

**Beyond the River, under the Eye of Rome**  
**Ethnographic Landscapes, Imperial Frontiers, and the Shaping of a Danubian Borderland**

by

Timothy Campbell Hart

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor David S. Potter, Co-Chair  
Professor Emeritus Raymond H. Van Dam, Co-Chair  
Assistant Professor Ian David Fielding  
Professor Christopher John Ratté

© Timothy Campbell Hart

[harttimo@umich.edu](mailto:harttimo@umich.edu)

ORCID iD: 0000-0002-8640-131X

*For my family*

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have gone to wreck and ruin on the shoals of academic controversy over ‘grand strategy’ and ‘barbarian ethnogenesis.’

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

### Primary Sources

A.M.	Ammianus Marcellinus, <i>Res Gestae</i>
<i>AWP</i>	ps. Hippocrates, <i>Airs, Waters, and Places</i>
<i>Adv. Marc.</i>	Tertullian, <i>Adversus Marcionem</i>
<i>Arg.</i>	Valerius Flaccus, <i>Argonautica</i>
<i>Can. Ep.</i>	Gregory Thaumaturgus, <i>Canonical Epistle</i>
Claud.	Claudius Claudianus:
<i>Cos. IV Hon.</i>	<i>Panegyricus de Quarto Consulatu Honorii Augusti</i>
<i>Cos. VI Hon.</i>	<i>Panegyricus de Sexto Consulatu Honorii Augusti</i>
<i>in Eut.</i>	<i>in Eutropium</i>
<i>in Ruf.</i>	<i>in Rufinum</i>
<i>Goth.</i>	<i>de Bello Gothico</i>
<i>Cod. Vind. Hist. gr.</i>	<i>Codex Vindobonensis Hist. gr.</i>
<i>Cons. Const.</i>	<i>Consularia Constantinopolitana</i>
<i>Cos. Ind.</i>	Cosmas Indicopleustes, <i>Topographia Christiana</i>
<i>CTh</i>	<i>Codex Theodosianus</i>
<i>de Admin.</i>	Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, <i>de Administrando Imperio</i>
<i>de Reg.</i>	Synesius of Cyrene, <i>de Regno</i>
Dio	Cassius Dio, <i>Res Gestae</i>
Festus	Festus, <i>Brevarium</i>
Florus	Florus, <i>Epitome</i>
Hydatius	Hydatius, <i>Chronica</i>
Joh. Ant.	John of Antioch, fragments
Mal.	John Malalas, <i>Chronographia</i>
Marc. Com.	Marcellinus Comes, <i>Chonicon</i>
Men. Prot.	Menander Protector, fragments
Olymp.	Olympiodorus of Thebes, fragments
Opt. Por.	Optatianus Porphyrius, <i>Carmina</i>
<i>Orig. Const.</i>	<i>Origo Constantini (Anonymous Valesianus 1)</i>
<i>Pas. Sab.</i>	ps. Cyril of Scythopolis, <i>Passio Sabae</i>
Pet. Pat.	Petrus Patricius
Philost.	Philostorgius, <i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i>
<i>Princ. Hist.</i>	Fronto, <i>Principium Historiae</i>
Priscus	Priscus of Panium, fragments
Prosp.	Prosper of Aquitaine, <i>Epitoma Chronicon</i>
<i>Scyth.</i>	Herrenius Dexippus, <i>Scythica</i>

Soc.	Socrates Scholasticus, <i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i>
Soz.	Sozomon, <i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i>
Strat.	ps. Maurice, <i>Strategikon</i>
Sync.	George Syncellus, <i>Extract of Chronography</i>
Theophanes	Theophanes, <i>Chronographia</i>
Tox.	Lucian of Samosata, <i>Toxaris, or On Friendship</i>
Wars	Procopius of Caesarea, <i>History of the Wars of Justinian</i>

### Secondary Literature

AntTan.	<i>Antik Tanulmányok</i> [Journal of Ancient Studies], Budapest: 1954–
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> , Th. Mommsen et al., eds. Berlin: 1863–
ILS	<i>Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae</i> , H. Dessau ed. Berlin: 1892–1962.
OLD	<i>Oxford Latin Dictionary</i> , P. G. W. Glare, ed. Oxford: 1992
PLRE	<i>Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire</i> , A. H. M. Jones et al., eds. Cambridge: 1971–1992
RIC	<i>Roman Imperial Coinage</i> , H. Mattingly et al., eds. London: 1968–1994.
RIU	<i>Die römischen Inschriften Ungarns</i> , L. Barkóczi et al., eds. Amsterdam: 1972–
Tit. Aq.	<i>Tituli Aquincenses</i> , P. Kovács and Á. Szabó, eds. Budapest: 2009–2010

## NOTES

**On Maps and Figures:** All figures are the author's original creations unless otherwise noted. Open-source G.I.S. data on terrain, rivers, and Roman roads was obtained from the University of North Carolina's Ancient World Mapping Center (<<http://awmc.unc.edu/wordpress/>>). Specific details of natural and political boundaries, however, are solely based on the author's own research. Site and city locations were taken from the geographic coordinates on Google Maps (<<https://www.google.com/maps>>). All photographs were taken by the author.

**On Abbreviations:** Throughout this study I have generally conformed to the standard abbreviations for ancient authors listed in the Oxford Classical Dictionary, 4th edition (S. Hornblower et al., eds. Oxford: 2012), but in a few cases I have employed shorter abbreviations of my own. These, together with those authors not included in the O.C.D. are listed in the abbreviations section above. I have largely avoided employing needless abbreviation of journal titles in my bibliography, except for a few epigraphic corpora and other standard reference works for which abbreviation is expected. These are listed, following the primary sources.

**On Fragmentary Authors:** I have cited the following fragmentary ancient sources using the numbering systems employed by the editors listed below.

Dexippus of Athens	Mecella, L. ed. Tivoli: 2013; Martin, G., ed. Tübingen: 2006
Dio Cassius, fragmentary books	Cary, E., ed. and trans. Cambridge, MA: 1961 (Loeb Classical Library)
Eunapius of Sardis	Blockley, R. C., ed. and trans. Liverpool: 1983
John of Antioch	Mariev, S., ed. and trans. Berlin: 2008
Menander Protector	Blockley, R. C., ed. and trans. Liverpool: 1985
Olympiodorus of Thebes	Blockley, R. C., ed. and trans. Liverpool: 1983
Priscus of Panium	Blockley, R. C., ed. and trans. Liverpool: 1983

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the intersection of political, ideological, and ecological forces in the borderland region extending along and beyond the Middle and Lower Danube *limites* of the Roman Empire. This region, roughly coterminous with the Danube drainage basin, and covering the modern nations of Hungary, and Romania, as well as parts of Austria, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Moldova, and Ukraine, was one of the most crucial stages upon which the later acts of Roman imperial history were played. In the following chapters, I employ ideas and models from current borderland studies and environmental history to compose a holistic account of the Roman-era Danubian Borderland that seeks to move beyond the horizons of individual Balkan academics and overworked models of ‘barbarian ethnogenesis.’ At the broadest level, this dissertation presents a case-study of how hegemonic power functioned in antiquity, in dialogue with diverse peoples and topographies. More specifically, I demonstrate how entrenched Greco-Roman ethnographic stereotypes and theories of environmental determinism were drafted into the service of Roman imperialism and came to profoundly shape the destinies of the people living on both sides of the river, frequently in unintended ways.

This dissertation contains two major sections. In the first, I examine the ecology and topography of the Danube Basin with an eye towards identifying natural boundaries and routes of connection across the landscape. This section also considers the arrival of Rome in the region at the dawn of the Common Era, and how the establishment of a military border along the right bank of

the Danube served to disrupt the region's preexisting natural and cultural rhythms. I approach this disruption by investigating how Rome's continued military presence along the Danube not only forced Greeks and Romans to alter the way they perceived the native people of the Danube Basin, but also exerted a strong influence over the political and cultural organization of the people living beyond the Middle Danube whom the Romans called Sarmatian Iazyges.

In the second half of this dissertation, I shift my focus eastward in order to write a new history of the Lower Danubian Borderland during the third through fifth centuries CE, when this region stood at the center of social, political, and military transformations wracking the Roman world. Throughout this section, I discuss how perceptions of, and policies towards the people beyond the Lower Danube were inspired by Rome's earlier encounter with the Iazyges in the plains beyond the Middle Danube. Crucially, I demonstrate how these ethnographic expectations - which developed to explain a particular cultural and natural setting - were misplaced when transferred from that original context to the 'Gothic' world of the eastern Danube Basin. Time and again, Roman decision makers thought they knew what to expect from the barbarians of this region, and in nearly every instance those expectations were proven inaccurate, frequently with disastrous consequences.

Much ink has been spilled over the years dissecting Rome's encounter with the peoples beyond their Danube *limes*, but by reassessing that encounter through the lens of the tenacious, insidious ethnographic stereotypes of transdanubians common across the Roman world, we can refine our understanding of both later Roman history, and the hegemonic and ideological forces that shaped the development of the empire's neighbors in the Danubian Borderland.



## INTRODUCTION

*During the reign of Constantius Augustus, when Valerius was governor of Thrace, it was announced that a great treasure had been found. Valerius visited the find spot and learned from the locals that it was a holy place, and that statues had been consecrated there according to an ancient rite. Valerius reported his findings to the emperor and received a rescript to confiscate any objects he discovered. When excavations had been completed, three statues of solid silver were found deposited there; they were done in a barbarian style, depicting men with hands bound, dressed in the embroidered clothing of the barbarians, with long hair, and deposited pointing towards the north, that is, towards the land of the barbarians. Only a few days after the statues were removed, the entire Gothic people overran Thrace, and only a little later Hunnic and Sarmatian tribes invaded both Illyricum and Thrace. For the holy site lay between Thrace and Illyricum, and based on the number of statues, it seems they had been consecrated to ward off the whole of the barbaricum. –Olympiodorus, fr. 27 (c. 425 CE)<sup>1</sup>*

### *I. A River and an Ideology*

When Olympiodorus of Thebes sat down to write his history of the reign of Honorius, he was faced with a daunting challenge. The Roman Empire of his day was a rapidly changing place in many spheres, and frequently not for the better. The sack of Rome by Alaric's Goths was still fresh in living memory, and disturbing rumors of a *nova feritas* from beyond the Danube were swirling at

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<sup>1</sup> Ἐν γὰρ ταῖς ἡμέραις, φησί, Κωνσταντίου τοῦ βασιλέως, ἐν τῇ Θράκῃ Οὐαλερίου ἄρχοντος, μῆνυσις γέγονεν ὡς θησαυρὸς εὐρεθείη. Οὐαλέριος δὲ παρὰ τὸν τόπον παραγενόμενος μανθάνει παρὰ τῶν ἐπιχωρίων ἱερὸν εἶναι τὸν τόπον, καὶ ἐξ ἀρχαίας τελετῆς ἀνδριάντας ἐν αὐτῷ ἀφιερῶσθαι. Εἶτα ἀναφέρει ταῦτα τῷ βασιλεῖ, καὶ δέχεται γράμμα ἐπιτρέπον αὐτῷ ἀναλαβεῖν τὰ μνησθέντα. Ἀνορυχθέντος τοίνυν τοῦ τόπου εὐρίσκονται τρεῖς ἀνδριάντες δι' ὅλου ἐξ ἀργύρου πεποιημένοι, ἐν σχήματι βαρβαρικῶ κατακείμενοι καὶ ἐξηγκωνισμένοι κατ' ἀμφοῖν ταῖν χεροῖν, ἐνδεδυμένοι δὲ βάρβαρον πεποικιλμένην ἐσθῆτα, καὶ κομῶντες τὰς κεφαλὰς, νεύοντες ἐπὶ τὸ ἀρκτῶον μέρος, τουτέστι κατὰ τοῦ βαρβαρικοῦ χώρου. Ὡν ἀνδριάντων ἀναληφθέντων πάραυτα καὶ μετ' ὀλίγας ἡμέρας πρῶτον μὲν τὸ Γόθων ἔθνος πᾶσαν ἐπιτρέχει τὴν Θράκην, ἔμελλε δὲ μικρὸν ὕστερον καὶ τὸ τῶν Οὐννων καὶ τὸ τῶν Σαρματῶν καταδραμεῖσθαι τὸ τε Ἰλλυρικὸν καὶ αὐτὴν τὴν Θράκην· ἐν μέσῳ γὰρ αὐτῆς τε Θράκης καὶ τοῦ Ἰλλυρικοῦ κατέκειτο τὰ τῆς τελετῆς, καὶ ἐφκει τῶν τριῶν ἀνδριάντων ὁ ἀριθμὸς κατὰ παντὸς τετελέσθαι βαρβάρου. We should probably read the emperor here as Constantius III, the politico and short-lived co-emperor with Honorius in 421. This fits with the curse narrative since 422 (Olympiodorus' "a little later") did witness Hunnic raids (Marc. Com. s.a. 422; Maenchen-Helfen 1973, pp. 76–77).

the Imperial court in Ravenna.<sup>2</sup> Nowhere was the uncertainty of the times manifested so clearly as in the empire's Danubian provinces. Since the early first century CE,<sup>3</sup> the Danube *limes* – a line of road-connected forts and watchtowers decorating nearly the full length of the great river's right bank – had stood as a visible symbol for the citizens of the empire of the boundary between civilization and barbarism, but events of the previous half-century had revealed the lie behind the *limes'* supporting geographic and ethnographic ideologies.

The river, together with its Roman<sup>4</sup> guardians, was *supposed* to separate the inhabitable world – the *oikoumene* – from the land beyond: a place known to Greeks and Romans as Scythia, and popularly imagined as a brutal arctic wasteland whose only inhabitants were wretched nomads cursed by their inhospitable home to squalid lives of perpetual wandering.<sup>5</sup> In the decades since 376, however, barbarian<sup>6</sup> groups with roots in the transdanubian<sup>7</sup> lands had been living south of the

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<sup>2</sup> The phrase is Jerome's and refers to the Huns (*Adv. Iovinian.* 2.7). Olympiodorus was quite familiar with these people, himself, as he had served as Honorius' ambassador at the court of one of the Hunnic chieftains (Olymp. fr. 19).

<sup>3</sup> All dates in this dissertation are in the Common Era, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>4</sup> My use of the term 'Roman' in this dissertation is, admittedly somewhat imprecise. In general, when discussing the second century and beyond, and particularly for periods after Caracalla's grant of near-universal citizenship (the *Constitutio Antoniniana* of 212), I use it to refer to all inhabitants of the Roman Empire. More specialized meanings (eg: citizens of *Roma urbs*, holders of citizenship, or in contrast to Greeks/other *ethnoi* **within** the empire) should be clear from context.

<sup>5</sup> Trajan's transdanubian Dacia had forced some adjustment in Roman conceptions of Scythia and Scythians, but it had done little to change the basic worldview described here. We will discuss this 'experiment' and its import at length in Chapters Two and Four.

<sup>6</sup> 'Barbarian' is certainly a loaded term in popular English usage, but it will be used periodically throughout this study and therefore demands a short justification. I use the term 'barbarian' when referring generically to people the Romans labeled as barbarians because there is no good alternative label that captures so broad a group of peoples. Needless to say, I do not load the term with either its popular modern derogatory connotations, or their Roman antecedents. When possible, I prefer to use more specific, and less problematic terminology, but there are many instances when a basic, generic, easily-understood label is called for, and in these instances, I employ the term 'barbarian.' For a comprehensive discussion of Greco-Roman prejudices related to the people they labeled as barbarians, see Isaac's *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (2004).

<sup>7</sup> My use of 'transdanubian' should not be confused with the contemporary Hungarian toponym of the same name. From the perspective of the Hungarian heartland between the Danube and Tisza Rivers, Transdanubia is the land to the **west** of the Middle Danube, that is, Roman Pannonia. Throughout this study, Transdanubia is the region **east** and **north** of the river, that is, outside Herodotus' *oikoumene*, and later beyond the Roman *limes*.

Danube largely outside Roman imperial control. The Empire's inability to permanently expel or subdue these Goths was not unprecedented, but whereas previous generations of 'Scythian' raiders had generally been content to haul their loot back home beyond the Danube, the Goths of the early fifth century showed no desire to leave imperial territory. Unburdened by centuries of Roman ethnographic and climatic prejudices, they seem to have recognized that the lands they sought in Illyricum and Thrace were ecologically similar to their former transdanubian homes, only with better access to Roman economic and political networks. For most Romans, on the other hand, such observations were unthinkable. It was easier, as we see in Olympiodorus' narrative of the silver statues, to imagine the empire under some wicked barbarian curse, than to admit that Rome's entire Danubian edifice was built on an ideological foundation fundamentally at odds with the ecology, topography, and pre-Roman cultural traditions of the greater Danube drainage basin.

※ *From drainage basin to borderland: the fundamental disjunction*

This dissertation is about the Danubian Borderland, its birth in the early years of the Common Era, its solidification and transformation during the next three centuries, and eventually, its partial death in the mid fifth century. Geographically, the Danubian Borderland is largely coterminous with the Danube drainage basin, an area of over 800,000 square kilometers, roughly equal to the size of Texas and Virginia combined,<sup>8</sup> yet they are not synonymous terms. Whereas the drainage basin represents an ecologically coherent region united by the river that runs diagonally through its heart, the Borderland was the byproduct of Rome's centuries-long effort to turn the Danube from a natural line of connection to a symbol of political and cultural separation. This basic

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<sup>8</sup> *The Danube River Basin District Management Plan - Update 2015*, p. v.

difference between drainage basin and borderland lies at the very heart of the present study. When Rome established its political presence in the Danubian region, it found a world of connectivity and movement, where a lack of overarching, hegemonic power had allowed for the development of human societies that straddled the river and had developed in line with the region's natural rhythms. Through this landscape, Rome drove its imperial *limes*, creating a line of political control that in no-way mapped onto the region's existing natural boundaries. In this dissertation, we will explore how the fundamental disjunction between Rome's artificial boundary and its physical setting exerted a strong influence on the way Romans perceived and interacted with the people living beyond the river.

Because the Danube *limes* was so misaligned, it could only be maintained with the help of strong supporting ideologies and systems of imperial control. While both of these pillars evolved continually during the first five centuries CE, a basic ethnographic and political 'playbook' had emerged by the end of the second century based largely on the specific constellation of economic, political, and topographical factors present specifically in the Hungarian Plain east of the Middle Danube. The totalizing nature of Rome's Danubian worldview, however, ensured that ideas tailored to one specific section of the Danubian Borderland were applied to the entire thing. This second disjunction, based on obdurate Greco-Roman notions of environmental determinism and barbarian cultural homogeneity, served to exacerbate the other, more fundamental disjunction between the region's natural and political divisions. Together, these two disjunctions lie behind nearly all the pivotal political and military events of Rome's history along the Danube River.

## *II. Borderlands and Frontiers*

Fundamental to the present study is the concept of the borderland as a particular type of liminal space. The term ‘frontier’ is more often used to describe the edges of the Roman world. I would argue, however, that these regions can be more accurately described as borderlands, following the ideas of the borderland studies workshop, a vibrant scholarly community of American historians, anthropologists, and social scientists that developed in the last quarter of the twentieth century in order to theorize a replacement for the aged Turner hypothesis for the eighteenth–nineteenth century North American frontier. The borderland studies workshop was also interested in extending and applying its ideas to more modern border regions, particularly the one between the United States and Mexico. Out of this scholarly milieu came the concept of the borderland: an area straddling the line of control between adjacent polities, yet possessed of its own, often unstable, traditions and identities, selectively drawn and modified from source societies on either side of the line of control. Such a setting differs rather markedly from the most common definitions of the frontier. According to James Cusick,

*what distinguishes a borderland from a frontier is the existence of a territorial boundary that is artificial but specific. The American West, [the quintessential frontier,] for example, is a place that is difficult to encapsulate as a single unit because it changed with time and settlement and always had ambiguous boundaries.<sup>9</sup>*

The Roman *limites*, with their relatively static positions and frequent disregard for naturally-meaningful boundary features appear much more geared towards the creation of borderlands than frontiers, as usually conceived.

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<sup>9</sup> Cusick 2000, p. 47.

Many of the ideas and models developed to explain borderlands of the early-modern and contemporary world can, and should, be applied more frequently to premodern states like the Roman Empire. This task is not without its challenges since we must be careful when adapting models designed to explain periods where statist ideologies of territorial exclusivity demand more strictly-defined political boundaries than would seem natural in the ancient world where conceptions of hegemony usually emphasized rule over cities and peoples rather than specific tracts of land.<sup>10</sup> What we can take from the borderland studies workshop is the general idea of viewing the edges of the Roman Empire, and the territory immediately beyond the *limites* as vibrant borderlands which not only developed lively hybrid cultures at the local level, but also existed in intense dialogue with societal cores on either side. Further, in these settings of physical and intellectual exchange, we need to recognize that borderland societies could exert cultural, economic, and political influence on the Roman heartland in addition to absorbing trends and trinkets from the core, according to the common ‘Romanization’ model. Of the Roman borderlands, none, I would argue, saw more dynamic cultural fusion, nor exerted a stronger influence over the cultural and political destinies of the Roman Empire than did the fluvial zone extending on either side of Rome’s de-facto military border along the lower and middle reaches of the Danube River.

### 0.2.2. The borderland matrix

Bradley Parker, an historian of colonial North America, has developed a ‘generic’ model of borderland processes which offers a useful set of tools to help us conceptualize the Danubian Borderland. Building off traditional ideas which characterize **frontiers** as amorphous “zones of

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<sup>10</sup> Mattern 1999, chs. 2 and 5.

interaction” on the edge of polities, Parker sets up a dichotomy between this type of liminal space and **borders**, explaining that they are “opposite types of divides – the first [ie: borders] hard, static, and linear and the second [ie: frontiers] soft, fluid, and zonal.” At the broadest scale of analysis one could, then, characterize any borderland region as lying somewhere on a sliding scale of ‘openness’ with a tightly controlled, closed border on one extreme – a decent example of this might be the Berlin Wall, as it was intended to function – and a broad, gradual, fluid frontier zone on the other extreme – such as Turner’s original model of the United States’ western edge.<sup>11</sup>

It is no accident that the examples given above are both ideals which never really existed in the way they were imagined to do so. While it might be possible, on paper, to describe a totally closed border or a frontier free from all organized control, no such system can exist in reality, because virtually every type of liminal space is actually made up of multiple, often imperfectly aligned boundaries.<sup>12</sup> Parker recognizes this fact and suggests, therefore, that we must see all borderlands as being shaped by a number of intertwined dynamics, each of which can be located at a certain point on the **borderland continuum** between closed borders and open frontiers.<sup>13</sup> Parker rightly suggests that geographic/ecological, political, demographic, cultural, and economic dynamics are likely to have broad, cross-cultural and pan-temporal salience.<sup>14</sup> This idea of a borderland matrix

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<sup>11</sup> Parker 2006, pp. 79–81.

<sup>12</sup> Natural elements, such as rivers, mountains, or seas, or human structures, such as the US–Mexico border fence, often (but certainly not inevitably) serve as signposts for the borders of polities. What such visible features hide, however, is the multitude of non-physical boundaries functioning in parallel, or in opposition to the visible markers. Sometimes these other boundaries coincide geographically with political borders, so one might find that, for example, a linguistic boundary maps closely onto a polity’s geographic borders. That this state of affairs need not always apply to linguistic boundaries, however, needs no great elaboration. The same can be true of other non-political boundaries. Thus, while a river or line of fortifications might signify the edge of a polity’s military or legal jurisdiction, ideological, cultural, and/or economic boundaries might extend much further afield, or, conversely, might never get close to a physical/political border extending far out into a region culturally or economically ‘other’ to the majority of the polity’s population.

<sup>13</sup> Parker 2006, p. 81.

<sup>14</sup> Parker 2006, pp. 81ff.

made up of intertwined and interconnected processes each existing somewhere on the open–closed continuum is a powerful model. By examining borderland processes with broad, cross–cultural importance, we can facilitate comparison between regions and across time. At the same time, one finds here a method of describing change over time within a single region, as different processes grow and recede in importance, carried along by the ebb and flow of history. Finally, this model is not limited by a particular scale of analysis. Borderland processes should prove identifiable at individual, communal, and regional levels. With Parker’s framework in mind, we must next consider a few influential models for the edges of the Roman Empire, as we seek to establish our own working model for the Danubian Borderland.

### **0.2.3. Theorizing Roman frontiers and borderlands**

In a 1994 monograph entitled *The Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A Social and Economic Study*, C. R. Whittaker proposed a sophisticated model which has proven highly influential in subsequent Anglophone research on the edges of the Roman world. Although the language employed by Whittaker remains fixed in the older scholarly world of frontiers and zones of interaction, his thinking shows strong parallels with the ideas developing concurrently in the borderland studies workshop, and must be seriously considered in any future model of Roman frontier/borderland dynamics. At a basic level, Whittaker wrote to critique Luttwak and his ‘grand strategy’ model, which he viewed as fundamentally flawed because it didn’t seriously consider the actual lived realities of the people dwelling near and beyond the edge of Roman political control, except in their capacity as economic producers often in need to protection by Roman arms. Whittaker’s model challenged this perspective by arguing that border people not only react to central forces, but, in turn, act in their own right, creating for themselves dynamic hybrid societies



with building blocks chosen from multiple sources.<sup>15</sup> Although he appears to have operated independently from the broader borderland studies community, Whitaker's perspective is fully in line with the ideas coming out of that group in the late twentieth century.

Whittaker began his argument with a direct challenge to Luttwak. Instead of drawing up 'scientific' lines of defense, Whittaker argued that the Romans established their *limites* where they did because of pragmatic considerations for communication and transportation.<sup>16</sup> While natural features such as rivers, or manmade structures like roads or walls could serve as "potent symbols of rule,"<sup>17</sup> their main function was to facilitate 'horizontal' movement along the edges of Roman controlled space. Isaac made essentially the same argument, in *The Limits of Empire: The Roman Army in the East* (1990), but whereas he insisted, perhaps too myopically, that the mobility afforded by such *limes* structures was mainly designed to facilitate the quelling of internal unrest,<sup>18</sup> Whittaker, more reasonably, recognized that the mobility associated with the Roman *limites* could be exploited for multiple purposes. Outward-looking military action and inward-focused policing both benefited from improved horizontal mobility, but, to Whittaker's mind, the main purpose of *limes* features such as roads and rivers was to promote and control economic activity along and across the outer

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<sup>15</sup> Luttwak's *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire* (1976), created a protracted, and at times vociferous, scholarly debate about the nature of Roman foreign policy, or, more accurately, whether Rome had a foreign policy at all. L. divided the history of the Roman *limites* into three periods which he described as characterized first by a system of hegemonic control (Julio-Claudian Principate), then by a system of preclusive defense based on the concept of static, scientific frontiers (Antonine period, plus or minus), which in turn evolved into a system of 'defense in depth,' as the empire faced new external threats in the fourth and fifth centuries. The most basic criticisms had to do with the *a priori* assumption that Roman emperors thought about their *limites* as a functioning whole and sought to develop coherent, empire-wide policies. Isaac seriously challenged Luttwak in *The Limits of Empire* (1992), aiming his critique mainly at Luttwak's assumption that Roman rulers cared about protecting their provincial populations. Mattern's *Rome and the Enemy* (1999) leveled an even more fundamental challenge by arguing that Roman actions on and beyond the *limites* were governed by ideological concerns over status and the *maiestas* of Rome, rather than rational political or economic motivations.

<sup>16</sup> Whittaker 1994, p. 59.

<sup>17</sup> Whittaker 1994, p. 26.

<sup>18</sup> Isaac 1990, chs. 6, 7, 9.

line of political control.<sup>19</sup> Isaac, together with the advocates of an ideologically-driven *limes* system, such as Mattern and Millar, view economic activity (other than looting associated with foreign campaigns) as of secondary importance to our understanding of the Roman borderlands, but Whittaker's economically-driven model has generally found acceptance in other scholarly quarters,<sup>20</sup> and indeed, the two perspectives need not be seen as entirely antithetical. Looked at through the lens of Parker's borderland matrix, we could characterize Whittaker's basic model as one where political processes (ie: the centrally-produced capital and manpower needed to create *limes* roads or secure political control over rivers) shaped the nature of concurrent economic processes.

The channeling of economic processes by the political forces active along the Roman *limites* led, according to Whittaker, to the development of a two-tiered "frontier society" within and beyond what we would call the borderland. Focusing mainly on the Rhineland, Whittaker drew on a broad survey of archaeological evidence to construct a model of this frontier society.<sup>21</sup> His model divided the territory beyond the *limes* into two distinct zones based on evidence of differing economic and political activity. The first zone is the borderland itself, a belt of territory running parallel to the fluvial *limes* line and extending many miles deep on either side of it. This zone shows close economic and cultural integration and continuity between the two sides of the river. Based on extensive survey of funerary, ceramic, and habitation material, Whittaker found that the belt

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<sup>19</sup> Whittaker 1994: 72-84.

<sup>20</sup> David Mattingly's *Tripolitania* (1994), for example, comes to similar conclusions about the purpose of the North African *limes*. Here, the author suggests that while horizontal movement along a border line was hampered by the difficulties of the Tripolitanian terrain, we should still see the existing *limes* structures (numerous low wall-and-gate structures known as *clausurae*) as primarily economic in function. Mattingly argues that the *clausurae* were located at strategic points along traditional transhumance and exchange routes, and were designed to control and exploit the economic activities which flowed along these desert highways (Mattingly 1994: 77-9). This economic perspective has been readily accepted among the luminaries of 'barbarian studies,' most notably Herwig Wolfram (1988), Peter Heather (1991, etc.), Peter Wells (1999, etc.), and Michael Kulikowski (2007).

<sup>21</sup> Whittaker 1994, pp. 122ff.

extending on either side of the Rhine was, essentially, archaeologically homogenous. The most intriguing observation for our understanding of Roman borderlands was that the observed homogeneity of material culture did not simply represent the ‘Romanization’ of the trans-*limes* barbarian peoples. While many elements of Roman material culture were observed in the territory beyond the river, Whittaker noted that the cultural exchange flowed the other way, too, with populations on the Roman side adopting elements of barbarian material culture long before the migrations of Franks and Alamanni into Roman territory during the fourth century. It seems, that in certain basic aspects of daily life, such as subsistence and habitation, the Roman provincials living near the *limes* may have had as much in common with their barbarian neighbors on the other side of the Rhine as they did with Gallo-Romans dwelling in the provincial core.

Whittaker’s observations about the nature of material culture in this borderland are crucial for two reasons. First, his evidence illustrated that acculturation occurred in multiple directions even in the presence of great disparities in political/military power. Had Whittaker’s archaeological survey revealed *different* patterns of foreign good usage on either side of the Rhine, he might have been able to argue that while the people on each bank selectively adopted elements from the other side, they still related more closely to their respective cultural cores further from the river, than to their borderland counterparts on the other side of the *limes*. The *actual* material evidence, however, described a homogenization of material culture on each side of the *limes*. This suggests, to me, that we have something more dynamic than mere cultural borrowing from one’s foreign neighbors. Instead, the existence of Whittaker’s “frontier society” suggests a centering of local identities within the borderland context. The two peripheries have, in a sense, merged and become (or perhaps

remained) a cultural center.<sup>22</sup> Employing Parker's method, we might identify political control, geographic position, economic exchange, and cross-cultural contact as the four salient borderland processes at work shaping Whittaker's frontier society.

※ *Drinkwater and the Alamanni*

One of the most important, if perhaps somewhat underrated, studies to build on Whittaker's work in *Frontiers of the Roman Empire* was John Drinkwater's *The Alamanni and Rome: 213-496* (2007). By limiting his focus to a small section of the Roman borderland, Drinkwater was able to more easily incorporate individuals and small tribal units into his discussion of a Roman borderland society. For our purposes, the most important insight Drinkwater brought to the table was his theory of place-based identity formation, which he calls *ethnogenesis-sur place*, and which offers us a compelling way of thinking about how geographic space can serve as a potent borderland process. The theory is best illustrated by a quick walkthrough of Drinkwater's model of Alamannic cultural development.

First, during the third century, small groups of Germanic raiders settled in the triangular salient of land between the headwaters of the Rhine and Danube rivers known as the Agri Decumates, finding the location a useful base for periodic, small-scale incursions into Roman-controlled territory in search of plunder. These groups adopted the titles Alamanni ('He-Men') and Iuthungi ('Young-Bloods') to reflect the image they wanted to project as fierce warriors.<sup>23</sup> When

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<sup>22</sup> Whittaker's second zone is not part of the Rhine borderland-proper, and thus is of lesser interest at this stage. In brief, it is located further back from the frontier line and shows less low-level integration of material culture, but more consumption of high-status Roman goods, often in novel, 'native' ways. These findings suggest to Whittaker an intentional policy by the Romans of establishing hegemonic control over more distant tribes by supporting friendly leaders and engaging with the native gift-giving economy.

<sup>23</sup> These are Drinkwater's own interpretive translations of the group designations. He sees them as self-created rather than Roman-imposed, and interprets them more like gang names than tribal ethnonyms (2007, pp. 62-67).

these groups were successful over a protracted period, they tended to spin off new ‘franchises,’ as groups divided and newcomers sought to emulate the successful raiders. Over time, these group names became linked with the Agri Decumates out of which they operated for many years. As this connection became more and more ingrained, it became easier and easier for newcomers to the region to slip into one of the established identities. Eventually, the original occupational element became less and less important, although it probably never wholly vanished, and the locational component developed into the cornerstone of the identities associated with the names Alamanni and Iuthungi.<sup>24</sup>

An important element of Drinkwater’s model of this “ethnogenesis-*sur place*” is the role played by Roman ethnographic ideologies. At some point, Romans bought into the association of Alamanni with the physical setting of the Agri Decumates. From then on, they characterized all the people living there as Alamanni, thus adding their powerful voice to the forces forging the new ethnic identity. Thus, we can see ethnogenesis-*sur place* as containing both inside and outside components. What began as a self-identity based on occupation first became loosely linked with a geographic region based on habitation, and then ossified into a regionally-defined ethnicity by a combination of internal occupational ‘softening’ and external Roman ideological imposition. The mechanism that allowed Roman ethnographic ideologies to take root among the Alamanni was twofold. First, recruitment and service in the Roman army exposed generations of Alamannic warriors both to Roman cultural practices, and the ethnographic ideologies which shaped the way their employers thought about non-Roman peoples.<sup>25</sup> Second, Roman support for friendly

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<sup>24</sup> For the full discussion, see Drinkwater 2007, ch. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Drinkwater 2007, ch. 5. For the Roman army as a shaper of barbarian group identities through recruitment and service, see also van Driel-Murray 2003.

Alamannic chiefs meant that the most powerful local leaders were those who accepted Roman economic help and the ideological baggage which came along with it. We will see a very similar dynamic playing out in the Middle Danube Borderland in Chapter Two.

In our task of fleshing out Parker's skeleton borderland matrix, Drinkwater provides a good example of a sophisticated attempt for one specific borderland society. His model shows how space, ideology, demographics, and politics intersected to shape the lived realities of people on the edges of the Roman world. Importantly, Drinkwater managed to move beyond a core-periphery mindset without downplaying the importance of Roman imperial power in shaping the destinies and identities of the Alamanni. Beyond his innovative model of space-based identity formation, Drinkwater considered not only how Roman politics shaped Alamannic society through subsidy and warfare, but also how the actions of Alamannic groups had a profound impact on Roman ideologies of power and the careers of numerous generals and emperors. This is particularly important, because it shows that one does not need to advocate any sort of equivalence in political or military power when suggesting that borderland societies can have important ideological and physical impacts on their neighboring core polities.

※ *Batty's Pontic-Danubian Realm*

A final monograph that we must consider briefly is Roger Batty's 2007 study, *Rome and the Nomads: The Pontic-Danubian Realm in Antiquity*, since it is the only recent work which examines the Danubian region holistically from a strong ecological/geographical perspective. For Batty, the world of the Danube is pictured as an extension of the world of the Eurasian (Pontic) Steppe, based on three pillars: 1) topographic, 2) climatic, 3) economic/cultural. Because this work is, for better or worse, something of a prequel for my own study, we must consider his analysis. *Rome and the*

*Nomads* contains much solid, detailed research, and was important for its efforts to rehabilitate migration and mobility as viable historical processes within a Roman borderland beyond the old models of barbarian invasion, but ultimately the work proves somewhat unbalanced in its insistence on the primacy of largely-invisible nomads as the cultural glue uniting the entire region.<sup>26</sup>

Batty's analysis rests on a theoretical framework which argues that the most important ecological/topographical elements in the whole region are its grasslands, most importantly, the wide stretch of plains which run northward between the Black Sea and the eastern arc of the Carpathian Mountains. This broad grassland, encompassing the modern regions of Moldavia, Bessarabia, and the Dobrogea, serves as a great natural highway linking the world of the Danube with the Pontic Steppe. This analysis is essentially correct, and we will demonstrate the crucial importance of this 'Scythian Corridor' many times in our own study. Batty's regional picture is flawed, however, because he largely ignores the Danube Basin's other great lowland region, the Hungarian Plain, which, by my own analysis exerted an earlier and even more important influence over Roman thought and policy within the larger Danubian Borderland than did the Scythian Corridor to the east. The Hungarian Plain is largely separated from Batty's Pontic-Danubian Realm by our region's great natural divider: the Carpathian-Balkan mountain chain, which may explain why the Middle Danube region falls largely outside the scope of his analysis. What this means is that Batty's ecological analysis must remain only half-complete. He does an admirable job of considering natural and cultural linkages with the steppe world, but pays little attention to the role of the Danube as an ecologically-uniting feature, nor to the Carpathians and Balkans as natural dividers. In essence, by

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<sup>26</sup> Batty 2007, chs. 1-3.

focusing on the region as an annex to the larger Eurasian steppe system, Batty failed to model the Danubian drainage basin as an ecological unit of its own. This study will aim to rectify this oversight, beginning in the following chapter.

#### **0.2.4. Towards a model of borderland processes for the Danubian world**

Our brief survey of borderland and frontier scholarship has provided the building blocks with which to construct a model of the processes and systems we should expect to find active within Rome's Danubian Borderland. From Parker we take the framework. His idea of a borderland matrix made up of different, interconnected processes offers us a powerful tool for thinking about the complex realities of life in a borderland. While we will not attempt to describe a 'hard,' mechanistic model in the following analyses, it will be helpful to think about the historical events and material patterns – both natural and cultural – discussed in this dissertation as borderland processes lying somewhere on a sliding scale between the closed-ness of a strictly-controlled border, and the openness of a broad frontier zone of interaction. This approach lies silently behind much of the following research, and has not only lent me clarity, but also helped facilitate analysis of change over time and at different scales.

Rather than uncritically excepting Parker's suggested process categories, we have, in this introduction, considered a select body of scholarship and highlighted the useful observations and potential drawbacks from a number of sources in order to locate borderland processes relevant for our own analysis. From the original borderland studies community, aimed, primarily, at the modern world, we see that economic and political forces must be viewed as working in tandem. Significant changes to the political sphere should produce corresponding economic ripples, while economic



practice can, in turn, serve to limit and shape political forces within a borderland.<sup>27</sup> From Whittaker, we observe that even in the absence of a well-developed, modern, capitalist ideology, economic forces play an important role in shaping the nature of Roman borderlands. In particular, the *limes* system seems best designed to give structure to intense economic exchange across and along its line of political control. Whittaker also offers suggestions for how to study economic activities on the edge of the Roman world by gathering material evidence of imports, exports, and consumption habits at both the sub-elite and elite levels. We will employ these ideas in our own Chapter Three, with an additional focus on the faunal evidence for animal husbandry and foodways.

Drinkwater, in turn, presents a strong test-case for the ways in which space and ideology can function together to affect identity creation and cultural change within a borderland. His study of the Alamanni shows that we must seriously consider Rome's power to shape identities as well as political entities on the margins of the empire, even as we work from a perspective centered on the borderland, rather than on some Roman or barbarian cultural core. Rome's powerful ethnographic voice, identified by Drinkwater as one of the most important factors influencing the development of Alamannic group identity and political organization, will be a near-constant companion in our own sojourn through the Danubian Borderland. If anything, Greco-Roman prejudices and stereotypes about transdanubian people were even more powerful than those that developed in the west to make sense of the Alamanni.

Finally, Batty's regional analysis offers insights and warnings. From *Rome and the Nomads*, we observe the importance of ecological and topographical forces in shaping subsistence patterns,

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<sup>27</sup> Clement 2004.

and channeling the movement of peoples and ideas. At the same time, we see in Batty's study a warning: we must always keep the underlying geographic and ecological unity of the Danube Basin in mind as we examine events and cultures within specific sub-regions. To lose sight of the underlying, natural whole would be to risk ignoring important regional dynamics as does *Rome and the Nomads* in its general disregard for the region of the Hungarian Plain.

Stepping back, we can divide the borderland processes highlighted by these scholars into three broad categories:

- 1). Economic forces (the agency of markets).
- 2). Political and ideological forces (the agency of people and ideas).
- 3). Spatial and ecological forces (the agency of the natural world).

These three categories represent the most universally-applicable borderland processes and will fill in our Parkerian framework at a basic level. We must, however, go further and consider how these three broad categories should be analyzed within the Danubian Borderland context. Based on the three categories just described, I propose the following four major divisions of analysis:

- A). Material evidence of changes in consumption/personal expression, and evidence for imports and exports as indicators of economic exchange.
- B). Material evidence of subsistence and habitation as indicators both of basic lifeways, and of culture change over time and/or demographic shifts.
- C). Textual evidence of political action and its consequences, and its manifestation in the material record.

D). Textual evidence for powerful ideologies, in particular their roles in identity creation/imposition among transdanubian peoples, and in shaping actions and policies by Roman decision-makers.

These four analytical divisions must, in turn, be viewed in dialog with the fundamental disjunction lying at the heart of Rome's Danubian Borderland. The imposition of an artificial boundary within a connected world will remain the most basic, important, and probably universal borderland process throughout this dissertation, influencing all the other dynamics examined in our study.

