlordism. Yet Alaric also functioned as the champion of men who had shed their blood in the service of the Empire. How should we conceive of the Goths following Alaric, some of whom eventually settled in Aquitaine? Professor Demandt refers to such men as mercenaries, and this is definitely an advance over older visions of wandering or marauding tribes in a quest to carve out kingdoms. Yet the 'mercenary' label obscures more than it explains. Mercenaries were a reality in Antiquity, especially during the Classical Greek and Hellenistic eras when there were many competing city-states, kingdoms, and even empires to whom soldiers-of-fortune could sell their services.³⁵ It is much harder to discern true forms of mercenaries in Late Antiquity. Alaric clearly sought gainful (i.e. permanent) employment for himself and his men within the regular forces of the Empire. A conspicuous exception may be the Huns in Europe, who are noted for supporting various causes and then withdrawing after being paid, before Attila's consolidation of autocracy.³⁶

Christine Delaplace suggests in her seminal account on the Gothic *regnum* of Aquitaine, that as far as the Empire was concerned, the Goths never constituted an independent nation on Roman soil.³⁷ Though she is also willing to use labels such as *condottieri* and 'mercenaries', a far more useful analogy she offers for understanding the interaction between Gothic leaders and Imperial courts, is that of the Roman Republic and the Italic *socii* (the latter relationship rightly categorized by Professor Demandt as a hegemonic symmachy). From the 380s to the 470s, the Goths essentially acted as allies and clients of a government that needed their military aid, but was generally unwilling to grant them the status that would have allowed them to participate in affairs of state. This becomes abundantly clear in Alaric's negotiations with Honorius (408-410), a rare case where the sources delineate various conditions, and where the former was much more concerned with becoming *magister militum* than with gaining land to farm. To pursue this line of thought further, it is much more profitable to regard the military conflicts between the western Roman government and

³⁵ TRUNDLE 2004; ROP 2019.

³⁶ Examples include the Hunnic leader Uldin who eliminated Gainas and his last supporters for Constantinople ca. 400 (Zos. 5.22.1-3) and whose services were requested by Stilicho in the war against Radagaisus in 406 (Oros. 7.37.12). Similarly, Aëtius hired Hunnic mercenaries for the cause of the usurper Ioannes in 425. The majority of these he later sent back to their lands across the Danube, after striking a deal with the Eastern Roman command that had brought down Ioannes (Philost. *HE* 12.14).

³⁷ DELAPLACE 2015.

the various *regna* in Gaul, Spain, and Africa during the fifth century, as provincial civil wars (*pace* Henning Börm) rather than as wars against external invaders.³⁸ But just as at Adrianople, it did not have to come to this.

When Alaric revolted in 395, he was an officer (of unclear rank but high enough that he believed it sufficed for eventual promotion to MVM), using the death of Theodosius I as an opportunity to exploit the grievances of several Gothic regiments that had suffered grave losses at the Frigidus the previous year. The looting they carried out in Thessaly has often been regarded as typical barbarian conduct. But one could go back as far as the mutiny of the Pannonian legions, at the time of Augustus' death in 14, to see similar behaviour by troops in similar circumstances.³⁹ Throughout the following years, we should also remember that Alaric's course was not the only path for Goths, let alone the default one, as evidenced by the careers of Fravitta, Modares, and Munderic, who all continued to serve in the Imperial army. At times, such as between 397 and 400 in the East and again between 403 (or 405 at the latest) and 408 in the West, Alaric too held a regular Imperial command.⁴⁰ But, just as it is important not to forget that Alaric's rise to power was born out of violence, we should be equally mindful of the Imperial violence that caused him to cease to be cooperative and loyal. While no source explains why Alaric left his eastern command and marched on Italy in 401, his decision was probably linked to the pogroms unleashed on Goths in Constantinople a year earlier. At its nadir, a church was torched where Goths had sought sanctuary. The targeted Goths were soldiers, and their families related to the aspiring generalissimo Gainas (at that point not yet a renegade).⁴¹ In the fallout from Gainas' conflict – resolved *nota bene* by the Goth Fravitta – Alaric may have either lost his command, or been subject to immense pressure by his followers to find a better deal elsewhere.

Such dynamics are explicitly recorded in 408, when the cabal at Honorius' court that brought down Stilicho, organized across Italy a similar massacre of families belonging to his barbarian auxiliaries.⁴² The surviving soldiers, justifiably incensed flocked *en masse* to Alaric's banner. It is, however, often forgotten that, despite intense pressure from his new troops, Alaric at this point petitioned Honorius' court to keep the peace by simply honouring the agreements Stilicho had made with him.⁴³ Only when the junta rejected this, ridiculously believing they had taken back control,

³⁸ BÖRM 2017.

³⁹ Tacit. *Ann.* 1.16-30.

⁴⁰ For Alaric's imperial commands, see *PLRE* 2: 'Alaricus 1', 44-46.

⁴¹ CAMERON & LONG 1993, chapter 6.

⁴² WIJNENDAELE 2018a, 270-272.

⁴³ Zos. 5.36.1-2.

did Alaric cast the die. He crossed into Italy with his forces, and mayhem ensued. No longer on the Empire's payroll, Alaric once again turned to extorting and pillaging local towns to supply his followers. Yet for a year-and-a-half, he kept negotiating in vain with Honorius' government to find a solution. During his final attempt to come to a diplomatic solution he was ambushed by Sarus, the nemesis of his brother-in-law Athaulf. Given the Empire's penchant for underhand tactics, Honorius' court may have orchestrated this attempt to assassinate Alaric.⁴⁴ Only then was Rome finally sacked in 410. It would take another decade till an agreement was finally reached that saw the core of Alaric's host settled in Aquitaine.

