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It has become acceptable that early Germanic ‘History’ began when in his *Bellum Gallicum*, concerning his campaigns in eastern Gaul, Caesar dealt with a Celticised people called *Germani*, who, he was told, had originally come from regions east of the Rhine. Further north he identified four tribal groups to the left of the Rhine River, who supposedly called themselves *Germani*. None of them will have spoken a Germanic dialect. Perhaps Caesar knew the work of Poseidonius of Apamea (c.135 – 51 B.C.) who around 80 B.C. wrote a history in which he named *Germani* living on the right side of the Rhine. Even though the peoples to the east of the Rhine included Celts or mixed populations, as a political device Caesar drew a population boundary along the Rhine and across cultural lines, invented a people and extended to all of them to the east the name *Germani*, linked them emotionally with the totally unrelated Cimbri and Teutones and bestowed on the east-rhenish lands the name *Germania* in contrast to *Gallia*. In the meantime it has become a truism that such lines of demarcation as rivers as well as frontiers can unite as much as they can divide peoples.

The *Germani* had no name for themselves. To the Greeks and later Byzantines all northern peoples were *Keltoi* or Celto-Scythians. As an ethnic designation the *Germani* were an academic invention. Thereafter, largely based on Tacitus (c.A.D.55 – 120), rightly or wrongly, derivatives of the term have been applied to the region and to the people inhabiting it, though at no time was the concept of a ‘people’ more than an abstraction. While elsewhere, in eastern Europe for instance, cohesive archeological ‘cultures’, such as the Przeworsk and Wielbark cultures, using common forms consistently could be identified, such a discovery was not possible in *Germania magn* for the post-Celtic and pre-Roman periods. In north-central Europe Tacitus only speaks of cultic communities.

The recent literature shows that the authors of Late Antiquity used such terms as *Germani*, *gentes Germani* or *Germania* as inaccurate classifications and only out of a vague tradition rather than as a description of actual conditions, based on the most superficial of contemporary knowledge of population groups or geographic locations. There was some satisfaction to refer to the peoples living beyond the Rhine-Danube frontier as *barbarians* and their habitats as *barbaricum*. Because
it was the function and responsibility of the ‘Empire without limits’ to intervene there whenever deemed appropriate in order to protect civilization against them and their aggressive threats and to ensure eternal victory, Rome could see itself on a permanent war-footing meeting out now preventive, now retaliatory strikes. Founded largely on the generalizing perceptions of the ancient ethnographers, propagandistic military reports and the hearsay of traders, coming from an alien cultural environment, this prejudice, reinforced by an inadequate knowledge of geography, ‘knew’ them to live beyond ‘civilization’ on the perimeter of the world, in squalid conditions, located in gruesome forests and fearful moors, subject to endless rain and eternal snow. Because of their primitive, semi-nomadic existence they were taken to be inferior, aggressive and despicable of character. Easily recognized on monuments because of their dishevelled, disorderly and untidy looks, they were threatening in appearance, bestial in their fierce practices, degenerate of being and incapable of any moderation or spirituality. They were the antithesis of all order and permanence and as personifications of evil seen to be naturally suited for destruction, or at least enslavement. It mattered to stress the presumed threat which they constituted to Roman civilization from beyond its limits at all times. Such uncritical, overly simplistic, misleading and propagandistic perceptions, not actually aiming to render an objective account, were not to be revised in their own time, even though they were in a constant state of flux. ‘Military intelligence’ had no intention, no need, to re-examine the traditional bias. The peoples living along the Rhine, Danube and beyond, were able to appreciate more than that for which they were given credit. Did they, however, recognize more than their basic common interrelatedness based on self-identity within the group, its proximity and their family ties? They don’t appear to have had a common myth of origin or socio-political structure and perhaps did not refer to themselves by a common name. But what was the origin of the Celtic tribal names, which were inscribed on the Tropaeum alpium erected in 9 B.C. and dedicated to Augustus, commemorating the conquest of the Alps? They must have identified with names before the appearance of the mega-tribes beginning with the fourth century and before they became used to being labelled by the Romans as a means of dealing with the seemingly nameless northerners. What matters most is what they may have called themselves.

To speak of these tribes collectively as ‘Germans’ would assume that there existed among them a sense of long established ethnic
homogeneity based on understandable dialects, common cultural forms, socio-political structures, cohesive continuity of descent, in short, of a commonly shared sense of identity expressed in a name. These cannot be demonstrated and were not ever really to come into being. Hence it should be considered that the term ‘Germanic’ is merely a preferred, though imprecise, term of convenience. It was a vainglorious attempt to trace the Germanic ethnogenesis to the brilliant Northern Bronze Age Culture in northern Europe and it is now accepted that, imaginative poetic generation myths to the contrary, Germanic ethnicity was the result of a lengthy polyethnic process of conglomeration in unassuming surroundings with humble materials. Eventually, such tribal bonding as there was, resulted from common experiences, felicitous as well as traumatic ones, rather than from a common ethnicity.

It is difficult to determine an acceptable designation with which to differentiate the groups of multi-ethnic peoples. In one sense a word as ‘Germanic’ misconstrues the identity of the tribal groups since they were neither ethnically nor linguistically uniform. It is a debatable term in Archeology where the inventory of anonymous objects cannot readily be linked conclusively with tribal names as such, but only by deriving interdisciplinary conclusions from known settlement histories. It is, however, a specialized term reserved by the philologists to describe an aspect of Indo-European etymology as it applies to all those participants in the First Germanic Consonant Shift. Yet it is a better term than the inaccurate ‘Teutonic’ when it is used as a cliche to embrace all manner of pejoratives. Nevertheless, restricted to Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, the term ‘Germanic’ will be applied without prejudice of biology or chronology and with the understanding that as an ethnic term, ‘Germanic’ implies a comprehensive, polyethnic, multilingual and multicultural designation applied to the groups of mixed populations originating in the regions beyond the Roman Empire’s northern frontiers.