### *III. The Shape of the Project*

The study that follows this introduction does not lend itself to neat chapters of equal length, but I have attempted to separate it into two major parts. The first part, consisting of chapters One, Two, and Three, seeks to investigate the natural and human forces that shaped the development of the Danubian Borderland in the first three centuries CE. \* **Chapter One** stands as something of a second introduction. It is devoted entirely to a survey and analysis of the geography and ecology of the Danube drainage basin and will provide the needed background on the 'natural half' of the Danubian Borderland's fundamental disjunction. In the chapter, we will pay particular attention to the ways in which natural features such as rivers, mountains, plains, and wetlands both foster and limit human and natural mobility within the region. We will see that the Danube Basin divides itself naturally into two sub-regions, separated by the great backwards-S of the Carpathian-Balkan chain of mountains. While the Danube itself unites the entire region, and connects the two divisions, each sub-region has its own particular character made up of a unique constellation of natural features common across the entire Danube Basin.

※ **Chapter Two** is a study of the ‘human half’ of the disjunction at the heart of the Danubian Borderland. Here, we will chart the development of Rome’s *limes* and the cooption and modification of Greek ethnographic ideas about Scythians by Roman authors and decision-makers. This chapter will demonstrate how this ‘Scythian Logos’ offered a convenient ideology capable of justifying the establishment and maintenance of the Danube *limes* as an artificial boundary in a geographically-connected land. From this beginning, Chapter Two charts the further evolution of the Roman Scythian Logos in dialog with Roman political and military actions in the Danubian theater. Trajan’s annexation of transdanubian Dacia, and the Marcomannic Wars, on either end of the second century CE, will receive particular attention as the catalysts for important changes in the way Romans viewed the free people living beyond the Danube. The chapter ends with a discussion of the ‘Scythian’ raids that devastated Moesia, Thrace, and other parts of the Eastern Roman Empire in the second half of the third century. We will show that while the Scythian Logos did a good job of justifying the maintenance of a Danube *limes*, it failed to prepare Roman decision-makers for dealing with the actual people living beyond the Lower Danube at the dawn of late antiquity.

※ **Chapter Three** presents an extended case study designed to illustrate the impact Rome’s physical and ideological *limites* had on one particular transdanubian population. Here, we will consider the material evidence for habitation, subsistence, and exchange among the people of the transdanubian Hungarian Plain. This population, identified by Roman sources as the Sarmatian Iazyges lived in close dialog with the Roman Empire from the moment of the *limes*’ establishment, and it is here, in the plains beyond the Middle Danube, where we can most clearly see the physical effects of Rome’s political and ethnographic power. Chapter Three will conclude the first part of

this dissertation with a theoretical model of the people of the Hungarian Plain as a borderland society, drawing on the human and natural forces examined in the previous two chapters.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six make up the second part of this dissertation. Together, they examine how Rome's stereotypical ideas about transdanubian people, derived mainly from their long encounter with the Sarmatian Iazyges of the Hungarian Plain, influenced the actions of emperors and other decision-makers during the fourth and fifth centuries. ※ **Chapter Four** begins with Aurelian's decision to withdraw Roman troops from the transdanubian provinces of Dacia, and then explores the important repercussions of that decision. We will discuss Constantine's attempts to reassert Roman hegemony over parts of the Trajanic provinces by legitimizing the settlement of a barbarian group known as the Tervingi within the old provincial borders. The final part of the chapter will examine the material evidence of this Constantinian policy and its crucial role in supporting the spread and florescence of the so-called Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov Culture, usually associated with the Tervingi and other Gothic tribes within the Lower Danube Borderland and western Pontic Steppe.

※ **Chapter Five** covers a short period between 367 and 378 when the imperial actions of Valens upset Constantine's borderland settlement, and paved the way for a chaotic fifth century in the Danubian Borderland. We will begin with Valens' reactionary treaty with the Tervingi following a less-than-glorious war, and discuss the old-fashioned, regionally-inappropriate ethnographic stereotypes which shaped the emperor's particular policy decisions. After comparing the material and geographical differences between Iazyx and Terving society, I argue that Valens' peacemaking tactics were based on the Rome's experience with the former, and therefore bound to fail when misapplied to the different social, political, and geographic situation of the latter. I show

how similar inappropriate assumptions about the Tervingi, based on engrained Scythian tropes, paved every step of the way to Valens' death at the disastrous Battle of Adrianople.

※ **Chapter Six** explores how Roman authors had to reassess the ethnographic status of the Tervingi and other Goths in the wake of Adrianople. This final chapter explores how the Goths shook off the Scythian mantle, and how Roman thinkers then applied it to the next transdanubian menace, the Huns. This chapter also readdress the fundamental disjunction of the Danubian Borderland by demonstrating how Attila disregarded Rome's *limes* when seeking to establish a new Danubian polity in the mid fifth century. This worldview, free from Greco-Roman ethnographic and climatic ideologies was the way of the future, and the final section of Chapter Six will briefly survey how the great disjunction played out during the early middle ages, as a succession of newcomers to the Danube Basin sought to carve out kingdoms that disregarded the old Roman *limes* in favor of more natural boundaries, all while medieval Roman writers and emperors continued to cling to their traditional view of the Danubian world, where the river marked the eternal border between Roman civilization and Scythian barbarism.



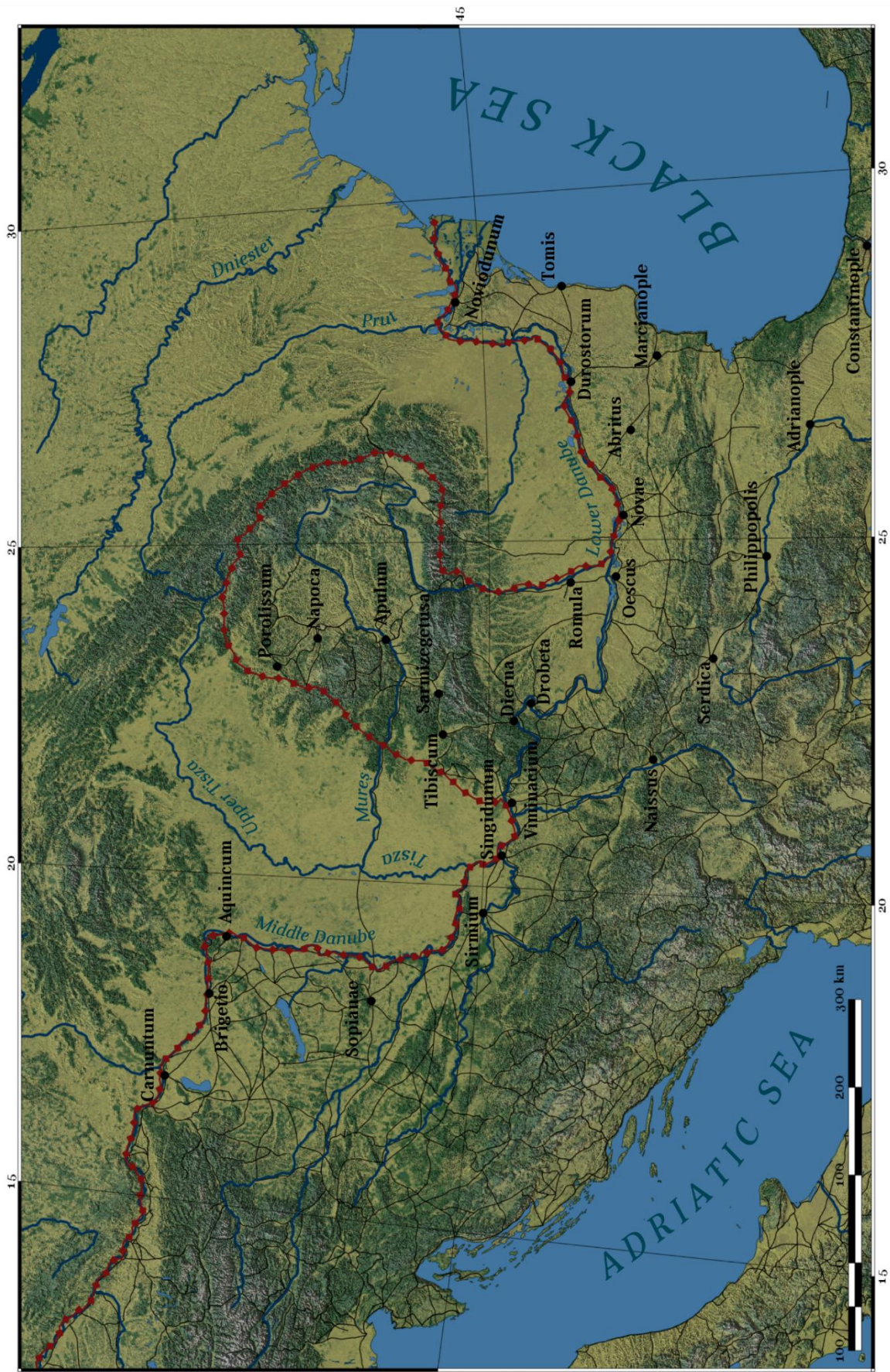


Fig. 0.1 The Danubian Borderland.

## CHAPTER ONE

### BEFORE THE *LIMES*: NATURAL RHYTHMS IN THE DANUBE BASIN

#### *I. Introduction: Peoples, Power, and Places*

For most of a millennium, from the early first century CE, the River Danube marked the north-central edge of the Roman Empire.<sup>28</sup> The stream served admirably as an avenue of communication - a *limes* in the true sense of the word - and while Roman political hegemony frequently extended beyond the river, and Trajan's Dacian conquests introduced transdanubian provinces for about two centuries, the Danube, together with its Roman-built forts, towers, and bridges, was the most enduring and visible marker of Roman power within the landscape of the northern Balkans. People separated from each other by the waters of the Danube and a few of its more important tributaries often enjoyed different statuses and relationships with Rome. For centuries, these waters separated civilization from barbarism in Roman eyes, yet such cultural and political divisions are not reflected in the natural environment extending on either side of the river.

Rather than marking a divide between distinct eco-zones, the Danube cuts its way through the middle of a large region united environmentally by a common orientation inward towards the stream, and by a high degree of macro-level climatic continuity. This zone, which can be roughly

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<sup>28</sup> While it is easy enough to determine the beginning of the Danube as the marker of the imperial *limes*, determining its end is much more difficult. The ideology underlying the river as the divider between the civilized and barbarian worlds endured long into the Middle Ages, even as Roman/Byzantine practical authority in the Balkans waxed and waned. We will discuss the origins of the *limes* in Chapter Two, and its protracted decline in Chapter Six.



equated with the Danube's massive watershed, forms an ecological borderland between the Mediterranean world of the Black, Aegean, and Adriatic Seas, and the continental climates of Central Europe and the Pontic Steppe. The Danubian region is a setting of gradual environmental change, and consequently, of only gradual change in traditional human economies and lifeways.<sup>29</sup>

From the Paleolithic through the Iron Age, cultures developed organically or migrated into the Danubian region from adjacent centers, and spread across its plains and hills, paying little heed to the great river as a boundary or limit.<sup>30</sup> Then, the Romans arrived. Just as the river cuts its way through the mountains and plains of the greater Danubian region, so Roman political boundaries cut their way across human landscapes long adapted to the natural rhythms of the land. Whereas the river acted as a conduit for movement and connection, the Roman *limes* served only to separate and control. Here, in a natural setting highly conducive to human movement, Roman legions, supported ideologically by Greek ecological and ethnographic stereotypes, divided territories and peoples into further sub-regions disconnected from naturally meaningful environmental boundaries. The primary aim of this dissertation is to investigate the varied impacts of this forced establishment of artificial borders through the geographic heart of an ecologically-connected Danubian world. In

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<sup>29</sup> A profitable way to think about any geographic region is as a collection of sub-regions, each with a slightly different natural profile, separated - often incompletely - by various environmental features and processes, while at the same time bound together by other features and processes. Environmental processes and features include elevation, geological/soil conditions, latitude, prevailing winds and weather patterns, physical barriers such as seas and mountains, and physical arteries such as certain plains and rivers. These features and processes form a unique combination in each sub-region, thereby ensuring that no two sub-regions possess identical environmental profiles. For example, two adjacent regions might be distinguished by changes in elevation and geological makeup, yet exist at the same latitude north and be subject to the same large-scale weather patterns. Furthermore, direct connection between the two sub-regions might be made by a river running down the elevation gradient towards the sea or a confluence with another stream. The end result would be two distinct, but distinctly interconnected sub-regions.

<sup>30</sup> The Danubian Basin was home to some of the most vibrant cultures of the European Neolithic and Bronze Age but these groups were long vanished by our period. Our interest begins in the pre-Roman Iron age with the various autochthonous Thracian/Dacian/Getic cultures and Celtic/La Tène immigrants from Central Europe. We will discuss these groups as they relate to the cultural and political dynamics of the Roman period in Chapters Two and Three.

order to draw meaningful conclusions from our later discussions of Roman political and ideological impositions, however, our first task must be to understand the rhythms and boundaries of the Danubian world in its natural state.

The Danube rises in the hills of Germany's Black Forest, but the river's upper reaches are part of the firmly-continental world of West-Central Europe, and fall, therefore, beyond the scope of this project. The borderland under study begins with the zone extending on either side of the river approximately from the point north of Budapest where the Danube makes its great turn southward through the plains of Hungary until it finally discharges its waters into the Black Sea many miles later. This subsection of the river can be further divided into two smaller sections: first, the **Middle Danube**, running south from the great curve through the plains of Hungary, turning eastward near Novi Sad, Serbia, and extending east as far as the Iron Gates gorge. The second division is the **Lower Danube** where, below the Iron Gates, the river continues to the east and forms, for most of the rest of its length, the border between Romania and Bulgaria. In antiquity, the Danubian Borderland broadly encompassed the Roman provinces of lower and upper Pannonia, the three Dacias, and the two Moesias,<sup>31</sup> as well as the tributary region between the Middle Danube and the western borders of Dacia - the heart of what is now known as the **Hungarian Plain** - generally referred to by the Romans as the **Sarmatian *barbaricum***.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> The internal divisions of Pannonia and Moesia were redrawn repeatedly during the fourth century, so it is best to simply speak of the macro-level provincial divisions here.

<sup>32</sup> This sub-region is of particular importance for this study, but referring to it is not always easy as there is no Roman-era term that does not reflect the imposition of an identity now seen as dubious (see Chapter Three). Despite the anachronism (there won't be any Hungarians on the Hungarian Plain until the tenth century), I will use the term 'Hungarian Plain' to refer to the lowlands at the center of the Middle Danube Basin, roughly between the rivers Danube and Tisza when speaking about the geographic region. As for the Roman term, both parts ('Sarmatian' and '*barbaricum*') reflect Roman perceptions of the people living there rather than anything about how those people may have seen themselves. This is obviously problematic, yet there are no good alternative labels since the Roman-era population of the Hungarian Plain left no writings of their own, and precious little survives in Roman sources reflective of any sort of internal perspective. In

As it cuts through the northern Balkans, the Danube is joined by a great number of tributary streams. The drainage areas of these rivers provide a rough indicator of the width and breadth of the Danubian Borderland. Western tributaries of the Middle Danube drain the hilly land of western Hungary, eastern Croatia, and northern Serbia. On the other side, tributaries extend north into and beyond the Carpathian Mountains, and throughout Transylvania and the Hungarian Plain. Further east, northern tributaries run the full north-south length of Moldavia and Bessarabia. The Lower Danube's southern tributaries are mostly shorter in length, generally extending only as far as the Stara Planina Balkans on the southern edge of the Bulgarian Plain.



Fig. 1.1 The Danube drainage basin: Over 800,000 square kilometers extending into seventeen modern nations.

order to avoid constant perlocution (ie: 'the people of the Hungarian Plain'), we will frequently rely on the Roman labels (ie: 'Sarmatia,' 'Sarmatian,' 'Sarmatian *barbaricum*') but will do so mindful of their external, potentially totalizing nature. Whenever possible, we will employ more specific group designations (eg: 'Iazyges,' 'Limigantes'), although even in these cases we are almost always still dealing with Roman terminologies.

## *II: The Climate of the Danubian Borderland*

### 1.2.1. Weather patterns

The Danubian Borderland encompasses territory traditionally considered part of the Balkan Peninsula, as well as regions generally associated with Central Europe. Indeed, many writers have used the Danube as a convenient boundary marker for their studies of either Balkan or European geography.<sup>33</sup> Using the river in such a manner is irresponsible, however, since the Danube does not mark any sort of sharp climatic divide. At the regional level, a climate gradient covers the entire Danubian Borderland, which, although more closely aligned with the continental climate of Central Europe, acquires more Mediterranean features at lower latitudes. The topography of the region, meanwhile, can be divided into a number of altitudinal zones running from sea-level to the highest Balkan peaks which rise to nearly 3,000 meters in a number of places.<sup>34</sup> The gradient interacts with these altitudinal zones to create a rich diversity of micro-climates characterized by distinct flora, fauna, and patterns of human use. Thus, the borderland is a region of great environmental diversity representing numerous variations on a fairly small number of common topographic and ecological themes.

The gradual transition between continental and Mediterranean climatic zones sets the Balkans apart from the two other European peninsulas which penetrate into the Mediterranean Sea.

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<sup>33</sup> e.g. Turrill 1929, p. 3; Roglić 1950, p. 13; Chataigneau 1934, p. 396. For a succinct discussion of the various definitions of the Balkans, see Carter 1977, pp. 7–10.

<sup>34</sup> The tallest peaks within the entire Balkan Peninsula is Mt. Musala (2,925 m.) located in the Rila range of the Rhodope Massif, which, with twelve peaks over 2,700 meters, also contains the greatest concentration of high peaks within the region. The second highest peak in the Balkans is Mt. Olympus in Thessaly (2,918 m.) (Turrill 1929, p. 9). Both of these peaks fall outside the Danubian Borderland. The highest peaks within the Carpathian and Stara Planina chains that bisect the borderland are, respectively, Mt. Moldoveanu (2,544 m.) and Mt. Botev (2,376 m.) (“Europe Ultra-Prominences” <<http://peaklist.org/WWlists/ultras/EuroCoreP1500m.html>> Accessed 9/2/2015).

Both Italy and Iberia are separated from continental Europe by continuous, high mountain ranges (the Alps and the Pyrenees, respectively) which serve to largely isolate the lands to the south from continental European climatic conditions.<sup>35</sup> The Balkans, although highly mountainous in their topography, are not separated from continental Europe in nearly as complete a manner as are Italy or Iberia. In the east, a wide swath of steppe and lowlands runs along the western shore of the Black Sea, connecting Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey with the Ukrainian and south-Russian (Pontic) steppe. Elsewhere, the mountains running through Serbia, Hungary, and Romania are lower than the Alps and Pyrenees, nor are they as continuous.<sup>36</sup> The end result of this fragmented geography is that the climate of continental Europe extends far into the Balkan peninsula, limiting the influence of Mediterranean climatic forces in the central and northern portions of the region.<sup>37</sup>

The most extreme form of the continental climate occurs in southern Russia, and the steppe of Central Asia where stable high-pressure systems produce extremely frigid temperatures throughout the winter months. The swath of largely-uninterrupted grassland connecting the South-Russian steppe and the plains of Moldavia, Wallachia, and Bulgaria functions as an ideal atmospheric

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<sup>35</sup> Turrill 1929, p. 40.

<sup>36</sup> While the mountains of the Balkan Peninsula never quite manage to break the 3,000 meter mark, the Alps can boast 537 peaks over that height, with Mt. Blanc outdoing the rest at 4,808 m. (<[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_mountains\\_of\\_the\\_Alps\\_above\\_3000\\_m](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_mountains_of_the_Alps_above_3000_m)> Accessed 9/2/2015). The Pyrenees are lower, yet can still boast 129 peaks over 3,000 meters. The tallest is Mt. Aneto at 3,404 m. (<[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Pyrenean\\_three-thousanders](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Pyrenean_three-thousanders)> Accessed 9/2/2015).

<sup>37</sup> Mediterranean climatic conditions dominate in the southern Balkans, as far north as Thessaly and parts of coastal Greek Macedonia, as well as along the Adriatic coast as far as Croatia and Trieste. This regime, characterized by hot summers with limited rainfall, and wet, mild winters, is the product of two seasonal weather patterns. During the summer, high-pressure systems from North Africa prevail over the Mediterranean basin, leading to hot, dry conditions. During the winter months, lower pressure systems move south from Europe into the Mediterranean basin, bringing with them most of the region's precipitation (Turrill 1929, pp. 40-42). The climate of continental Europe, by contrast, generally features low pressure systems during the summer and high pressure fronts during the winter, with the result that the rainfall pattern, although in all seasons wetter than what one finds to the south, is fundamentally the inverse of Mediterranean. This continental climate shows maximum precipitation during the early summer months, with dryer conditions beginning in late summer and continuing into the winter, which is further characterized by recurrent frigid winds out of the far north (*Bulgaria*, 1920, p. 39; Magyari et al. 2010, p. 916).

conduit between the frigid high-pressure fronts north of the Crimea, and the wintertime low-pressure systems prevailing in the Mediterranean. With no significant mountainous barriers, the high-pressure seeks out the low, causing the Russian cold to extend far into Romania and Bulgaria, often in the form of strong winter gales and snow-bearing storms.<sup>38</sup> During the summer, the high-pressure Mediterranean systems attempt to force their way north and east into the Danubian Borderland leading to hot conditions in many areas. At the same time, the wet summer conditions of Central Europe exert an even stronger influence, particularly on the Hungarian Plain and in Romania north of the Carpathians.<sup>39</sup> The end result for the borderland as a whole is a fundamentally continental climate, with precipitation distributed throughout the year, and the severe winters of the Russian steppe, but with just enough Mediterranean influence, particularly in coastal and low-lying areas, to produce hotter, dryer summers than one finds in Central Europe and south Russia.

### 1.2.2. Elevation zones and climate

While regional weather patterns provide the entire Danubian Borderland with some basic climatic similarity, the region's varied topography exerts a profound influence on local conditions.

Five major ecological divisions can be drawn based on elevation: 1) **lowlands** such as coastal belts

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<sup>38</sup> *Roumania* 1920, pp. 37-42; *Bulgaria* 1920, pp. 39-42. I rely heavily in this chapter on a number of excellent, if quite venerable British War Office reports on the geography and climate of the Danubian region. These anonymous reports (ie: *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, *Bessarabia* 1920, *Bulgaria* 1920, *Transylvania and Banat* 1920) were commissioned in the years before the outbreak of World War I and are the detailed products of that era's military intelligence. As such, although their ethnographic sections are of little use (if rather more interest), their comments of local geography and climate are detailed and clear. They are of particular use when attempting to reconstruct the natural setting of the region prior to the massive changes wrought by two world wars and a half-century of communist rule. This is particularly true for the Danube itself, which underwent significant modification to aid navigation during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The *Handbook of the River Danube* captures a picture of the river in the final moments of its pre-modern state and is of supreme value for it.

<sup>39</sup> *Roumania* 1920, p. 41. I discovered this fact in an all-too personal way when excavating at the Roman site of Tibiscum in the Banat, Romania in July/August 2014. During the three-week season, we lost nearly a third of our work days to torrential rains. My hosts informed me that, although somewhat heavier than average, this precipitation was not particularly unusual.

and river valleys, 2) **plains and steppes** with a maximum elevation of only a few hundred meters, 3) isolated **hill-country** and the foothills of higher mountain formations ranging between 700 and 1000 meters, 4) **montaine zones** up to 1,500 meters, representing the entirety of lower mountain ranges, and the middle slopes of the higher massifs, 5) **alpine zones** above 1,500 meters.<sup>40</sup>

Topographical peculiarities limited to one or more particular sub-region often shape local conditions in unique ways, but there are some environmental trends common across the region to each of the five altitudinal zones. In terms of local climate, higher elevation areas generally experience more extreme seasonal conditions, particularly in the winter, but in our region there is an important exception to this pattern. Excluding the highest exposed alpine zones, the harshest winter conditions in the Danubian Borderland are generally found in the low-elevation plains of Moldavia, Wallachia, and northern Bulgaria which, as described above, feel the influence of the steppe winter most keenly.<sup>41</sup>

Elevation tends to influence the natural plant communities across the region in predictable ways.

1). **River valleys** and many **coastal zones** often feature extensive, vibrant wetland ecosystems. The Lower Danube, with its massive delta system, and plethora of riverside swamps and dead-arms, exhibits the largest, but by no means only, collection of such ecosystems.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Turrill 1929, ch. 8, pp. 111-117.

<sup>41</sup> *Roumania* 1920, pp. 37-42; *Bulgaria* 1920, pp. 39-42.

<sup>42</sup> On the delta, see Tudorancea and Tudorancea, eds. 2006. For a detailed ecological analysis of a riparian ecosystem in the context of human habitation, see Borojević 2006, especially ch. 4, pp. 107-117.

2). Ecologically speaking, the **plains** of the Danubian Borderland are closely linked to the steppe lands of South Russia and Central Asia. Although fairly well watered by rivers and precipitation, the combination of thick loess soil overlying porous limestone bedrock serves, in many sub-regions, to quickly wick away moisture. The result is a grassland ecosystem more arid in nature than the amount of rainfall would suggest.<sup>43</sup> The exact historical extent of steppe ecosystems within the lowlands of the Danubian Borderland, however, remains a controversial topic, and one to which we will return below.

3). The **hills and foothills** of the Danubian Borderland, in their natural state, are largely home to forests of broadleaf, deciduous trees. In recent times, this ecosystem has been greatly influenced by human habitation and agricultural exploitation. Even in areas not currently under cultivation, poor forestry practices, and excessive grazing along transhumance routes, have meant that many healthy forests have been replaced with scrub, leading to increased erosion and ecosystem degradation. Destruction of the hill forests was particularly pronounced during the 19th and 20th centuries, but the process has its roots in much earlier periods.<sup>44</sup>

4). The **lower mountain**, or **montaine zone** is home, in its natural state, to a similar plant community as the hill zone. Broadleaf forests predominate, and because this zone's mountainous terrain makes agricultural exploitation more difficult, there has generally been

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<sup>43</sup> Turrill 1929, pp. 158-9.

<sup>44</sup> For a detailed discussion of the evidence for deforestation and its mechanisms, see Turrill 1929, ch. 10, especially pp. 188-211. In general, forest degradation begins with deforestation through fire (sometimes accidental) and axe, followed by a stripping of humus soils through erosion and the action of animal hooves in areas turned over to grazing.



much less deforestation above 1000 meters. This would have been particularly true in antiquity, when we can postulate nearly unbroken forest at higher elevations.<sup>45</sup>

5). In the **alpine zone**, above 1,500 meters, the broadleaf forests of the montaine give way to an ecosystem dominated by conifers and beech. As elevation increases, forests transition to high shrub land, and eventually to alpine meadows. These open environments have traditionally been used as summer pasture for pastoralists, and the seasonal trek between the mountaintops and lowland plains represents one of the oldest, and most important human rhythms within the Danubian Borderland (more on this below).<sup>46</sup>

6). Elevation zones rarely possess sharp, clear-cut boundaries; gradual transition from one zone to another is more typical. Within this setting, **rivers** play an important role. Propelled by gravity, they tend to cut across elevational zones, providing avenues of increased mobility between regions for plant and animal species, and in certain instances for humans, as well.

### *III. Topography of the Danubian Borderland*

#### **1.3.1. The mountains: semi-permeable membranes**

As Braudel said, mountains come first,<sup>47</sup> since they usually lie at the heart of a region and exert a strong influence on surrounding ecosystems and patterns of human subsistence. The mountainous zones of the Danubian Borderland perform both of these functions within our region. Geologically, the mountains can be divided into two groups: the large **Carpathian-Balkan chain**, and a smaller, geologically distinct massif: the **Apuseni Mountains** of western Transylvania.

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<sup>45</sup> Turrill 1929, pp. 189-91; *Roumania* 1920, pp. 51-52.

<sup>46</sup> Turrill 1929, p. 181; *Roumania* 1920, p. 52.

<sup>47</sup> Braudel 1972, p. 25.



*Fig. 1.2 Mountain Formations of the Danubian-Balkan region.*

Of the region's two mountain groups, the Carpathian-Balkan chain is, by far, the most important, both ecologically, and for the history of human subsistence within the region. Shaped like a great backwards 'S,' the Carpathian-Balkan chain runs the entire north-south breadth of the Danubian Borderland, and spans a significant portion of its east-west width. This geological formation can be divided into four major subdivisions: 1), the **Northern Carpathians**, 2), the **Eastern Carpathians**, 3), the **Southern Carpathians**, and 4), the **Balkans/Stara Planina**. The Northern Carpathians run east from the Bohemian Forest through Slovakia and the southern Ukraine. These mountains mark the extreme northern boundary of the Danubian Borderland. The Eastern Carpathians extend in a south-southeasterly direction through eastern Romania where the peaks form a natural boundary between the traditional sub-regions of Transylvania (to the west) and

Bukovina/Moldavia (to the east). At about the same latitude as the Danube Delta, the mountains make an approximately 90-degree turn to the west, and become the Southern Carpathians.



*Fig. 1.3 High Southern Carpathians, looking south into the Predeal Pass, Romania*

This range runs nearly straight west, separating the Romanian regions of Transylvania (to the north) from Wallachia (to the south), until the mountains hit the Danube at the Iron Gates. The Iron Gates represent the clearest break in the Carpathian-Balkan chain. Here, the Danube rushes through a deep gorge which rises steeply on either side of the river. On the south side of the river, the Stara Planina Balkans extend as far south as Vidin, before turning to the east in a long, gentle arc which eventually straightens into a solid east-west range, gradually decreasing in elevation, before hitting the Black Sea coast in a series of cliffs lying to the south of Varna. To the north of the Stara Planina lies the Bulgarian Plain, while the traditional region of Eastern Rumelia lies to the south. Finally, back north of the Danube lie the **Apuseni Mountains**, a cluster of peaks located on the western

edge of the Transylvanian plateau between the two western ‘arms’ of the Carpathian arc. Although separated from both the Northern Carpathians and Southern Carpathians by major river valleys, this range still serves to separate the bulk of the Transylvanian highlands from the lowland regions to the west.

### 1.3.2. Hills and foothills: the transitional zone

The mountain chains of the Danubian Borderland were virtually all thickly forested in antiquity, and many sections have remained so to this day.<sup>48</sup> As mentioned above, the major exceptions to this rule are the alpine meadows which occupy the upper slopes of the taller mountains and have long been of particular use to pastoralists as summer pasture for their sheep. Deforestation of the upper elevations has been somewhat limited largely because, in many regions, traditionally-forested foothills have extended outward from the massifs themselves. These regions offer easier access to timber and more fertile, workable land for cultivation, and so have historically been sites of great human habitation and exploitation. The **Transylvanian Plateau** occupies this ecological niche for the Apuseni mountains, as well as the northern slope of the Southern Carpathians, and the western side of the Eastern Carpathians. Although the surrounding ranges rise fairly abruptly from the rolling hills of the Transylvanian plateau, there are sufficient transverse valleys and passes to allow movement into the mountainous zones.<sup>49</sup>

A broad belt of foothills also occurs on the other, ‘outer’ side of both Carpathian ranges. The entirety of **western Moldavia** consists of hills and plateaus deeply cut by the north-south rivers Siret

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<sup>48</sup> Pounds 1969, p. 31; See also Giurescu 1980.

<sup>49</sup> Gudea 1979, p. 65.

and Prut and their various tributaries.<sup>50</sup> The belt of hills continues below the Southern Carpathians where it serves as a gradual transition zone between the mountains and the Wallachian Plain. In some western parts of the range, the transition from mountain to hills is characterized by sheer slopes, but in general, the two zones merge together seamlessly as they do on the other side of the mountains. This **sub-Carpathian hill country**, like the mountains to the north, are cut into a number of sub-regions by the many Danube tributaries issuing flowing south from the mountains.<sup>51</sup>

The northern foothills of the Stara Planina function similarly to the Wallachian hills just described. In most places they transition seamlessly between the Bulgarian Plain to the north, and the mountains to the south. Like the Wallachian hills, the hills of this **Balkan Foreland** are cut into a series of low ridges and plateaus by the many north-south rivers running between the mountains and the Danube.<sup>52</sup> Unlike most of the northern foothills of the Southern Carpathians on the 'other side' of the system, the southern face of the Balkan range tends to descend in elevation sharply, often in the form of sheer, rocky slopes. In some places, such as around Sofia, there are a few intervening foothills between the mountains and the central Bulgarian lowlands to the south, but in many places, the descent from the mountains to the lowlands is quite abrupt.<sup>53</sup>

### 1.3.3. Plains and steppes: seas of grass?

Separated from the mountains by the foothill regions, lie the plains and steppes of the Danubian Borderland, an ecological zone of the utmost importance for understanding the region's human and natural dynamics. There are five major grassland sub-regions within the borderland,

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<sup>50</sup> *Roumania* 1920, p. 22.

<sup>51</sup> *Roumania* 1920, pp. 17-21.

<sup>52</sup> *Bulgaria* 1920, pp. 13-20.

<sup>53</sup> *Bulgaria* 1920, pp. 27, 33.



which, although separated from one another by rivers and, in some places, mountains and hills, nonetheless form a more-or-less connected series of lowlands extending south and west from the great Eurasian Steppe. These are, in order moving south and west, 1) the **Bessarabian/Moldavian Plain**, 2) the **Dobrogea**, 3) the **Wallachian Plain**, 4) the **north Bulgarian Plain**, and 5) the **Hungarian Plain** (including the Banat) in the far west. A sixth lowland zone, the south Bulgarian or **Thracian Plain**, lies south of the Stara Planina, largely outside the Danube watershed, but closely linked to the regions north of the Balkan range by the low hills along the Black Sea coast of Thrace.



*Fig. 1.4 Major lowland topographic zones of the Danubian-Balkan region.*

While each of these sub-regions has its own distinctive character, they all have some features in common, particularly the presence of steppe biomes covering some percentage of their areas. A few general words on steppe geography and ecology are in order before surveying each sub-region

individually. Classic steppe biomes are characterized by an almost complete absence of trees, save along watercourses, and while this type of environment can be found in a few places, such as in certain parts of the Dobrogea, and the area directly east of Bucharest,<sup>54</sup> the vast majority of the steppe land within the Danubian Borderland is better described as **forest steppe**, that is, a transitional landscape dominated by a mosaic of grassland and small forest groves.<sup>55</sup>



*Fig. 1.5 Forest-steppe environment in the central Hungarian Plain near Fülöpszállás, Hungary.*

In a setting free from human influence, which the Danubian Basin has never been for at least the last ten millennia, steppe ecosystems are dependent on two natural factors, one geological, and the other climatic. The first is the presence of loess soil, that is, fine-grained silt produced mainly by the grinding action of continental glaciers during the Pleistocene, and originally deposited in regions south of the ice by wind action. This type of soil, which can be found in many areas across Eurasia,

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<sup>54</sup> Roumania 1920, p. 24, 34.

<sup>55</sup> Magyari et al. 2010, p. 916.

is highly fertile, yet it tends not to be conducive to the growth of trees, when present in sufficient depth, except in regions with annually consistent rainfall, because of its exceptional ability to wick away soil moisture into underlying strata. Thus, in the fully-continental environments north of the Carpathians one finds forests growing in loess zones because of the prevailing wetter conditions, but in regions with even slightly more seasonal variation in precipitation, as is the case throughout the bulk of the Danube Basin, trees have a slightly more difficult time taking root in deep loess, and thus, according to traditional interpretations, steppe reigned as the dominant lowland biome prior to intensive cultivation of loess zones during the 18th and 19th centuries.<sup>56</sup>

The assumption that the Hungarian steppe, and by extension, other Danubian grasslands, evolved naturally during the early Holocene has been questioned since the middle 20th century. The vast grasslands that characterized the Hungarian puszta/Alföld since the Middle Ages, together with their pastoral inhabitants, formed an integral part of Hungary's developing national consciousness since the arrival of the Magyars in the tenth century. To simplify a complex phenomenon, it will suffice to say that because of the cultural importance grassland holds for the modern Hungarian people, until fairly recently, most scholars simply assumed that so characteristic an ecosystem was a natural product of the region's climate and topography.<sup>57</sup> More recently, however, scholars have noted that most Danubian lowlands are far from homogenous, exhibiting, instead, the forest steppe ecosystem described above. Further, in many places, grasslands and oak-lime parkland exist in close proximity under virtually identical soil, water, and atmospheric

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<sup>56</sup> Childe 1929, pp. 3-4; Magyari 2010, p. 916.

<sup>57</sup> For a discussion of these early arguments on the natural openness of the loess lowlands of the Danubian region, see Garnett 1945, pp. 133-134. Fleure (1960) is a good example of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century scholarship that begins from an *a priori* assumption that the region's loess soil zones were naturally open environments.



conditions, a phenomenon which has caused some to argue that the extensive steppe lands of the early modern period were not a purely natural phenomenon. As observed above, the continental climate, with its more even rain distributions, still exerts a strong influence over much of the Danubian Borderland, particularly in the north-west region where the Hungarian Plain is located, and so it has been argued that much of the lowlands can theoretically support trees despite historically attested steppe ecosystems. According to this theory, the great steppes of the Danubian Borderland grew out of a more thickly forested period due to a combination of environmental change and human agency, but with a strong emphasis on the latter. Deforestation through burning and timber harvesting followed by intensive animal husbandry created environments hostile to forest growth and greatly facilitated the spread of grassland in a region already well suited to such floral communities.<sup>58</sup>

It seems highly likely that human actions did have a hand in spreading steppe biomes through the Danube Basin, but the extent of this phenomenon and the periods of its occurrence remain extremely unclear. Some have argued that the main period of deforestation occurred in the Middle Ages, while others point to a much earlier, Neolithic phase.<sup>59</sup> Overall, the case for some degree of very early deforestation seems most persuasive, yet the possibility that there was somewhat less steppe present during the Roman period than was documented during the early modern period will need to be factored into later discussions. For now, let us conclude that the result of this farrago of topographic, climatic, pedological, and anthropogenic influences was some version of the forest steppe ecosystem still found in those parts of the Danubian lowlands spared the ravages of the

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<sup>58</sup> Borojević 2006, pp. 110–6.

<sup>59</sup> For the Neolithic case, see Willis et al. 1997. For the medieval argument, see Pounds 1969, p. 500.

mechanized plow.<sup>60</sup> Regions without loess, such as hill country and river valleys, are heavily forested, while those covered by this soil type show trees where local conditions manage to mitigate against the water-wicking abilities of the loess. Grassland reigns elsewhere in the loess zones, although not through natural means alone.

※ *The major lowland zones*

1). The **Bessarabian/Moldavian Plain** begins east of the river Prut, and south of Chişinău, as hill systems extending out from Bukovina and Moldavia dwindle away into undulating grassland.<sup>61</sup> The plain's southern boundary is marked by the final length of the Danube, including its great marshy delta.<sup>62</sup> The plain's eastern edge is usually drawn at the Dniester, but, in truth, the Bessarabian grasslands have no geographic eastern border since they are, in reality, simply the western-most portion of the South-Russian steppe. In Bessarabia, we encounter our first example of the harshness of steppe climate. The grasslands are both dryer than the hilly country north of Chişinău, and also subjected to harsher, more capricious weather systems characterized by frequent strong winds coming off the larger steppes to the northeast.<sup>63</sup>

Movement into the Bessarabian Plain from the South-Russian steppe involves crossing the Dniester which, in common with many larger rivers in the region, is flanked in its lower reaches by significant marshland.<sup>64</sup> Tervingi Goths attempted to use the Dniester as a bulwark against hostile Hunnic and Alan raiders in the late fourth century, yet the ease with which the ersatz barrier was

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<sup>60</sup> Specifically, the mixture of continental, Mediterranean, and Pontic climatic conditions with uneven loess deposition, variable water tables, and the potentially destructive action of deforestation and animal grazing.

<sup>61</sup> *Bessarabia* 1920, pp. 1-2.

<sup>62</sup> *Bessarabia* 1920, p. 4.

<sup>63</sup> *Bessarabia* 1920, pp. 4-5.

<sup>64</sup> *Bessarabia* 1920, p. 3.

crossed should warn us against viewing even the largest rivers as serious impediments to human mobility.<sup>65</sup> The Danube presents similar obstacles when leaving the region to the south, but the Prut offers less challenge in this regard.<sup>66</sup>

2). The region of the **Dobrogea** begins on the southern side of the Danube delta, and is bordered on three sides by the course of the river, which is flanked by wide marshy zones in many places. The southern boundary is usually drawn to coincide with the political border between Romania and Bulgaria, but this also reflects a transitional topographic zone known as the Deli Orman (“Crazy Forest” in Turkish), characterized by rough low hills extending north from the eastern terminus of the Stara Planina near Varna, and clearly distinct from the steppe land to the north which occupies the bulk of the Dobrogea.<sup>67</sup>

The highest elevations in the Dobrogea are found in the north-west corner and never extend above 400 meters. The rest of the roughly-rectangular region consists of undulating grasslands edged with coastal lakes and lagoons, and riverine marshes.<sup>68</sup> The combination of loess soil above limestone bedrock serves, in many places, to render the grasslands more arid than its moderate rainfall patterns would suggest, but in areas, such as near rivers or in hillier districts, where steppe conditions do not prevail, the land appears much more vibrant and verdant.<sup>69</sup> As with Bessarabia to the north, Boreas keeps an icy grip on Dobrogea during the winter months, bringing harsh, frigid conditions out of South Russia. Dobrogea is blessed during the other three seasons, however, with a

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<sup>65</sup> A.M. 31.3.4-7.

<sup>66</sup> *Bessarabia* 1920, p. 4.

<sup>67</sup> *Roumania* 1920, p. 33; *Bulgaria* 1920, pp. 14-15.

<sup>68</sup> Zahariade 2006, pp. 8-10.