Yet Gothic misgivings about Imperial authorities never went away. Consider Athaulf's perspective when he finally pledged his sword to Honorius' cause in 413, and had the Gallic usurpers Jovinus and Sebastianus crushed in exchange for food to feed his people.⁴⁵ The *magister militum* Constantius was unable to meet his end of the bargain, however, because his rival Heraclianus thwarted the delivery of African grain.⁴⁶ Constantius could hardly be blamed for this, yet Athaulf must have interpreted it as the umpteenth example of how the Empire could never be fully trusted. Similar tensions may explain Gothic attitudes, when in 422 the *magister militum* Castinus campaigned against the Vandals in Spain. Castinus' army was supported by Gothic auxiliaries, and managed to have the Vandals surrounded, starved into submission, and reduced to pleading for surrender. Yet Castinus insisted on giving battle regardless, which prompted the Gothic auxiliaries to desert.⁴⁷ They may have honestly wondered how wise it was to follow a man who had no interest in letting other barbarians survive who were prepared to surrender. Castinus was resoundingly defeated, which shattered Constantius III's fragile restoration of Imperial security in Spain.⁴⁸ Unlike the Goths, who received an imperially sanctioned settlement in Aquitaine, the Vandals had been on the receiving end of no fewer than three Imperial campaigns in the course of five years (at least one of which had decimated Alani and Siling Vandals). Small wonder they radicalized to such an extent that they adopted a militant brand of Arianism, allowing them to commandeer the wealth of Catholic bishops.⁴⁹ Geiseric

⁴⁴ WIJNENDAELE 2019, 479-484.

⁴⁵ Olympiod. *Fr.* 22 (BLOCKLEY 1983).

⁴⁶ WIJNENDAELE 2017, 146-147.

⁴⁷ Hyd. 69 [77 BURGESS 1993].

⁴⁸ WIJNENDAELE 2015, 43-46; STEINACHER 2017, 78-83; ROBERTO 2020, 45-49.

⁴⁹ For the suggestion of a new Vandal 'identity', and conversion to Arianism, as a result of Imperial-Gothic campaigns in Spain during the later 410s, see MODÉRAN 2014, 86-91.

took the fight to Africa where he used every future opportunity to exploit western Roman weakness to ensure the survival of his people.⁵⁰

Internal Borders and the Unravelling of Empire

For the rest of the fifth century, Aquitanian Goths would lend troops for the western Roman cause, or against it, depending on which powerbroker was steering the imperial government. They were keenly aware that they should never let their guard down. The Burgundians, who in 413 had received permission to settle along the Rhine, were nearly exterminated by Aëtius and his Hunnic allies in the mid-430s.⁵¹ This was probably as recompense to Attila and Bleda, who had sponsored Aëtius' return to power at Ravenna in 433, and who had lost their uncle Octar to the Burgundians in 430.⁵² The Aquitanian Goths resisted similar attempts by Aëtius' subordinate Litorius, who also used Hunnic mercenaries to fight his way to Toulouse, where he was ignominiously captured and died. At this point, Professor Demandt is right that, since the Imperial West had no secure geographical borders in the fifth century, it had reached its own temporal limit.⁵³ The presence of various armed communities with considerable autonomy inside the Transalpine provinces, taxed the Imperial West's energies to enforce borders on them from Italy – especially once Geiseric moved his forces to the Maghreb and conquered Africa Proconsularis. And yet the peoples living inside the Western Empire in the fifth century were not the same as those living across the Rhine before 405, or across the Danube before 375. They were products of Late Roman Imperialism, moulded by processes of violence, deception and exploitation. When they were finally settled, they became a new provincial military elite, who in effect functioned as the *Socii* of the Fifth Century Imperial West, supplying it with troops, but without enjoying political equity. It was a system that need not necessarily have led to the end of empire in the West. Indeed, at its finest hour in 451 it halted Attila – hitherto *Invictus* – during his invasion of Gaul, in the most momentous land battle of that century which saw communities pitted against one another all the way from Armorica to Crimea.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ CLOVER (1966) demonstrated that Geiseric's aggressive foreign policy was primarily devoted to the survival of his *regnum*. In both this study and the previously mentioned one of Modéran, we still feel the loss of these scholars and their finalized book-projects.

⁵¹ Prosper *s.a.* 435.2.

⁵² Socrat. *HE* 7.30.6.

⁵³ "Seit das Reich im 5. Jahrhundert keine sichere räumliche Grenze mehr besaß, war seine zeitliche Grenze erreicht." DEMANDT, above, p. 42.

⁵⁴ Jord. *Get.* 191.

Here I wish to conclude and add an alternative to professor Demandt's thesis. Just as Alaric's career would have been impossible without the Cold War between the powerbrokers of Arcadius and Honorius' courts, so too I believe a range of other internal factors contributed decisively to the disintegration of the Western Roman Empire: institutionalized child-emperorship, the warlordism of western Roman officers, and an extremely rich senatorial aristocracy that shamelessly refused to contribute to the taxation necessary to support its own army.⁵⁵ Without these three elements, one can ask whether there would have been any internal borders at all that Constantius III had to impose on the settlements of ca. 420, let alone those eventually resulting in the *Regna* of Gaul, Spain, and Africa. Could it be that the Western Empire mainly had itself to blame for its own demise?

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