The archeological evidence from their homelands demonstrates that during the centuries of our concern these peoples were not erratically scouring, undisciplined, socially amorphous hordes, but societies with socio-political and administrative structures. During the centuries the Roman army was Germanized and agreements of accommodation between Rome and the tribes living outside and inside the Imperial frontiers had come into effect. These determined the manner in which tribal groups were admitted, even invited, into the Empire.
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and provisioned in return for services to the Empire. These groups did not have a common and co-ordinated strategy to render the Empire ineffective by means of a devastating conquest, nor was it a dispossessing land rush. Most of their movement within the Empire took the form of military assignments performed in the service of the Empire. In view of their relatively small numbers they initially settled in pockets and generally life followed its accustomed patterns. The many returnees from military service and some continuing association with the Empire had introduced political structures and developed cultural enrichments, with which they had gained certain civilizational, material and cultural achievements beyond the frontiers. These were on a comparable level with those of the ‘Romans’ of more modest means living in the northern provinces of the Empire. At the same time, and far into the hinterland of Germania magna the Germanic nobility saw role models among the Roman officer corps. Of course, their worldview had, as far as one can tell, developed neither philosophy nor theology, though they did arrive at an artistic response. That they brought with them a political and a cultural potential is indicated by their willingness to assimilate with the socially elevated Roman world. This assimilation was particularly demonstrated by their leaders, who married even into the Imperial family, and by the general indirect preparedness to adopt and adapt Rome’s material civilization. While some of the Germanic personalities participated in discourse with the still pagan intellectuals, others, such as the Empress Eudoxia, daughter of the Frank Bauto, had no hesitation to persecute such members of Germanic tribes as lived in Constantinople. Evidently the progressing assimilation assumed bewildering dimensions producing crises of personal and social identity, reflected in the Romanization of personal names. However, even during the upheavals and transitions Roman artists and architects were valued by the new lords and were able to continue their work, while repairs and improvements were promoted to counteract the neglect and decay. The new rulers tried to make their contribution to the reconfiguration of the Roman Empire. What bothered the Christian intellectuals of the day was not that the ‘strangers’ were ‘barbarians’ but that they were Arian Christians. It is very likely that in the interaction the ‘Romans’ cared little to gain, weigh, discuss or revise any objective insights and understanding of the social, political and cultural dynamics of contemporary Germanic society, either within or without the frontiers of the Empire. The barbarians were perceived to be an ever-present threat.
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To present an overview of the archeological evidence for all the Germanic tribal groups and their regions of eventual settlement, including Vandals, Visigoths, Ostrogoths, Burgundians and all of the regions occupied by the Franks, would go far beyond the scope of this book. While there are some objects which are stylistically typical for all the Germanic peoples and their settlement areas to which reference has been made, it would be distracting to devote space to a detailed discussion of the variety of types of gilt silver fibulas/brooches in south-central Europe, for instance, or funerary practices among the Goths in southern Russia, settlement patterns in Vandal Africa, and so forth. Instead it is the intention of this book to deal with the material evidence of those peoples who settled along the Rhine, the Alps, the North and Baltic Seas and along the eastern frontiers with the Slavs. The material civilization of the tribal groups settled along and within these generally natural boundaries — Alemans, Bavarians, early Burgundians, Franks, Frisians, early Lombards, Saxons and Thuringians — will be discussed in terms of the archeological evidence as it relates firstly to known History and to settlement patterns and to archeological inventories.

This book is an attempt to discuss the material evidence obtained by archeological means in order to amplify the available information about the societies, their hierarchical distinctions, their social dynamics and values and something of the ethnological, cultural context from which the people entered into history. It is an attempt to complement our knowledge of these societies by means not readily evident in the histories recording their appearance. It examines at length the material evidence derived from archeological remains concerning the Germanic peoples in Central Europe, first in terms of their settlements and then in terms of their funerary evidence. Each of these allows conclusions about cultural patterns and practices, and about activities and the emergence of social differentiations.

It will be easily noticed throughout the book that the documentary literature of significant texts is complemented with the ancillary documentation provided by the archeological history and the pertinent literature of significant objects. The numerous objects shown integrated throughout the text are visual quotations. The objects ‘speak’ a language of which the vocabulary is not readily understood, for it may be cultic, ethnic, social, economic and even anthropological. Even the most mundane artefact expresses a human quality about those who made and used it. These are objects the features of which can be easily
overlooked or relegated to the level of mere ornamentation. A ‘multilingualism’ of the languages of texts and objects speaks for the cultural and civilizational characteristics of these early European peoples. Here the literature of primary texts bears much less emphasis and has to be considered in tandem with the nature of primary objects as equally significant source documents, for often the objects ‘speak’ a language of intricate understandings and appreciations where the texts must remain silent. Readers versed in the ‘language’ of texts may not gladly want to consider the ‘language of objects. But perhaps a new emphasis can be effected which will pay greater heed to the role played by objects when examining the reconfiguration of the Roman Empire and of the participating peoples. When considered together it will be evident that the Central European region in question developed in its component entities at an early stage many important elements of cultural cohesion well before these entities came under the control of the Carolingian administration.