<sup>69</sup> *Roumania* 1920, p. 34.

climate rendered warm and somewhat wet by winds prevailing from the Aegean. The mild climate continues into the autumn due to the mitigating influences of the Danube and the Black Sea.<sup>70</sup>

3). Crossing the Danube from Dobrogea, one enters the eastern edge of the **Wallachian Plain**, one of the largest and most diverse of the Danubian Borderland's grassland zones. The plain extends north from the Danube as far west as the Iron Gates. Elevations gradually rise as one moves north, and eventually the plain merges seamlessly into the foothills of the Southern Carpathians.<sup>71</sup> As with the other grasslands surveyed above, the Wallachian Plain is characterized by thick loess deposits, particularly in its eastern portions. Unlike the Dobrogea, however, in most parts of Wallachia, the loess overlays thick gravel strata which holds water better than the limestone bedrock east of the Danube. Precipitation percolates quickly through the loess layers but is then held in the underlying gravel strata. This phenomenon produces dry steppe land atop the loess and verdant, spring-watered valleys wherever one of the Danube's many tributaries manages to cut through to the underlying gravels.<sup>72</sup> In modern times, deep wells have allowed for agricultural exploitation of the fertile loess soils outside the river valleys, but historically, most human settlement in the Wallachian plain has been along the rivers, or in the foothills that make up the region's hazy northern border.<sup>73</sup>

4). The counterpart to the Wallachian plain is the **North Bulgarian Plain**, which extends south from the Danube until it merges with the northern foothills of the Stara Planina Balkans. The topography of this region is somewhat similar to that of the Wallachian plain, in terms of the

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<sup>70</sup> Zahariade 2006, pp. 11-12.

<sup>71</sup> *Roumania* 1920, p. 23.

<sup>72</sup> *Roumania* 1920, pp. 23-4.

<sup>73</sup> *Roumania* 1920, pp. 23-4

presence of wooded steppe ecosystems, but the loess deposits here rest upon higher bedrock than in the region north of the river, and this has resulted in a more dramatic landscape of valleys and plateaus, often with steep cliffs marking the transition between plain and riverine zones. Indeed, in most places, the northern edge of the Bulgarian plain rises from the Danube valley in sheer, imposing cliffs of 150 meters or more, standing in marked contrast to the northern bank which is generally low and often marshy.<sup>74</sup> The particulars of the geography here have made the Bulgarian plain somewhat easier to cultivate than much of the Wallachian plain to the north, and while both regions have been extensively planted in modern times, the Bulgarian plain proved more suitable to traditional agricultural practices.<sup>75</sup>

5). The final grassland region within the Danubian Borderland is the **Hungarian Plain** or **Alföld**. This sub-region is massive: over 40,000 square kilometers of lowland,<sup>76</sup> now largely under intensive cultivation, filling the bulk of the Pannonian Basin between the Apuseni foothills in the east and the Dinaric Alps in the west. To the north, it is bounded by the Northern Carpathians, while the southern limit is marked by the rough uplands between the Dinaric Alps and the western beginnings of the Stara Planina.<sup>77</sup> The rivers Danube in the west and Tisza in the east divide the Pannonian Basin vertically into rough thirds. Not all of this immense area consists of plains, but the region lying between the Danube and the Tisza – the ancient Sarmatian *barbaricum* – is almost entirely covered by forest steppe of the sort described above. Steppe ecosystems extend out to the east and west of these rivers, but coverage is less complete, and tends to taper off further away from

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<sup>74</sup> *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, pp. 18–19; *Bulgaria* 1920, pp. 13–14.

<sup>75</sup> *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, pp. 70–71.

<sup>76</sup> Lindner 1981, p. 14.

<sup>77</sup> Pounds 1969, pp. 14–7.

the Danube–Tisza core.<sup>78</sup> By the early 20th century, the fertility of the Hungarian Plain had been fully recognized and exploited, but this was a phenomenon of the early modern age, and in antiquity, forest steppe was extensive between the Danube and the Tisza.<sup>79</sup> The Hungarian Plain is somewhat isolated from the other grasslands within the Danubian Borderland, leading some scholars to exclude it from regional Danubian studies.<sup>80</sup> However, analysis of the plant taxa found in both the Hungarian, Wallachian/Bulgarian, and South Russian plains strongly suggests that there has been longstanding ecological exchange between these regions, most likely through the Iron Gates region, although perhaps also through gaps in the Northern Carpathians.<sup>81</sup>

#### **1.3.4. Rivers: arteries and road-blocks<sup>82</sup>**

The Danube itself is the centerpiece of the region's complex drainage system, running, as it does, clean through the region from north–west to south–east. Virtually all the other rivers within the sub–regions surveyed above flow into the Danube. Only the Dniester in Bessarabia, and the Maritsa and a few smaller streams in Bulgaria flow directly into the Black Sea instead. A detailed discussion of the intricacy of the Danube's hydrology and topography is not required at this juncture, but a few general facts and trends will provide a useful background for our further study. The Danube is the largest river in Europe by volume, and in length, at about 2,800 kilometers, only the Volga surpasses it.<sup>83</sup> As mentioned above, the river falls into three natural divisions: 1) the Upper Danube, running east from its sources in Germany's Black Forest as far as the so–called Carpathian

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<sup>78</sup> *Handbook of the River Danube*, 1915, p. 84; Magyari et al. 2010, p. 916.

<sup>79</sup> *Handbook of the River Danube*, 1915, pp. 82–85.

<sup>80</sup> Such is the case in Roger Batty's 2007 *Rome and the Nomads*, the only comprehensive, modern, regional study of the Danubian region. His decision to largely ignore the Middle Danube Basin remains perplexing (eg. p. 69).

<sup>81</sup> Magyari et al. 2010, p. 930.

<sup>82</sup> See figs. 1.10 and 1.12 below for maps showing the rivers discussed here.

<sup>83</sup> *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, p. 8.

Gates near Budapest, where the river turns southward, 2) the Middle Danube, extending from the Carpathian Gates south through the Hungarian Plain, and then east as far as the Iron Gates where it cuts between the Southern Carpathians and the western beginnings of the Stara Planina Balkans, and 3) the Lower Danube which continues east between the Wallachian and Bulgarian Plains, before turning north around the Dobrogea, and finally emptying into the Black Sea in a massive delta system.<sup>84</sup> The Upper Danube falls outside the scope of this study, but the lower divisions form the backbone of the Danubian Borderland.

※ *The rivers of the Danube Basin*

1). **The Middle Danube** runs nearly due south through the Hungarian Plain, before turning eastward just west of Novi Sad, Serbia. During its north-south course, the river is fed by a number of tributaries draining out of the Dinaric Alps to the west, most importantly the Drava. The Sava, another important alpine tributary, joins the Danube at Belgrade, after its eastward turn. The Drava and the Sava carry a great deal of melt-water during the spring, and traditionally caused damaging floods thanks to the Danube's generally low banks in this region.<sup>85</sup> During the summer, evaporation lowers the river's level significantly, but even at its minimum, the Middle Danube remains navigable by craft with a draught of 1.5 meters or less.<sup>86</sup> The Danube is somewhat more easily crossed during its passage through the Hungarian Plain than at other places. The current is slower than on the Upper Danube where a stronger gradient of descent is present,<sup>87</sup> and while the Lower Danube runs slower still, the high bluffs and riparian marshlands present additional challenges

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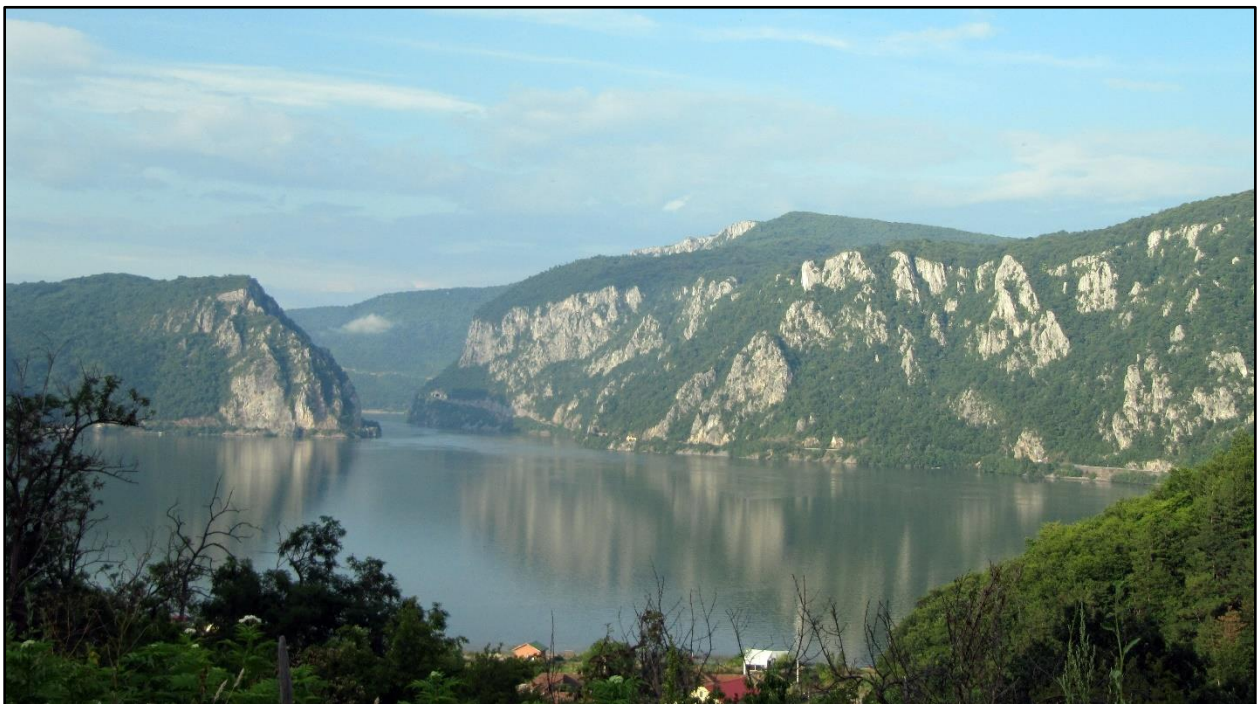
<sup>84</sup> *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, pp. 8-9.

<sup>85</sup> *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, p. 28.

<sup>86</sup> *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, p. 130.

<sup>87</sup> *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, pp. 19-20.

for the lower section, which are largely absent from the Middle Danube. Crossing is made even easier during the winter, as the Middle Danube freezes over nearly every year between later December and February, sometimes for up to 30 days,<sup>88</sup> a phenomenon well documented by ancient authors, such as Ovid, Cassius Dio, and Ammianus Marcellinus.<sup>89</sup> About ten kilometers north-west of Belgrade, the Danube is joined from the north by the Tisza, marking the third major confluence of the great river's middle section.



*Fig. 1.6 Narrowing of the Danube near the western entrance to the Iron Gates*

The Middle Danube ends at the **Iron Gates**, where the Carpathian and Balkan ranges converge near Turnu Severin, Romania. The mountains press in on either side of the river for the entire stretch between the cities of Baziaş and Turnu Severin, and in places the descent down to water level is sheer, creating impressive gorges. The river narrows significantly in this stretch –

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<sup>88</sup> *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, p. 30.

<sup>89</sup> Ovid., *Tr.* 3.10.27-34, 51-56, 3.12.27-30; Dio 54.36.2; A.M. 29.11.4.



down to a mere 36.5 meters at the Iron Gates proper – creating fast currents of up to 3.5 meters per second.<sup>90</sup> Although no outright cataracts exist here, making it possible for non-motorized vessels to travel through the gates both downstream and against the current when under tow, there are a number of submerged ledges and boulders which, prior to modernization efforts in the 20th century, made the passage extremely dangerous without a navigator knowledgeable of local conditions.<sup>91</sup>

2). Below the Iron Gates, the **Lower Danube** begins, and the river assumes a different character. The angle of descent after the Iron Gates is extremely gradual, descending only 36 meters in 934 kilometers of length, causing the river to flow at a more leisurely pace than anywhere upstream.<sup>92</sup> As the Danube cuts its way through the grasslands of Bulgaria and Wallachia, it is joined by dozens of tributaries flowing out of the Carpathians and Stara Planina Balkans, swelling the river's volume greatly. With no enclosing mountains or other geological constraints, the Lower Danube carves a wide valley through the plains which varies in breadth from 9.5 to nearly 27 kilometers. This valley, although rendered extremely fertile by regular depositions of alluvium, is often marshy and prone to flooding, particularly east of Giurgiu.<sup>93</sup> In general, the southern edge of the Danube valley is better defined than the north, due to the high bluffs which mark the edge of the Bulgarian Plain.<sup>94</sup> The northern edges, on the other hand, tend to be marshy and less clearly delineated. Past Giurgiu, there exist only two stretches – near Hârşova and between Brăila and Galaţi – where the pre-modern river followed a single channel and was not flanked by extensive marshland on the

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<sup>90</sup> *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, pp. 12-13.

<sup>91</sup> *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, pp. 13-15, 130.

<sup>92</sup> *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, pp. 19-20. The average ratio of descent for the whole Lower Danube is, therefore 1/25,930. The final leg of the river from Braila to the mouth of the Delta descends a mere one meter over 187 kilometers, for a ratio of approximately 1/175,000.

<sup>93</sup> *Roumania* 1920, pp. 26-27.

<sup>94</sup> *Bulgaria* 1920, p. 12.

north/west bank.<sup>95</sup> Thus, generally speaking, gaining access to the river itself is challenging for different reasons when approaching from either side. The challenges of crossing from the north are somewhat mitigated during the winter, however, when the Lower Danube, like the middle section, is prone to freezing over, here for up to 40 days between December and the end of February.<sup>96</sup> Little need be said about the Danube delta at this juncture, save that it is nearly 100 kilometers wide at the coast, and that its great marshes, although providing ideal habitat for myriad birds and other wildlife, present a significant obstacle to human movement between Bessarabia and the Dobrogea.<sup>97</sup>

A few words must now be said about the principal tributaries of the Lower and Middle Danube. Just as the Danube itself both facilitates movement and communication along its length, and hinders it somewhat in the perpendicular direction, so too do the small rivers of this region. In general, we can divide the tributaries into two categories: those which are large enough or run through valleys of sufficient width and dryness to facilitate movement along their lengths, and those which, because of their small volume, extensive riparian marshes, or narrow, precipitous gorges, do nothing to aid in such movement. As one should expect, the longer of the tributaries often contain sections which are conducive to mobility and other parts which are not.

3). Moving upstream for its mouth, the first important tributaries of the Danube are the **Prut** and the **Siret**, the two great rivers of Moldavia, which together drain all of that region, as well as the western half of Bessarabia.<sup>98</sup> Both the Prut and Siret run essentially north-south, in line with the

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<sup>95</sup> *Roumania* 1920, pp. 27-28.

<sup>96</sup> *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, p. 30.

<sup>97</sup> For a comprehensive study of the topography and ecology of the Danube delta, see Tudorancea and Tudorancea, eds. 2006.

<sup>98</sup> The eastern half of Bessarabia drains into the Dniester which flows directly into the Black Sea. Although not a tributary of the Danube, the Dniester is similar to the Prut and Siret in its lower stretches, although north of Bendery its stream becomes more rapid and its course more restricted by high riparian bluffs (*Bessarabia* 1920, p. 3).

march of the Carpathians, allowing them to follow the natural contours between the foothills rather than cutting across them in deep gorges. As a result, both rivers, as well as their own principal tributaries, flow through wider, less precipitous valleys than do most of the Danubian Borderland's other streams, and so provide ready lines of communication north along the axis of the Carpathians. Additionally, the Prut and the Siret themselves are wide and deep enough, with no troublesome cataracts, to allow for navigation far upstream by boats drawing up to one meter of water.<sup>99</sup> This landscape of rivers and hills has been heavily inhabited and cultivated since prehistory, and formed one of the regional cores of the important Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov Culture during the fourth century.<sup>100</sup>

4). Moving west, the Danube is fed by a great number of rivers flowing out of the Southern Carpathians and the Stara Planina. Of the **Carpathian tributaries**,<sup>101</sup> most begin as fast mountain torrents, cutting deep valleys through the Carpathian foothills, but eventually lose a great deal of their volume to evaporation and infiltration as they wind their way through the loess land of the Wallachian Plain, where most of their lower courses become swampy and surrounded by lagoons and dead-arms.<sup>102</sup> Of the Wallachian tributaries, the **Olt** is the largest and most important, and the only stream that reaches the Danube with most of its volume intact. The Olt is also the only tributary to cut through the full breadth of the mountains. It has its origins in Transylvania, where it drains the south-east quarter of that region. The river is already quite large when it makes its way

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<sup>99</sup> *Roumania* 1920, pp27, 30-31.

<sup>100</sup> We will discuss this material culture complex extensively in Chapter Four.

<sup>101</sup> There are dozens of streams flowing out of the Carpathians, but they tend to converge as they enter the Wallachian Plain. The most important of these tributaries are, from east to west, the Buzău, Ialomița, Prahova, Dumbrăvița, Argeș, Olt, Jiu, and Cerna.

<sup>102</sup> *Roumania* 1920, pp. 28-29.

across the Carpathians through a narrow pass known as the Red Tower, which, despite a tenuous nature, does allow for land movement parallel to the river's course.<sup>103</sup> Movement through the mountains on the river itself, however, is not particularly practical because of numerous rapids south of the Red Tower Pass. In its lower stretches, the Olt is prone to division into multiple streams, but its great volume and fairly rapid flow mitigate somewhat against the growth of riparian marshes.<sup>104</sup>

Looking at the rivers of this region as a group, one can generalize that they are actually more of a hindrance to movement than an aid. The larger tributaries, such as the Olt, Jiu, and Ialomița allow for navigation along part of their lengths, usually through the Wallachian Plain and into the Carpathian foothills, and represent important natural lines of north-south communication and movement. Progress further into the mountains, however, either by water or along the banks, is usually difficult or impossible due to the deep, narrow valleys these rivers tend to cut as they descend from their mountain sources. The smaller tributaries are even less useful since their volume decreases so much during passage through the plains that they are of little use for navigation even in their lower stretches. The Wallachian rivers also represent significant obstacles to longitudinal movement across the plains and foothills. In the plain, the challenge is presented by the marshes and lagoons which flank most of the streams. Further north in the foothills, the difficulty lies in crossing the deep valleys these rivers frequently carve.

5). The **Balkan tributaries** flowing north from the Stara Planina are numerous,<sup>105</sup> and like their northern counterparts often serve as significant impediments to longitudinal movement across

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<sup>103</sup> *Roumania* 1920, pp. 12-14, 28-29.

<sup>104</sup> *Roumania* 1920, p. 29.

<sup>105</sup> The most important of these rivers are, from east to west, the Rusenski Lom, Yantra, Vit, Iskar, Ogosta, Tsibritsa, Lom, and Timok.

the Bulgarian Plain. The character of these rivers is, however, somewhat different from those of Wallachia. Probably due to the narrower width of the Bulgarian plain, the southern tributaries tend to suffer less from evaporation and infiltration than do the Carpathian streams.



*Fig. 1.7 Riparian cliffs along the Iskar River, south of Pleven, Bulgaria.  
(This image was shot from a moving train, hence the blurred foreground.)*

Additionally, the deeper loess and higher bedrock of the Bulgarian Plain causes the rivers to cut deeper valleys through the lowlands than one finds in Wallachia, and consequently there is less marshland surrounding the Bulgarian tributaries in their lower reaches. Often, these valleys are uneven, with sheer cliffs rising on the eastern banks while the western edges tend to merge more gradually with the surrounding plain. This lopsided topography, and the general lack of riparian marshland, may make the Bulgarian tributaries somewhat easier to cross than their Wallachian

counterparts, but the eastern cliffs still pose significant difficulties, to the point where, during the late 19th century, they were proposed as fortification lines by the Bulgarians when contemplating invasion from the west.<sup>106</sup> Many of the Bulgarian tributaries are navigable by smaller craft, and thus can serve as highways from the Danube south into the Balkan foothills, although further into the mountains, where currents become swifter and valleys narrower, the rivers often become less conducive to human use.<sup>107</sup>

The Balkan tributaries mirror the Wallachian in a final way, in that like the northern streams, only one of the southern rivers manages to pierce clean through the mountains to the region beyond. In Bulgaria, this is the **Iskar**, which has its origins in the Rila Dagħ, the northern-most spur of the Rhodope Mountains. The river traverses the lowlands around Sofia, gathering volume, before cutting its way through the Balkans, marking the boundary between the western and central portions of the Stara Planina with an extremely narrow gorge, not at all conducive to riparian land travel.<sup>108</sup> The lower courses of the Iskar follow the pattern explained above, with steep cliffs on the eastern bank, and more gradual slopes to the west. The river runs fast and deep, and is only easily crossed at a handful of places along its lower reaches.<sup>109</sup>

Having surveyed the major tributaries of the Lower Danube, we turn now to the middle section. Here, the river is fed by a smaller number of streams, but the tributaries that do exist are, as a rule, larger than all but the greatest of the Lower Danube's confluents. Moving from southeast to

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<sup>106</sup> *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, p. 69; *Bulgaria* 1918, pp. 16–20. The most defensible river banks are those of the Timok in the far west of Bulgaria, and the Yantra further east, although most of the rivers in this region possess eastern cliffs to one degree or another.

<sup>107</sup> *Bulgaria* 1920, pp. 16–20.

<sup>108</sup> *Bulgaria* 1920, p. 22. During the late 19th century, construction of a railway following the course of the Iskar gorge required 22 separate tunnels in order for the rails to pass through the narrowest sections.

<sup>109</sup> *Bulgaria* 1920, pp. 17–18

northwest, the Middle Danube tributaries are the *Timiș*, which drains southwest Transylvania and the southern Banat, the *Tisza*, which, together with its own important tributary the *Mureș*, drains the Apuseni mountains, the northern Banat, and the majority of the Transylvanian plateau, the *Sava*, which joins the Danube at Belgrade and drains the southwest portion of the Pannonian Basin and the Dinaric Alps, and finally the *Drava*, which joins the Danube further north and drains the central basin and Dinarics.

6). The **Timiș** has its origins in the Cerna mountains near the western end of the Southern Carpathians. Its headwaters are fairly close to those of the river Cerna which drains south into the Lower Danube, but the *Timiș* takes a different route, flowing north, instead, through the hills of southwest Transylvania and the Banat. Although not as large as the other Middle Danube tributaries, it is important because its valley is fairly wide, even in the mountains. This route north is easily connected with the equally-traversable Cerna valley running south into the Wallachian plain. The mountains here are fairly low, and thus, the Cerna-*Timiș* route offers one of the most convenient passages between Wallachia and Transylvania, and by extension, also between the Lower and Middle Danube Basins. Following Trajan's conquest of the Dacian Kingdom in the early second century, the Romans built a road following the Cerna-*Timiș* route, making it into one of the most important avenues into and out of Transylvania.<sup>110</sup>

7). The **Tisza** rises in the Northern Carpathians and flows in a great arc west and south, cutting its way through the Hungarian Plain before eventually mingling its waters with those of the Danube near the town of Novi Slankamen in Serbia. For most of its length, the river flows through

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<sup>110</sup> Fodorean 2013, pp. 39-40. We will discuss this route in greater depth in Chapter Four.

plains and lowlands, and consequently its progress is slow, except when engorged by spring meltwater. The valley of the Tisza is shallow and prone to flooding, a phenomenon common to all the major tributaries of the Middle Danube.<sup>111</sup> The river is navigable by larger Danube craft as far north as Szeged, where it converges with the Mureş, and by barges over much of its remaining length. The **Mureş** itself is a significant riverway which drains a large portion of Transylvania and flows through fertile agricultural land for much of its length. The Mureş is deep enough to accommodate navigation by barges for over 600 kilometers upstream from its convergence with the Tisza.<sup>112</sup> Together, these two streams ensure that the region of the central Hungarian Plain was characterized by easy fluvial mobility in both a north-south, and east-west direction.

8). The western quarter of the Pannonian Basin is drained, primarily, by the **Sava** and **Drava** rivers which flow south and east from the Dinaric alps through the foothills and lowlands of western Hungary and Croatia. The rivers are similar in scale and character, and can be safely treated together. As they make their way from the Dinaric foothills into the lowlands of the western Pannonian plain, the Sava and Drava both spread and meander, creating wide floodplains dotted with numerous dead-arms and small lakes. This riparian environment is prone to flooding, particularly nearer to the Danube confluences. When not in spate, however, the Drava and Sava pose only moderate challenges to mobility. Movement along their lengths is facilitated by the wide floodplain, while the gradual transition between the floodplains and the surrounding territory, together with the slow current of both streams, makes crossing these rivers fairly easy.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, pp. 80-82.

<sup>112</sup> *Transylvania and Banat* 1920, p. 41.

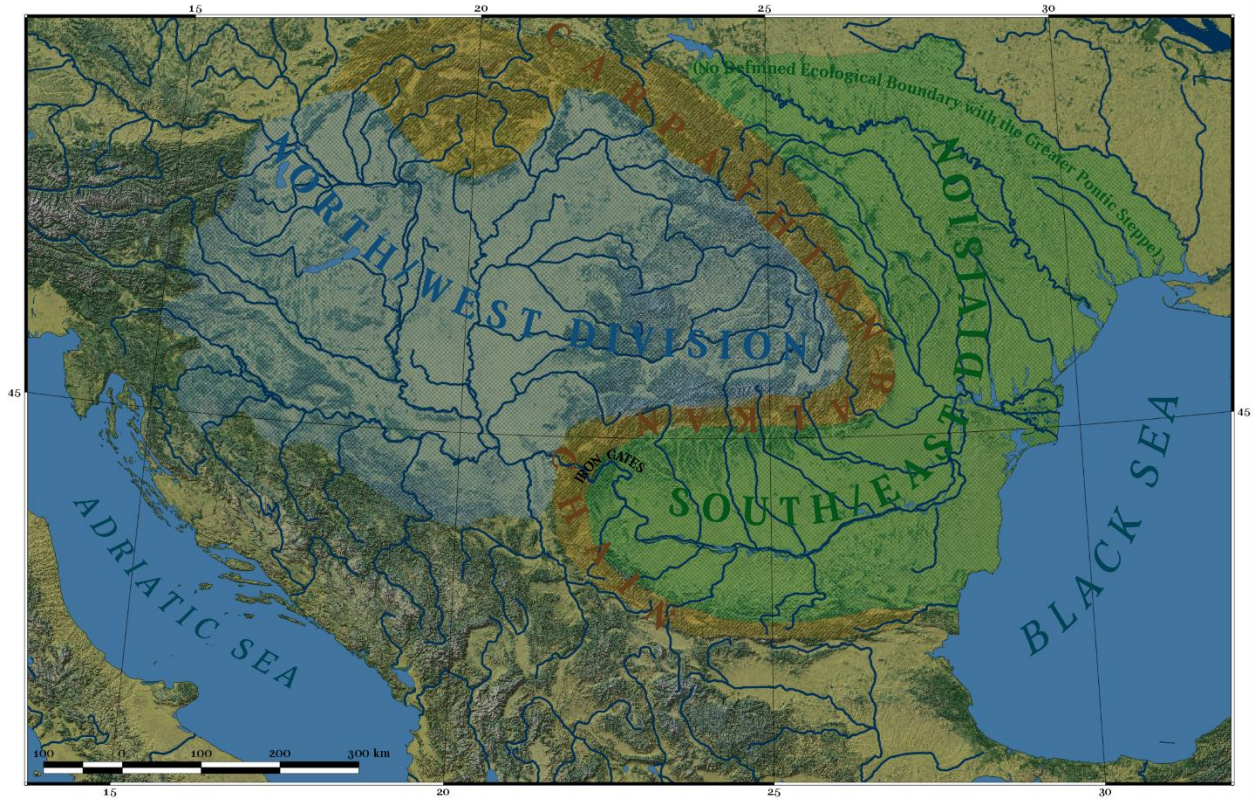
<sup>113</sup> Pounds 1969, pp. 655-6.



#### *IV. Fitting the Pieces: Sub-Regions and Points of Interaction*

Having covered the most important topographic and climatic features of the Danubian Borderland, it now remains to consider how the natural environments described create logical sub-regions within the larger Middle and Lower Danube zones, and allow for certain types of connection and movement between these sub-regions. These natural boundaries and points of connection, together with the larger macro-regional themes already discussed, form the stage upon which human life was played out in the Danubian Borderland. There are two crucial elements to be considered, first **topographic and climatic connections**, together with their resultant floral and faunal regimes, and second, points of **human connection and separation**. Having surveyed the natural environment, we are now in a position to consider how these two types of mobility work together to give the Danubian Borderland its particular characteristics.

The mountain ranges of the Danubian Borderland do the most to divide the zone into coherent subdivisions. This is because they influence both natural and human factors. First, changes in elevation caused by mountains and their surrounding foothills serve to limit the extent of steppe ecosystems. Loess soil, a crucial ingredient in the creation of grasslands, only accumulates in relatively flat, low-elevation regions, limiting the growth of steppe lands to the areas beyond the reach of the mountains. At the broadest level, the great backwards-S of the Carpathian-Balkan chain divides the Danubian Borderland into two major divisions: 1) a north and west region encompassing the Middle Danube Basin and Transylvania, and 2), a south and east division made up of the Lower Danube Basin, that is, Bessarabia, Moldavia, Wallachia, and northern Bulgaria.



*Fig. 1.8 The two major natural divisions of the Danubian Region.*

The Iron Gates region acts as the main natural nexus between these two divisions. East-west movement is conducted along the river, while north-south movement flows naturally through the Cerna-Timiş route. The importance of this region for control over the entire Danubian Borderland was recognized by Trajan. Following his conquest and annexation of Dacia, he first constructed a permanent stone bridge over the Danube, just downstream from the mouth of the Cerna valley, at the eastern mouth of the Iron Gates, and then established the city of Drobeta (Turnu Severin) at its northern terminus in order to secure control over both n-s and e-w routes.<sup>114</sup> Even after the bridge

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<sup>114</sup> Fodorean 2013, pp. 15-16, 19-21, 39-40.

fell into disrepair sometime in the third century, Drobeta was maintained as a crucial bridgehead until at least the mid sixth century.<sup>115</sup>



*Fig. 1.9 View North, up the easily-traversed Cerna Valley, Romania.*

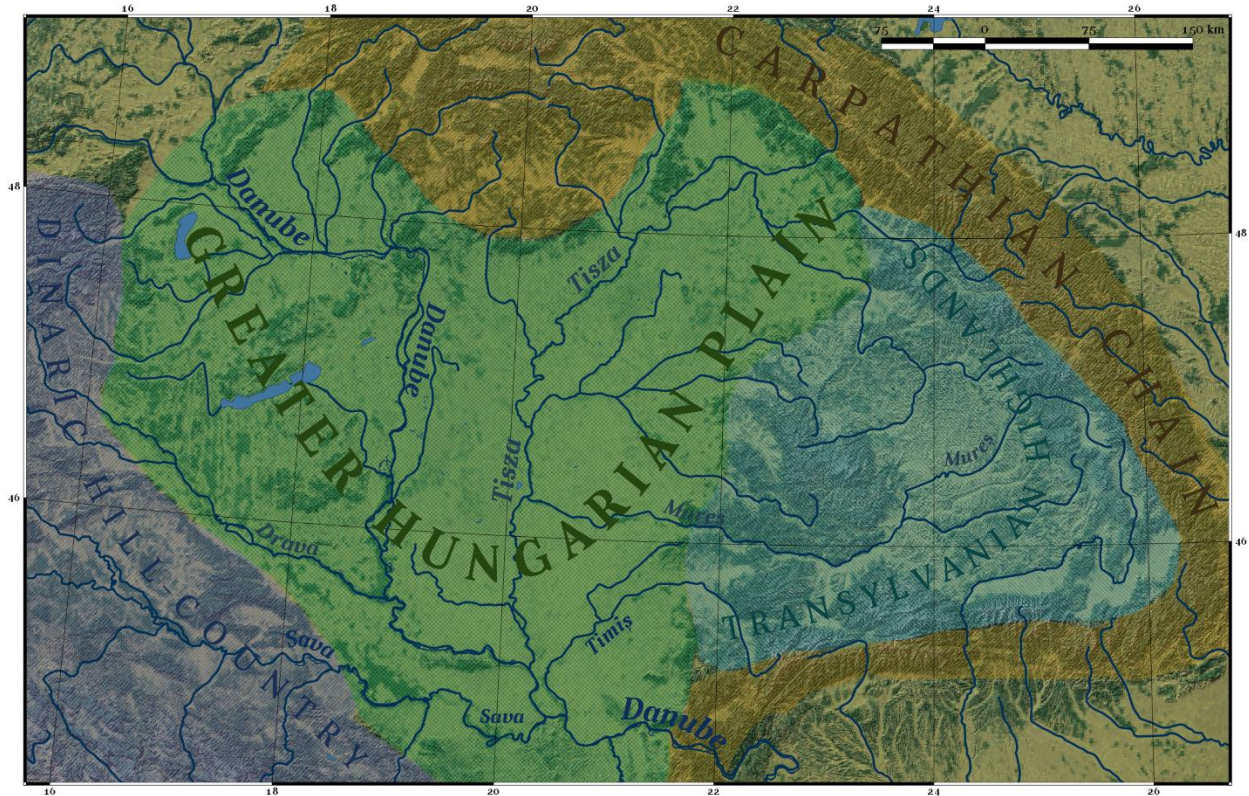
#### **1.4.2. The north/west division (Pannonia-Sarmatia-Dacia) a connected and mobile land**

Looking first at the north/west division, elevation can be used to further divide the Middle Danube Basin into three zones, 1) the hill country sloping down from the Dinaric Alps in the west, 2) the highlands of Transylvania in the east, and 3) the lowlands in between. Within the setting of these divisions, the major rivers of the Middle Danube Basin do not stand out as meaningful natural boundaries.

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<sup>115</sup> Bondoc 2009, pp. 53-68. The Cerna-Timiş route began a few miles upstream from Drobeta at Dierna, but the bridgehead city was the more important regional center.





*Fig. 1. 10 Natural sub-regions of the north/west Danube Basin.*

The Danube flows somewhat east of the transition zone between the Dinaric foothills and the plains, while the Tisza runs through the heart of the Hungarian Plain. The other rivers (the Timiș, Mureș, Sava, and Drava) all run, more or less, in line with the elevation gradient present along their routes, ensuring that natural conditions do not greatly differ on either side of their streams. Additionally, none of these rivers presents insurmountable challenges to human mobility. Movement along their lengths is usually easy since they generally run through wide valleys which function as ready lines of communication except during times of flood. Perpendicular movement suffers from the challenges inherent in crossing any large river, but, again, the low valleys and generally modest angle of descent makes getting from one bank to the other not extremely difficult, while annual freezes further facilitate crossing during the winter.

East-west movement in and out of the lowlands also poses no great challenge, owing to the gradual rise of the surrounding foothills, and the general absence of rivers running parallel to the mountain chains. Movement east-west across the plain is challenged only by the Tisza and the Danube, both of which are navigable, can be crossed with ease in their frozen winter state, and, as explained above, only present serious impediments to movement during times of flood. North-south movement is somewhat more challenging in Transylvania, where there are more hills and rivers to contend with, and where the heights of the Apuseni range require either an arduous traverse or a lengthy detour in order to travel between the northern and southern horns of the Carpathian arc. In the plains, too, north-south overland movement is slightly more difficult owing to the presence of a handful of tributaries feeding the Tisza and its major confluents. These streams, however, are, as a rule, quite small and do not pose much of a challenge to movement, since they run mainly through low plains.<sup>116</sup>

While the surrounding mountains provide fairly clear - although by no means impermeable - natural boundaries between the Middle Danube Basin and the surrounding regions, there are, as we have just seen, no corresponding internal borders. There are, to be sure, different ecological zones present within this sub-region of the Danubian Borderland, but they transition gradually into one another without any significant impediments to human or natural mobility existing to create clear-cut delineations. The Romans divided the Middle Danube Basin into three portions: **1) The northern portions of Dacia (Porolissensis and Apulensis)** which correspond, roughly to the modern Romanian regions of Transylvania, eastern Banat, and western Moldavia,<sup>117</sup> **2) the provinces**

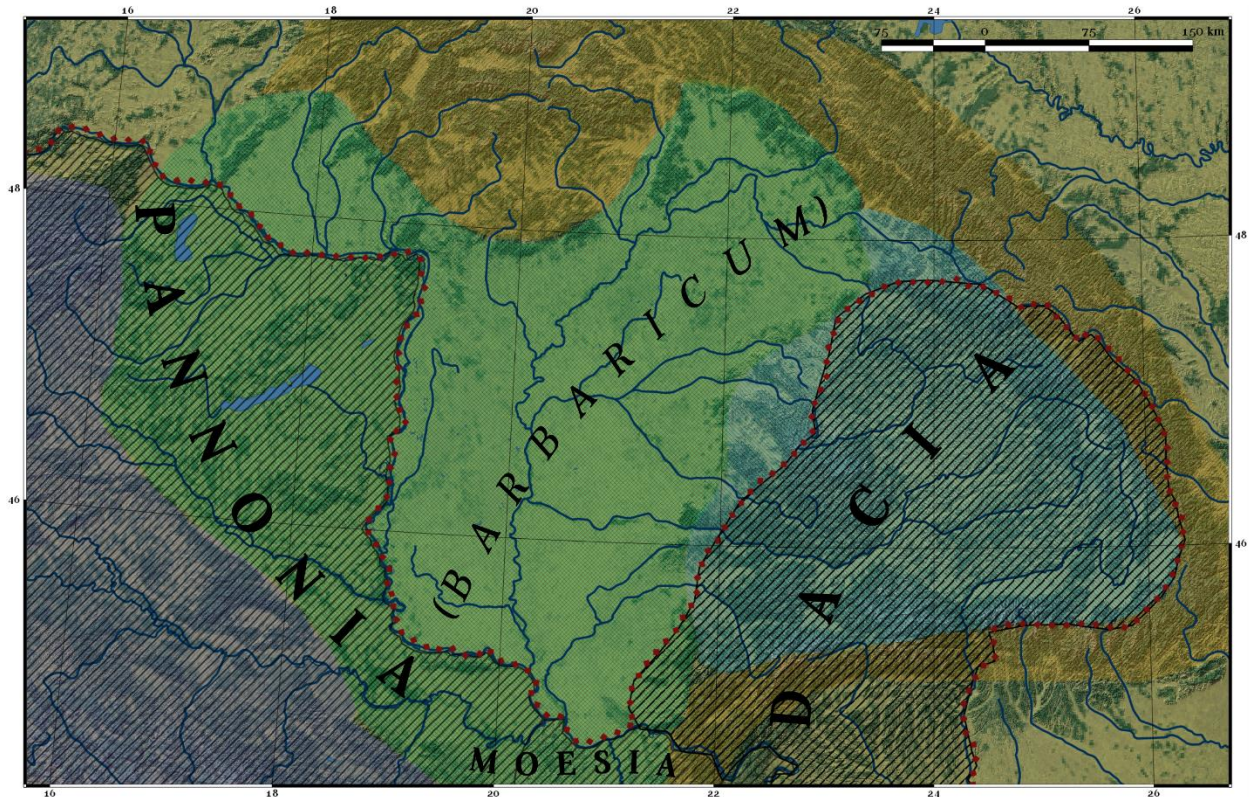
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<sup>116</sup> Pounds 1969, p. 496.

<sup>117</sup> The third Dacian province, Malvensis, lay primarily south of the Carpathians in what is now Wallachia, and should be assigned, therefore, to the south-east division of the Danubian Borderland.



of Upper and Lower Pannonia, lying west of the Middle Danube, in what is now Hungary, Croatia, and Serbia, and 3) the plains of the Sarmatian *barbaricum* in between the Danube and the Apuseni foothills at the western edge of Dacia, territory now split between eastern Hungary and northern Serbia.



*Fig. 1.11 Roman political boundaries in the north/west division of the Danubian Borderland.*

In light of the preceding discussion of the region's topography and geographic features, it should be obvious that these three Roman divisions rely on fundamentally artificial boundaries. At first blush, the Danube appears to be a natural boundary marker, but as we have seen, it really is no such thing in its middle courses. It does not mark the boundary between different ecological zones, meaning that it does not serve to check ecological exchange across its width. At the same time, it is not, in its natural state, a particularly effective barrier to human mobility. Further east, the boundary

between Dacia and the Sarmatian *barbaricum* is even less clear. To this day, scholars debate exactly where the limit of Roman provincial control was located, and the correct conclusion may well be that it simply petered out somewhere west of the last military outposts, just as the Apuseni foothills merge into the Hungarian Plain.<sup>118</sup> As we shall see, the factors that gave the three Roman divisions of the Middle Danube Basin meaning were not natural, but rather artificial creations called into being by the might of the Roman military machine.

### 1.4.3. The south/east division (Malvensis–Moesia–Scythia) a divided land

The south-east division of the Danubian Borderland corresponds roughly to the Lower Danube drainage basin together with the eastern part of Bessarabia that drains into the Dniester rather than the Danube. Topographically, this is an altogether more complicated region than the north-west division, and one not nearly as conducive to unfettered human movement, although it contains important natural highways capable of channeling human movement in certain directions. In general, the elevational zones in this half of the Danubian Borderland are narrower than those seen in the other half. The plains of the Middle Danube Basin are all part of one large central lowland zone while those of the Lower Danube watershed are connected like a long, narrow, chain extending south and west out of the great Eurasian Steppe. Similarly, while the great arc of the Carpathians produces in the north-west division a large, contiguous hill zone in Transylvania, this enclosed region is not mirrored on the other side of the mountain chain in Moldavia and the Wallachian foothills, where the hill zones all orient outwards and away from one another. In

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<sup>118</sup> Gudea 1979, p. 70 and p. 70, note 19. The main question is whether the Banat was ever administered as part of Dacia, or whether it fell into the tributary lands of the Sarmatian *barbaricum*. If the former, then the *limes* must be placed along the Mureş river and the Tisza below the confluence. If we exclude the Banat, then the *limes* probably ran along the line of forts extending from Lederata on the Danube north through Berzobia and on to Tibiscum on the Timiş.

general, the south-east division is a land of thin, linear natural features, while the north-west division is characterized by enclosed spaces.



*Fig. 1.12 Natural sub-regions of the south/east Danube Basin.*

It would be incorrect to characterize the south-east division of the Danubian Borderland as a region fundamentally hostile to human movement. Indeed, as we shall see, a great highway of grassland extends from the Eurasian Steppe south along the coast of the Black Sea into the heart of the Balkan Peninsula. Nonetheless, the peculiarities of the region's river and mountain topographies serve to direct and limit mobility in ways unknown in the north-west division. These differences in natural environment had important implications for how the two halves of the Danubian Borderland interacted with Rome and Roman power.



The south-east division can be divided into two distinct sub-sections. Both sub-sections focus on portions of the network of grasslands which form the core of the south-east division. The first sub-section can be called the **Scythian Corridor**, the region beginning north of the Danube Delta in eastern Moldavia and Bessarabia, and extending south through the Dobrogea and beyond into the plains of Thrace. East-west movement is blocked on one side by the Black sea, and on the other by the Eastern Carpathians and the deep north-south valleys of the Moldavian hill country. Further south, the Scythian Corridor is partially separated from the Wallachian and Bulgarian plains by the swampy lower courses of the Danube. Movement is not, however, totally restricted. Getting between the steppes of lower Bessarabia and the plains of eastern Wallachia/southern Moldavia can be accomplished by crossing the Siret and Prut, large rivers, but generally more manageable than the Danube. Meanwhile, north-south movement along the Scythian Corridor faces only two major hurdles, namely the Dniester and the great Danube delta. While the delta itself is indeed a formidable obstacle to human mobility, the river narrows to a single channel upstream at the point of its last great curve to the east between Brăila and Galați. Unsurprisingly, this bend played host to multiple Roman installations designed to guard the crossing zone.<sup>119</sup> Once past the delta, north-south movement is largely unrestricted through the steppes of the Dobrogea. Further south, the low hills of the far eastern Stara Planina present the only real natural roadblock to movement into the plains of Thrace and onward to Constantinople and the northern Aegean.

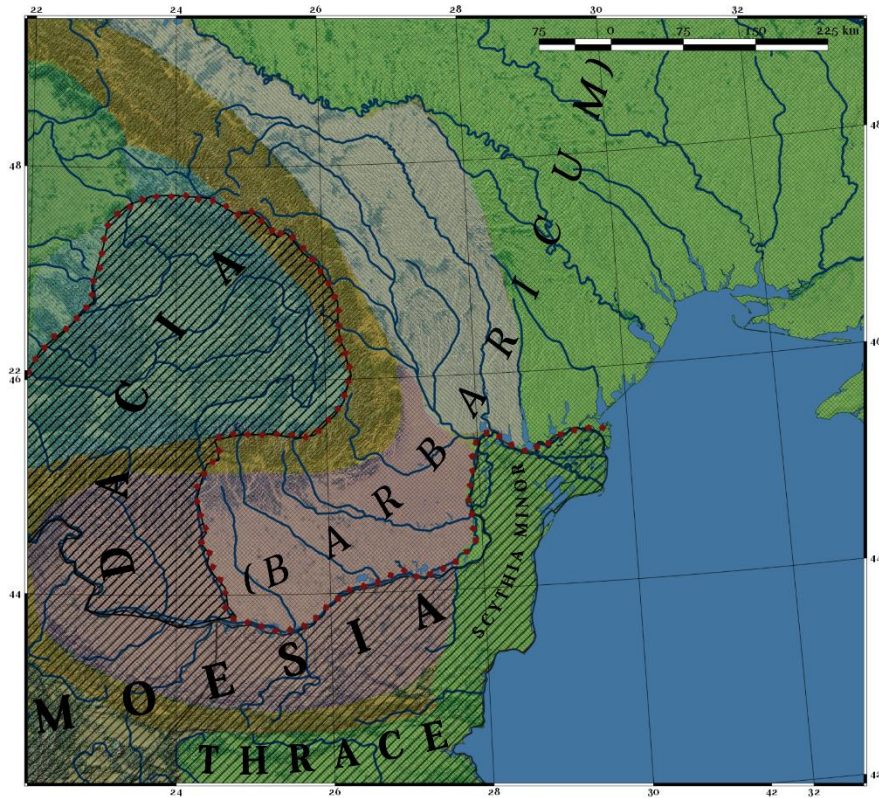
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<sup>119</sup> Two forts, Noviodunum, and Dinogetia, guarded the Danube bend together with the fortified urban center of Troesmis. The early phases of these installations are largely obscured by large-scale late Roman (third-fifth century) fortifications, but references from Ptolemy's *Geography* (3.8.2.10.1; 3.10.2) suggest earlier initial fortification (Scorpan 1980, pp. 17-33). This was the crossing zone where Valens launched the final phase of his Gothic war in 369, and where he later negotiated peace with the Tervingi *iudex*, Athanaric aboard a ship in the middle of the river (A.M. 27.5.6-10). We will return to this important war and treaty in Chapter Five.

The second macro-division of the Lower Danube drainage basin is the zone immediately north and south of the Lower Danube and west of the Scythian Corridor. This region consists of two lowland zones (the Wallachian and Bulgarian plains) plus two hill-mountain zones (the southern slopes and foothills of the Carpathians, and the northern slopes and foothills of the Stara Planina). Taken as a whole, this area is somewhat similar, topographically, to the Middle Danube Basin, only rotated 90-degrees. Here, we have two hill zones marking the northern and southern limits of the zone, with a region of plains in between. This grassland is not, however, nearly as conducive to mobility as are the lowlands of the Middle Danube Basin. The Wallachian and Bulgarian plains are not as homogenous as the grasslands of the Middle Danube Basin, and the rivers here generally pose greater challenges to mobility because of their deep valleys and frequent riparian marshes. In general, movement north-south across the region is easier, despite requiring passage across the Danube, than is movement east-west through the plains, due to the great number of troublesome river crossings required to move through the plains. The obvious exception to this rule is waterborne movement along the Danube itself which is generally easy in this area due to the river's width and depth. Meanwhile, north-south movement is usually easiest by land routes, since the plains are less cut-up in this direction, the transition from plain to foothill to mountain is often gradual, and at the same time, most of the Wallachian and Bulgarian tributaries are useless as avenues for large-scale human movement because of shallow depths in the plains, and frequent cataracts as they cut through the mountains.

As we saw in discussing the north/west division above, Roman political boundaries took no heed of the natural divisions in the landscape, and we see the same pattern within the south/east division of the Danubian Borderland. East of the Iron Gates, the Lower Danube marked the

boundary between **Dacia Malvensis**, to the north, and the two provinces of **Moesia** to the south. Further east, beyond the northward-curve of the Carpathians, the region we have labeled the Scythian Corridor remained essentially outside Roman political control. Finally, the Dobrogea was separated from Moesia as its own province of **Scythia Minor**. Whereas, as we have seen, the region's natural axis of mobility is mainly north-south, with only the Danube serving as an easy east-west corridor, the Roman Lower Danube *limes* effectively severed the natural routes across the river between the foothills of the Carpathians and Stara Planina, and between the plains of Dobrogea and the Scythian Corridor to the north.



*Fig. 1.13 Roman political boundaries in the south/east division of the Danubian Borderland.*

### 1.4.5. Regional mobility patterns and their implications

Looking at the whole Lower Danube Basin, we see a much less connected region when compared with the Middle Danube Basin. First, the hill zones all orient outward and away from one another, unlike Transylvania. Second, the plains of the south-east division are less conducive to general mobility because movement tends to be convenient only in the north-south direction, unlike on the Hungarian Plain, where movement in any direction is fairly easy. The difficulty in east-west movement across the Wallachian and Bulgarian plains is also the factor that separates the Scythian Corridor from the plains to the west. As long as Rome controlled fluvial movement on the Lower Danube and its major tributaries, raiders and migrants moving southward out of the Pontic Steppe almost always found it much easier to cross the Lower Danube once and continue unhindered into Thrace than to fight their way westward through Wallachia or the Bulgarian Plain, crossing one marshy river after another. Given these realities, it was more crucial that Rome maintain the ability to interdict would-be river-crossers north of the Danube here than it was in the Middle Danube theater, a fact we see reflected in the greater use of transdanubian bridgeheads in eastern Wallachia.

The Middle Danube was the preferred invasion/raiding route for armies and bands looking to gain access to Pannonia and the West. Movement down from the Pontic Steppe by way of the Lower Danube was naturally directed south at Thrace and Greece because of the difficulties in east-west movement. To counter the vulnerability posed by the open landscape of the Middle Danube Basin, Rome worked hard to ensure that the population of the Sarmatian *barbaricum* remained politically divided and subservient to Rome. Without the double-barrier of these buffer tribes, and the Roman *limes* forces, any hostile raiders able to cross over the Northern Carpathians would find the plains and hills of Pannonia ripe fruit for the picking, not to mention Italy just over the Julian

Alps. Indeed, as we will discuss in Chapter Two, the Marcomannic Wars began in the later second century precisely because Rome's clients beyond the Middle Danube failed to interdict raiders from further afield.<sup>120</sup> When Attila finally broke down the Middle Danube *limes* system in the mid fifth century - a topic to be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five - the Middle Danube Basin proved an extremely productive base for his Hunnic-Gothic coalition and other would-be raiders and invaders of Italy and the western provinces.<sup>121</sup>

By contrast with the openness of the Middle Danube Basin, groups moving directly out of the Pontic Steppe into the Scythian Corridor found their progress firmly directed to the south by the natural boundaries of the south/east division of the Danubian Borderland. The most notable examples of this phenomenon during the Roman period were the two waves of 'Gothic' invasions/raids, which we will discuss in depth in the following chapters. During the third century, peoples identified alternatively as Scythians and Goths raided out of the Crimea. Some plundered by sea, and these pirates found it easy enough to loot and pillage throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. Those who raided by land, however, found their options for movement much more limited. The topography funneled these barbarians south through the Scythian Corridor into Thrace, Macedonia, and Greece, while Pannonia, Dacia, and the rest of Illyricum remained largely untouched by the third century marauders.<sup>122</sup> The second round of 'Gothic' invasions a century later followed a similar pattern. Tervingi and Greuthungi Goths/Scythians crossed the Lower Danube in the Dobrogea and

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<sup>120</sup> Dio 72.1a (*exc. de leg. gent. 6*).

<sup>121</sup> The Lombard invasion of Italy in the later sixth century began from Pannonia, but this region had also been the home base of Theodoric from which he launched his semi-sanctioned ouster of Odoacer. Earlier, Attila himself had found the Middle Danube Basin a convenient base for his raids into Italy and Gaul, as had Alaric before him. We will return to the fourth-fifth century breakdown of Rome's Danubian order in Chapter Five.

<sup>122</sup> Batty 2007, pp. 387-95.

moved along the Scythian Corridor into Thrace. Subsequent movements westward into the Middle Danube Basin followed roads and river routes in Thrace south of the Stara Planina, rather than facing the laborious prospect of constant river-crossings in the Bulgarian Plain followed by a forced passage through the Iron Gates. In short, as long as Rome controlled the Danube itself, the risk of hostile movement westward across the Bulgarian and Wallachian plains was greatly decreased.<sup>123</sup>

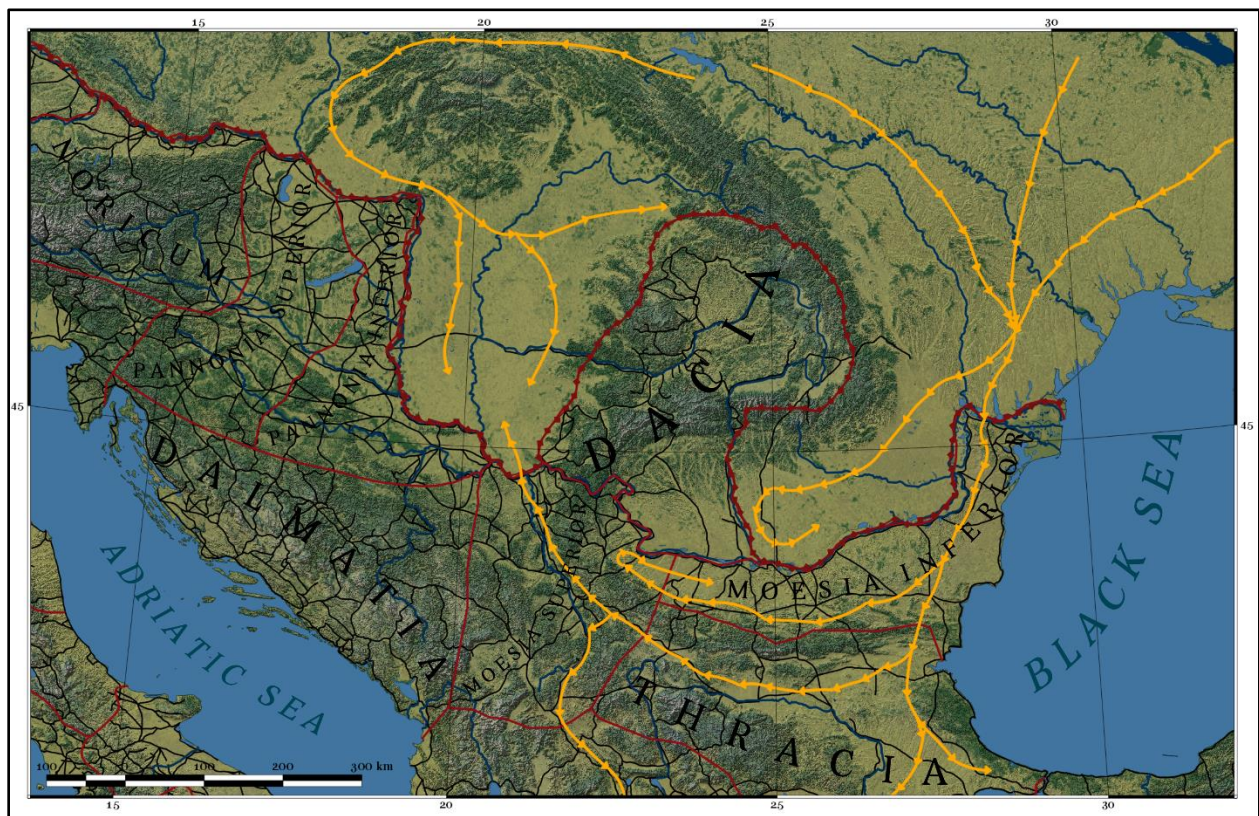
The final component to be discussed in this section is the road network. Like the rivers, roads were avenues of communication and movement. Although tracks and routes of various sorts predated the Roman presence in the Danubian Borderland, the construction of well-made Roman roads represents an important turning point. Aside from presenting a visible marker of Roman power within the natural landscape, roads, once constructed, essentially become part of that natural landscape. Thus, during late antiquity, centuries after their construction, Roman roads should be seen as ‘dry rivers,’ that is, as another topographical feature of the Danubian Borderland which could be used by Romans and non-Romans alike in various ways. In general, roads ran parallel to the river system, illustrating, incidentally, the importance of the latter as well as the former. Most major rivers had a road running parallel, but in other places the roads do not literally shadow the rivers, but serve the same essential function. Thus, in the Bulgarian and Wallachian plains, the major east-west road runs along the south bank of the Danube, while numerous north-south ‘tributary’ roads serve to link Dacia and Moesia. These do not always follow the lines of the Danube's actual tributaries, but in facilitating movement between the plains and mountains, they serve exactly the same function as the navigable rivers. In the north-west division, where movement through the lowlands was generally

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<sup>123</sup> Batty 2007, pp. 397-9.



fairly easy, roads – or their lack in regions outside Roman administration – may not have done much to alter the basic, natural mobility profile of the region. In the south-east division, however, roads running parallel to the Lower Danube would have done much to facilitate east-west mobility. Consequently, control of such routes – like the river itself – would have been a more important foundation block of Roman power in this region than in the lands of the Middle Danube.



*Fig. 1.14 Rome's Danubian provinces and major natural movement routes in the borderland.*

## ***V. Conclusions***

The Danube's vast watershed encompasses over 800,000 square kilometers<sup>124</sup> sandwiched between the heart of the Balkan Peninsula to the south, and the continental regions of Central Europe and the Pontic Steppe to the north. While this region stands as a natural climatic borderland

<sup>124</sup> *The Danube River Basin District Management Plan – Update 2015*, p. v.

where continental and Mediterranean weather patterns meet and mingle, for most of human history it was a heartland for the people who inhabited its plains, hills, and mountain valleys. The Danube itself, and its important navigable tributaries, the Sava, Drava, Tisza-Mureş, Iskar, Olt, Siret, and Prut, tie the region together by creating avenues of easy human and natural mobility. These watery highways, when joined with the basin's regionally-coherent climatic conditions, ensured that both autochthonous and immigrant communities spread widely with little concern for rivers as boundaries. Around the beginning of the Common Era, as the Danubian lands stood on the brink of momentous socio-political change, Strabo of Amaseia captured a snapshot of the river basin and its various inhabitants when it still existed as a cultural heartland. For Strabo, whose *Geography* we will discuss in the following chapter, the Danubian lands were the domain of the Thracians, whose various subdivisions – Getae, Tyregetae, Bastarni, Dacians, Bistonians, Odrysae, Moesians, and more – were found across the Middle and Lower Danube Basins, interspersed with immigrant communities of European Celts and Pontic Sarmatians.<sup>125</sup>

When Rome consolidated its political hegemony over the Balkans at about the same moment that Strabo's *Geography* appeared at the bookshops of the Mediterranean World, the victorious Ausonians found the Danube just as useful a highway as had the local population, and so the imperial *limes* was drawn along the course of the river. Although Roman *limes* were not designed to create a hermetic seal around the edges of empire, they did – when functioning properly – allow Roman authorities to wield a great deal of control over those who crossed the boundary, as well as those living in the territories beyond.<sup>126</sup> The establishment of strict, military control over what had

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<sup>125</sup> See Chapter Two, section IV for discussion of Strabo's Danubian ethnography.

<sup>126</sup> Luttwak 1976; Whittaker 1994; Isaac 1992; Mattingly 1994.



previously been the region's greatest source of internal mobility, represented a profound disruption of the Danubian watershed's natural and cultural rhythms. Indeed, we will spend the rest of this dissertation exploring how aftershocks from the establishment of the Danubian *limes* continued to exert a disruptive influence for the next four centuries, and beyond.

As we have demonstrated in this chapter, the Danube was not a natural boundary within the ecological context of its massive watershed, and so Rome's transformation of the river into an imperial *limes* required the physical disruption of established cultural groups, and patterns of exchange and mobility. It also required a concurrent ideological transformation in order to justify the effort and expense of building a barrier where none had existed before. By 'happy' coincidence, there existed an almost tailor-made worldview popular among Greeks since the fifth century BCE. This outlook, popularized first by Herodotus, already saw the Danube as the boundary between the comprehensible *oikoumene* and the mad barbarian lands beyond. Those barbarians were known to Herodotus and his successors as Scythians, and in Chapter Two, we will examine how, following the establishment of the Danubian *limes*, that ethnographic label - together with a whole host of dependent barbarous tropes - came to be applied to more and more of the people dwelling outside the new Roman provinces of Pannonia, Moesia, and, eventually, Dacia. While Herodotus' 'Scythian Logos' had little practical effect in the centuries BCE, beyond encouraging Greek cultural chauvinism regarding Danubian peoples, when coupled with the might of Rome's legions, the Scythian worldview caused real harm, first to the people of the transdanubian regions, but ultimately to Roman provincials and powerbrokers as well.

## CHAPTER TWO

### SCYTHIANS ON THE MIND: GRECO-ROMAN ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE WORLD OF ROME'S DANUBE *LIMES*

*Certainly, the authors of the present day can give a better account of the Britons, Germans, and the peoples living both north and south of the Danube, that is, the Getae, the Tyregetae, and the Bastarni.* -Strabo, *Geography* 2.5.12 (c. 20 CE)<sup>127</sup>

*From this point [at the Danube] all the peoples are, generally speaking, Scythian, although various specific tribes hold the lands adjacent to the riverbank: in one place the Getae, known as Dacians by the Romans, in another area the Sarmatians, who are 'Sauromatae' to the Greeks, in particular the Sarmatians known as Hamaxobii or Aorsi; in another zone dwell base-born Scythians, descended from slaves, and even cavemen [Troglodytae]! Close beyond [to the north] dwell Alani and Roxolani.* -Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 4.12.80 (c. 77 CE)<sup>128</sup>

#### *I. Introduction: Explaining a World Gone Mad*

Cassius Dio may have claimed that with the death of Marcus Aurelius in 180 CE, the Roman Empire descended “from a kingdom of gold to one of iron and rust,”<sup>129</sup> but such a gloomy prognosis would hardly have rung true for most citizens of the empire in 247 when the Eternal City was preparing to celebrate its millennial birthday with elaborate *ludi saeculares*. Despite recent political instability, public affairs seemed, finally, to be stabilizing. Philip, the emperor, was securely in power, relations with the Senate were better than they had been in decades, and order had been

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<sup>127</sup> Μάλιστα δ' οἱ νῦν ἄμεινον ἔχοιεν ἂν τι λέγειν περὶ τῶν κατὰ Βρεττανούς καὶ Γερμανούς καὶ τοὺς περὶ τὸν Ἰστρον τοὺς τε ἐντὸς καὶ τοὺς ἐκτός, Γέτας τε καὶ Τυρεγέτας καὶ Βαστάρνας.

<sup>128</sup> *Ab eo in plenum quidem omnes Scytharum sunt gentes, variae tamen litori apposita tenuere, alias Getae, Daci Romanis dicti, alias Sarmatae, Graecis Sauromatae, eorumque Hamaxobii aut Aorsi, alias Scythae degeneres et a servis orti aut Troglodytae, mox Alani et Roxolani.*

<sup>129</sup> Dio 72.36.4.

restored along the Danube *limes* following a series of raids by the Carpi, a tribe of free Dacians who really should have known better.<sup>130</sup> It was true that Olbia, a city far north along the Euxine coast but theoretically attached to the province of Moesia, had been sacked by Scythians in 238, but it was hardly the first time that that distant bastion of Hellenism had suffered disaster.<sup>131</sup> With the recent Carpic unpleasantness tidied up and a huge party in the works at Rome, the people of Philippopolis – largest city in the province of Thrace – were probably as optimistic about the future as anyone ever was in antiquity. The stability and optimism present at the end of 247, however, would prove illusory; within two years, Philippopolis would come to share the fate of Olbia: its walls breached by Scythian arms, treasures looted, and populace either killed, scattered, or led off beyond the Danube in chains.<sup>132</sup>

We can thank Herennius Dexippus of Athens for most of what we know about the siege of Philippopolis and the other events of these third century Scythian troubles. Dexippus was a contemporary of, and participant in, these events, which he chronicled at length in a work entitled, fittingly, *Scythica*.<sup>133</sup> In the surviving fragments we see barbarians identified as Scythians conducting sieges – sometimes with success – involving complex towers and mining operations. In the field,

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<sup>130</sup> The murder of Alexander Severus in 235 was perpetrated by Maximinus Thrax, who spent most of his brief reign on campaign before succumbing to a mutiny of his own soldiers while marching on Rome to put down usurpers. Gordian III emerged from the resultant power vacuum and ruled successfully until 244 when he died mysteriously while on campaign against Persia. In early 248, Philip the Arab was firmly in power and appeared to be doing a decent job (Potter 2014, pp. 162-171, 225-237). For the *ludi saeculares* and Philip's relationship with the Senate, see Potter 2014, pp. 232-237. For the Carpic wars, see Kovács 2014, pp. 230-234. For the various Carpic raids in the 230s and 240s, see *SHA, Gord.* 26.3, and *Zos.* 1.15. There is considerable debate about who the Carpi actually were. The Romans seem to have considered them a group of back-woods Dacians (*Zos.* 4.34.6), but modern attempts to study their origins and cultural habitus have been hindered by a lack of evidence and nationalistic narratives (Batty 2007, pp.376-379; Ionița 1982, pp. 76-77; Bichir 1976).

<sup>131</sup> Batty 2007, pp. 198-199, 433-434. The earlier tragic history of Olbia is remarked upon by Dio Chrysostom in his *Borysthenitic Oration* (see sec. 2.3.1 below).

<sup>132</sup> *Scyth.* fr. 24, *Cod. Vind. Hist. gr.* 73 fol. 195, A.M. 31.5.17.

<sup>133</sup> Dexippus, it seems, helped organize and execute a campaign of guerilla warfare in and around Attica following the Herulian/Scythian capture of the city in 267. A speech in his voice, rallying the survivors to the defense of their homeland is partially preserved (*Scyth.* fr. Mec. 31/Mar. 25).

they defeat the legions of Decius on multiple occasions and even kill the emperor and his son at Abritus.<sup>134</sup> We learn of Athens' capture and the Hellenic defenders, Dexippus among them, forced to resort to guerilla tactics to resist the Scythian menace. The historian-turned-general's speech to the Greek partisans is full of classical commonplaces, but this cannot hide the fact that the world has been turned upside down: civilized men reduced to sniping from the woods, unable to resist the unified strength of a barbarian army.<sup>135</sup> Even if many of the details in Dexippus' battle narratives and speeches stem from the Hellenic warfare of Thucydides,<sup>136</sup> the basic facts of the *Scythica* appear reliable.<sup>137</sup> These Scythians were organized, aggressive, and capable of capturing Roman cities. What's more, they held no special dread of the imperial legions and proved more than capable of defeating the best Rome had to offer in an admittedly troubled time. In short, these raiders failed to act in the ways Scythians were supposed to.

There were two dominant schools of thought regarding Scythians at the time of the invasions, and the partisans of both would probably have been surprised by the enemies that actually showed up at the walls of Philippopolis. Some thought of Scythians as dangerous, nomadic horsemen. These Scythians knew that the secret key to invincibility lay in mobility and disavowal of landed property. One cannot defeat what one cannot catch. This 'strong Scythian' had his origins

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<sup>134</sup> For Scythian siege narratives, see, eg: *Scyth. fr.* 22 (Marcianopole), fr. 24 (Philippopolis), fr. 27 (Side). For the death of Decius, *Scyth. fr. Mec.* 23/Mr. 17. See also, Zos. 1.23, Jord. *Get.* 101–103, both of which are dependent on Dexippus.

<sup>135</sup> For Dexippus' guerilla tactics, see *Scyth. fr.* 25. For the strength of the Scythians, see also Decius' speech in *Scyth. fr. Mec.* 30/Mar. 24.

<sup>136</sup> For an assessment of the many linguistic and thematic parallels, particularly in the siege narrative from fr. 24, see Blockley 1972.

<sup>137</sup> Millar 1969. While Potter questions Dexippus' historical acuity and objectivity (2014, pp. 228–230), there is no reason to seriously doubt the veracity of the basic narrative, given the author's proximity in time to the events of the *Scythica* and his own personal involvement in the war. Indeed, Potter considers it highly likely that Dexippus relied heavily on reports from Romans taken captive by the Scythians for most of his non-Thucydidean details on Scythian warfare and political organization (personal correspondence, June 2017).

in the ethnographic writings of Herodotus and his contemporaries, but had been transmitted, more or less unchanged, through the centuries, arriving alive and well in the minds of non-specialist writers of the middle Empire, such as Lucian and Tertullian. Even if this sort of Scythian was thought to be extremely dangerous, it was a danger that belonged mainly to another reality: the inverted world of the Scythian steppe.<sup>138</sup> These barbarians had no place besieging cities; such a sedentary act went against their very nature.<sup>139</sup>

Other third century Romans, particularly those more in tune with current military practices on and beyond the Middle Danube, were conditioned to see the Carpathian Basin beyond the river as the heart of Scythia and its remaining ‘free’ inhabitants, the Sarmatian Iazyges, as the quintessential Scythians. This conflation of Scythians and Sarmatians/Sauromatians also dated back to Herodotus and his contemporaries,<sup>140</sup> but whereas the original Sauromatians were described as even more

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<sup>138</sup> Hartog’s *The Mirror of Herodotus* (1988) revolutionized the field by interpreting the author’s Scythian Logos as a comment on contemporary Greek society. The Scythians were described as inversions of the Greeks in terms of economy, religion, politics, and culture. While Hartog’s point that we, today, cannot use Herodotus to study the real, historical Scythians, is absolutely correct, this did not stop the ancients from accepting and internalizing his ethnography as the objective truth.

<sup>139</sup> Herodotus’ Scythians mainly stay in their own world beyond the Danube and Euxine. Most notably, when Darius and his army manage to get across the Danube ahead of their Scythian pursuers, the barbarians choose not to pursue despite having chased the Persians around the Pontic Steppe for months (4.140–142). Early in the *Histories*, we learn that having defeated the native Cimmerians north of the Black Sea, the victorious Scythians pursued them across the Caucasus mountains into Media (Hdt. 1.103–5; 4.12.). For the next twenty-eight years, “the Scythians were masters of Asia, and all was wasted by their violence and pride; for apart from their exacting tribute, which they laid upon each man, apart from the tribute they rode around and plundered whatsoever it was that anyone possessed” (1.106). Unmatched on the battlefield, the Scythians were ultimately defeated through treachery. Cyaxares, king of the Medes, hosted a large number of the Scythian elite at a banquet, where, after getting them drunk, he promptly had his men slit their throats (1.106). Bereft of leadership, the horde no longer posed a threat. Herodotus is vague concerning subsequent events, but some of the invaders, at least, eventually returned home to the Pontic Steppe (4.1). In this fable, the Scythians are adept at plundering the countryside and exacting tribute, but totally out of their depth in the world of cities and politics.

<sup>140</sup> In Herodotus, the Sauromatai are the product of Scythian men and Amazon women, and dwell beyond the Tanais River (the Don), adjacent to the territory of the Scythians-proper. Their customs are identical to the rest of the Scythians, and they are said to speak a dialect of the same language. The only difference is the Amazonian practice of allowing women to fight in battle, at least until married (4.110–117). The Hippocratic author of the *Airs, Waters, and Places* also describes the Sauromatai as a subset of the larger Scythian *ethnos* (17). Fourth century BCE authors Theophrastus and Isocrates continue the conflation of the two groups (Phot., *Bibl. Cod.*, ‘Theophrastos,’ 278; Isocrates, *Panegyricus* 67–70).

fearsome than the standard Herodotean Scythians, the contemporary second and third century Sarmatians were long-standing clients of Rome and popularly seen as impotent, feckless wanderers prone to minor acts of banditry across the river, but posing no credible threat to Roman order. Despite an unexpected raid into Greece in the 160s that led to the sack of the sanctuary of Demeter at Eleusis, the Sarmatians had been so thoroughly subdued during the Marcomannic Wars, that there had been nothing even remotely similar from them in nearly a century.<sup>141</sup> This sort of ‘weak Scythian’ certainly was not considered capable of storming cities and killing emperors.

One thing that everyone could agree on was that the barbarians beyond the Danube were Scythians, whatever that might imply, and so Dexippus identified his barbarians as such, even though he, and others, knew that these particular barbarians had an alternative name: Goths.<sup>142</sup> When these people sacked Olbia in 238 and began raiding into the empire a decade later, they revealed the lie behind both popular stereotypes. This chapter aims to answer the question of why the Romans misunderstood and underestimated the third century ‘Scythians.’ Rather than focus on the emergence of the vibrant, multi-ethnic Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov Culture probably responsible for the bulk of the third century raiders,<sup>143</sup> we will consider how Romans adopted and modified Greek

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<sup>141</sup> Maximinus Thrax may have campaigned briefly against the Sarmatians in 236–7, however Herodian (7.1.2) is the only substantial narrative account and it suffers from the ills common to that author, namely imprecise terminology and a lack of detail in narratives about military campaigns and, particularly, barbarian peoples. For a recent, if perhaps a bit optimistic scholarly assessment, see Kovács 2014, pp. 225–230. By Kovács’ reckoning, Maximinus first waged war against Germanic tribes beyond the Rhine and Upper Danube in 235–6, then moved his operations to the Hungarian Plain where he subdued apparently rebellious Sarmatians and Dacians in 236–7. This latter campaign is poorly documented, and may have been more propaganda than reality.

<sup>142</sup> Gregory Thaumaturgus, a contemporary of the third century troubles, describes the barbarians as “Boradoi and Gotthoi” (*Ep. Can.* 5). Fragment 23/17 of Dexippus acknowledges that the Scythians who killed Decius were also known as Goths, although the use of this term here may stem from the epitomizer, George Syncellus.

<sup>143</sup> The topic of Gothic origins is hugely complex and controversial and has probably seen more attention than it actually deserves. The association between the Sântana-de-Mureş/Cernjachov material culture group and the early Goths is fairly clear, although the exact relationship is fuzzy because of the limits imposed by modern thinking about archaeological cultures (For a succinct discussion of the problems with interpreting material remains, see Kulikowski 2007. Goffart 2006 offers a more thorough deconstruction.). We will not seek to greatly advance this field here or elsewhere in this

ethnographic stereotypes about Scythians, and how these tropes came to be applied to the peoples living beyond the Middle and Lower Danube. When trying to conceptualize and understand the people beyond the Danube, Romans tended to favor Scythian explanations from among multiple existing ethnographic models because the worldview that went along with the ethnographic tropes – where the Danube marked a clear divide between Scythia and the rest of the *oikoumene* – helped explain (and thereby support) the establishment of the river as the empire’s north-central military boundary.

Once the association between transdanubian peoples and Scythians was more firmly established in the Roman imagination, emperors and authors began to use it more intentionally, emphasizing certain of the canonical tropes while downplaying others in order to portray the free transdanubians as impoverished weaklings unfit for inclusion within the empire. Such a view of the people beyond the river helped perpetuate the subjugation and exploitation of the Iazyges and other transdanubian tribes, a topic to which we will dedicate the entirety of Chapter Three. Scholars examining the interactions between Rome and other foreign peoples, most notably Carthaginians, Germans, and Persians, have recognized that the stereotypes and prejudices Romans had about barbarians exerted a strong influence on the policies implemented by the Roman state.<sup>144</sup> To date, however, there has been little corresponding effort to understand the Scythian ideologies underlying and shaping Roman interactions with the peoples beyond the Danube. This chapter considers the development and early employment of Scythian tropes by Roman authors and policy makers up to the third century turmoil. Stereotypical ideas about Scythians and Sarmatians underlie nearly every

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dissertation, although we will return to the Sântana-de-Mureş/Cernjachov Culture in Chapter Four as a point of comparison to archaeological trends from the Hungarian Plain to the west.

<sup>144</sup> Isaac 2004, Drinkwater 2007, Mattern 1999, Lee 1993.

Roman–barbarian interaction known from the Danubian Borderland, both the imperial triumphs and disasters. By charting the development of Scythian and Sarmatian tropes in the Roman imagination, this chapter will lay the intellectual foundations upon which we can interpret the political and social history of the Danubian Borderland in the following chapters. Beginning with the Scythian depredations of the third century described by Dexippus, tropes originally employed to make sense of the second century Middle Danube Borderland failed to evolve with the changing realities of the late antique frontier, particularly when applied to the different natural and cultural landscape of the Lower Danube. What had once been an ideological support for Rome’s Danubian *limes* system, increasingly led Roman generals and emperors to misunderstand their northern neighbors. The Scythians had changed, Rome’s intellectual arsenal failed to keep up, and the results proved disastrous on multiple occasions.

## ***II. Why Did Dexippus Identify his Barbarians as Scythians?***

### **2.2.1. Thinking about the ancients thinking about barbarians**

The fact that Dexippus and his contemporaries knew various tribal designations for the barbarian enemies of the third century raises an obvious question: why did he and other Roman writers choose to group all the hostile peoples from beyond the Danube under a Scythian heading? To answer this question, we must first consider how the ancients thought about foreign peoples. From early times, Greeks, and later Romans measured themselves in comparison to other, foreign peoples whom they labeled as barbarians. In order to make sense of the diversity of barbarian peoples, Greek thinkers tended to group foreigners into categories based on common geographic



location and perceived cultural similarities.<sup>145</sup> Thus, Dexippus' Scythians were not a real people, but rather the reflection of a body of traditional Greek and Roman ideas about nomadic societies which had been slowly evolving since the fifth century BCE when Greek authors, most notably Herodotus, first recorded popular ideas about Scythians. The most important legacy of these early writers was their ability to gather together many notions about nomadism and package them up under the tidy heading of 'Scythian.' This label was then frequently applied to any northern people thought to exhibit the characteristics first documented by Herodotus, and remained in use almost continuously throughout the nearly eight hundred years separating Dexippus from the 'father of history.'<sup>146</sup>

The power of these Scythian tropes was great. Once it had infiltrated into the cultural consciousness of the Roman world, the Scythian label could function in multiple directions. Rather than simply imposing the Scythian name on barbarians observed to exhibit the expected characteristics, the label, once applied to any group, served to impose those very characteristics upon the target population within Greek and Roman minds. Because of the way Greeks and Romans tended to stereotype and generalize about barbarian peoples, a tribe or warband identified as 'Scythian' suddenly acquired a whole set of cultural baggage when interacting with Romans. The barbarians who threatened the Roman Danube during the third century had their own tribal names and identities, some of which were known to Roman writers. They were *Gotthoi*, *Iouthoungoi*, *Boranoi*, and more, but, to put it bluntly, calling someone from beyond the Danube a Goth in the

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<sup>145</sup> The literature on this topic is vast, but see particularly Sherwin-White 1967, Momigliano 1975, Dauge 1981, Hall 2002, McCoskey 2002, and Isaac 2004.

<sup>146</sup> Herodotus' set of tropes described many aspects of Scythian culture as distortions and inversions of contemporaneous Greek life (Hartog 1988). Because this Scythian Logos presented the barbarians as almost perfect inversions of the Greeks, Herodotus' stereotypes became extremely popular and were repeated by many later authors, often with little innovation or allowance for historical change. Greeks and Romans were predisposed to seek traditional answers to explain the world around them, and so, once established, tropes for describing distant barbarians proved extremely tenacious, even in the face of widening information horizons.

third century didn't mean anything because it was a fresh nametag.<sup>147</sup> As soon as you labeled that individual a Scythian, however, you provided them with an eight-hundred-year pedigree everyone understood. This sort of stereotyping had real power to shape popular perceptions, particularly since few people in the Roman world ever went to 'Scythia,' or saw a real 'Scythian.'

The ability of this 'Scythian Logos' - to adopt Hartog's term<sup>148</sup> - to transmit itself over the centuries and hop between target groups was fostered by another hallmark of Greco-Roman thought: the theory that the geography and climate of a people's homeland exerted a profound influence over that people's national character.<sup>149</sup> The chief source for the Greco-Roman doctrine of environmental determinism, or at least the oldest surviving major proponent of the theory, is the author of the Hippocratic treatise *Airs Waters and Places*. Here we find explicit statements suggesting that the physical and moral characteristics of barbarian peoples are determined, to a large extent, by the climate of their homelands. The essential contrasts are between cold lands, represented by the north and west, and warm ones, found in the south and east. According to ps. Hippocrates, Aristotle, and others, northerners were fierce and independent, yet stupid and incompetent. Southerners, by contrast, were timid, lazy, and slavish, yet also clever and sophisticated.<sup>150</sup> The Scythians, living in the furthest north, under the very shadow of the bear-star, were, naturally, the most extreme example of a 'northern' people, save only the mythic Hyperboreans.

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<sup>147</sup> Iuthungoi appear in Dexippus (*Scyth. fr. Mec. 34/Mar. 28*), while his contemporary, Gregory Thaumaturgus names the barbarians as Gotthoi and Boradoi (*Can. ep. 5*). Two centuries later, Zosimus drew up a fuller list including Gotthoi, Boranoi, Carpi, and Ourougoundoi (Burgundians?) under the Scythian label (1.25.1, 1.31.1), but it is difficult to determine which of his tribal names reflect third century realities as opposed to his own fifth century context.

<sup>148</sup> Hartog 1988, pp. 3-11. Hartog uses the term to refer to Herodotus' narrative of Scythian history and ethnography, but most importantly to refer to the body of ethnographic and ecological stereotypes about Scythians and Scythia. I use the term in this latter manner.

<sup>149</sup> This concept was ably discussed in the first chapter of Benjamin Isaac's 2004 monograph *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*.

<sup>150</sup> Isaac 2004, pp. 62-74; ps. Hip. *AWP* 16.

Benjamin Isaac made an important contribution to our understanding of ancient ideas about environmental determinism by noting that when migrating to a new homeland, populations could acquire the characteristics of the new climate, but that this process was seen, in nearly all ancient sources, as a purely negative phenomenon. In other words, when settling in a new location, populations retained the worst characteristics of their old home while acquiring only the negative features of their new domain.<sup>151</sup> Fierce but unsophisticated northern barbarians were thought to become weak when settled in southern lands, yet they always remained stupid.<sup>152</sup> Picturing the world as divided into different climatic zones capable of shaping the basic characteristics of their inhabitants lies at the root of the ethnic malleability of the Scythian Logos. Since clusters of national characteristics were associated with defined ecological zones, and tradition had firmly established the Scythians as inhabiting both a certain region (north and east of the Danube) and ecological niche (steppe lands), then it was a small step to begin thinking about any people inhabiting that eco-zone, or ones with similar climatic and topographic features, as Scythians.

### 2.2.2. The Scythian Logos

The basic package of Scythian tropes compiled by Herodotus covered geography, climate, religion, warfare, subsistence, and many other, more specific cultural practices. Briefly summarized, Herodotus and his many descendants described the Scythians as archetypal nomads, forever wandering, possessed of no cities, and supremely dangerous because of their mobile lifestyle. At the

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<sup>151</sup> Isaac 2004, p. 108.

<sup>152</sup> One of the clearest examples of this phenomenon, and also a strong testament to the longevity of this worldview comes from the sixth century historian Procopius. When describing the lifestyle of the Vandals, a Germanic/Gothic tribe from Central Europe who had usurped control of Roman North Africa in the mid fifth century, Procopius emphasized the decadent nature of Vandal society, where the luxuries of the south had entirely enervated and emasculated the formerly-fearsome warrior society (*Wars* 4.6.5-9).

same time, they belonged, fundamentally, to another world. Scythia was a land of eternal winter, far away at the ends of the earth, and totally unfit for civilized, urban, agricultural life. Scythians rarely posed a threat to the *oikoumene* because their lifestyle required them to remain outside it.<sup>153</sup> When Herodotus' nomads did attempt to extend their domain into comparatively-civilized Media, they proved militarily formidable yet fundamentally out of place in the world of cities and agriculture. Unable to properly play the game of thrones, they were defeated through treachery. The survivors returned home and Herodotus' Scythians never ventured south of the steppe lands again.<sup>154</sup> Although the Danube marked the southern boundary between the Scythian world and the rest of the *oikoumene*, for Herodotus and his followers, the Scythian heartland lay far to the north beyond the Black Sea, at the outer edge of Classical Greek geographic knowledge.<sup>155</sup>

During the later Roman Republic and early Principate, as Rome expanded into the Danubian lands, Hellenizing ideas about Scythians started to show up in Roman literary works, such as the

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<sup>153</sup> One of the most important *topoi* in Herodotus' Scythian Logos is the terrifying notion that the Scythians are impervious to attack and utterly invincible within their steppe homeland. Herodotus works throughout the Logos to establish Scythia as an alien world. Existing beyond the Danube, it is geographically and topographically distinct from the civilized parts of the *oikoumene*, with bizarre and inhospitable weather (4.28–31); its people possess neither cities nor fields (4.2,97), and all attempts to import proper Greek practices are met with extreme violence (4.76–80). The Scythians benefit from such a setting and behavior and are complete immunity to attack and invasion. The historian explains: "This greatest thing that [the Scythians] have discovered is how no invader who comes against them can ever escape and how none can catch them if they do not wish to be caught. For this people has no cities or settled forts; they carry their houses with them and shoot with bows from horseback; they live off their herds of cattle, not from cultivation, and their dwellings are on their wagons. How can they fail to be invincible and inaccessible to others?" (4.46).

The narrative of Darius' failed invasion of Scythia serves to validate this theory of Scythian invincibility. The Persians are never able to force their enemies to give battle since, as the Scythian king Idanthyrsus points out, his people have neither farms nor cities which they must fight to protect (4.127). The normal rules of ancient warfare don't apply in the wastes of Scythia. As Hartog aptly put it, "the Scythians are nomads and, spatially, Scythia is an 'other' space to the extent that it is an inaccessible place. As Darius learns to his cost, throwing a bridge across the Ister does not suffice for truly entering Scythia. He exhausts himself in [a] mockery of a hunt and emerges from it defeated, without ever setting eyes upon his adversaries." (Hartog 1980, p. 61).

<sup>154</sup> Hdt. 1.103–106.

<sup>155</sup> Hdt. 4.17–31, 48–50, 99–101.

poems of Horace.<sup>156</sup> Greek ethnographic tropes became commonplace among Rome's educated, decision-making elite part-and-parcel with the broader Roman adoption of Greek literary culture following annexation of the Aegean and much of the Hellenistic world during the second and first centuries BCE. With the Herodotean ethnographic worldview well entrenched, and the Danubian region on people's minds at Rome after Tiberius' conquest of Pannonia between 12 and 9 BCE, the poet Ovid, when exiled to Tomis near the Lower Danube in 8 CE, thought characterizing the local Getae as Scythians a promising tactic to secure his recall from a place he described as the ends of the earth.<sup>157</sup> Ovid's Scythicizing descriptions of Tomis, its people, and the surrounding barbarians owe much to Herodotus and show clearly the relevance of the original tropes some five hundred years after their codification. At the same time, Ovid wrote under very different political and cultural conditions and his Scythians also reflect the contemporary realities at the very moment Ausonian control over the Danubian region was transitioning from loose hegemony to firmer political dominion.<sup>158</sup> Ovid's picture of Scythian life is painted in great detail within the verses of his exilic poetry. For this reason, as well as because the poet writes from the perspective of an elite Roman insider of the generation that established the Danubian *limes* system, we must consider his characterization of the Danubian lands and peoples in closer detail.

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<sup>156</sup> In particular, *Carm.* 3.9-10: "The Scythian plainsman whose wagons carry their roaming houses in their accustomed way, lead better lives [than do the morally corrupt Romans]," but also see *Carm.* 1.35.6-9; 2.20.13-20; 3.4.29-36.

<sup>157</sup> See Mattern 1999, ch. 1 for a good overview of the educational and literary practices of Rome's decision-making elite in the early Principate. On the conquest of Pannonia, see Kovács 2014, pp. 23-36. Tiberius was engaged in putting down a major Pannonian revolt at the moment of Ovid's exile, so to a Roman public that saw the whole Danubian world as largely homogenous, his exilic missives from the other end of the river would still have seemed topical.

<sup>158</sup> Illyricum and the Thracian kingdoms had been brought to heel less than two decades prior, Getic and Sarmatian raids south of the river had been repulsed, and the area had finally been organized into the province of Moesia around the year 6 CE, and Tiberius had recently quashed a major revolt in Pannonia (Kovács 2014, pp. 25-40).

### 2.2.3. Ovid in exile: the environment of Tomis

Nearly every aspect of Ovid's characterization of Tomis and its hinterland is designed to emphasize the region's harshness, danger, and uncouth inhabitants, but the natural environment, in particular, proved fertile ground for the poet's crop of invective against his place of exile. Reading Ovid's description of the climate of Tomis and its environs, an unformed reader would be forgiven for imagining the city located in some Arctic tundra. The poet works hard to describe his position as at the very limits of human habitation. Appealing to contemporary astronomical and climatic theories, Ovid notes that the stars and winds of Tomis are those of the arctic: "very near us are the stars having the form of a wagon [*plaustra*], possessing extreme cold. Here is the source of Boreas; this coast is his home, and he takes strength from a place nearer to him."<sup>159</sup> Simple mention of *Boreas*, *Arctus*, or *Aquilo* were enough to situate Ovid in, or at least on the verge of the wretched Scythian world,<sup>160</sup> but the poet also employed other climate-based tropes to emphasize his pitiable position. Echoing Herodotus' picture of Scythian wagons crossing the frozen Cimmerian Bosphorus,<sup>161</sup> Ovid describes the annual freezing of the Danube, "not narrower than the papyrus-bearing river," such that "where ships had gone before, now men go on foot and the waters congealed with cold feel the hoof-beat of the horse, [and] across the new bridge, above the gliding

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<sup>159</sup> *Pont.* 4.10.39-42. Vergil's digression on the winters of Scythia (*Georg.* 3.349-383) served to popularize the trope at Rome prior to Ovid's exile, but its roots are Herodotean (4.28-31). In Ovid, Astronomical and meteorological references come in a number of forms. For winds, frigid Boreas is ubiquitous (eg: *Tr.* 1.10, passim; 3.11.8; *Pont.* 1.5.72; 4.10.41; 4.12.35) but one also encounters the malignant Aquilo (*Tr.* 1.11.19; 3.10.17). Astronomical references are more varied, but continually emphasize polar constellations: eg: *sidera praebentia formam plaustris* (*Pont.* 4.10.39), *Parrhasiae gelido virginis axe premor* (*Tr.* 2.190), *proxima sideribus tellus Erymanthidos Ursae* (*Tr.* 3.4.1).

<sup>160</sup> eg: *polus* (*Tr.* 4.10.108), *Arctus* (*Tr.* 1.2.29; 1.3.48; 3.10.11; 5.5.39; *Pont.* 2.7.58).

<sup>161</sup> *Hdt.* 4.28-31.

current, are drawn by Sarmatian oxen the carts of the barbarians.” When winter finally, briefly, relents, all Ovid can say about the region is that the ice reluctantly melts.<sup>162</sup>

While trees bud and grape vines send up new shoots in his beloved Italy, these temperate flora are absent from the Pontic plains.<sup>163</sup> It would seem that the poet resides in a tree-less steppe, a setting he describes in greater depth elsewhere:

*I lie abandoned on the beach, at the very edge of the world, where buried earth supports perpetual snows. No fields here produce fruit, nor sweet grapes, no willows are green upon the bank, no oak upon the hill, nor can you sing the praises of the sea any more than the land, for the waters here - always bereft of sunlight - perpetually toss beneath the madness of the winds. Wherever you gaze, lie plains with no cultivators, vast steppes which nobody claims.*<sup>164</sup>

This sort of steppe landscape is the natural home of the Scythian, as anyone who has read Herodotus, or any subsequent ancient ethnography of the steppe, knows.<sup>165</sup>

The overall effect of Ovid's pessimistic description of the environment around Tomis is to rhetorically transport it north into the world of the Crimea and the greater Pontic Steppe. Ovid recognizes that he isn't residing quite in those lands at the ends of the earth, but his presentation of

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<sup>162</sup> *Tr.* 3.10.27-34. The freezing of the river and the resultant nomadic migrations are a recurring refrain throughout the poems (eg: *Tr.* 3.12.27-30; *Pont.* 1.2.71-88) but Ovid also claims that the sea itself frequently freezes over and that it sometimes gets so cold that wine solidified, unwatered, in the amphora (*Pont.* 4.7.7-12). For the eventual, reluctant thaw, *Tr.* 3.12.27-32.

<sup>163</sup> *Tr.* 3.12.13-16: *quoque loco est vitis, de palmitis gemma movetur: / nam procul a Getico litore vitis abest. / quoque loco est arbor, turgescit in arbore ramus: / nam procul a Geticis finibus arbor abest.*

<sup>164</sup> *Pont.* 1.3.49-56: *orbis in extremi iaceo desertus harenis, / fert ubi perpetuas obruta terra nives. / non ager hic pomum, non dulces educat uvas, / non salices ripa, robora monte virent, / neve fretum laudes terra magis, aequora semper / ventorum rabie solibus orbata tument. / quocumque aspicias, campi cultore carentes / vastaque, quae nemo vindicant, arva iacent.* The imagery of Ovid bereft on the beach is probably also designed to invoke the popular trope of abandoned Ariadne.

<sup>165</sup> Pomponius Mela, for example, writing his geography only slightly after Ovid, relies almost exclusively on Herodotus for his description of Scythia (1.110-117). As for Ovid's description, like most of the scenes he paints in order to illustrate his dismal place of exile, this portrayal of the topography around Tomis is partially accurate. The Dobrogea does, indeed, possess vast plains, but it is far from devoid of trees. The winters are certainly very cold, but they are far from perennial; summers at Tomis are warm and wet: grapes can certainly grow there, and agriculture has always been endemic (Zahariade 2006, pp. 10-12; Personal observation, 2014).

the region makes it seem that one need only cross the Danube and wander over the first hill to find oneself in the land of *Iphigenia at Tauris*.<sup>166</sup> Another passage is particularly revealing:

*A land next to the stars of the Erymanthian bear holds me, a region made rigid with stiffening cold. Beyond are the [Cimmerian] Bosphorus and the Tanais and the Scythian marshes and the scattered names of regions barely known at all. Farther still is nothing at all except uninhabitable cold. Alas! How near to me are the very ends of the earth!*<sup>167</sup>

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Dobrogea lies on the ‘Scythian Corridor,’ at the extreme southern tip of the larger Pontic steppe system, and so, in a way, Ovid's description is apt. This, however, is probably largely coincidental. Cast into a region on the extreme edge of the Roman Empire, it made sense rhetorically for the poet to describe his setting using tropes developed for the extreme edge of the known world. For someone like Ovid, for whom Rome was the world, the conflation of empire and *oikoumene* must have seemed natural, particularly in light of his own fierce desire to return from the margins to the imperial center. The natural setting described in the exile poetry makes it clear that, in the poet's words, “Naso's home now is in the Scythian world.”<sup>168</sup>

#### 2.2.4. Ovid in exile: cultural landscapes

*I am living in the midst of the barbarian world. About me are the Sauromatae, a cruel people, the Bessi, and the Getae, names unworthy of my talent!*<sup>169</sup>

Ovid frequently discusses the local tribal peoples in the hinterland of Tomis, and while he does not always call them Scythians, he does consistently characterize them using established

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<sup>166</sup> In *Tristia* 4.4.55ff., Ovid discusses the myth of Orestes and Iphigenia among the Tauroscythians of the Crimea. Although the myth does not take place exactly at his place of exile, the poet notes that “not far away from me is the place where the Tauric altar of the quivered goddess is sprinkled with the blood of murder.” Ovid later describes his location as actually on the “Cimmerian shore,” a clear reference to the Crimea and bit of poetic license (*Pont.* 4.10.1-2).

<sup>167</sup> *Tr.* 3.4.47-52: *Proxima sideribus tellus Erymanthidos Ursae / me tenet, adstricto terra perusta gelu. / Bosphoros et Tanais superant Scythiaque paludes / vix satis et noti nomina pauca loci. / ulterius nihil est nisi non habitabile frigus. / heu quam vicina est ultima terra mihi!*

<sup>168</sup> *Tr.* 3.12.51.

<sup>169</sup> *Tr.* 3.10.5-6: *Sauromatae cingunt, fera gens, Bessique Getaeque, / quam non ingenio nomina digna meo!*



Scythian tropes and stereotypes. The native Getae and Sarmatae are culturally indistinguishable to Ovid and are presented, over and over again, as nomadic terrors, forever in search of victims to plunder, and devoid of all restraining laws and social graces. First and foremost, the local peoples are violent and uncouth:

*Greater hordes of Sarmatae and Getae go and come upon their horses along the roads. Among them there is not one who does not bear quiver and bow, and darts yellow with viper's venom. Harsh voices, grim faces, truest indication of their minds, neither hair nor beard trimmed by practiced hand, right hands not slow to stab and wound with the knife which every barbarian wears fastened to his side.*<sup>170</sup>

The physical and physiognomic descriptions are generic Roman stereotypes applicable to most barbarians,<sup>171</sup> but adding the particular archery-related details places these barbarians in the Scythian category.<sup>172</sup> The poisoned arrows seem to be Ovid's own addition to the trope, and one he repeats elsewhere.<sup>173</sup> These wandering horsemen wreak havoc on the local rural population, further strengthening their association with the fierce Scythians. Here, their actions follow a typical, and perhaps partially realistic pattern, leaving the locals too scared to even cultivate their land:

*[Once the Danube has frozen over for the winter], the barbarian enemy with his swift horses rides to the attack - an enemy strong in steeds and in far flying arrows - and pillages the neighboring farmland, far and wide. [...] What they cannot carry or lead away they destroy, and the hostile flame burns the innocent cottages. Even when peace prevails, there is terrified dread of war, nor does*

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<sup>170</sup> Tr. 5.7.13-20: *Sarmaticae maior Geticaeque frequentia gentis / per medias in equis itque reditque vias. / in quibus est nemo, qui non coryton et arcum / telaque vipereo lurida felle great. / vox fera, trux vultus, verissima mentis imago, / non coma, non trita barba reseca manu, / dextra non segnis fixo dare vulera cultro, / quem iunctum lateri barbarus omnis habet.*

<sup>171</sup> eg: Josephus applies the same stereotypes of brutality and uncouthness to the Germans (BJ 2.16.4). Seneca explicitly names both Germans and Scythians when describing wild, lawless barbarians, explaining that they, like beasts, lack the restraining influence of human intellect (*de Ira* 2.15).

<sup>172</sup> cf. Hdt. 4.8-10 (Hercules' bow as the symbol of Scythian kingship.); 4.46, 128 (Archery from horseback as a key element of Scythian military strength.); 4.76 (Scythian king executes Anacharsis, another Scythian, with a bow as punishment for conducting Greek religious rites in Scythia.); 4.132 (Scythian king threatens to destroy Darius' Persian army with arrows).

<sup>173</sup> eg: *Pont.* 1.2.13; 4.7.7-12. In particular, the poisoned arrows trope appears to be an imported stereotype usually attributed to the Parthians (eg: Vergil, *Aen.* 12.857-888; see also, Williams 1994, p. 19).

*anyone till the soil with down-pressed plowshare. This region either has an enemy in sight, or fears one when there is nothing to see; the soil lies idle, abandoned in rigid neglect.*<sup>174</sup>

The final component of Ovid's stereotypical ethnography is the attribution of a nomadic lifestyle to the hostile barbarians. These are more than brigands endemic to a lawless border region; as described by Ovid, his foes are true nomads, living a life that could have come straight from the pages of Herodotus. The mobility of the barbarians lends them strength since their horses have great stamina, and they have "the knowledge of how to endure for long both thirst and hunger, and [have the skills to ensure] that a pursuing enemy will have no water."<sup>175</sup> In several places, the poet mentions the movement of nomadic wagon trains across the frozen Danube.<sup>176</sup> That these annual winter crossings are more formulaic than observational can be deduced easily enough because Ovid wants to have his cake and eat it too. He describes raids as preventing cultivation,<sup>177</sup> that is, as taking place during the spring and summer months, while also insisting that only the frozen river allows the barbarians access to the Dobrogea. It could be argued that Ovid is simply a poor ethnographer and has misunderstood the annual migration rhythms, but I suspect the correct reading is even less charitable. Ovid is not even trying to accurately describe the world around him. Perpetual fear of

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<sup>174</sup> *Tr.* 3.10.51-70: *sive igitur nimii Boreae vis saeva marinas, / sive redundatas flumine cogit aquas, / protinus aequato siccis Aquilonibus Histro / invehitur celeri barbarus hostis equo; / hostis equo pollens longeque volante sagitta / vicinam late depopulatur humum. [...]* (65) *quae nequeunt secum ferre aut abducere, perdunt, / et cremat insontes hostica flamma casas. / tunc quoque, cum pax est, trepidant formidine belli, / nec quisquam presso vomere sulcat humum. / aut videt aut metuit locus hic, quem non videt, hostem; / cessat iners rigido terra relicta situ.* This passage is interesting for another reason, too. In general, the rural farming class is absent from Ovid's discussions of the local population. This is one of the few places they show up, if only as victims of nomadic predation. Elsewhere, Ovid is so keen to paint himself on the wild frontier that we repeatedly find Getae and Sarmatae circling the very walls of Tomis, raining poisoned arrows down on the cowering citizenry (*Tr.* 5.10.19-28; *Pont.* 1.2.13-22). *Tr.* 4.1.65-86 describes another raid, including the poet's reluctant assumption of real arms in defense of the town. We are invited to speculate on how far the man who once rejected the arms of epic poetry has now fallen.

<sup>175</sup> *Pont.* 1.2.83-86. Ovid warns Augustus in the same poem that these nomadic strengths make the Getae and Sarmatae contemptuous of Roman authority (*Pont.* 1.2.81-82). This condensed discussion is clearly based on Herodotus' extended narrative of Darius' failed invasion of Scythia (4.83-142) where the nomads lead the Persian forces through deserts and scorched landscapes (4.125-127) before contemptuously telling the King of Kings to flee while he still can (4.130-132).

<sup>176</sup> *Tr.* 3.10.33-34; *Tr.* 3.12.29-30; *Pont.* 4.7.9-10.

<sup>177</sup> *Tr.* 5.10.19ff.

attack such that agriculture becomes impossible is a strong statement about the backwardness of his place of exile, and therefore a potentially powerful tool for his recall. Whatever the actual truth, the poet does not appear to have felt any need to reconcile his claims of perpetual raiding with his descriptions of winter crossings. Those had to be included because the trope was so popular. Capturing reality was never the goal.

Despite painting the barbarians of Tomis with a consistent, Herodotean brush, Ovid clearly understood that the specific tribal landscape was actually rather more varied. Tribal and ethnic names can be broadly divided into three categories: first, general ethnic terms, such as Getae, Sarmatae/Sauromatae,<sup>178</sup> and Scythian, second, throwaway references to obscure tribes from earlier accounts of the Scythian world, and third, specific tribal names reflecting contemporary realities in and around the Dobrogea.<sup>179</sup> Within this literary landscape of tribes, the ubiquity of the Getae in Ovid's Dobrogea is crucial, yet easy to overlook. The nominal form (*Geta*) appears 57 times in the exilic corpus and the adjectival *Geticus* 26 times, for a total of 83 references. The next most common ethnonyms, 'Scythian' (*Scythicus*, *Scythes*, *Scythia*) with 30 references, and 'Sarmatian' (*Sarmata*, *Sauromata*, *Sarmaticus*) with 29<sup>180</sup> appear much less frequently. These numbers suggest that despite characterizing the local population using tropes and stereotypes derived from the Scythian world, Ovid still recognized that the majority of the population were Getae, a subset of the Thracians. The Getae are particularly dominant in the nominal category. *Geta* occurs 57 times as opposed to a mere

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<sup>178</sup> Ovid seems to use the older Greek 'Sauromatae' and the newer 'Sarmatae' interchangeably, the specific choice depending on metrical constraints.

<sup>179</sup> One can appreciate that the second and third categories cannot always be separated with absolute certainty.

<sup>180</sup> The equally general 'Thracian' (*Threïcius*, *Thrax*, *Thracia*) shows up a mere five times, and inclusion of the more metrically-manageable 'Bistonian' (*Bistonus*, *Bistonius*) brings the Thracian total to eleven. **See Appendix 2.1 for a concordance of these references.**

14 *Sarmatae/Sauromatae*, one *Thrax*, and no *Scythae* at all. In contrast, the adjectival forms are rather more evenly divided. *Geticus* is the largest single category with 26 occurrences, but *Sarmaticus* appears 15 times, and *Scythicus* 23. Taken together, these closely associated nomadic terms outnumber *Geticus* 38 to 26, or approximately 3 to 2.<sup>181</sup>

Although admittedly a crude tool, these calculations do add their support to the overall picture emerging from the actual tropes present in Ovid's exilic verse. Arriving in Tomis, Ovid encountered a Greek polis surrounded by a rural population of Getic farmers and pastoralists. This reality is reflected by the dominance of *Geta* among the various nouns used to describe the hostile barbarians. At the same time, Ovid also learned that there were Sarmatian herdsmen living in the hinterland at least for part of the year. Ovid then, had a choice to make. The Getae were something of an unknown commodity at Rome,<sup>182</sup> but Ovid needed to make them intelligible to his readers and patrons back in the capital. He had the option of looking south to the Thracian world, well stocked with its own set of barbarian tropes,<sup>183</sup> or north to the Scythian world of the Crimea and beyond. Even without the climatic and ethnographic tropes already examined, Ovid's strong preference for Scytho-Sarmatian adjectives over Thracian ones makes the poet's choice obvious.

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<sup>181</sup> As usual, the 7 Thracian/Bistonian adjectives represent a distinct minority.

<sup>182</sup> Pomponius Mela nicely illustrates Rome's lack of knowledge - real or traditional - about the Getae. An armchair-geographer, writing soon after Ovid, he also relied on traditional Greek ethnographic sources for his treatment of the Danubian and Scythian worlds. Like Ovid and his contemporary Strabo, Mela knew that the people living immediately beyond the Danube were Getae, not Scythians, but he had neither the contemporary data of the latter, nor the literary savvy of the former required to handle a people less familiar at Rome. The result is a remarkable hole in his ethnography. While both the Scytho-Sarmatians to the north (2.1-15) and the Thracians to the south (2.16-26) receive detailed attention, Mela only mentions the intervening Getae briefly in passing (2.18): they have no culture of their own to be described, and, because Mela relied so closely on earlier Hellenistic and Greek sources for the bulk of his material (Romer 2001, pp. 9-27), following Ovid's innovations may never have come to mind. In this, however, he was out of step with a growing literary trend. Ovid's Scythian Danube, or a worldview characterized by similar confections, was the way of the future.

<sup>183</sup> Mela's discussion of Thracian customs (2.16-21) is indicative of the 'path not taken' by Ovid. The major tropes are fierceness (2.16, 18), frequently frenzied Dionysiac worship (2.17), belief in the immortality of the soul (2.18), and the practice of female ritual suicide (2.19-21). The topography is described as harsh, but not as extensively so as in Scythia (2.16). There are no tropes associated with nomadic life.

### 2.2.5. Ovid in exile: broader implications

Ovid's contemporary, Strabo of Amaseia aspired to present an accurate picture of the Danubian world in his geographic writings - a topic to be touched on below - but the same cannot be said of Ovid. By shaping his descriptions of the Dobrogea and its peoples with an eye towards securing his recall, Ovid relied on Scythian tropes well known among his Roman readers, and by so doing, effectively obscured the Getic identity of the region's non-Greek majority. The Getae are mere ciphers in Ovid, buried, like Tomis in winter, by a blizzard of Scythian commonplaces. This characterization required some innovation on Ovid's part since most of the existing Scythian tropes were tied to tribes or places traditionally located north of the Euxine in the Crimea and the larger Pontic Steppe. Ovid collapsed the geography by describing Tomis as a part of the Scythian world: subject to its climate, full of its peoples, and just around the corner from the famous locations of Pontic myth and legend. Such innovation was more than some contemporary writers, like Pomponius Mela, could manage, but it was the way of the future.

### 2.2.6. The later Scythian tradition

Our detailed discussion of Ovid's Scythian Logos is important because it is one of the two earliest extensive collections of tropes from the Principate. The other is found in Strabo's *Geography*, which we will consider below. While it would be difficult, and perhaps pointless, to try and show that Ovid's text, itself, single-handedly changed the way Romans thought about the Danubian regions, we can certainly point to it as more comprehensive than earlier Roman discussions of Scythian matters, and note its location near the beginning of Rome's long tradition of Herodotean reception in non-specialist thought on transdanubian peoples. Scythians were never the most

common subject for the authors of the Roman Empire – in Latin or Greek – but many who did turn their muse in the direction of the steppe produced extremely traditional portraits of the Scythians and Sarmatians, of which Ovid’s Scythian Logos is an early and important example.<sup>184</sup>

Valerius Flaccus and Martial show slight variations in their treatment of Scythians reflecting contemporaneous conditions on the frontier,<sup>185</sup> but for the most part, their treatments are highly traditional. Valerius Flaccus, feeling compelled by the epic genre, inserted a book of warfare in the middle of his *Argonautica* (Book 6). With a setting in Colchis, where once Power and Violence bound Prometheus to the Scythian crag,<sup>186</sup> the chapter is populated by tribes lifted directly from Herodotus’ Scythian steppe.<sup>187</sup> Martial’s use of stereotypes also broadly mirrors Ovid; the lands beyond the Danube are a frozen waste inhabited by fierce, nomadic, and frequently conflated Getae/Dacians and Sarmatae.<sup>188</sup> One specific passage is worth considering. Describing a slave, Martial notes that the errand boy “should not be of the type that plays on the frozen river [Danube]

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<sup>184</sup> Ovid was extremely popular, even while in exile, to the point of needing to defend his reputation from slander in the *Ibis*. In *Tr.* 5.7.25–30, Ovid expresses his pleasure at learning that some of his works are being performed at Rome, even during his forced absence. We can safely assume that the exilic poetry was circulated among Ovid’s elite patrons, and that Ovid’s descriptions of the rigors of Tomis would have been easily intelligible to an educated audience steeped in the Greco-Roman literary canon. There is slim evidence for posthumous popularity of Ovid’s exilic works, but see Pliny, *HN* 32.152 for a possible reference. To go further would be unadvisable.

<sup>185</sup> Both Valerius Flaccus and Martial wrote during the later decades of the first century when the Danube was on everyone’s mind. Sarmatian raids were repelled in 69–70 (Tacitus, *Hist.* 1.79), and Domitian waged two wars in the 90s against Dacia and its aggressive king Decebalus (Dio 68). Kovács (2014, pp. 70–84) offers a detailed, recent analysis of the rather confused and unsatisfactory sources.

<sup>186</sup> Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, 1–11. Aeschylus was familiar with the same basic set of Scythian tropes we find in his rough contemporary, Herodotus. The eponymous hero of the *Prometheus Bound* lays them out later in the play when prophesying Io’s future wanderings. His Scythians are nomads, live in wagons, and are fearsome archers (709–711).

<sup>187</sup> cf. *Argonautica* 6.41–170 and *Hdt.* 4.17–21, 99–117. Heniochi, Cimmerians, Sindi, Neuri, Arimaspi, Thyrsagetae, and Sarmatae are all found in both accounts. Some of the other tribes in Valerius Flaccus, such as the Coralli, Iazyges, and Alani seem to reflect the steppe peoples of his own day.

<sup>188</sup> The first polar astronomical reference comes in book six when Martial writes to a veteran of Domitian’s Dacian war about his time under the Parrhasian *triones*, and the “lazy stars of the Getic *polus*” (6.58.1–2). This short passage shows the continued association of the Getae/Dacians with the arctic climate of the Scythian world. The popular association is strong enough that there is no need to even refer to more traditional Scythians or Sarmatians. Further astronomical/climatic references occur at 7.6, 7.7, 7.80, 9.45, 9.101. Martial’s usage of these tropes is standard and requires no further elaboration.

with a Sarmatian wheel, fed full with the milk of a Getic heifer.”<sup>189</sup> This one passage manages to pack in a full bouquet of Scythian tropes. First, we have the typical frozen Danube, possibly with a reference to wagons crossing the stream. Second, we see here a clear example of the conflation of Getae and Sarmatae; the wheel/hoop is Sarmatian, the cow is Getic, and the boy seems equally at home with each.<sup>190</sup> Third, and finally, the reference to milk as a staple food is designed to invoke the usual stereotypes of nomadic subsistence.<sup>191</sup> The only thing lacking from this short passage is the stereotype of Scythian fierceness, but since it deals with a child, this is not totally surprising.<sup>192</sup> In general, Martial’s traditional post-Ovidian use of Scythian tropes makes sense in the context of Domitian’s less-than-convincing record in his Dacian wars. Decebalus, the Dacian king, was pacified for the time being, but not defeated, and no new territory was annexed. Writing blatantly to curry favor with the *princeps*, Martial cast Domitian’s enemies as nomad Scythians: worthy foes for Domitian’s ‘victories,’ yes, but not at all worth annexing. After all, who would want to rule over the tundra of the Parrhasian *triones*? This small innovation – the use of Scythian tropes to denigrate an enemy as unworthy of Roman attention – would go on to have a long, and important afterlife.

Trajan’s annexation of Dacia at the turn of the first century changed the way many Romans thought about the transdanubian lands, but the new ideas, which we will consider below, did not

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<sup>189</sup> Mart. 7.80.6-8. [...] *ferat carmina nostra puer, / non qualis Geticae satiatu lacte iuvencae / Sarmatica rigido ludit in amne rota.*

<sup>190</sup> Throughout the corpus, Martial uses Scythian/Sarmatian terms at about the same rate as Getic/Dacian ones (19 vs. 15 references). Frequently, he employs *Sarmaticus* and *Geticus* in the same poem, essentially as synonyms. Note in particular, 7.2, 8.11, 9.101.

<sup>191</sup> See Shaw 1982, for a detailed analysis of this particular dietary trope. This passage also raises another interesting point. In the wake of Domitian’s Dacian wars, slaves from beyond the Danube appear to have been common enough in Rome that Martial felt the need to point out to his friend that he would be sending something better. Slaves from beyond the frontiers were probably one of the only ways common Romans ever interacted with such people.

<sup>192</sup> Martial covers the martial tropes elsewhere, but usually in such a way as to emphasize Domitian’s *virtus*: “three times he smashed the treacherous horns of Sarmatian Hister, three times bathed his sweating steed in Getic snow!” (9.101.17-18). See also, 7.2, 7.6, 7.7.

lead to a rejection of existing traditional ideas about Scythians. The evidence is scant, but two authors from the end of the second century clearly reveal the vitality of the Herodotean/Ovidian Scythians in the popular imagination of the Western and Eastern Empire during the later second century. Lucian of Samostata, writing in the second half of the second century, employs Scythian figures as interlocutors in three different works.<sup>193</sup> His picture of Scythian life, although broadly consistent with the established classical tropes, tends towards the idealized ‘noble savage’ model, a modification of the original tropes with a pedigree nearly as long.<sup>194</sup> Lucian’s treatment of the Sarmatians is different. In the *Toxaris*, Sarmatians appear as major antagonists in two of the stories told by the eponymous Scyth to illustrate the importance of friendship among his people.<sup>195</sup> While the details of Lucian’s Scythian tales can be connected with contemporaneous fears and concerns stemming from the ongoing Marcomannic Wars along the Danube frontier,<sup>196</sup> everything is seen through the lens of the traditional Herodotean tropes.

The Christian writer Tertullian is another interesting case for the ubiquity of the most traditional Scythian tropes during the middle empire. He was raised in North Africa, about as far

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<sup>193</sup> These are, *Anacharsis, or On Athletics*; *Toxaris, or Friendship*; and *The Scythian, or the Proxenos*. For the most part, the figures of Anacharsis and Toxaris are used by Lucian as barbarian foils to illustrate his main points through contrast.

<sup>194</sup> The innovator of this tradition, or at least its oldest known proponent, was Ephorus of Cyme, who wrote a generation after Herodotus. His history is lost, but a quotation in Strabo claims that the Scythians exceed all peoples in justice “since they are frugal in their ways of living and not money-getters, they not only are orderly towards one another, because they have all things in common, their wives, children, the whole of their kin and everything, but also remain invincible and unconquered by outsiders, because they have nothing to be enslaved for” (Strabo 7.3.9). The underlying logic of the nomadic advantage should be familiar from Herodotus, but see Gardener-Garden 1987, pp. 3-7 for an analysis of Ephorus that suggests a parallel, largely-independent tradition. The ‘noble savage’ trope plays out in Lucian’s *Toxaris*, in particular, where we find story after story of extreme, and extremely barbaric Scythian loyalty and friendship.

<sup>195</sup> The first occurrence of the Sarmatians is in the story of Dandamis and Amizoces, where they show up as the primary antagonists and prove their villainy with acts of theft, kidnapping, and mutilation (*Tox.* 39-41). The other episode occurs in the story of Macentes, Lonchates, and Arsacomas. Here, the Sarmatians show up as the vassal allies of the hostile Bosphorans, together with the Alans. They and their compatriots are defeated by a numerically-inferior Scythian force in a battle described using traditional Greek military terms and strategies (*Tox.* 54-55). We will revisit the first story in depth below.

<sup>196</sup> For analysis of the importance of the Marcomannic Wars, see section 2.4.5 below.



from Scythia or the Danubian Borderland as one can get within the Roman world, but educated in the traditional elite manner, meaning he was almost certainly familiar with Ovid's corpus, as well as Vergil and Horace who also go in for traditional Scythian stereotypes from time to time.<sup>197</sup>

Tertullian's writings, despite their Christian overtones, show that he held all the classical prejudices about Scythians. We see Scythian tropes most clearly at the beginning of his diatribe against the heretical Marcion, whom Tertullian characterizes as a barbarous Scythian despite being from Anatolian Pontus. All the expected tropes about harsh climate and nomadic subsistence make their due appearances.<sup>198</sup> As the third century dawned, then, Scythian tropes were alive and well in the minds of Greek and Roman authors.

From Lucian and Tertullian, it is a short chronological jump to the third century troubles and their historian. When Dexippus wrote about the barbarian raids of his own day, he did so within the larger Scythicising worldview stretching back first to Ovid and then to Herodotus and his contemporaries. Dexippus assigned his barbarians the Scythian label because that was what most people called them, regardless of other tribal names more reflective of their own internal identity. Dexippus generally avoided describing the barbarians with Scythian tropes, but the centuries-old lineage of the Scythian Logos meant that simply labeling his barbarians as 'Skythai' shaped how most of his readers, and indeed, perhaps the author as well, thought about them.

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<sup>197</sup> Tertullian only converted to Christianity in his later life after a successful career as a lawyer. The traditional education underlying his vocation is clear in the expressiveness and depth of Classical allusion found in his Christian writings (Conte 1994, pp. 601-603). His familiarity with traditional Scythian tropes is part of this larger picture of a well-read member of the Roman provincial elite. The most notable instance of Scythian stereotypes in Vergil appears in the *Georgics* (1.231-251, 3.190-201, 3.339-383) and serve to contrast climate and culture at the extreme ends of the earth by comparing Scythians and Libyans. For Horace, see particularly *Carm.* 3.24.9-16, but also *Carm.* 1.19.9-2, 1.35.9-12, 1.35.33-40, 2.11.1-5, 3.4.29-36, 3.8.17-24, 4.5.25-28, and 4.14.41-44.

<sup>198</sup> *Adv. Marc.* 1.3-5. In his *De Anima* (25.7), Tertullian revisits the climatic tropes, showing a strong belief in environmental determinism in the style of the *Airs, Waters, and Places*.

### *III. Dexippus' Non-Scythian Scythians and the Ethnographic Tradition*

For Herodotus, Ovid, and all the other writers dependent on the traditional Scythian Logos, Scythians and Sarmatians are, first and foremost, consummate horsemen.<sup>199</sup> They live their transient lives in the saddle, and are dangerous enemies because of their mobility and skill as mounted archers. When we encounter Scythians in the fragments of Dexippus, however, we do not see them relying on these expected strengths. While the historian admits that the besiegers of Philippopolis possessed a strong cavalry arm, Dexippus also describes them as extremely dangerous on foot: Cniva, the Scythian leader, has veteran infantry under his command capable of demoralizing inexperienced adversaries with a terrifying battle-cry before finishing them off with cold steel.<sup>200</sup> Indeed, when attempting to repel Scythian invaders from Attica, Dexippus and his Greek defenders knew they were no match for their transdanubian enemies in close combat and resorted to unorthodox guerilla warfare until reinforced by Roman regulars.<sup>201</sup> So much for the heirs of Thermopylae and Platea. When the Scythian army arrives at the walls of Philippopolis in Dexippus' narrative, they become even less recognizable. These ostensible nomads besiege the city, employing all number of sophisticated war machines and stratagems in their attempt to reduce the place.<sup>202</sup>

The identification of these sophisticated, infantry-based enemies as Scythians comes as quite a surprise. Nothing in the way Dexippus' barbarians behave associates them with their assigned identity according to the ethnographic tropes examined thus far. While details of the siege

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<sup>199</sup> See also Dio Chrysostom's *Borysthenitic Oration* (*Or.* 36). Here, when describing the 'Scythicized' Greek inhabitants of Olbia, Dio dresses them all in black after the Scythian Melanchlaini of Herodotus (*Hdt.* 4.20, 107), and also emphasizes the horsemanship of Callistratus, his paragon of Olbian Greco-Scythian civilization (*Or.* 36.7-8).

<sup>200</sup> *Scyth.* fr. 24.6.

<sup>201</sup> *Scyth.* fr. 25.1-5.

<sup>202</sup> *Scyth.* fr. 24.

descriptions owe much to the language of Thucydides,<sup>203</sup> interspersed among the traditional scenes are some details which seem to match up much more closely to how ancient authors describe the warfare of northern agricultural barbarians (Celts and Germans) than to the martial habits usually attributed to nomadic Scythians. In particular, the demoralizing battle-cry and the use of massed infantry tactics appear to match the descriptions of Alamannic warfare in Ammianus Marcellinus' battle narratives.<sup>204</sup> Given Dexippus' personal experience with these Scythians, it is reasonable to assume that there is more truth than fancy in his *militaria*, at least when not sidetracked by Thucydidean delusions of grandeur. What are we to make of all this? We have already demonstrated that for Roman readers of Dexippus' day, the term 'Scythian' carried with it many ingrained, traditional assumptions. These stereotypes, however, described archetypal steppe nomads; Germans and Celts were a different 'class,' covered by a separate set of tropes and stereotypes.<sup>205</sup> The juxtaposition, then, of the Scythian label – with all its unspoken cultural baggage – and Dexippus' very un-Scythian descriptions of warfare and siegecraft demands investigation. How did Dexippus, and Roman writers more generally, reconcile contemporary information about

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<sup>203</sup> Dexippus' siege narrative has strong Thucydidean parallels, suggesting that we should not put too much stake into the *specific* stratagems employed by Cniva (Blockley 1972), yet there is no reason to assume that such literary borrowing undermines the fundamental reality of the account. We can note the formulaic moments (destroying war machines with boulders, building defensive counter-walls, etc.) without rejecting the entire scene. Wholesale fabrication seems unlikely given Dexippus' chronological proximity and personal connections to his literary subject.

<sup>204</sup> 16.12.20, 42–45, 63. The battle in question is the so-called Battle of Strassbourg between an Alammanic host and the army of Julian Caesar. While the barbarians fight fiercely in close-order combat, the detail of the battle-cry (*barritus*) is actually performed by a Roman unit, the Cornuti. The Germanic name of their tribune (Bainobaudes), however, makes it probable that this was a Germanic (probably Frankish) auxiliary unit, and the war-cry, which Ammianus takes pains to point out as remarkable, should be read as one of their native traditions.

<sup>205</sup> Isaac 2004, chs. 11 and 12. For the importance of Julius Caesar's *Bellum Gallicum* on shaping Roman conceptions of northern, non-nomadic barbarians, see Schadee 2008. For a discussion of Caesar's own manipulation of Scythian tropes in his description of Germania, see Krebs 2006. In short, Krebs suggests that Caesar's description of his trans-Rhenish actions intentionally invokes images of Herodotus' trackless Scythia in order to justify his own decision to return west of the Rhine. This seems logical, but in general characterization of Germania as distinct from Scythia both in terms of its geography and the cultural practices of its peoples would prove the more common choice for later Roman authors (eg: Tacitus, *Germ.* 1.1, 4–5, 17.1–2, 26, 46.1–2).

people they called Scythians or Sarmatians with older, established stereotypes, and where did new information, such as Dexippus' battle array, come from?

### 2.3.2. Ethnographic investigations: a parallel tradition

To answer these questions, we must begin, again, in the age of Ovid, when another writer, Strabo of Amaseia, was working to describe the Danubian Borderland. While the traditional tropes were passing through the generations relatively unchanged, a parallel ethnographic tradition also existed which attempted to describe Rome's barbarian neighbors based on up to date knowledge instead of ancient tropes. When these two parallel literary traditions occasionally converged, the corpus of Scythian tropes could expand and evolve, but operating as it did on an agglutinative principal, old stereotypes were rarely fully abandoned, even as new ones were being absorbed into the cultural canon.

We will consider some of the details of Strabo's characterization of the Danubian Borderland and its peoples below; for the moment, however, a short discussion of his ethnographic methodology is in order. Strabo, a Pontic noble with scholarly training in history writing and Homeric textual criticism, produced a seventeen-volume geographic treatise in Greek around the year 25. This *Geography* was based on a half-century of personal observation and scholarly enquiry across many regions of the Mediterranean world.<sup>206</sup> While Strabo admits that his knowledge of the regions north and east of the Black Sea is only second-hand and sometimes too reliant on mythic or otherwise-unverifiable sources,<sup>207</sup> he offers a great deal of detailed information about the tribes dwelling immediately north and south of the Danube and may well have personally visited the borderland.

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<sup>206</sup> Roller 2015, pp. 167-170.

<sup>207</sup> Strabo, 11.6.2-4

Such ethnographic travel was certainly not unprecedented. Posidonius, whose ethnography of the northern lands survives only in small fragments, traveled extensively during the first century BCE. Some fifty years after Strabo, the sophist Dio Chrysostom attempted – or at least claimed to have attempted – a similar expedition to gather first-hand information for an ethnography of the Getae.<sup>208</sup>

In addition to fieldwork and analysis of secondary material,<sup>209</sup> Strabo employed a new type of information about the lands on and beyond the outer edge of Roman control. Although military intelligence in the modern sense was unknown in the Roman world, Roman forces active on the frontiers employed spies and scouts when on campaign if for no other reasons than to ensure the column's grain supply.<sup>210</sup> In so doing, the army acquired information about the peoples in and immediately beyond their sphere of operation.<sup>211</sup> Strabo specifically cites the recent campaigns of Aelius Gallus in Arabia as an example of how this sort of accidental intelligence was expanding the collective knowledge horizon. Although we lack so overt a statement for our region, Strabo's

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<sup>208</sup> See below for more detail on Strabo's treatment of the region. In terms of his travels, Strabo notes "I have traveled westward from Armenia as far as the regions of Tyrrhenia opposite Sardinia, and southward from the Euxine Sea as far as the frontiers of Ethiopia. And you could not find another person who has travelled over much more of the distances just mentioned than I" (Strabo 2.5.11).

For Dio Chrysostom's abortive ethnographic expedition, see *Or.* 36.1: "I happened to be on vacation in Borysthenes [ie: Olbia on the western coast of the Euxine] one summer, since I'd sailed there after my exile with the plan of traveling onward, if possible, through the lands of the Scythians [west] into those of the Getae with the plan of observing local conditions there." We might question as to whether Dio Chrysostom actually visited Olbia. The level of detail he provides in describing the city and its history (1-6) suggests autopsy, but since the setting is peripheral to the discourse's main topic it could merely represent an exotic framing narrative. If so, we can at least surmise that Dio spoke to someone who had recently visited the distant city. As for the proposed ethnographic trip, a raid by local Scythians against the city (15-16) apparently forced the orator to abandon the project and head home (25). Presumably, conditions in the hinterland were too unsettled for safe travel.

<sup>209</sup> For example, Strabo dedicates a great deal of (rather tedious) prose to an analysis of Homer as a possible early source of information on the Moesians and other peoples of the Danubian Borderland, also citing Posidonius during the discussion (7.3.2-4).

<sup>210</sup> Hence the title *frumentarii* for such scouts/spies. Their late antique successors were the *agentes in rebus* and *notarii* who performed similar functions but worked more directly for the imperial bureaucracy rather than through the army. The *protectores domestici* (of which Ammianus Marcellinus was a member), in turn, assumed some of the clandestine military duties formerly the prerogative of the *frumentarii*. For the *agentes* and *notarii*, see Sinnigen 1959; for the *frumentarii* see Sinnigen 1961 and Mann 1988; for the *protectores*, see Jones 1964, pp. 636-640.

<sup>211</sup> Lee 1993; Austin and Rankov 1995.

knowledge of the Danubian Borderland also shows a sophistication reflective of recent military intelligence.<sup>212</sup> The campaigns of Plautius Silvanus Aelianus as governor of Moesia in the 60s CE offer a useful model for borderland military policies during the period of the initial solidification of the Danube *limes*. Recorded on Silvanus' tombstone at Tibur are his gubernatorial accomplishments, including the resettlement of 100,000 *transdanuvii* – an utterly preposterous figure, although the underlying act is believable – south of the river, the establishment of client treaties with various other groups, and punitive expeditions north of the Danube to subdue potentially–destabilizing nomads identified as Sarmatians and Scythians.<sup>213</sup> The three types of action recorded on the Plautius Silvanus inscription – resettlement, subjugation through client treaties, and punitive expeditions – would continue to form the main pillars of Roman frontier policy along the Danube for the next four hundred years. Through such actions, news and information from beyond the *limes* trickled back into a wider Roman consciousness: first through the works of ethnographers like Strabo, and later more generally.

Following the trail of new information beyond the ethnographic genre, a passage from Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* offers an illustrative example of how bits of *militaria* could further filter into otherwise-traditional treatments of barbarian peoples. Here, amidst the standard collection of ethnographic and epic *topoi* employed in his catalogue of Scythian enemies (*Argonautica*, bk. 6), the poet provides some unexpected contemporary details on Sarmatian arms and tactics.<sup>214</sup> Most of the

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<sup>212</sup> For the new information brought back by Gallus, see 2.5.12. In inferring a military source for some of Strabo's Danubian material, we might point to his discussions of local-level tribal divisions (7.3.2) and the movement of local peoples back and forth across the Danube (7.3.13). Both types of information would have been of particular interest to Roman forces as they worked to establish the river as the functional – and hence ideological – edge of the empire.

<sup>213</sup> The inscription is *CIL* 14.3608 (*ILS* 986). For analysis see Conole and Milns 1983 and Sarnowski 2006.

<sup>214</sup> *Arg.* 6.162, 231–238.

tribes included in the Scythian catalogue first appear in Herodotus and are described using standard tropes about nomadic behavior and warfare. This is to be expected in a work of epic literature like the *Argonautica*. Not so the Sarmatians, who, unlike their Herodotean selves, are described by Valerius as armored lancers.<sup>215</sup> Syme's venerable point was well made: these lancers reflect the real Sarmatians Rome was then dealing with in the plains beyond the Danube.<sup>216</sup> Valerius presumably included this modern information in order to connect his mythic narrative to a topic of contemporary interest;<sup>217</sup> juxtaposing modern Sarmatians with a literary narrative of Scythian warfare in far-off Colchis caused no problems. The established framework of stereotypes could be modified to encompass new areas and modern cultural practices without threatening the overall ethnographic edifice.<sup>218</sup>

### 2.3.3. Tradition and innovation: the balance of power in Dexippus

What all this means is that the way most people thought about the people beyond the Danube never came close to reflecting reality, even as the state of specialized military and

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<sup>215</sup> In Herodotus, the Sauromatae are horse-archers like all the rest of the Scythian peoples (4.114).

<sup>216</sup> For the original analysis of Valerius Flaccus' Sarmatians, see Syme 1929.

<sup>217</sup> With Roman legates repulsing the Roxolani in 69-70 CE (Tacitus, *Hist.* 1.79), and Domitian facing down the Iazyges during his Dacian campaigns in 89 and 92 (Dio 67.7-8, 67.12.5), Sarmatians would have been on people's minds at Rome, wherever we may date the *Argonautica*.

<sup>218</sup> A brief look forward in time to Ammianus Marcellinus is instructive. Here we can identify three contradictory characterizations. First, the Alani, a Sarmatian tribe, are described by Ammianus using details lifted directly from Herodotus (31.2.13-25). Elsewhere, the Sarmatians of the Hungarian Plain are introduced as armored lancers (17.12.2-3). So far, so good: like Valerius, Ammianus has used contemporary data in one place and relied on established tropes to describe the more distant Alani. Surprisingly, however, whenever Ammianus actually describes Sarmatians engaged in battle (17.13.8-15; 19.11.13-16), they appear mainly as infantry, fighting to defend settled villages. Ammianus, a career military staff-officer, has been judged largely reliable in his presentation of battles and tactics (Austin 1979), so we cannot simply dismiss these descriptions as military commonplaces. Thus, we have a highly paradoxical picture of Sarmatian warfare and society: 1) The Alani are described as bow-wielding nomads, 2) the more westerly Sarmatians are described as rapacious lancers, but 3) they are shown in battle as common barbarian foot-soldiers. This three-part characterization is telling. The battle narratives show that by the later 4th century, Valerius' armored, lance-wielding Sarmatians - once the product of contemporary knowledge - no longer reflected reality, or at least no longer accounted for the majority of the Sarmatians Rome was then dealing with. The fact that they still feature so prominently in Ammianus' Sarmatian introduction shows how ethnographic stereotypes, operating on an agglutinative principal, could snowball over time.

ethnographic knowledge about these people increased to unprecedented levels. We may now safely return to Dexippus' *Scythica* with a slightly firmer foundation. His descriptions of Scythian battle tactics do not resemble the war-making of the Herodotean Scythians, but generally do match what we know about early Gothic/Germanic warfare. These details reflect Dexippus' personal knowledge gleaned from his own role in the defense of Athens and, presumably interviews with other participants in the events he describes. For most contemporary readers, however, all this 'accurate' information would have been subsumed by the Scythian label. Once that label was applied - and because of the prevailing worldview, Dexippus had virtually no choice but to apply it - the new information would have been crushed under the weight of the conjured tropes and stereotypes. Seeing Scythians behaving like Germans in the *Scythica* would simply have made them more terrifying to Dexippus' readers. They had gained a new skill set without losing the fearsome nomadic attributes traditionally assigned to them.

#### ***IV. Situating the Scythians in the Danubian Borderland***

The ability of the third century Scythians to besiege and sometimes capture cities was virtually unprecedented. Barbarian raids had been a recurring problem for all of Roman history, but the number of times barbarians had actually managed to capture Roman or Greek cities was much smaller. Armies were occasionally defeated, most frequently on the eastern frontier in the course of the sporadic, but unending conflict with the comparatively-civilized (to Roman eyes) Persians, but Roman cities were simply not sacked by barbarians. The obvious question, then, is what changed. How did the third century Scythian chaos come to happen? One method of investigation would be to consider the political instability then shaking the Roman world in an attempt to understand the



failed military response to the incursions.<sup>219</sup> Another well-trod approach would be to investigate the invaders. Who were these ‘Scythians,’ known elsewhere as Goths?<sup>220</sup> While both of these approaches have proven productive, there is another important aspect that has not been adequately considered, namely the role played by popular ideas about the transdanubian peoples circulating in the borderland at the time of the invasions.

As the river came to define the edge of Roman political control during the first century CE, so were elements of the Scythian Logos employed to create an ideological frontier. The worldview expressed so eloquently in Ovid’s exilic poetry pictured the Danube as the firm edge of both the Roman Empire and the *oikumene*: the world of farmers, cities, and laws. Beyond existed only Arctic cold and horrible Scythian nomads. Then something unexpected happened: Trajan invaded, defeated, and then – most surprising of all – annexed the Dacian Kingdom north of the river. The whole Ovidian worldview was thrown into chaos, and the Scythians and Sarmatians who occupied the minds of the frontier authorities in the succeeding centuries morphed to fit the altered political circumstances. Even as authors active *outside* the borderland continued to pass on traditional notions of Scythian behavior and culture, an unexpected transmutation of the traditional stereotypes gradually took place among those dealing more closely with the Danube frontier. Transdanubian Scythians came to be seen as weak adversaries unworthy of military attention. While they remained fearsome at an individual level, Scythians and Sarmatians of the post-Trajanic period were thought to pose no collective threat to the stability of the borderland. This mindset began with Trajan’s annexation of Dacia as a transdanubian province, and was further entrenched following the decision

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<sup>219</sup> eg: Kovács 2014; Watson 1999.

<sup>220</sup> eg: Thompson 1966; Wolfram 1988; Heather 1991; Heather and Matthews 1991; Kulikowski 2007.

by Marcus Aurelius (later reconfirmed by Commodus) not to annex additional territory during the Marcomannic Wars. These two geopolitical decisions required ideological justification. Scythian stereotypes proved amenable to the required distortions and innovations, but ended up creating a new, ‘weak Scythian’ trope only actually applicable to certain segments of the transdanubian population. An analysis of how Scythian stereotypes changed within the borderland, then, can help us understand how the Roman authorities came to so profoundly underestimate the transdanubian barbarians who raided into Moesia, Thrace, and Asia Minor in the mid third century.

#### 2.4.2. Strabo’s Hellenistic Danube

Once again, we must step back more than two centuries to the early first century in order to contextualize the events of the third. This time, we begin with Strabo of Amaseia. Writing at about the same time as Ovid, Strabo described the Danubian Borderland at the tail-end of the Hellenistic period, at a moment before the complete consolidation of Roman power along the river. While, as we saw above, Ovid emphasized the Scythian nature of Danubian Borderland’s Getic population, Strabo’s ethnographic survey focused on the Getic nature of this population, painting a very different picture of the region:

*Immediately adjoining [Germania] is the land of the Getae, which, though narrow at first, stretching as it does along the Ister on its southern side and on the opposite along the mountain-side of the Hercynian forest (for the land of the Getae also embraces a part of the mountains), afterwards broadens out towards the north as far as the Tyregetae; but I cannot tell the precise boundaries.<sup>221</sup>*

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<sup>221</sup> Strabo 7.3.1: εἴτ’ εὐθύς ἡ τῶν Γετῶν συνάπτει γῆ, κατ’ ἀρχὰς μὲν στενή, παρατεταμένη τῷ Ἰστρῷ κατὰ τὸ νότιον μέρος, κατὰ δὲ τοῦναντίον τῇ παρωρείᾳ τοῦ Ἑρκυνίου δρυμοῦ, μέρος τι τῶν ὄρων καὶ αὐτὴ κατέχουσα, εἴτα πλατύνεται πρὸς τὰς ἄρκτους μέχρι Τυρεγετῶν· τοὺς δὲ ἀκριβεῖς ὄρους οὐκ ἔχομεν φράζειν. This description seems to encompass the entire Carpathian basin as well as the Wallachian plain and Moldavia. The narrow beginnings of ‘Getic’ probably represent the zone east of the Morava river between the Danube and the westernmost tip of the Northern Carpathians. The southern edge of the zone is clearly set at the Danube, while the northern margin seems to follow the arc of the Carpathians north and east before dipping south to merge with the Tyregetae in the plains around the mouth of the Tyras river, known today as the Dniester. A further example of Strabo’s ‘Geticization’ of Herodotus’ and Ovid’s Scythian landscape can be seen in his brief discussion of the coastal plain running north from the Danube to the Dniester. The geographer calls this corridor the Desert of the Getae, but notes that it is the same place “in which Dareius the son of

Scythians and Sarmatians do appear in this landscape, but they are peripheral figures, either dwelling in the north beyond the sea, or representing transient migratory communities, which, although disruptive, could not fundamentally upset the Getic cultural hegemony.<sup>222</sup>

Speaking of both the Getae-proper and their kindred, the Dacians, Strabo repeats the general Greek consensus that they were a subset of Thracians since they spoke dialects of the same language.<sup>223</sup> Further, the Getae were thought to be identical to the Mysians/Moesians, and in earlier times, at least, communities of each group existed on both sides of the Danube.<sup>224</sup> The blurry boundaries between Getae/Dacians, Moesians, and Thracians apparently continued down to Strabo's own day when "the migrations [the Getae] make to either side of the Ister are continuous, [such that] they are intermingled with the Thracians and Mysians."<sup>225</sup> This is an extremely important observation. Sometime after Herodotus, for whom we know the Danube was seen as the outer boundary of the knowable world, the river came to be seen not as marking the boundary between discrete worlds, but rather as running *through* the middle of a greater Thracian world. For cultural outsiders like Herodotus, and much later the Romans, the Danube would seem like a natural boundary marker between peoples and world systems. In Strabo, however, we catch a glimpse of

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Hystaspis was caught on the occasion when he crossed the Ister to attack the Scythians and ran the risk of perishing through thirst, army and all" (Strabo 7.3.14).

<sup>222</sup> For the transient Sarmatian communities on the Wallachian and Bulgarian Plains, see Strabo 7.3.17. For the persistence of 'Herodotean' Scythians north of the Crimea, see 11.2.1,12. Strabo notes, however, that his knowledge gets spotty in this Trans-Euxine region, the further east he goes, forcing him to rely on old stories and myths (11.62-4). This is a remarkable admission for an ancient author!

<sup>223</sup> Strabo 7.3.2; 7.3.11.

<sup>224</sup> Strabo 7.3.2.

<sup>225</sup> Strabo 7.3.13.

something more rooted in the actual landscape.<sup>226</sup> Strabo's Danubian ethnography does not really record an insider's perspective, but his research methods, rooted in autopsy and recent Roman military intelligence, come about as close as we ever get to such a perspective in an ancient ethnographic source. With Herodotus' tropes partially banished by an expanded knowledge horizon, and Roman power in the region still nascent, we catch in Strabo's *Getia*, something approximating a picture of the natural cultural divisions in the Danubian world.

### 2.4.3. The birth of the Danubian *limes*

Roman military activities along the Danube likely contributed to the detailed picture of the Danubian Borderland Strabo was able to describe in his *Geography*. Ironically, however, the stable *limes* these campaigns created also encouraged Romans to place undue importance on the river as a cultural border. Strabo's Getic heartland represents a period just before this full imposition of Roman authority. By Nero's reign, the Danube line had been drawn, as testified by the Plautius inscription which describes new client leaders journeying south to the river in order to swear loyalty to the Roman standards.<sup>227</sup> Although Plautius used the ethnically-neutral *transdanuvius* to describe the people beyond the river (Sarmatians, Bastarnae, Roxolani, Dacians, and Scythians), the idea of the river as an ethnic divider had become more entrenched by the time Pliny wrote his *Historia Naturalis* a decade or so later, during the reign of Vespasian. First, we must look at Pliny's ethnographic roll-call of the peoples living south of the Danube in the Bulgarian Plain, where we find a detailed tribal list which captures the same ethnic complexities as Strabo's earlier account:

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<sup>226</sup> As we argued in Chapter One, the topography on either side of the Middle and Lower Danube is similar, with plains and forest-steppe giving way to hills and mountains. The greater Thracian world described by Strabo makes sense from a topographical perspective; the meaningful ecological boundaries had nothing to do with the river.

<sup>227</sup> *CIL* 14.3608, lns. 16-18: *ignotos ante aut infensos p(opulo) R(omano) reges signa / Romana adoratuos in ripam quam tuebatur perduxit.*

*[The opposite side of the Haemus mountains] sloping down towards the Danube is inhabited by the Moesi, Getae, Aodi, Scaugdae and Clariae, and below [to the east] of them the Sarmatian Arraei called Areatae, and the Scythians [of the inland Dobrogea], and around the shores of the Black Sea the Moriseni and the Sithoni, the [Thracian] ancestors of the poet Orpheus.<sup>228</sup>*

These various inhabitants of the province of Moesia, including, presumably, some of Plautius' resettled barbarians, are not grouped under any single overarching ethnonym: all are now simply subjects of Rome. While their particular identities might be of interest to an ethnographer like Pliny, there was no need to group them into a larger barbarian category since their provincial identity mattered more. In less than 200 years, this region would be producing Roman emperors.

Many different tribes also dwell north of the Lower Danube in Pliny's account, but here, by contrast, the author makes an important distinction: "[north] from this point [at the Danube] all the tribes in general are Scythian."<sup>229</sup> Gone is Strabo's Getia; Ovid's expanded Scythia has come to stay. Here, near the end of the first century CE, the transdanubian tribes are *gentes Scytharum*. The use of a partative genitive rather than the adjective *Scythicus* strengthens Pliny's claim of identity.<sup>230</sup> Ovid's language led to the rhetorical dominance of *Getae* over *Sarmatae* and *Scythae* in his vocabulary, but now we see the tables turned. The transdanubian Getae and Sarmatians are now *gentes Scytharum*.

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<sup>228</sup> Pliny 4.11.41: *Haemi excelsitas VI passuum subitur. aversa eius et in Histrum devexa Moesi, Getae, Aodi, Scaugdae Clariaeque, et sub iis Arraei Sarmatae quos Areatas vocant Scythaeque et circa Ponti litora Moriseni Sithonique Orphei vatis genitores optinent.* We needn't bother trying to work out the details of this ethnography; it will suffice to note that Pliny includes Getic, Thracian, and Scytho-Sarmatian peoples all living south of the river.

<sup>229</sup> Pliny 4.12.80. Pliny goes on to list a number of different subsets of these Scythians, including Getae/Dacians, Sarmatae/Sauromatae, and a number of more specific tribes culminating in the north with Alani and Roxolani.

<sup>230</sup> Whereas the adjective can, and is, used to simply describe style or practice, in other words outward appearance, such as when Ovid sends a friend arrows in the Scythian style (*Scythica tela: Pont. 3.8.19.*), or describes the crowds of trouser-wearing Getae he encounters in Tomis as a "*vulgus Scythicum*" (*Tr. 4.6.47*), the nominal form reflects a stronger statement of inner, intrinsic identity.

Whatever the specific tribal affiliation, for Pliny, a Scythian identity lay above all in the Transdanubia.<sup>231</sup>

A single turn of phrase would be a rather slender reed upon which to build an argument.

The author, however, repeats and refines his claim about the Scythian nature of the transdanubian peoples a few sections later:

*Everywhere, the common name of the Scythian peoples has been recast as either ‘Sarmatae’ or ‘Germani,’ nor does the archaic designation endure [as the most accurate descriptor] for any but the most distant of those peoples living almost unknown to the rest of humankind.*<sup>232</sup>

The phrase *nomen Scytharum* means the common title of the Scythian peoples. Pliny is not questioning his earlier statement that all the people north of the Danube were, in his mind, ethnically

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<sup>231</sup> The rest of the passage is also important for reconstructing the tribal geography of the region: *From this point [ie: the mouth of the Danube] all the races in general are Scythian [Ab eo in plenum quidem omnes Scytharum sunt gentes], though various sections [subdivisions?] have occupied the lands adjacent the coast, in one place the Getae, called by the Romans Dacians, at another the Sarmatae, called by the Greeks Sauromatae, and the section of them called Wagon-dwellers [Hamaxobii] or Aorsi, at another the base-born Scythians, descended from slaves, or else the cave-dwellers [Trogodytae], and then the Alani and Rhoxolani. The higher parts [superiora] between the Danube and the Hercynian Forest as far as the winter quarters of Pannonia at Carnuntum and the plains and level country of the German frontiers there [Germanorumque ibi confinium campos et plana] are occupied by the Sarmatian Iazyges, while the Dacians whom they have driven out hold the mountains and forests as far [west] as the river Tisza. From the river Maros [the Morava, not the Mureş], or else the Dora if it is that that separates them from the Suebi and the Kingdom of Vannius, the opposite side of the country [ie: the northern side] is occupied by the Basternae then other German tribes [further north] (Pliny 4.12.80).*

This is one of the better ancient descriptions of the Carpathian Basin in antiquity. The geography is a bit muddled, but it can be interpreted readily enough. The Dacians hold the territory between the Carpathians and the river Tisza, while the Sarmatian Iazyges (who Strabo had located north of the Black Sea, and Ovid places near Tomis a half century earlier) now inhabit the Hungarian Plain between the Tisza and Middle Danube, as far west as Carnuntum. The western border of Dacia/Iazygia appears to be located around the Marus (Morava) and Duria (Váh) rivers. These are tributaries of the Danube flowing south from Moravia and Slovakia, respectively, just beyond the westernmost reaches of the Northern Carpathians. Beyond, to the west are Suebi, but we will soon encounter these particular Germans as Marcomanni and Quadi. Bastarni, identified here as Germanic, exist ‘on the opposite side of the country,’ that is, to the north, probably in and beyond the Northern Carpathians. This passage is the earliest textual evidence for the migration of some Sarmatian Iazyges into the Hungarian Plain. Because it corresponds chronologically to the earliest identifiable material evidence of Sarmatian settlement in the Middle Danube Basin – a topic we will discuss in Chapter Three – we are on somewhat steady ground for reading the rest of Pliny’s Danubian ethnographic excursus as based in contemporary intelligence rather than archaic tropes alone.

<sup>232</sup> Pliny 4.12.81: *Scytharum nomen usquequaque transit in Sarmatas atque Germanos; nec aliis pisca illa duravit appellatio quam qui extremi gentium harum ignoti prope ceteris mortalibus degunt.* The Loeb edition renders these lines as: “The name of Scythians has spread in every direction, as far as the Sarmatae and the Germans, but this old designation has not continued for any except the most outlying sections of these races, living almost unknown to the rest of mankind,” but I think this is a mistranslation of *transeo* which ought to mean “changed to” or, in context, “redefined as,” rather than “spread as far as.”

Scythian. The use of the nominal *Scythes* reinforces the notion that, at the broadest level, as he saw things, these people were real Scythians, regardless of how modern ethnographers might choose to describe them.<sup>233</sup> Pliny is not disputing the accuracy of such ‘modern’ information. We should not read this passage as a claim that recent re-labeling is incorrect. The Scythian identity exists at a higher level, superseding and overriding other, more specific designations. We see here a bit of cognitive dissonance: the people beyond the Danube are, at the same time, both Scythians and something else. Only in the furthest regions, where Roman research has yet to penetrate, does the Scythian identity exist on its own, because there, beyond the knowledge horizon, only the macro-level, geographically/climatically-based identities exist.

#### 2.4.4. The Dacian exception

Pliny’s simultaneous abandonment of large-scale ethnic labeling of the Cisdanubian tribes and imposition of a totalizing Scythian identity on the transdanubians reflects a reality of Roman political thought. The *Res Publica* ruled over cities and peoples (*gentes, civitates*) rather than wielding dominion over specific territory. Geographic features frequently served as markers of political boundaries, but only when they were thought to mark the border between different peoples.<sup>234</sup> The Nile, for example, despite its great cultural and economic importance, is absent from Seneca’s first-century list of natural political boundaries, because it flowed through an ethnically-homogenous

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<sup>233</sup> Had Pliny meant the phrase to mean something like “the Scythian label,” we would expect a phrase like *nomen Scythicum*. With an adjectival form, we might translate the passage as “the peoples previously identified as Scythians have now been reclassified as Sarmatians and Germans,” but the use of the noun makes this a poor interpretation. Pliny is, indeed, explaining that in his day, the people north of the Danube were commonly referred to by specific tribal names. He identifies these, here, as simply Sarmatae and, unusually, Germani, but we know from the rest of his work that Pliny is often more specific, referring, for instance, to Sarmatian Iazyges or Arreatae, or Germanic Basternae (see above).

<sup>234</sup> Isaac 1990, pp. 394–399.

region.<sup>235</sup> Despite cutting through the middle of Strabo's Getic world, the Danube was too useful as a military highway for Rome to establish the military frontier anywhere else. Ideological justification followed, in the form of the Scythian label, yet Trajan's decision to annex land beyond the river upset the balance. That decision flew in the face of the prevailing Scythian ideologies which, as we have seen, characterized the entire transdanubian region as an arctic wasteland full of dangerous nomads: a good testing ground for Roman mettle, but certainly not somewhere to set up permanent camp. Trajan's wars may have been reactive in the face of Dacian aggression, or proactive, driven by a need for martial glory and the mineral resources of the Apuseni Mountains in western Transylvania,<sup>236</sup> but regardless, what is important for our purposes, is simply that he did annex territory beyond the river. After that, the old Scythian formula no longer fit, and so new elements of the Logos were highlighted to justify the policy change.

The sources for the period of Trajan's wars (101-106) are quite poor. Tacitus is the most important prose author of the period, although his extant works do not directly deal with contemporary history. He rarely mentions the Dacians, but when he does, he breaks with earlier historiographic trends by preferring the term *Dacus* over *Geta*.<sup>237</sup> We might speculate that Tacitus'

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<sup>235</sup> Seneca, *Q Nat.* Prl.7.9-10: *How ridiculous are the boundaries of mortals! Let our empire confine the Dacians beyond the Ister; let it shut out the Thracians by means of the Haemus; let the Euphrates block the Parthians; the Danube separate Sarmatian and Roman interests; the Rhine establish a limit for Germany; the Pyrenees lift their ridge between the Gallic and Spanish provinces; between Egypt and Ethiopia let an uncultivated wasteland of sand lie. (10) If someone should give human intellect to ants, will they not also divide a single floor into many provinces?* Later, Seneca explains that the Rhine and Danube separate pacified and hostile tribes (*[amnes sunt], qui medius inter pacata et hostilia fluit, Danuvius et Rhenus.*) (*Q Nat.* 6.7.1).

<sup>236</sup> While never posing an existential threat to Roman hegemony in the region - despite Tacitus' claims to the contrary (*Agr.* 41.2) - the Dacians under Decebalus were generally more organized, if no more aggressive, than the other transdanubian peoples, and proved capable, on multiple occasions, of defeating Roman forces in pitched battle. Domitian warred against them with mixed success in the 80s and 90s CE (Suetonius *Dom.* 6; Tacitus *Agr.* 41.2; Dio 67.6-10, 12; Mart., *passim*) and Trajan's two Dacian wars (101-106) saw Decebalus defeated and the Dacian heartland (Transylvania, western Wallachia, and part of the Banat) annexed as Rome's only transdanubian province. For overviews of the difficult sources, see Kovács 2014, pp. 84-88, and (for the 'reactive' model), Griffin 2008, pp. 111-113.

<sup>237</sup> He refers to Dacia a mere seven times in his entire corpus, and Dacia only twice. Tacitus never uses the term *Getae*.



language choices are a product of his Trajanic dates, reflecting common usage following the wars and annexation.<sup>238</sup> With Dacia defeated and annexed, Tacitus had a strong impetus to avoid unnecessary Dacian complications. In earlier times, the Getae/Dacians had represented a major threat beyond the *limes*, and could be convincingly denigrated with Scythian tropes, such as those employed by Martial during Domitian's Dacian campaigns.<sup>239</sup> Now, however, with the region officially part of the empire of the Roman people, characterization using nomadic tropes would have both denigrated the province and called into question the entire venture of annexation. Trajan's first Dacian War was successful enough to earn the emperor the first victory honorific for a transdanubian campaign. The fact that he assumed the title *Dacicus*, instead of, perhaps, *Scythicus* or *Sarmaticus* suggests that even in 102, when annexation had not yet become the imperial objective, it was recognized that a victory over nomadic Scythians would yield less popular prestige than the conquest of a barbarian people considered settled.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> The *Agricola* and *Germania* were written before Trajan's conquests, but their constrained topics make it unsurprising that Dacians (or Scythians more generally) are not discussed. The *Agricola* largely concerns itself with Britain, and while the *Germania* does deal with regions adjacent to the traditional geographical Scythia, Tacitus' characterization of the Germans as noble savages ensures that he has little to say about the Dacians. Even if they were considered more noble and semi-civilized than other transdanubians (see below), they were still considered Scythians in the pre-Trajanic period, and as such it would have hurt Tacitus' rhetorical valorization of the Germans to discuss other, potentially equally worthy 'Scythians.' Instead, when discussing the eastern edges of Germania, we only hear of Sarmatians who are denigrated because of their filthy appearance and mixed heritage (*Germ.* 46).

<sup>239</sup> See section 2.2.6 above.

<sup>240</sup> Griffin 2008, p. 109. We will discuss the politics of imperial victory honorifics further below. It is worth noting here, however, that while no emperor ever assumed the title *Scythicus*, *Sarmaticus* is the third most commonly assumed victory title (12 different emperors took it) after only *Germanicus* (29 emperors) and *Parthicus/Persicus* (20 emperors) (*ILS* 3.1, pp. 272-312). The frequency of *Sarmaticus* titles, however, does not reflect any special prestige attached to these perceived nomads, but rather the ease with which they could be trounced for a quick propaganda victory in the two centuries following the Marcomannic Wars. The lesser status of *Sarmaticus* victories is signaled by its secondary position within the full titlature of the emperors who took it. This trend is most visible on coin obverses. Marcus Aurelius, for example, always lists his Marcomannic titles as M. ANTONINVS AVG. GERM. SARM., and never the other way around (eg: *RIC* 3.337, 340, 342, 362, 365), and the trend is followed by all later emperors.

Two additional sources from the Trajanic period must be examined. Lucius Annaeus Florus, a contemporary of Tacitus, penned a short epitome of Roman history, based largely on Livy. In chapter 28, Florus succinctly summarizes a conflict between Rome and the Dacians from the period after the death of Burebista (appx. 30 BCE). The succeeding chapter explains that the Sarmatians were also defeated during the same period.<sup>241</sup> The text includes a few important details. Whereas the Dacians “stick close to the mountains,” the Sarmatians “range their horses over the wide-spread plains,” in a land where “they possess nothing except snow, ice, and forests.”<sup>242</sup> Florus makes no such statements about the nature of Dacia or its inhabitants, but ends his Sarmatian chapter by noting that these people are “so barbaric that they do not even comprehend the concept of peace.”<sup>243</sup> There is much we can infer from these seemingly superficial discussions. First, the division is telling. Writing history under Trajan, it was no longer appropriate to speak of Dacians and Sarmatians in the same breath. The text itself hammers home the point. Not only are the Dacians textually separate, but they inhabit different ecological worlds (mountains vs. plains). Only the plains are described using the Scythian trope of arctic climate. The groups are also separated by mode of life. Only the Sarmatians *inequitant*, a verb surely intended to invoke the full gamut of Scythian nomadic tropes, when used here in conjunction with *campus*. Florus even manages to sneak in a parting jab at the irredeemably barbaric nature of the Sarmatians. As Scythian nomads, they are the lowest of the low, unable to be reasoned with or handled diplomatically. Florus applies none of these tropes to the

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<sup>241</sup> Both groups were driven back beyond the Danube, although Florus notes, in a nod to the Trajanic present, that the Dacians were not wholly defeated in that conflict, but simply placed in reserve for later conquest: *Sic tum Dacia non victa, sed summota atque dilata est* (28).

<sup>242</sup> Florus 28: *Daci montibus inhaerent; 29: Sarmatae patentibus campis inequitant. [...] Nihil praeter nives privinasque et silvas habent.*

<sup>243</sup> Florus 29: *Tanta barbaria est, ut nec intellegant pacem.*

Dacians. The age-old Scythian tropes were as present in the *zeitgeist* of Trajanic Rome as in previous periods, but they could no longer be as easily applied to the new provincials of Dacia, as to free and client barbarians like the Sarmatians, even when referring to earlier historical periods. bb

The final source is Trajan's monumental column, located between the two libraries within his forum complex at Rome. The imperially-commissioned friezes may, at least partially, reflect Trajan's official party line on the Dacians in the years following his wars.<sup>244</sup> The Dacians are held up as dangerous foes, but enemies worthy of incorporation within the Roman Empire. Not surprisingly, Scythian attributes are not to be found.<sup>245</sup> In terms of lifestyle, the Dacians of the column are clearly a settled, organized people. They have forts and houses, albeit of wood, which they defend against the Roman advance with organized, determined effort. The political organization of the kingdom is also explicitly shown; these are not mere tribesmen. The suicide of Decebalus in one of the final panels completes the picture of the noble enemy. On the Roman side, we find the legions working seamlessly to defeat this enemy, but, crucially, more often building forts and structures within the conquered territory. The message is clear: Rome has come to Dacia to stay; as the old Dacian civilization is torn down, a new provincial society is being born.<sup>246</sup> The legions are shown in the best light possible as bringers of civilization to a land inhabited by a barbarian people worthy of incorporation because of their bravery and organization.<sup>247</sup> Given these

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<sup>244</sup> Wolfram Thill 2011, pp. 284-285, 308-309. On the question of whether the column was commissioned by Trajan or Hadrian, see Claridge 1993 and Claridge 2007.

<sup>245</sup> Visually, the Dacians on Trajan's column match Ovid's descriptions of the Getae and Sarmatians, with their shaggy, bearded faces and barbaric trousers. These elements, however, were some of the most generic aspects of Ovid's characterization, representing northern barbarians in general, rather than the Scythicized variety in particular.

<sup>246</sup> Wolfram Thill 2011; Dillon 2006.

<sup>247</sup> Dillon (2006) has convincingly shown that scenes of violence have been downplayed on the column (although in no way eliminated) in favor of scenes emphasizing construction and transition in order to support Trajan's policy of annexation.

propaganda concerns, there was no way the Dacians could be portrayed as a stereotypical Scythian horde, yet Romans still expected to find Scythians in the transdanubian lands, and so it is up to the Sarmatians to fill the entire niche. They, too, are present on the column as allies of the Dacians, but they are clearly set off from the Dacians by their unique armor and only appear in battle scenes where they usually flee, pell-mell from Roman pursuers.<sup>248</sup>

Looking forward a few decades, Marcus Cornelius Fronto, the boyhood tutor of emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, offers an important glimpse at the transdanubian stereotypes and ideas circulating among Rome's power elite after Trajan's wars. Fragments of the introduction to an unwritten history composed just prior to the outbreak of the Marcomannic War in 166, seek to justify Verus' decision to wage war against Parthia instead of along the northern frontier. The main fragment is invaluable for its insight into contemporary attitudes towards the Sarmatians:

*Not one of them anywhere [has] a village, nor a permanent roof, nor a deep-rooted threshold; they obtain freedom through their poverty, since the reward acquired by subjugating the poor is one of unprofitable labor. [...] [These people] wander and roam: [their migrations] are undertaken with nothing firm in terms of a route, and with a [daily] end point based not on location but on the fading light. [...] 7. [These people I was just describing], who carry out disastrous raids, I classify in the category of brigands, rather than proper enemies. Alone of all peoples, the Parthians wield a hostile name against the Roman people that is not at all to be held in contempt.<sup>249</sup>*

Although Fronto has omitted to name the people he is describing, an earlier passage<sup>250</sup> and the details he provides here make interpretation easy: these are the tribes beyond the Danube. The most

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<sup>248</sup> The Sarmatians appear in only two panels, nos. 31 and 37.

<sup>249</sup> *Princ. Hist.* 6-7: *Nemini usquam oppidum neque tectum diutinum aut limen inveteratum, libertatem inopia sortiti, quia inopem subigendi sterilis fructus laboris capitur ... vagi palantes, nullo itineris destinato fine non ad locum sed ad vesperum contenditur... 7. ... <direp>tiones clades ediderunt, latronum potius quam hostium numero duco. Soli hominum Parthi adversus populum Romanum hostile nomen haud umquam contemnendum gesserunt.*

<sup>250</sup> *Princ. Hist.* 4: *[...] Imperium populi Romani a Traiano imperatore trans flumina hostila porrectum. [...]* This sets up a dichotomy between the two theaters in which Trajan campaigned: beyond the Danube and the Euphrates. The later passage, then, is presumably elaborating on that dichotomy. In Fronto's day, of the two hostile regions of Trajan, only Parthia remains a threat. The unnamed land of nomads, then, must be the transdanubian plains.

important part for our purposes is Fronto's verdict that these impoverished nomads are not worth conquering, and indeed cannot even be considered real enemies. This is the period after the Dacian wars. The only part of the transdanubian world even remotely worth Roman arms has already been claimed. While Parthia remains defiant, Fronto has characterized all the remaining free people beyond the Ister, that is, the Sarmatians, as weak, impoverished wanderers good for nothing but low-level raiding. A real emperor focused on a real enemy, like the Dacians or Parthians. This trope would prove popular over the next century.

#### **2.4.5. The Marcomannic Wars: plague, war, and terror**

After decades of relative tranquility, war came to the Danubian Borderland in 166 CE. From a single raid into Pannonia the border crisis quickly escalated into a series of protracted conflicts between Rome and a coalition of tribes led by the Marcomanni, Quadi, and Sarmatian Iazyges. These Marcomannic Wars dominated the remainder of emperor Marcus Aurelius' reign, but were far from an existential struggle. Indeed, after the initial barbarian attacks were repulsed, we cannot even characterize the continued conflict as a war of defensive necessity. The Marcomannic Wars have traditionally been seen as an important turning point in Roman history: the first in a seemingly-endless series of barbarian invasions culminating, eventually, in the collapse of the entire imperial edifice in the West.<sup>251</sup> Such models have been rightly critiqued as overly simplistic and reliant on a toxic combination of anachronistic ideas about barbarian ethnicity and a propensity to uncritically

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<sup>251</sup> eg: Mommsen 1906, pp. 248-256 (who takes seriously the ancient sources describing hundreds of thousands of Roman prisoners taken, but admits that Rome's later barbarian antagonists were largely not those tribes which had been involved in the Marcomannic Wars); Mócsy 1974, p. 185 (who accepts the notion that the ultimate cause of the Marcomannic Wars was 'pressure' on the frontier caused by Gothic migrations further east); Garzetti 1974, p. 506 and Birley 1987, pp. 253-255 (who cast the war as the first stage of the 'barbarian invasions')

accept the tone of desperate defense present in many late imperial sources.<sup>252</sup> Rather, with an incurable pandemic ravaging the known world, Marcus Aurelius found political refuge in an otherwise unremarkable border war. By playing on the fears and desires of the Roman populace, Marcus shepherded the empire through a dark moment and emerged with a legacy of stoic, principled leadership. The politics of fear and loathing underlying much of that reputation have largely been forgotten. This period of frontier strife also solidified the notion of the weak Sarmatian in the minds of Rome's political elite and, in a further-modified version, among the populace of Rome's Danubian provinces. These ideological developments, in turn, directly underlie Rome's failure to anticipate and defend against the Scythian invasions of the third century.

Based on the treaties preserved in Cassius Dio, we can be confident that the primary goal of the war was to reestablish hegemonic control over the transdanubian tribes. Further territorial expansion was not a priority, despite ancient statements to the contrary.<sup>253</sup> The tribes sought peace and alliance almost as soon as hostilities began,<sup>254</sup> and so we must ask why the Marcomannic Wars

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<sup>252</sup> Drinkwater 2007, pp. 28–32; Kovács 2014, pp. 113–174.

<sup>253</sup> Kovács 2014, pp. 116–118. Beginning as early as Dio and Herodian, historians have argued that Marcus intended the war to pave the way for further territorial annexation beyond the Middle Danube, and that the creation of *Marcomannia et Sarmatia provinciae* was only scuppered due to Commodus' unwillingness to take over the project on the death of his father in 180 CE (Dio 72.33.4.2 [Xiph. 267]; Hdn. 1.5.6; *SHA, Marc.* 24.5). This is nonsense. A policy of further transdanubian annexation would have required a continuing break from the Augustan precept of stable *limites*, but also would indicate the ideological collapse of the barbarian tropes and stereotypes supporting the Danube as the empire's north-central boundary. Dacia was an outlier, not a model to be emulated.

<sup>254</sup> The first act of the war was a raid by 6,000 Langobardi and Obii into Pannonia. The raiders were competently dealt with by the local auxiliary forces, and no serious damage is reported. In the aftermath, Ballomarius, king of the Marcomanni led a delegation of ten leaders from the transdanubian tribes and successfully reconfirmed the peace with the local governor (Dio 72.1a [*exc. de Leg. Gent.* 6]). Kovács' suggestion that these people were marauding warbands from deeper in the *barbaricum* is surely correct since they play no further role in the war (Kovács 2014, pp. 119–121). The wars began, then, because of a breakdown in the client treaty system beyond the Middle Danube. The cardinal sin committed by the Marcomanni, Quadi, Iazyges, and other eventual antagonists was their failure to interdict the Langobardi and Obii as they moved through their territories and on into Pannonia. Recognizing that such a failure amounted to a major slight against the *maiestas* of Rome, Ballomarius and the other leaders quickly sought to reaffirm their existing alliances (Kovács 2014, p. 121; Strobel 2001, p. 109; Dobesch 1994, pp. 93–94; Zwickler 1941, p. 87). Despite the initial truce brokered by Ballomarius, Marcus soon launched a punitive expedition (Kovács 2014, pp. 128–129) which can be considered the first act in the war-proper.

dragged on for over a decade, only ending when Commodus brokered new treaties in the early 180s, particularly since, in the end, there was no systematic change to how Rome exercised its power in the Danubian Borderland.<sup>255</sup>

The importance of plague for understanding this period should not be underestimated. Disease followed Lucius Verus back from the Parthian campaign, and while calculating its demographic and economic impacts is notoriously difficult, this Antonine Plague seems to have been unusually severe and persistent, lasting until at least 182.<sup>256</sup> Thus, we should see the whole drama of the Marcomannic Wars as set against a backdrop of epidemic death, generating a general mood of depression and anxiety across the Roman world, but particularly in large cities like Rome where high population densities – a cause of high mortality at the best of times – created conditions ripe for massive outbreaks. Just such a scene is captured in the *Vita Marci* where the author describes thousands of plague dead at Rome being removed by the cartload and burned at public expense.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> When Marcus died at Vienna in 180, Commodus smoothly assumed the imperial mantle (Hdn. 1.5) but, according to Dio and Herodian, quickly abandoned his father's unfinished war partially due to an innate indolence, and partially because his advisors were constantly complaining about the Scythian climate beyond the Danube and pining for the easy living to be had in the capital (Dio 73.2.1-2; Hdn. 1.6.1-2). Terms had already been struck with the Iazyges (Dio 72.16 [*exc. U.*]), and now they were extended to the Marcomanni, Quadi, and Buri on the Dacian border (Dio 73.2-3). Dio's narrative implies that the treaties were rushed through and did not project Roman strength in the region, but Herodian notes that in most cases, alliances only came about following military reduction by Commodus' legates (Hdn. 1.6.7-9).

<sup>256</sup> The story that the pandemic originated somewhere in the east and was carried west by the army (*SHA, Verus* 8.1-2) is plausible, but Duncan-Jones has noted that 'plague from the east' was, itself, a trope in Greco-Roman literature with roots stretching back to Thucydides (Duncan-Jones 1996, pp. 111-114), so we should not spend too much energy looking for the ultimate source or seeking a clear medical diagnosis. Smallpox or bubonic plague are the two most likely culprits; either would have been potentially devastating. In arguing for the severity and wide distribution of the plague, Duncan-Jones relies on a variety of sources from different parts of the empire. For the period of the plague, roughly 165 to 180, military diplomas nearly disappear from the Danubian region (pp. 124-125), new building inscriptions vanish at Rome, and decrease in other parts of Italy, only to pick back up afterwards (pp. 125-128), dateable stamped bricks decrease noticeably at Rome (pp. 129-130), and the documented taxable population at several Egyptian villages suffer declines between 70 and 93 percent (pp. 120-121). This data is scattered and individually inconclusive, but together seems to paint a clear picture of widespread disease with a high mortality percentage. Contemporary accounts are preserved in the writings of Galen (19.15,17-19), Aelius Aristides (*Or.* 48.38-44), and Lucian (*Alex.* 36).

<sup>257</sup> The imperial biographies known collectively as the *Historia Augusta* are infamous as problematic sources (see Rohrbacher 2016 for a strong recent assessment), however the *Vita Marci* is generally considered among the more reliable of the lives, being based heavily on the lost work of Marius Maximus (see Birley 1987, pp. 25-26 for a defense).

*There was such terror of this Marcomannic war that [Marcus Aurelius] Antoninus summoned priests from all corners, performed foreign religious rituals, and purified the city in every way, and he was delayed by these undertakings from setting out on campaign. (2) The [archaic] Roman ceremony of the Feast of the Gods [Lectisternia] was celebrated for seven days. (3) And there was also such a plague that the corpses had to be removed in carts and wagons. [...] (4) About this time, also, the co-emperors ratified certain draconian laws concerning burial and tombs, in which they went so far as to forbid anyone to build a tomb at his villa, a law still in force. (5) The plague killed many thousands, including many nobles, for the most important of whom Antoninus erected statues. (6) Such, too, was his clementia that he ordered the dead of the lower classes to be burned at public expense.<sup>258</sup>*

That Marcus, the most rational and philosophic of emperors, felt compelled to reintroduce archaic rituals like the *Lectisternia*, hints at imperial desperation to exert some shred of influence over an exceptional, destabilizing force beyond human control. Indeed, much of Lucian's *Alexander*, in which a shameless religious con-man acquires wealth and prestige by playing on popular fears in a time of plague, humorously describes just such an anxious society eager to grasp at even flimsy promises of salvation. The inevitable impotence of all Marcus' ceremonies and purifications (not to mention Alexander's), then, may have lent an added importance to the wars along the Danube. There, at least, the emperor could be seen doing something tangible against the forces of death and despair.

We must also consider two barbarian attacks into Italy and Greece. Early in the war, Marcomanni raided into Northern Italy, while Sarmatae and Costoboci plundered the Sanctuary of Demeter at Eleusis.<sup>259</sup> For the first time since the Cimbri breached the Alps in 101 BCE, barbarians

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<sup>258</sup> *SHA, Marc. 13.1-6: tantus autem terror belli Marcomannici fuit ut undique sacerdotes Antoninus acciverit, peregrinos ritus impleverit, Romam omni genere lustraverit retardatusque a bellica projectione sit. (2) celebravit et Romano ritu lectisternia per septem dies. (3) tanta autem pestilentia fuit ut vehiculis cadavera sint exportata sarracisque. [...] (4) tunc autem Antonini leges sepeliendi sepulchrorumque asperrimas sanxerunt, quando quidem caverunt ne quis villae adfabricaretur sepulchrum, quod hodieque servatur. (5) et multa quidem milia pestilentia consumpsit multosque ex proceribus, quorum amplissimis Antoninus statuas conlocavit. (6) tantaque clementia fuit ut et sumptu publico vulgaria funera iuberet efferi.*

<sup>259</sup> In Italy, Marcomanni and their allies raided as far as the walls of Aquileia, sacking the town of Opitergium along the way (Dio 72.3.2, Lucian, *Alex.* 41, A.M. 29.6.1). For the hopelessly-confused dating, see Kovács 2014, pp. 121-129. The raid into Greece happened at about the same time, during the first years of the Marcomannic Wars (*SHA, Marc.* 13.1, Paus. 10.34.5, Aelius Aristides *Or.* 22).



dared to touch the empire's two hearts, ravaging the countryside and defeating Roman defenders along the way.<sup>260</sup> Together with the ongoing plague, the raid was a direct challenge to the emperor's ability to steer the ship of state through the troubled waters. While Rome soldiered on with little lasting damage to its military or infrastructure, the same cannot be said for the collective psyche, particularly in the capital. Unexpected external violence within a space perceived as inviolate has the potential to be particularly traumatic to both first- and second-hand witnesses.<sup>261</sup> Even though the damage was minimal, the raids *appeared* to call into question the whole edifice of the *pax Romana*. 'What happened at Opitergium could happen *here*,' must have been a common refrain throughout Italy as news of the attacks spread. "So great was the dread of this Marcomannic War, that [Marcus Aurelius] Antoninus summoned priests from all sides, performed foreign religious ceremonies, and purified the city in every way."<sup>262</sup> The passage from the *Vita Marci* recording the devastation of the plague includes a second impetus for Marcus' rituals: terror of the Marcomanni among the population of Rome. Assigning a fixed date for the events described in this passage is impossible, but given the ambiguities of the passage, it makes best sense to read the report of terror at Rome as reflecting the general mood in the city during the protracted conflict rather than at a

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<sup>260</sup> Lucian says the Marcomannic raiders destroyed a Roman force of 20,000 on their way into Italy (*Alex.* 41). The number killed might be suspect, but the event itself probably did occur as the raiders passed through Pannonia on their way towards Italy (Kovács 2014, p. 129). Rome shrugged off the loss with little apparent difficulty. This is demographic reality of Roman frontier warfare. The Empire could endure defeats that would have forced barbarian antagonists to sue for peace.

<sup>261</sup> Much has been written along these lines on the impact of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the collective American psyche (eg: DeBrix 2005, Altheide 2006, Gardner 2008, Skrimshire 2008). The collective experience of trauma associated with the 9/11 attacks led not only to a renewed sense of national solidarity, but also, more sinisterly, to a pervasive culture of fear and despair which proved fertile ground for manipulation by political actors. We, in the United States and around much of the world, are still very much in the grip of this 'politics of nightmare' in 2017.

<sup>262</sup> *SHA, Marc.* 13.1. As noted above, part of the impetus for these unusual rituals was probably the ongoing plague, which the author of the *Vita Marci* proceeds to describe. Marcus' actions, however, must have also been designed to counteract the fear and anxiety felt at Rome following the attack in northern Italy.

specific moment.<sup>263</sup> Rome itself was never threatened by the Marcomanni, but fear of barbarians, and particularly Germans, was always latent among the populace.<sup>264</sup> The ongoing plague created a mood of despair with no tangible ‘other’ to which blame could be assigned. Even before the invasion of Italy, the Marcomanni lurking beyond the Danube’s thin, blue line, together with their terrifying Scythian allies, would have provided an obvious outlet for the people’s fear. Afterwards, fear and loathing of the barbarian enemy must have greatly intensified, in part, thanks to Marcus’ unusual plague rituals which only served to reemphasize the city’s precarious condition.

With disease raging across the empire, and blows struck against the cultural heartlands of both the Latin West and the Greek East, Marcus Aurelius pursued the border war with vigor out of proportion to the actual threat. Public sentiment surely demanded nothing less. To make the most political hay out of the wars, however, the danger and savagery of the enemy needed to be emphasized. The Marcomanni and their allies could not be seen as noble foes to be defeated on the battlefield and then brought into the Roman fold. Rather, they became the plague incarnate, a sub-human blight for which the only cure was death or enslavement. It is this politics of nightmare that lies behind Marcus’ supposed desire to utterly eradicate the Iazyges.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Taken literally, the first sentence seems to suggest a date at the very outset of the war, that is, before the invasion of Italy, but given the author’s sketchy treatment of the war’s chronology in general, and the conflation of events from before and after the death of Verus within this single chapter, it is better to read the initial report of terror at Rome as reflecting the general mood in the city.

<sup>264</sup> eg: Vell. Pat. 2.108.3–4: “[Marboduus, king of the Marcomanni at the time of Augustus,] was an object of terror for this reason: having [the rest of] Germania to his left and in front of his lands, Pannonia to the right, and Noricum behind, he was feared by all [the surrounding peoples] as capable at any time of attacking any of them. (4) Nor did he allow Italy to remain free of anxiety over his growing power because the peaks of the Alps, which mark the boundary of Italy, were no more than two hundred miles distant from his own frontier.” See also Isaac 2004, ch. 12. for a more general discussion about Germans.

<sup>265</sup> Dio 72.13.

Marcus' monumental column offers a powerful, if mute testament to the politics of fear and dehumanization underlying the Marcomannic Wars. When compared to Trajan's Column, the scenes of warfare on the later monument come across as particularly brutal and chaotic. On Trajan's Column, as discussed above, we find the legions working tirelessly to defeat the enemy, but, crucially, more often building forts and structures within the conquered territory. The message is clear: Rome has come to Dacia to stay; as the old Dacian civilization is torn down, a new provincial society is being born.<sup>266</sup> Marcus' column, by contrast, paints a completely different picture of war beyond the Danube. Scenes of construction are largely absent while acts of enslavement, execution, and the violent sacking of barbarian settlements are repeatedly illustrated.<sup>267</sup>

Whether Marcus, Commodus, or both were involved in determining the content of the frieze does not really matter. Scenes of violence against utterly-defeated enemies, just like Marcus' supposed plan to exterminate the Iazyges are reflections of popular sentiment during the wars. 'Tough guy' rhetoric plays well in an atmosphere of fear, and the dehumanization of the state's enemies needs little elaboration in the present moment. Marcus may indeed have claimed to want the Iazyges dead and gone, but his actions reveal a different agenda. As for the scenes of death and destruction on the column, that was, indeed, the reality of war, but the choice to blatantly illustrate the unsavory bits reflects a population at Rome conditioned by years of conflict to view the Marcomanni, Quadi, and Iazyges as sub-human enemies: barbarians to be feared but unworthy of

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<sup>266</sup> Wolfram Thill 2011.

<sup>267</sup> For examples of the violent imagery on Marcus' Column, see figs. 2.2-2.7 at the end of the chapter. While the exact date of the monument's completion is not clear, it was probably finished around the same time as Commodus' final treaties with the transdanubian tribes.

any respect. This dehumanization would play out in Commodus' post-war characterization of the Iazyges of the Hungarian Plain.

#### 2.4.6. The Marcomannic Wars: nothing but bandits over the Danube

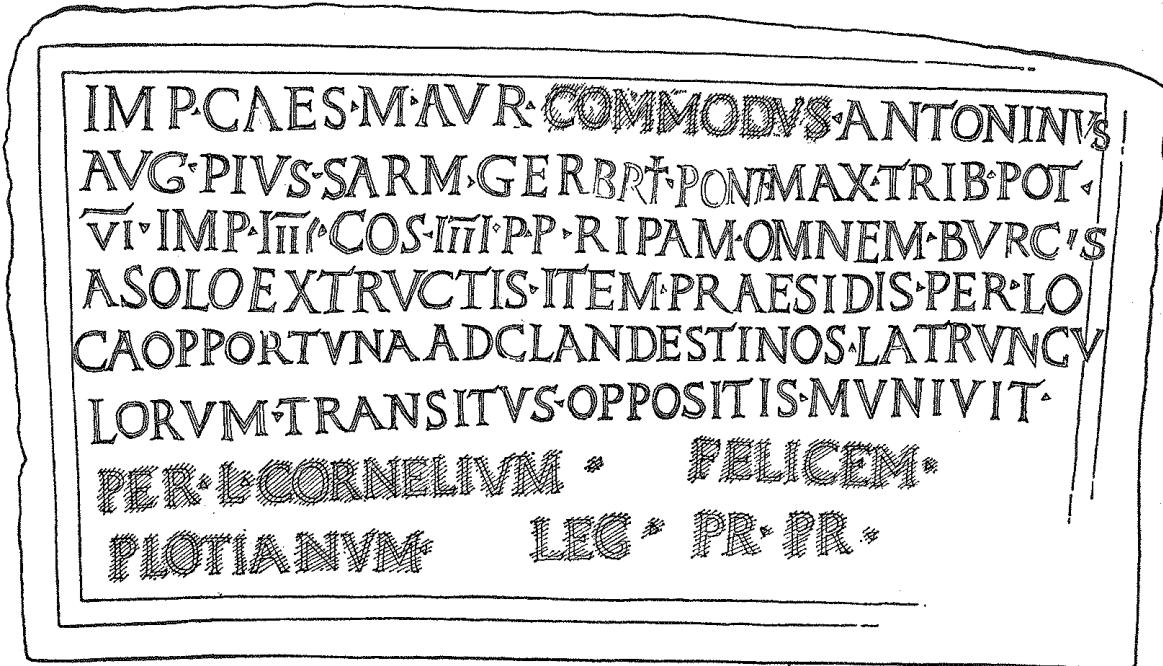


Fig. 2.1 Commodus' mass-produced, post-war refortification inscription, touting his anti-bandit measures.

When Commodus took over the steering-oars in 180, he put the ship of state on a new course by opting not to continue his father's endless border war. Commodus' later misdeeds negatively influenced how ancient writers interpreted his early frontier policies but enough survives to strongly suggest that he didn't simply turn around and go home. Commodus brought Marcus Aurelius' project to a successful conclusion as attested by a half-century of nearly-uninterrupted peace along the Danube between 182 and 235.<sup>268</sup> After many years of warfare characterized by dehumanization of the barbarian enemy, however, Commodus had to justify his decision to make

<sup>268</sup> Mócsy 1974, pp. 196-204; Kovács 2014, ch. 4.

peace. The emperor's explanation appears in the form of a series of official inscriptions from military sites along the Middle Danube *limes*, and dating to just after the Marcomannic Wars:

*Imp(erator) Caes(ar) M(arcus) Aur(elius) [[Commodus]] Antoninus  
 Aug(ustus) Pius Sarm(aticus) Germ(anicus) pont(ifex) max(imus) trib(unicia) pot(estate)  
 VI imp(erator) IIII co(n)sul IIII p(ater) p(atriciae) ripam omnem burgis  
 a solo extractis item praesidiis per lo-  
 ca opportuna ad clandestinos latruncu-  
 lorum transitus oppositis munivit  
 per [[L(ucium) Cornelium Felicem  
 Plotianum leg(atum) pr(o) pr(aetore)]]].<sup>269</sup>*

From this context, it is clear that the *latrunculi* are the Sarmatian Iazyges dwelling beyond the river in the central Hungarian Plain.<sup>270</sup> Characterizing these people as bandits, and diminutive ones at that, was a calculated political move. With these inscriptions, Commodus sent two messages at once. On the surface, he is indicated a return to the Trajanic worldview which saw the remaining free transdanubians as impotent wanderers unworthy of Roman military attention. At the same time, the term *latrunculus* had a sinister undertone. Unlike the 'Robin Hood'/*hajduk* model of social banditry often used to explain outlaws in medieval and early modern Europe, it seems clear that most Romans feared and loathed those they labeled as *latrones*.<sup>271</sup> With these public inscriptions, therefore, Commodus skillfully manipulated the already fearful provincial populace. For civilians, bandits were very much a threat. As word of Commodus' treaties spread, people would, perhaps, have first breathed a sigh of relief, but then wondered why the emperor was going soft on the enemy. With

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<sup>269</sup> A number of identical inscriptions are known: *CIL* 3.3385; *RIU* 1127-1137, 1426; Tit. Aq. 935; AntTan 47, 2003, 291-299. "Emperor and Caesar, Marcus Aurelius [[Commodus]] Antoninus Augustus Pius, victor over the Sarmatians, victor over the Germans, Pontifex Maximus [chief priest], with tribunician power for the sixth time, saluted imperator four times, consul four times, father of his country, fortified the whole bank [of the Danube] with fresh-built guard posts and defensive works placed throughout those places suitable for the furtive crossings of bandits; executed by [Lucius Cornelius Felix Plotianus, pro-praetorian legate.]"

<sup>270</sup> Alföldi 1941, pp. 30-37; Kovács 2014, pp. 161-162. Shaw (1984, p. 12) is wrong when he interprets these inscriptions as referring primarily to common, internal banditry.

<sup>271</sup> For the 'social bandit,' see Hobsbawm 1969, and 1974, ch.4. For Roman fear and loathing of bandits, see Shaw 1984, pp. 18-24.

the rhetoric of these inscriptions, Commodus first re-stoked smoldering fears of barbarian violence,<sup>272</sup> but then assuaged them by reminding provincials that he was taking active measures to protect them. The multivalent nature of the Scythian Logos made this sort of nuanced characterization of the Iazyges possible. The Sarmatians could be both individually terrifying and collectively no match for the power of Rome.

## ***V. General Conclusions***

We began this chapter with the premise, introduced previously in Chapter One, that Rome's political order in the Danubian region was based on the establishment and perpetuation of a fundamentally artificial boundary within the physical and cultural landscapes of the Danube Basin as they existed around the beginning of the Common Era. That boundary was the Roman *limes*, following the course of the river for nearly its entire length. Climatically and topographically, the Danube's drainage basin forms a coherent eco-region which, although representing a borderland

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<sup>272</sup> For contemporary fears of Sarmatians, see Lucian's *Toxaris*, which dates to the period of the Marcomannic Wars or their immediate aftermath. Here, the Scythian narrator tells the story of Dandamis and Amizoces, two Scythian friends who end up in a nasty war with the neighboring Sarmatians. First, the enemy invades across the Tanais River: "At once they began to round up the cattle, secure the prisoners, plunder the tents, and seize the wagons, taking most of them with all their occupants and offering violence to our concubines and wives before our very eyes; and we were distressed over the situation (*Tox.* 54-55)." As we have seen, nearly every treaty struck between Rome and the belligerent tribes during the Marcomannic Wars required the barbarians to return large numbers of Roman prisoners. Even if the figures involved were actually lower than the tens of thousands listed in our sources, it seems clear that human plunder and ransom were major features of the conflict. Lucian is playing on very real, contemporary fears when he describes his Sarmatians dragging away women and children to wretched captivity. In the tale, the hero Dandamis sees his friend Amizoces led captive over the river. Naturally, he swims the Tanais and approaches the Sarmatians to pay the ransom. A system clearly exists for such exchanges, again, probably reflective of Lucian's contemporary reality. In the fable, however, the Sarmatians prove wicked captors indeed, demanding that Dandamis give up his eyesight in exchange for his friend's liberty. The deal is struck, and Amizoces helps his blinded friend back across the river before putting out his own eyes in sympathy (*Tox.* 40-41). There are two important points to take from Lucian's use of the Sarmatians. First, the author has some sense for the practical workings of the war on the frontier, which he uses to give his Scythian tales greater power and relevance to his elite audience. Second, we see Lucian filtering contemporary events through a framework of traditional Scythian settings and stereotypes. It is clear from the *Toxaris*, that Lucian had a solid understanding of Herodotus' tropes and expected his readers to have the same. Finally, it is worth noting here that Lucian's Sarmatians are anything but weak. They represent the fears felt in the eastern empire following the sack of Eleusis: an unexpected, violent, savage force from beyond civilization was just waiting to fall upon the unwary or unfortunate.

between larger continental and Mediterranean climate zones, nonetheless exists as a heartland from its own roughly-800,000 square kilometer perspective. The cultural landscape of the pre-Roman Danube Basin was captured in its final fluorescence by Strabo even as Rome was busy establishing the *limes* that would do away with the greater Hellenistic/Iron Age Thracian world. The *limes* was located at the Danube for pragmatic reasons because of its utility as a natural highway and visible symbol of the Roman frontier, yet because the river does not follow any sort of ecological or cultural division, it required some sort of new logic to justify its existence to those interested in more than mere military expediency.

Ideological support for the emerging Roman military-political order along the Danube appeared in the form of the ‘Scythian Logos,’ a set of ethnographic and climatic stereotypes first popularized in the Greek world by Herodotus, but still very much alive and kicking in popular imagination across the Mediterranean world when Ovid chose to employ its tropes to describe the Getae and Sarmatians dwelling in and around his exilic home on the shores of the Euxine Sea. Because this Herodotean Logos identified the Danube as the southernmost limit of the Scythian world, it appeared tailor-made for the new Roman Danube. We see in Ovid’s exilic poetry an early expression of Rome’s eager adoption of Scythian tropes to describe not the world of the Pontic Steppe, but instead the lands immediately beyond the Danube. This trend – the rhetorical transportation of the heart of the Scythian world south to the hills and plains of Transdanubia – became the new normal, and writers of the later first century like Martial and Pliny consistently characterized the populations over the river as Scythians, and their lands as brutal Arctic wastes.

While these traditional tropes continued through the generations largely unchanged, as reflected in the writings of Tertullian and Lucian, two major political developments introduced new

elements into the catalog of Scythian stereotypes, namely the twin notions that Scythians and Sarmatians, as nomads, were both destitute and militarily weak, rather than simply free from the encumbrances of settled life and deadly because of that freedom. The first new trope – nomadic poverty – had always been part of the Greek conception of steppe nomads, but it took on a new importance following Trajan’s annexation of Dacia as Romans tried to wrap their heads around the emperor’s decision to leave the Sarmatians of the Hungarian Plain outside direct imperial rule. A consensus soon emerged: as penniless nomads, the Sarmatian Iazyges were simply not worth the financial cost of conquering and administering. The characterization of the Iazyges and other inhabitants of the regions beyond the Middle Danube as bandits – individually threatening but collectively impotent when faced with Roman might – was an innovation of the late second century in the aftermath of the Marcomannic Wars, when, after over a decade of violence and dehumanizing rhetoric aimed at the transdanubians, Commodus sought to justify his decision to end the conflict with a new round of treaties instead of the total conquest and eradication promised in Marcus Aurelius’ wartime propaganda.

Such was the intellectual landscape when ‘Scythian’ barbarians began to raid out of the Black Sea and across the Lower Danube *limes* in the middle of the third century. These barbarian raiders, whose depredations were chronicled by Dexippus in his *Scythica*, did not look or behave as expected. They fought on foot, where they proved formidable in battle, and were organized enough to besiege and capture even major Roman cities like Philippopolis, Athens, and Side. The remarkable success of these invaders was greatly facilitated by Rome’s popular misconceptions about Scythians. Both strains of Roman thinking about transdanubian peoples – the enduring Herodotean Scythian tropes, and the ‘modern’ ethnographic theories about weak Sarmatians – ensured that the Roman intellectual



arsenal was unprepared to handle ‘Scythian’ leaders like Dexippus’ Cniva. While popular perceptions were still rooted in stereotypes incapable of comprehending Scythians as threatening to the walled cities and organized legions of the Roman *oikoumene*, conventional military thinking was equally unprepared because it was based myopically on Rome’s previous century spent lording it over the Middle Danube where the tribes had long since learned to bear the Roman yoke.

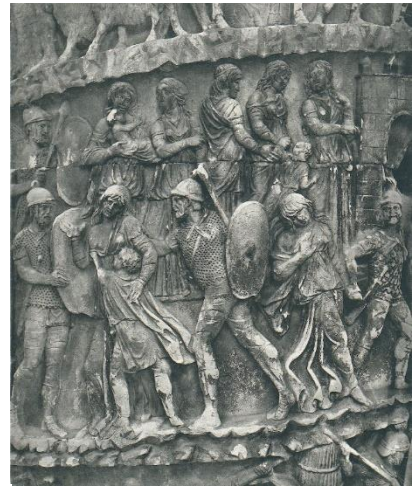
Rome’s third century ‘Scythian delusion’ was exacerbated by the ongoing political crisis inside the empire during the chaotic second half of the third century. Had either the political scene quickly stabilized or the Scythian tropes proven less entrenched, outcomes might have been different, but with both internal political chaos and a fundamentally-flawed understanding of the external enemy to contend with, we can easily understand why it took over three decades to fully staunch the flow of Scythian warbands wreaking havoc from beyond the Danube. As it was, the price of Rome’s Scythian delusion was the sack of Philippopolis, Athens, and numerous other cities, and the death or enslavement of thousands.



*Fig. 2.2 Scene of chaotic battle.*



*Fig. 2.3 Burning barbarian tuguria.*



*Fig. 2.4 Enslavement of prisoners.*



*Fig. 2.5 Prisoners executing each other.*



*Fig. 2.6 Politics of terror: women and children forced to watch the execution of their menfolk.*



*Fig. 2.7 Marcus' Danubian policy on display: assault, sack, execution, and enslavement.*

## CHAPTER THREE

### THIS SARMATIAN LIFE: SUBSISTENCE PATTERNS AND SOCIAL SYSTEMS IN THE ROMAN-ERA HUNGARIAN PLAIN

*But although the Limigantes knew [defensive plans] were being prepared, still they stood at the conference with bowed heads, as though they had nothing in mind other than entreaties, but really nursing deep in their hearts feelings altogether different than their attitude and words suggested. (10) And when the Emperor appeared on the raised tribunal and was beginning to deliver the mildest of speeches, intending to address them as future loyal subjects, one of the Sarmatians, struck by some savage madness, hurling his shoe at the tribunal, shouted “Marha, marha!” (which is their signal for war), and the uncivilized horde, following him, suddenly raised a barbarian standard and with bestial howls rushed upon the emperor himself! –Ammianus Marcellinus 19.11.9–10 (c. 390 CE)<sup>273</sup>*

#### ***I. Introduction: Ammianus and the Attack on the Sarmatian Village.***

In 359 CE, the banks of the Middle Danube river bore mute witness to an unprecedented event. Somebody threw a shoe at Roman Emperor Constantius II. According to Ammianus Marcellinus, who recorded the incident in book 19 of his histories, the shoe and accompanying war cries prompted gathered Sarmatian tribesmen to mount a mad assault on the dais where Constantius was delivering an address as part of ongoing peace negotiations. Unsurprisingly, Roman troops guarding the imperial party reacted with extreme violence.<sup>274</sup> As Constantius mounted a horse and fled to safety, his soldiers got to work butchering the Sarmatian rebels who, fighting on foot with no

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<sup>273</sup> *Quae Limigantes licet properari sentirent, nihil tamen praeter preces fingentes, stabant incurvi, longe alia quam quae gestu praeferebant et verbis altis mentibus perpensantes. (10) Visoque imperatore ex alto suggestu, iam sermonem parante lenissimum, meditanteque alloqui velut morigeros iam futuros, quidem ex illis, furore percitus truci, calceo suo in tribunal contorto, “Marha marha” (quod est apud eos signum bellicum) exclamavit, eumque secuta incondita multitudo, vexillo elato repente barbarico, ululans ferum, in ipsum principem ferebatur.*

<sup>274</sup> A.M. 19.11.7–17.



means of escape, perished to the last man. By all rights, the attack should never have been allowed to happen. Only a year earlier, a Sarmatian army had been defeated after threatening Constantius at a similar treaty ceremony.<sup>275</sup> In the revenge-campaign that followed, Roman forces had located and destroyed Sarmatian villages deep within the marshlands at the confluence of the Danube and Tisza rivers.<sup>276</sup> The tribesmen of 359 were the last holdouts and their previous requests for a treaty can, perhaps, partially explain the surprise of the eventual assault on the imperial tribunal.

Besides the intrinsic interest of so unusual a story, and its superficial resemblance to another, more recent shoe-related assault on a head-of-state,<sup>277</sup> Ammianus' narrative of the failed council and the events leading up to it is of particular importance because it describes Sarmatians in a manner quite distinct from the usual tropes of the Scythian nomad, weak or strong, discussed in the previous chapter. Although at other points in his history, Ammianus does describe Sarmatians and Scythians using various canonical tropes, his narrative of Constantius' Sarmatian wars provides us with our only near-contemporary picture of something resembling daily life and warfare that doesn't blatantly

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<sup>275</sup> A.M. 17.13.5-11. The similar events of the years 358 and 359 in Ammianus' suggests the possibility that the historian has divided the events of a single campaign into two, perhaps due to faulty source material. This is possible, since - as far as we can tell - the historian was not an eye-witness to the Danubian affairs he describes in books 17 and 19. Kovács argues persuasively against such a reading, however, noting a significant number differences between the two passages, most notably that while the Romans initiate the violence in 358 (17.13.8), it is the Sarmatians who strike first in 359, flinging shoes and shouting an unfamiliar war cry as they attack (19.11.10). Kovács rejects the reduplication argument and supports the long-held theory that Ammianus had access to official state documents related to the campaign upon which he based his narrative. Such a source would explain his inclusion of detailed, and accurate topographic descriptions, as well as place-names, and unusual details like the shoe incident, unfamiliar war cry, and the details of a Roman contingency plan at the first conference (Kovács 2016, pp. 115-119). Even if we prefer to see the historian relying on intermediate sources (as argued by Bleckmann 2007), it need not concern us overly. Duplication would simply indicate that Ammianus relied on multiple sources when piecing together his Danubian history and should not make us question the underlying reality of the events any more than we normally would. As for the shoe-flinger, it is such an unusual story that I personally doubt it could be a total invention, but perhaps this is an overly-optimistic view!

<sup>276</sup> A.M. 17.13.1-20.

<sup>277</sup> The incident in question is the 2008 assault on U.S. President George W. Bush at the prime minister's palace in Baghdad, Iraq. There, too, a frustrated local man used his shoes as missiles, although the outcome was far less bloody. When asked, the president remarked "all I can report is that it is a size 10." Despite the obvious similarities between the ancient and modern incidents, the underlying ideologies were probably totally different (Meyers and Rubin 2008).

depend on age-old Scythian stereotypes. This chapter begins with Ammianus but the main goal is to attempt as full a reconstruction as possible of life in the Roman-era Hungarian Plain, a task that will quickly lead from the world of texts to that of material evidence. This investigation of the Hungarian Plain's inhabitants during the Roman period represents an extended case study designed to highlight the many ways Rome's Danube *limes* - cutting its way through the heart of the north/west division of the Danube drainage basin with its supporting ideologies in tow - shaped the lives and culture of the people living in the transdanubian borderland. Further, the people of the Hungarian Plain are of particular importance to our larger study because, as discussed in Chapter Two, it was Rome's experience dealing politically and militarily with the Sarmatian Iazyges during the first and second centuries CE that introduced the most significant innovations into the corpus of ethnographic tropes we have labeled as the Roman Scythian Logos, namely the 'weak Scythian' trope designed to justify imperial decisions not to annex the land between Pannonia and Dacia.

In this chapter, we will consider what life was actually like for the people living in this region Rome deemed too insignificant and impoverished for full inclusion within the community of provinces. The picture that emerges is one of an agricultural society ruled by an aloof elite clinging tenaciously to memories of a more nomadic past on the Pontic Steppe. Relations between these immigrant Iazyges and the autochthonous village population were not always cordial, and the massive economic and political power of Rome - looming large from just over the *limes* in Pannonia, Moesia, and Dacia - ensured that the people of the Hungarian Plain were kept in a perpetual state of dependency, able to be crushed militarily, or starved back into line through economic warfare, should they attempt any independent action.

Returning to Ammianus, the first item to note is that the Sarmatian warriors Constantius treats with at both his peace conferences consist mainly of foot-soldiers. There appears to be a cavalry wing in the first battle, but it is quickly overwhelmed by its Roman counterpart. In the second engagement, the Sarmatian cavalry is entirely absent.<sup>278</sup> The larger context of these two battles is the revolt of the Limigantes, who, according to Ammianus, were the Sarmatian underclass. These Limigantes, it seems, had revolted and driven out their Roman-supported aristocracy over twenty years earlier, destabilizing the usually-predictable client-tribes of the Hungarian Plain, and leading ultimately to conflict with Rome.<sup>279</sup> Although Ammianus was not an eyewitness to Constantius' Sarmatian campaigns, his record of these wars was probably based on state documents available at Rome when he composed his history there in the 380s. Ammianus probably even had access to Constantius' official after-action report which the orator Themistius - who apparently read the version sent to Constantinople - described as a complete account of the war, its places, and events.<sup>280</sup> For these reasons, we can put some faith in the details of his description of the Limigantes war, particularly in terms of military actions and the sort of topographical and ethnographic information regularly reported to commanders in the course of routine military intelligence work.

Drawing on this archival material, Ammianus describes the Limigantes dwelling in the lowlands around the confluence of the Tisza and Danube, that is, just over the border from the Roman province of Moesia Superior. Indeed, the barbarians appeared to be particularly attached to

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<sup>278</sup> cf. A.M. 17.13.9; 19.11.11-15.

<sup>279</sup> A.M. 18.13.1; *Orig. Const.* 6.32.

<sup>280</sup> Them. *Or.* 4.56d-57a. For analysis of the reliability of Ammianus' account of these campaigns, see Kovács 2016, pp. 115-119. Ammianus' reveals his access to state documents, in a diatribe condemning Constantius' misrepresentation of his role in Roman victories for which he deserved no credit (A.M. 16.12.69-70). Although this level of access permits greater reliance on his history for reconstructing military events, we must remember that we are still getting a picture shaped by Ammianus' personal hostility towards Constantius.

their specific homeland. Following raiding activity across the Danube into Pannonia – sure to rouse Roman ire – the Limigantes attempted to broker a new treaty of peace and clientage with Constantius in 358. They offered the usual terms: annual tribute, recruits for the Roman army, and acknowledgement of their total subservience to Rome, but they absolutely refused to relocate from their homes as Constantius had earlier requested.<sup>281</sup> The land these Limigantes were willing to fight and die for is described in some detail in Ammianus’ narrative. Far from inhabiting the stereotypical nomad steppe, these Sarmatians lived in a mosaic of islands, marshes and floodplains:

*For the Tisza, rushing with winding course into the lands [where the Sarmatian Limigantes live], joins with the Danube. And while it flows alone and free, it slowly traverses a long, broad plain but near its mouth, flowing together into a narrow tract, [the Tisza] thus protects the inhabitants from Roman attack by means of the Danube’s channel, and makes them safe from inroads of other barbarians [other Sarmatians on the plain?] by its own obstacle, for the greater part of the region is marshy, and since it floods whenever the rivers rise, the area is full of pools and overgrown with willows, and therefore impossible to navigate except for those well acquainted with the area.<sup>282</sup>*

The description of the topography and environment of the Danube–Tisza confluence appears to support our faith in Ammianus, for it is detailed and accurate. The floodplain is, indeed, characterized by a mosaic mixture of marsh and poplar/willow groves interspersed with scattered loess bluffs and islands where mixed grassland and oak/maple forests prevail.<sup>283</sup> Such a landscape would not support a traditional pastoral, nomadic economy, but it would be well suited for sedentary or semi-sedentary communities engaged in a mixture of agriculture and short-distance

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<sup>281</sup> The Limigantes offer terms: A.M. 17.13.3. *Verum aspectu primo exercitus tamquam fulminis ictu perculti, ultimaque cogitantes, vitam precati, tributum annuum delectumque validae iuventutis et servitium sponponderunt, abnuere parati si iuberentur aliorum migrare, ut gestibus indicabant et vultibus, locorum confisi praesidio, ubi lares post exactos dominos fixere securi.*

Constantius’ relocation plan: A.M. 17.13.2: *Deliberatum est tamen, id quoque lenius vindicari, quam criminum magnitudo poscebat, hactenus ultinone porrecta, ut ad longinqua translati, amitterent copiam nostra vexandi.*

<sup>282</sup> A.M. 17.13.4. *Has enim terras Parthiscus irruens obliquatis meatibus, Histro miscetur. Sed dum solus licentius fuit, spatia longa et lata sensim praelabens, et ea coartans prope exitum in angustias, accolae ab impetu Romanorum alveo Danubii defendit, a barbaricis vero excursibus suo tutos praestat obstaculo, ubi pleraque umidioris soli natura, et incrementis fluminum redundantia, stagnosa sunt et referta salicibus, ideoque invia, nisi perquam gnaris.*

<sup>283</sup> Medzihradzsky 1996, pp.447–449; *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, pp. 80–82; Knipl and Sümegi 2012.

transhumance. Once again, Ammianus' descriptions ring true. We catch a glimpse of some aspects of Sarmatian daily life as it comes to a violent end during Constantius' first punitive campaign against the Limigantes in 358. The scene is worth including in full for its details of Sarmatian life, but also for the callous brutality of the Roman army:

*Scarcely had the enemy horde been laid low, when the families of the slain, dragged from their miserable hovels, were led forth like cattle without regard to age or sex. [...] (13) Then, riled up by the heat of battle and the fruits of victory, [our soldiers] roused themselves to destroy those who had deserted the fight or were hiding in their huts. And coming there with a thirst for barbarian blood, the soldiers butchered [the Sarmatians] after tearing to pieces the light straw [thatching], and no house, even those built from the strongest timbers, saved any of them from the danger of death. (14) Finally, when everything was blazing and nobody could hide any longer, with all means of saving their lives cut off, they either perished obstinately [in their huts] by fire, or else fleeing the flames and emerging to escape one impending torment, were slaughtered by the hostile [Roman] blades. (15) But some did escape the weapons and the towering flames, and these plunged into the whirlpool of the nearby river, hoping to reach the opposite bank through skillful swimming. Of these, most lost their lives beneath the waves, but enough others were shot down with missiles that the whole course of the wide river foamed with blood flowing abundantly everywhere. And so, the wrath and bravery of the victorious Romans together annihilated the Sarmatians.<sup>284</sup>*

The point of Ammianus' description was not to paint an ethnographic picture of Sarmatian life, but in describing the carnage of the massacre he includes some incidental details. The first thing we notice is that these Limigantes live in houses (*tuguria*), not the wagons of the archetypal Sarmatian or Scythian.<sup>285</sup> *Tuguria* are always primitive dwellings, but they have no association with

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<sup>284</sup> A.M. 17.13.12-15. *Vix dum populis hostilibus stratis, gregatim peremptorum necessitudines ducebantur, humilibus extractae tuguriis, aetatis sexusque promiscui. [...] (13) Incitante itaque fervore certaminum, fructuque vincendi, consurrectum est in perniciem eorum qui deseruerant proelia, vel in tuguriis latitantes occultabantur. Hos, cum ad loca venisset avidus barbarici sanguinis miles, disiectis culmis levibus obruncabant, nec quemquam casa, vel trabibus compacta firmissimis, periculo mortis extraxit. (14) Denique cum inflammarentur omnia nullusque latere iam posset, cunctis vitae praesidiis circumcisis, aut obstinate igni peribat absumptus, aut incendium vitans, egressusque uno supplicio declinato, ferro sternebatur hostile. (15) Fugientes tamen aliqui tela, incendiorumque magnitudinem, annis vicini se commiserere gurgitibus, peritia nandi ripas ulteriores occupare posse sperantes, quorum plerique summersi necati sunt, alii iaculis periere confixi, adeo ut abunde cruore diffuso, meatus fluminis spumaret immensi; ita per elementum utrumque, Sarmatas vincantium ira virtusque delevit.*

<sup>285</sup> A.M. 17.13.12. cf. Horace, *Carm.* 3.9-10; Ov., *Tr.* 3.10.27-34; A.M. 31.2.10 (on the Huns); A.M. 31.2.18 (on the Alans).



nomads in surviving usage.<sup>286</sup> In their death-agonies, these cottages reveal their architecture. They are wood-framed (*casa trabibus compacta firmissimis*) and thatched with straw (*[tecta] culmis levibus*). Details are lacking, but it is clear from the scene that the Limigantes live in a nucleated settlement close to a wide river. Based on the earlier topographic excursus, we can confidently locate the village on a loess island in the marshland at the Danube-Tisza confluence. This riverine location is further reinforced by the desperate Sarmatians who attempt to escape the massacre by swimming.<sup>287</sup> This is a river-person's skill, not a nomad's.

Taken together, the details of topography, habitation, lifestyle, and warfare gleaned from Ammianus' narrative of the Sarmatian wars paint a picture of Sarmatian society distinctly at odds with virtually every earlier source. Far from the pastoral nomads of Herodotus or Ovid, the Limigantes are, essentially, peasants living a settled life in the floodplains and loess-land of the Hungarian Plain, and, presumably, practicing some mixture of agriculture and pastoralism. In the rest of this chapter, we will examine what archaeology can tell us about Sarmatian subsistence and culture, and, crucially, the often-fraught relationship between the transdanubian peoples and the power of Rome. Ammianus' description is a piece of literature and cannot be accepted uncritically on its own, but an examination of Sarmatian settlements and burials from the Carpathian basin makes it clear that he got a lot more correct than he got wrong. Unsurprisingly, the ancient, ossified Scythian tropes still so prevalent in Ammianus' day bore little resemblance to actual life among the people Rome labeled as Sarmatians.

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<sup>286</sup> OLD: "*tugurium*." Sallust's use of *tugurium* in the *Bellum Jugurthinum* is typical. He uses the term in several places to describe rustic or slave dwellings among the Numidians (*BJ* 12.5, 19.5, 46.5, 75.5), and connects the word more explicitly with the local term for barbarian huts (*mapalia*) in his own ethnographic history of the region (*BJ* 18).

<sup>287</sup> A.M. 17.13.15.

We will begin with a discussion of how to responsibly approach the archaeology of a people whose actual group and individual identities have been almost completely submerged in a sea of Greco-Roman stereotype. In order to test the nomadic heart of the Scythian Logos, we will examine the faunal remains and domestic architecture from Roman-era settlements of the Hungarian Plain. The picture that emerges will be refined through an analysis of the region's burial culture, which can only be properly understood in dialog with the evidence for subsistence and foodways. Finally, we will attempt to fit the pieces together and draw a hypothetical model of the social, political, and economic systems driving the society we catch a glimpse of in Ammianus' battlefield narrative.

## *II. Literary and Archaeological Sarmatians*

In order to responsibly examine the archaeological remains of the people of the Hungarian Plain, we must first come to grips with some thorny theoretical issues that have long plagued the study of the 'barbarian' neighbors of the Roman Empire. Scholars interested in these societies are faced with two formidable obstacles having to do with the interpretation of group identity among the barbarians. Reaching forward from the depths of the past creep the persistent, flexible, and deceptively strong tentacles of Greco-Roman ethnographic thought, while, closer to home, the malignant legacy of nineteenth and twentieth century ethno-nationalism – particularly of the German variety – continues to be felt in much contemporary and recent scholarship. As discussed in Chapter Two, ancient conceptions of foreign peoples relied heavily on theories of environmental determinism to posit a predictable, unchanging barbarian world beyond the limits of the *oikoumene*. This framework must remain in mind when we place ancient texts in dialog with material evidence.

Meanwhile, the influence of early nationalistic scholarship is even more dangerous. Archaeology emerged as an academic field during that second half of the nineteenth century, at the

same moment as the crystallization of national consciousness in Germany, Italy, and beyond; the former was quickly put to use in service of the latter. The need to locate and describe an ancient lineage for itself was most keenly felt in the young German Reich, which lacked either the famous antiquities of the Eternal City or the more secure Early Modern legacies enjoyed by Britain and France. While scholars working in the Rhineland, Bavaria, and Württemberg emphasized their regions' Roman past by excavating the former German-Raetian *limes*,<sup>288</sup> even more scholarly energy was directed towards providing the fledgling German ethno-state with a venerable, non-Roman pedigree. Ancient texts, most notably Tacitus' *Germania*, and the *Getica* of Jordanes were held up as preserving genuine records of ancient Germanic peoples. These 'noble savages' were just the sort of ancestors German nationalists with an historical inferiority complex were looking for, but the relationship between the ancient tribes and the modern state was not, initially, obvious. Meticulous archaeological excavation, analysis, and classification offered a solution. German prehistorians of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, led by Gustav Kossinna, advanced a three-part model for settlement archaeology (*Siedlungsarchäologie*).<sup>289</sup> First, archaeological cultures were identified based on patterns of material form, use, and geographic distribution. Next, these cultures were paired up with known historical tribes, usually based on the convergence of textual and material location. Finally, Kossinna

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<sup>288</sup> The Reichs-Limeskommission (RLK) was founded in 1892 with the goal of exploring the long Roman frontier that ran through the heart of the recently-united southern German states. Local *limes* commissions with decades of independent excavation experience were brought together for the first time. The Upper German-Raetian *limes*, stretching from the Black Forest to Passau on the Danube and unfettered by later political boundaries, was a potentially potent symbol of German unity. The state kept the Reichs-Limeskommission well-funded, allowing for extensive survey and excavation efforts along the *limes*. By the 1920s, over eighty camps and forts, and more than 800 watchtowers had been identified (Winbolt 1922, p. 148). Of the 41 major sites now included within the Upper German-Raetian *limes* UNESCO monument, 21 were explored scientifically by the RLK (Matešić and Sommer eds. 2015, *passim*).

<sup>289</sup> Kossinna's publications are many, but see particularly "Zur Archäologie der Ostgermanen" (1905), *Die Herkunft der Germanen: zur Methode der Siedlungsarchäologie* (1920), and *Ursprung und Verbreitung der Germanen in vor- und frühgeschichtlicher Zeit* (1936). For assessment and deconstruction of his theoretical model, see Klein (1971 and 1974), Sklenar (1983), and Veit (1984 and 1989). For Kossinna's political influence in 20<sup>th</sup> century Germany, see Arnold (1990).

argued that by observing the movement of specific material elements between regions, scholars could track not only general trends in cultural diffusion, but also the specific routes and dates of ancient migrations. This approach, when coupled with a textually-influenced conception of ancient group identity as unchanging, allowed for the creation of concrete, scientific links between the Germans and Goths of Tacitus and Jordanes, and the Prussians and Saxons of Imperial Germany.

No single element of Kossinna's approach is completely invalid, but all must be dealt with carefully. In the past, when used together to identify the supposed ancient ancestors of modern peoples, this method has caused much real harm, particularly during the twentieth century.<sup>290</sup> For our purposes, it is enough to point out that this outdated, German school of prehistoric archaeology has cast a long, long shadow and continues to do so to this day. Its worst aspect is that it assumes a teleology ending in the states and ethnic groups of the present day, allowing for easy cooption by nationalists and racists wishing to stake claims to specific territories or justify the mistreatment of other groups conveniently lacking a long, archaeological pedigree. Theoretically, the Kossinna model also relies on conceptions of how personal and group identities work which cannot be sustained in light of current theories, an issue of particular importance for our own analysis. None the less, the model has continued to the present day in much Romanian and Hungarian scholarship. More often than not, 20th century scholars of the Sarmatians, Dacians, and other prehistoric peoples of the Carpathian Basin have assumed a fairly simplistic one-to-one relationship between the material complexes they excavate, and the literarily-attested tribes.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Arnold 1990.

<sup>291</sup> eg: Párducz 1941, 1944, 1950, Harmatta 1950 but also Vaday 1989, 1991, 1999, Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2015.

### 3.2.2. Ethnicity and group identities

Archaeological remains represent the concrete products of once-living individuals and groups. This may seem obvious, but it bears stating because it is all too easy to begin to view the material complexes we find through excavation as entities of their own rather than the products of multivalent human agency. The problem is that humans are complex creatures at both the individual and group levels. In the rigid world of nineteenth century science, when the whole cosmos appeared to be ruled by immutable, predictable, natural laws, it was logical to assume archaeologists could read backwards from collected artifacts in order to identify and understand the people who deposited them in the same way scholars were eagerly collecting and categorizing the earth's plants, animals, and minerals in order to understand the intricate clockwork of the natural world.<sup>292</sup> Although the rigid nineteenth century conception of natural law has also been sharply critiqued, the problem is even more extreme when studying complex human cultures. Archaeology can tell us a lot about the concrete elements of how people lived, and sometimes even identify the movement of groups from one region to another, but it is not nearly as good at revealing how individuals and groups constructed their various identities. This is particularly true in prehistoric settings or in regions without a coeval epigraphic habit or literary tradition, like the Hungarian Plain during the Roman period.

The basic problem is one of practice vs. meaning. An illustrative example will be useful at this juncture. Even if, for example, we know from excavation that people in the Roman-era Hungarian Plain tended to bury their rich female dead in clothing decorated with glass beads and

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<sup>292</sup> Kohler 2007; Conn 1998, ch. 2.

held together with bronze fibulae,<sup>293</sup> we have no way of knowing all the details of what that tradition meant, both on an individual and societal level. Was the beaded decoration a sign of **ethnic affiliation** – that is, a statement of a particular group membership aimed at outsiders (“*This woman is a woman of the Iazyges, an exclusive group with a shared history.*”), or, rather, did it send a message of **status identity** directed at members inside the community (“*This woman is a wealthy member of the aristocracy.*”)? Perhaps the burial costume broadcast both messages, or something else altogether. Further, we must ask if the costume reflected anything at all of the dead woman’s own **personal identity** (“*In life, my status a Iazyx/elite/whatever was important to me.*”) or should we see it as the material reflection of an **imposed identity** made by the group that buried the woman (“*We buried our grandmother in a manner reflecting how we wish to present her importance, and our family’s position to our broader society.*”)?

As previously discussed, traditional theories of settlement archaeology (*siedlungsarchäologie*) rely on simplistic theories regarding the identification of observed material culture complexes with attested (or retrojected) groups and cultures. This mindset can easily lead researchers to assume that observed patterns in material evidence, particularly in intentional depositions, such as burials, automatically reflect outward-focused ethnic identities.<sup>294</sup> Not only does such an assumption indicate a poor understanding of how ethnicities form and manifest themselves, but it also overlooks the many other potential messages material evidence might have been intended to send. There is no

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<sup>293</sup> This is, indeed, how elite women are most commonly buried in the Roman-era Hungarian Plain. See sections 3.4.2 and 3.4.3 below for the main discussion of burial ritual and personal adornment.

<sup>294</sup> We see this mindset frequently in contemporary and twentieth century scholarship from the various national academies of the Danubian region. In addition to the works cited in note 289, above, all of which rely on this mindset to a certain extent, see Vaday et al. 1989, for a discussion of Sarmatian costume. The ‘burial items = ethnic expression’ mindset underlying the entire work is revealed in the final discussion (p. 114).

academic consensus on how ethnicity functions, a fact no-doubt reflective of the great diversity of organizing principals among humanity's many ethnic divisions, past and present.<sup>295</sup> There are, however, a few widely-accepted features that tend to set ethnicities apart from other types of group identity and which are relevant to the interpretation of archaeological material. Although somewhat venerable, Frederik Barth's theoretical framework remains fundamental to most current understandings. First, ethnic identities are **categories of ascription**; in other words, an ethnic identity is something that individuals claim for themselves, albeit often unconsciously, rather than **categories of imposition**, where an outside agent defines the boundaries and characteristics of a group.<sup>296</sup> Right away, this definition causes problems for the scholar of Rome's barbarian neighbors. Lacking any early textual tradition, we have no preserved internal voice for the people beyond the *limites*, but much written from the outside perspective of Greek and Roman ethnography. Even if we accept some or all of the details of a particular ancient account, we must remember that the tribal divisions and defining characteristics given by Herodotus, Ovid, Tacitus, Pliny, Ammianus, etc. reflect outside impositions rather than unfiltered expressions of internal, barbarian group identities. This is not to say that we cannot use Greek and Roman sources but we do run into problems when attempting to put such sources in dialog with archaeological material because said material, an expression of internal identities, may not actually be organized according to the same criteria used by

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<sup>295</sup> The most basic disagreement is between those scholars (eg: Barth 1969, Nash 1989, Weber 1978, ) who advocate a constructivist/instrumentalist form of ethnicity where individuals have some potential for changing their ethnic affiliation through performance of specific cultural displays (Barth 1969, pp. 11-15, 25), and those (eg: Geertz 1963, Grosby 1994, Fishman 1980) who posit a model where more primordial ties of lineage, language, and/or phenotypic expression tend to be of particular ethnic salience and thereby limit individuals' ability to move between ethnic communities (Geertz 1963, pp. 108-115). There is good evidence in favor of more constructivist ethnicities among the barbarians of Roman antiquity, when we can speak of ethnicity at all (Amory 1997, Kulikowski 2007, Goffart 2006), although this does not preclude more primordial ethnic identities in other contexts.

<sup>296</sup> Barth, 1969, pp. 9-10.

Greek and Roman authors to describe the people of the same region. In other words, just because Dio and Pliny describe Sarmatian Iazyges living in the Hungarian Plain at a certain time, does not mean that our elite woman in the beaded dress considered herself a Iazyx simply because her burial falls within an observed material culture complex with similar geographic and chronological boundaries.

A second important feature of ethnic identities is that while they define themselves in dialog with other ethnicities through displays of cultural practice, not all elements of cultural practice within a given society are ever considered ethnically salient. Additionally, it is often impossible to determine which cultural markers are of ethnic salience by observing material and praxis from the outside.<sup>297</sup> In other words, even if we do accept that the Iazyges we hear about in the texts were an ethnic group (as opposed to some other type of collective), we cannot assume that the cultural markers used internally to identify an individual as an insider or outsider are the same ones we find in the material remains. Assuming our beaded lady did think of herself a Iazyx, we must consider whether perhaps this ethnic identity was visually marked by something archaeologically-invisible, say a particular hairstyle or woven dress-pattern, or even maintained by something entirely incorporeal such as membership in a particular lineage – real or fictive – or profession of a certain religious belief.<sup>298</sup> In such a scenario, the material elements preserved in her grave might be

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<sup>297</sup> Barth 1969, pp. 13–15.

<sup>298</sup> Indeed, lineage/descent is often thought to be of particularly broad, cross-cultural salience within ethnic communities. Descent is often acknowledged to rely more on belief and ascription than genuine, biological connection, at least on the scale of centuries and large populations. Such ‘fictive kinship’ remains at the core of highly-influential conceptions of ethnicity in the classical and late antique worlds (Wolfram 1988, Hall 2002). This is not an unreasonable approach, but it does not mean that all ethnic groups considered common descent to be of such value.



broadcasting an entirely different, non-ethnic set of messages, and we, from our perspective as archaeologists, might well never be able to tell the difference.

Finally, ethnic identities are not of equal importance for all societies, and only some societies choose ethnic affiliation as a defining feature. The rise of the ethno-state in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe and the continuation of the principal of ethno-nationalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Balkans following the successive, messy dismemberment of the poly-ethnic Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and Yugoslav states, encouraged scholars from those regions to retroject their own obsession with ethnic identity onto earlier inhabitants of their lands.<sup>299</sup> Ethnic movements were also important forces in the breakup of the European colonial empires in the decades after World War II, as many former colonial subjects sought to define themselves in more internally-meaningful ways. This phenomenon has ensured the enduring importance of ethnicity as a category of group identity within postcolonial theory.<sup>300</sup> What all this means for the scholar of the Roman *limites* is that it is extremely tempting to assume that the peoples who lived beyond the Roman frontier were also organized around ethnic principles. This feels natural to someone from the twenty-first century academy, but we must remain aware that this feeling is more of a product of our own society and academic worldview than a reflection of the ancient evidence, textual or material. In the case of our particular study, as we will discuss below, while we can be fairly certain that a population known to

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<sup>299</sup> Modern American society, for example, does not consider any single ethnic identity to have a special claim on ‘Americanness.’ If ethnic ascription is not generally used as a *positive* ethnic marker in the United States, ethnicity *is* actively used to informally mark certain minority groups as outsiders. None the less, the collective ‘American’ identity remains fundamentally non-ethnic, according to most definitions. The Roman Empire may have functioned quite similarly, particularly after Caracalla’s broad extension of citizenship in 212, with legal status holding much greater salience than tribal or ethnic affiliation (Mathisen 2006), even as certain ethnic groups – most notably for our purposes, Scythians – were excluded or marginalized based on those Roman perceptions of ethnicity.

<sup>300</sup> For a discussion of how this feature of the postcolonial critique impacts the study of the ancient world, see Mattingly 2011, ch. 2.

the Romans as the Iazyges did migrate into the Hungarian Plain from somewhere on the Pontic Steppe in the early first century, there is little clear evidence for how that group thought about and organized itself once it got there, or how immigrants and locals viewed and interacted with each other. In such a setting, to return to our beaded lady, it would be unwise to speculate about her origins or personal identity beyond what we can determine from the value of her jewelry and grave goods, and the exchange networks that supplied them.

### **3.2.3. Archaeological cultures and the limits of knowledge**

Most of the pitfalls surrounding ancient ethnicity and group identity can be mitigated by admitting that we will never be able to fully reconstruct the relationship between material remains and ancient identities. The development of specific artifact complexes does have meaning, but what it can tell us is not so much about how ancient peoples saw themselves as about the socio-political systems they inhabited and how they related to other, neighboring systems. Thus, for example, use of Roman-imported pottery beyond the frontier can tell us a lot about networks of trade and imperial hegemony,<sup>301</sup> but much less about how the acquisition of Roman imports reflected self-perception among the people of the Hungarian Plain. In the remainder of the chapter, we will attempt to extract as much information as we responsibly can from the material remains of life in the Roman-era Hungarian Plain. We will begin by considering what settlement architecture and nucleation patterns can tell us about ancient subsistence, then look at the evidence of faunal remains from the region's settlements in order to refine our picture of ancient husbandry practices. Burial evidence may not allow us to definitively answer the ethnicity question, but it will enable us to

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<sup>301</sup> Whittaker 1994.

consider immigration into the Hungarian Plain and the cultural connections between the Roman-era society that emerged and the surrounding provinces and barbarian lands. This analysis will also consider the evidence for ancient networks of exchange and clientage, and the powerful role played by the Roman army in shaping the lives of the people living in the plains beyond the Danube.

Inevitably, we will have to consider issues of group identity within the Roman-era Hungarian Plain; we will, however, strive to avoid the problems of the ethnicity debate as much as possible. Instead, we will focus on what the evidence can tell us about how different group identities *functioned* within the region, rather than getting bogged down in determining exactly how such groups were *defined*. In our case, while we will attempt to come to some conclusions about the origins, lifeways, and socio-political relations with Rome and the preexisting population, enjoyed by the Pontic immigrants labeled Sarmatian Iazyges by our sources, we will not attempt to determine whether those Iazyges constituted an ethnic group, a warband organized around the warrior occupation, or some other type of collective organism.

The thorny issue of group identity makes choosing collective nouns for our study particularly challenging. The Greek and Roman sources speak of Scythians and Sarmatians at the macro-level, and Goths and Iazyges – to name only two – at a sub-regional scale. As discussed, these terms reflect Roman perceptions, and we may never know how close they come to any particular internal identity among the people they purport to describe. At the same time, these terms are still our best option when describing the peoples under investigation. Avoiding them entirely because of their external origins would require cumbersome substitutions. For the present chapter I will use the Roman terms ‘Iazyx/Iazyges’ to refer specifically to the immigrant population we can securely connect with earlier groups from the Pontic Steppe, and locate archaeologically within the

Hungarian Plain.<sup>302</sup> For the preexisting population, I will attempt to employ more neutral terminology, such as ‘village population’ or ‘agricultural majority,’ despite the fact that, following the arrival of the Iazyges, the Romans lumped the whole region’s population together under the heading ‘Sarmatian.’ That term will be largely reserved for discussions reflecting Roman perceptions of the people of the Hungarian Plain, although totally avoiding it elsewhere may not always be practical.

### 3.2.4. The path forward

To sum up, we can think about the societies of the Danubian Borderland as operating on three different registers. Two of them are accessible to us, while the third remains largely outside our scholarly reach. First, we have the level of Roman perceptions. These are the literary Sarmatians as described by Herodotus, Ovid, Ammianus, and the rest. The second level is the level of observable material culture. This is the society/societies that actually existed in the region the Romans identified as Scythia and the Sarmatian *barbaricum*. As suggested above, we can reconstruct much about the mechanics of this society based on excavated remains of settlement and burial. The third level is the level of identity, both individual and group. People living in the Hungarian Plain – and indeed people everywhere – operated in this sphere every day as they, individually and collectively, assigned meanings to the things they did and systems they engaged with. Put starkly, most of those meanings are forever beyond our grasp. In most cases, we cannot know, for example, whether people practicing ‘Sarmatian’ burials claimed to trace their lineages back to earlier regions and periods of ‘Sarmatian’ material culture. Was the woman buried in the beaded dress an

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<sup>302</sup> The archaeological identification of the initial Iazyges immigration within the material record is clear and broadly accepted (see further discussion below). We will not, however, push the evidence too far by assuming that the arrivals from the Pontic Steppe represented a cohesive ethnic group or tribe, as opposed to some other type of collective, as has been the usual practice.

immigrant from the Pontic Steppe bringing with her a cultural practice – perhaps together with an ethnic identity – from the east, or was she someone with deep roots in the Danubian place where she died who adopted ‘foreign’ ways for political or social reasons? We will never, and can never know, and it is a mistake to waste too much energy trying to access this third level when analyzing material remains. Instead, we will look for evidence of subsistence and settlement patterns and for networks of material and intellectual exchange between Iazyges immigrants, village populations, the Roman provinces, and barbarian regions further away from the frontier. While the ethnic history of the ‘real’ Sarmatians may remain beyond our reach, we will be able to say something about how the people of the borderland – however they self-identified – lived and related to the empire next door, and, in turn, how well those relationships were captured by the pens of Greco–Roman authors.

### *III. Food and Shelter*

The most unchanging and fundamental elements of the Greco–Roman characterization of people they labeled Scythians and Sarmatians have to do with their patterns of subsistence and habitation. As we have seen, these transdanubian archetypes are repeatedly cast as long–distance, nomadic pastoralists. Any investigation of the material life of the actual people the Romans identified as Sarmatians in the Hungarian Plain, then, should concern itself, first and foremost, with these aspects of daily life. Right away, however, we run into a problem. How do you identify a nomad, archaeologically? Finding iron–clad evidence of nomadic subsistence in the archaeological record can be extremely difficult since the physical remains of habitation might be limited to ephemeral campsites or temporary settlements. Because even long–distance nomads almost always operate according to a regular, seasonal pattern of movement in search of fresh grazing for their livestock, it should be possible to identify major routes materially based on changes in soil

compaction and composition – dung, in large quantities, changes soil in recognizable ways – and the physical remains of livestock corrals and shelters.<sup>303</sup> Unfortunately, this sort of study, which would rely on large-scale surface survey work, has not been undertaken for the Hungarian Plain. Further, given the extensive and intensive cultivation of the Hungarian Plain since early modern times, surface evidence of earlier hypothetical nomadic routes most likely no longer exists to be discovered. The challenge of locating nomads archaeologically – together with the ever-present issue of politicized archaeology – led Roger Batty to significantly underutilize material evidence in *Rome and the Nomads*.<sup>304</sup> Batty conceived of archaeology as a potential way of positively identifying nomadic communities within the Danubian region, but concluded that the ephemeral nature of the evidence and polemical attitude of much twentieth century Balkan archaeology was too thorny an issue for him to tackle in a systematic way. I believe, however, that he was going about the question backwards. The ancient sources, as we have seen, are wont to characterize *all* the peoples beyond the Danube as nomads (with the possible exception of Dacians, as discussed in Chapter Two). Our job is to complicate this picture archaeologically as we have already done literarily. It may indeed be true that the archaeological record underrepresents nomadic peoples, but this is fine. Our task is not to somehow prove that nomadism didn't exist in the Danubian Borderland, for it surely did, but rather to illustrate through the material record that there were other systems of human economy in play as well, and that those systems were broad, old, and reflected periods of connectivity across the

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<sup>303</sup> See Cribb 1990, ch. 5 and Chang and Koster 1986 for thorough summaries of both earlier approaches to nomadic archaeology, and suggestions on how to proceed going forward. Both articles argue that identifying nomadic populations archaeologically should be possible, but that scholars have often focused on locating the most ephemeral evidence (shallow post-holes, perishable tent remains, etc.) rather than the more durable and permanent products of nomadic life (movement routes, stone corrals, ovens, etc.).

<sup>304</sup> For his justifications (in my opinion unsatisfactory), see Batty 2007, pp. 33, 50–52, 277–278.

river predating the Roman *limes*. Meanwhile, there is much that we can infer about archaeologically invisible nomadic subsistence by looking at the material evidence of settled habitation that does survive, particularly when done in dialogue with consideration of the natural environment.



Fig. 3.1 Important Roman-era Hungarian Plain settlements and Roman frontier sites.

### 3.3.2. Gyoma 133: a roof over your head

The first generation of Roman-era archaeology in the central Hungarian Plain (the so-called Sarmatian *barbaricum* between Pannonia and Dacia) focused almost exclusively on the evidence of burials, as exemplified by Mihály Párducz's three volume *A Szarmatakor Emlékei Magyarországon* [*Denkmäler der Sarmatenzeit Ungarns*], which remains an important resource to this day. Since the 1980s, however, archaeological efforts have also been devoted to the excavation and study of settlements within the region. The modernization of Hungary's transportation infrastructure in the

decades after the fall of the Iron Curtain, in particular, has led to a number of large rescue-excavations of Sarmatian settlements, most notably the site of Hajdúnánás-Fürjhalom-Dűlő in Hajdú-Bihar County,<sup>305</sup> and the site of Üllő, located just south-east of Budapest.<sup>306</sup> One of the most thoroughly published ‘Sarmatian’ settlements of the Roman-era Hungarian Plain is the site of Gyoma 133, located near the Körös River in south-eastern Hungary between the modern towns of Gyoma and Endrőd. The site, which was excavated from 1987 to 1992, revealed numerous domestic structures and also produced large corpora of ceramic and osteological materials, and will serve as our entry point into a larger discussion of the region’s archaeology.<sup>307</sup> In 2017, enough other Sarmatian sites have been excavated to suggest that Gyoma 133 is a fairly representative, if somewhat large, example of a mid-imperial (second-third centuries) settlement from the region of the Hungarian Plain. A total of 383 anthropogenic features were excavated at the site, covering several different time periods; the vast majority of the features, however, were dated to the Roman imperial period, roughly between 150 and 250 CE, based on well-established typologies of imported Roman tableware found at the site.<sup>308</sup> Taken together, the houses, ditches, wells, pits, ovens, and workshops of Gyoma 133 provide a detailed picture of a vibrant Sarmatian village which grew to its greatest extent and prosperity in the peaceful century following the Marcomannic Wars.

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<sup>305</sup> Márkus 2005.

<sup>306</sup> Kulcsár and Merai 2011.

<sup>307</sup> Vaday 1996.

<sup>308</sup> Vaday 1996B, pp. 13-14; Vaday 1996C, pp. 65, 134. A word of warning is required regarding chronology in this chapter. While I have tried to be as specific as possible when discussing individual sites, the reality is that most of the settlements of the Roman-era Hungarian Plain can only be roughly dated based on ceramic typologies and occasional coin finds. While some scholars (eg: Párducz and Vaday) have attempted to produce more detailed chronologies based on items of personal adornment from burials, these appear to me quite vague and unsatisfactory. Since our conversation deals mainly in broad regional and chronological strokes, I have not attempted to push these typologies too far. The problem is even worse when dealing with faunal corpora where published data almost always represents the entire collection from a given site, with no attempt at chronological division. When comparing between sites, I have had to accept that my picture can, at best, represent a general composite for the entire Roman period, that is, the first through fourth centuries CE.



Seventeen features at Gyoma 133 were identified as houses. These structures follow a fairly consistent architectural plan. Identified as houses by their compacted or plastered floors, all are partially subterranean, excavated 10–80 cm into the ground. Most of the houses are irregularly-oblong in plan with no indication of internal architectural divisions. They are of modest size, ranging from 1.92 x 2.2 m. (appx. 4.25 m.<sup>2</sup>) to 4.3 x 6.16 m. (appx. 26.5 m.<sup>2</sup>). Some of the houses preserve internal postholes, indicating wooden ridge-pole construction; external postholes are preserved in a few instances, but the excavators acknowledge that they may be underrepresented due to the removal of the site's upper strata by mechanical means.<sup>309</sup> The upper architecture of the posthole houses would most likely have been wood-framed with wattle-and-daub walls and thatched roofing.<sup>310</sup> Scattered adobe bricks were found at Gyoma 133, suggesting that some buildings may have been built with this material, but the number recovered and the prevalence of central post-holes suggest that these would have been a minority.<sup>311</sup> Standing architecture does not survive, but the preserved footprints and postholes combine to paint a clear picture of a village largely, if not entirely, made up of so-called *grubenhäuser*: semi-subterranean houses known from many areas of the European Iron Age.<sup>312</sup> The houses of Gyoma 133 are scattered throughout an excavated area of about hectares following no observable organization scheme, although the whole ancient settlement may have been significantly larger.<sup>313</sup> Other domestic features, such as wells, ovens, and storage pits

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<sup>309</sup> Vaday 1996C, pp. 65–66, 157. The houses are features nos. 36, 52, 65, 90, 124, 128, 164, 206, 220, 222, 229, 284, 295, 317, 349, 361, and 365. The depth of the floors below the ancient surface level appears to vary significantly, but the majority fall into the 20–30 cm. range.

<sup>310</sup> Wells 1999, pp. 57–58.

<sup>311</sup> Vaday 1996C, p.157.

<sup>312</sup> Wells 1999, pp. 35–36, 57–58, 171; Cattani 1994. The excavated floors may have been partially covered with boards to create a subterranean storage pit for food preservation.

<sup>313</sup> Vaday 1996B, p.12. The excavation report frustratingly does not provide any definitive statistics on the size of the inhabited area. The best data available states that the excavated area “extended 170 metres east–west and 160 metres north–south,” although based on the site plan, only about two-thirds of this rectangle was actually excavated, perhaps about

lie scattered throughout the excavated area with a greater overall density in the southern half of the site.<sup>314</sup> This section also contains most of the site's industrial features: elongated ovens of uncertain function, and irregularly-excavated workshop areas, some of which revealed evidence of metalworking.<sup>315</sup> The overall picture is of a chaotic, nucleated settlement of fairly dense habitation. The lack of graves or identifiable agricultural lands indicates that these aspects of daily life were conducted outside the inhabited village core.

### 3.3.3. Sarmatian settlements: larger patterns and potential origins

Gyoma 133 was hardly alone in the micro-region around the Körös river. Extensive state-sponsored field surveys of the 42 km.<sup>2</sup> region surrounding the twin towns of Gyoma and Endrőd in the second half of the twentieth century revealed the presence of 226 settlements, indicating continuous, or near-continuous habitation of this part of the Great Hungarian Plain from the Neolithic through modern times.<sup>316</sup> In addition to Gyoma 133, the Gyomaendrőd Microregion Project, led by Sándor Bökönyi from 1984 to 1992, oversaw excavations at a number of the identified sites, uncovering another Sarmatian-period settlement at Endrőd 170, which revealed similar domestic and storage structures, although on a smaller scale.<sup>317</sup>

#### ※ *Central Hungarian Plain*

Looking beyond the Gyoma-Endrőd region, evidence for nucleated settlements from the Roman/Sarmatian period appears throughout the *barbaricum* between Pannonia and Dacia. The

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15,000 m.<sup>2</sup> The excavated area, however, does not reflect the entire scope of ancient habitation, so the actual village may have been significantly larger than 1.5 hectares.

<sup>314</sup> Vaday 1996C, p. 105.

<sup>315</sup> Vaday 1996C, pp. 78-82, 105.

<sup>316</sup> Bökönyi 1992, p. iii,

<sup>317</sup> Jankovich et al. 1992, pp. 99-120.

largest known Sarmatian settlement was excavated near the village of Üllő in the south-east suburbs of Budapest. Excavations of only one fifth of the survey-identified settlement area revealed around 8000 anthropogenic features including numerous semi-subterranean houses, a 500-meter defensive ditch, and nearly 50 pottery kilns. The proximity of the site to the Danube and the Roman city of Aquincum on the western bank may account for the unusual size of the site and help explain its robust ceramics industry (to be discussed further below), but the material and architectural remains place the settlement at Üllő securely in a Sarmatian milieu. Aside from scale, none of the major aspects of the Üllő site are unique.<sup>318</sup>

### ※ *Upper Tisza Region*

Moving, north and east, we turn to the upper Tisza-Someş valley, an important transitional zone between the north-west *limes* of Roman Dacia and the main body of the Hungarian Plain. Here, a major Sarmatian/Roman period site was identified between the neighboring towns of Csengersima and Petea (on either side of the Hungarian-Romanian border). Extensive excavations took place during renovations to the customs checkpoint in the late 1990s, uncovering over 1000 features dating from the Roman period, including the expected semi-subterranean houses and several pottery workshops and kilns.<sup>319</sup> A similar settlement was excavated at Beregsurány some 40 km. north in the low hills on the other side of the Tisza floodplain, revealing the usual mixture of domestic structures, workshops, and kilns, as well as elongated kilns/ovens similar to those found at Gyoma 133 far to the south.<sup>320</sup> The Csengersima and Beregsurány sites are far from isolated. Indeed, the entire upper-Tisza basin is dotted with the remains of similar settlements from the

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<sup>318</sup> Kulcsár and Merai 2011, p. 61.

<sup>319</sup> Gindele and Istvánovits 2011, p. 85.

<sup>320</sup> Istvánovits 1997, pp. 717-720.

Roman period, as well as earlier and later eras. Sites typically cluster in the higher ground outlining the edges of the Tisza floodplain and the smaller, flood-prone belts flanking the many tributaries that crisscross this region: a zone that served as a major movement corridor between the main body of the Hungarian Plain to the south-west and the northern portion of Roman Dacia to the east.<sup>321</sup>

※ *The Banat*

A similar settlement situation can be reconstructed for the Banat, the region adjacent to the main Hungarian Plain in the south-east and presently divided between Hungary, Serbia, and Romania. Because the bulk of the region falls within Romania, most (Romanian) scholars studying the region have interpreted their findings in dialog with trends observed in the (Romanian) Transylvanian Highlands to the east - that is, in Dacia - rather than the (Hungarian) plains to the west, although, topographically, much of the Banat can be seen as an extension of the Hungarian Plain, partially enclosed to the east by the foothills of the Southern Carpathian and Apuseni Mountains.<sup>322</sup> Recent work by Micle and Grumeza has begun to bring the significant body of Romanian literature on settlement archaeology from the Romanian Banat into dialog with the Hungarian world of Sarmatian archaeology, and if we manage not to be blinded by nationalistic ethnic ascriptions, it appears that the settlements in this region just beyond the south-western edge of Dacia bear numerous similarities to those found in the Hungarian Plain and Upper Tisza regions.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>321</sup> Istvánovits 1997, p. 719, Gindele and Istvánovits 2011, p. 87.

<sup>322</sup> Grumeza 2015, pp. 76-77.

<sup>323</sup> Micle 2011, p. 179; Grumeza 2015, *passim*. A remonitory note seems prudent at this juncture considering the nationalist archaeologies being used here and throughout this chapter. Just as the Romanians have been too quick to cry 'Dacian!' or 'Daco-Roman!' when interpreting Roman-era archaeology within their ambit (eg: Benea 1996), so too have Hungarians been eager to label their material from beyond the *limites* as Sarmatian (eg: everything we've already looked at!). My use of the term runs parallel to the traditional Hungarian use but - and this is worth restating - I use it for very different reasons. As discussed above, this project largely rejects the ethnic-ascription models underlying Romanian and Hungarian identifications of sites and artifacts as 'Dacian' or 'Sarmatian.' I use these terms to reflect Roman conceptions of the peoples and regions under investigation (eg: Roman writers identified the inhabitants of this area as Sarmatians). As we will discuss

First, like the Upper Tisza region, the Banat was densely populated. 351 settlements dated to the second through fifth centuries have been identified through survey work, although only a small fraction have since been excavated. While some of the identified settlements cluster along the Mureș, Timiș, Caraș, and other important rivers of the Banat, the densest concentrations are located in the plains of western Banat.<sup>324</sup> Among excavated settlements, multiple organizational schemes are known,<sup>325</sup> but the basic toolkit of domestic structures remains constant. Houses are usually semi-subterranean (although Mare identifies two categories based on depth<sup>326</sup>), irregularly oblong in shape, of modest size (appx. 10–14 m.<sup>2</sup>) with no or few internal divisions, and built of post-and-beam construction. This is essentially the same domestic architecture seen at Gyoma 133 and throughout the greater Hungarian Plain. Storage pits, ovens, kilns, wells, and encircling ditches round out the usual domestic assemblage in the Banat, as in the rest of the region.<sup>327</sup> Reconstructing the group (read: ethnic) identities of the people who once inhabited these settlements remains extremely controversial in the scholarship,<sup>328</sup> a topic we will only partially weigh in on below, but the basic identification of the ancient Banaters as settled people, as opposed to nomads seems clear.<sup>329</sup>

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below, the actual ethnic makeup of the people of the Roman-era Hungarian Plain was complex and, in all likelihood, changeable and highly unstable. We will mostly avoid trying to untangle this mess of internal identities and focus instead on how the Romans perceived the people beyond the river.

<sup>324</sup> Grumeza 2015, pp. 75–77; Mare 2004, p. 28.

<sup>325</sup> Grumeza 2015, p. 78. Eg: Houses are sometimes situated in rows, sometimes in clusters; storage and workshop features sometimes cluster around houses and sometimes are relegated to the settlement periphery.

<sup>326</sup> Mare 2004, p. 137.

<sup>327</sup> Grumeza 2015, pp. 80–81.

<sup>328</sup> The point of Grumeza's survey of the sites is to highlight the multiple cultural influences and problematize earlier suggestions of a single dominant element, usually identified as Dacian or Daco-Roman (Grumeza 2015, *passim*).

<sup>329</sup> Grumeza 2015, p. 78. It is worth noting that the excavated settlements in the Banat show little evidence of multi-phase occupation, suggesting that villages migrated every generation or so. This phenomenon is not the same as seasonal nomadism, or even continuous short-range transhumance.

### ※ *Regional Trends*

From our extremely elementary survey of settlements, we see strong evidence for basic similarities in community organization throughout the Sarmatian *barbaricum* lying between Dacia and Pannonia. Settlements are nucleated but lack any formal organization scheme. Houses cluster in different ways at different sites, but are nearly always of similar design: modest, single-room, semi-subterranean structures with post-and-beam superstructures finished in wattle and daub, and roofed with archaeologically-invisible material, most likely some sort of thatching. In other words, they match quite well with the *tuguria* of Ammianus' Limigantes narrative, and the burning barbarian houses on the Column of Marcus Aurelius.<sup>330</sup>

Storage pits are numerous at the settlements, suggesting not only a diet at least partially reliant on stored agricultural products – charred grains have been found in multiple such pits in Banat settlements<sup>331</sup> – but also a society that was sedentary enough to require mass storage from year to year. Whether some or all of the population engaged in nomadic livestock herding some or all of the time, the villages of Sarmatia clearly served as permanent bases for at least part of the region's people. The longevity of the Sarmatian villages appears variable, and the small percentage known from actual excavation makes generalizing difficult. Some broad observations can be ventured, none the less. All of the Banat settlements surveyed by Grumeza were single-phase sites, and even Gyoma 133 only appears to have lasted for about three generations. Although clearly following an agricultural subsistence strategy, this was still a society that moved to greener pastures after

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<sup>330</sup> A.M. 17.13.12.

<sup>331</sup> Grumeza 2015, p. 79. The pollen profile of the soils from Gyoma 133 also indicates cultivation of cereals (wheat and barley) there (Medzihradzky 1996, p. 449).

exploiting a particular location for some number of years or decades. The feasibility of such a lifestyle suggests a relatively low overall population for the region, a topic we will return to below.

Finally, while it would be difficult to characterize any of these villages as wealthy based on the scant remains of luxury goods or ‘high-tech’ items like blown glass or sophisticated metalworking (more on this below), certain Sarmatian villages do show significant evidence for industry, usually in the form of ceramic production (eg: Üllő and Csengersima, but also see below), but also metalworking (eg: Gyoma 133, possibly Beregsurány). The location of the major ceramics centers near the Roman frontiers and along major axes of movement (for Üllő, the major Roman road across the Hungarian Plain from Aquincum to Dacia, and for Csengersima the Upper Tisza-Someş river corridor between northern Dacia and the upper Hungarian Plain) suggest that here, at least, the local population was closely engaged with regional networks of exchange, a topic to which we will return below.

#### **3.3.4. Eating like a Sarmatian: what’s for dinner at Gyoma 133?<sup>332</sup>**

The excavations at Gyoma 133 recovered a large corpus of faunal remains, the vast majority of which consisted of bone fragments from four domestic species: cattle (*Bos taurus*), pigs (*Sus domesticus*), sheep (*Ovis aries*), and goats (*Capra hircus*).<sup>333</sup> These four species represent the dominant

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<sup>332</sup> The following discussion relies on the relative proportions of different species within faunal assemblages from various parts of Europe and Asia. Unfortunately, there is no perfect way to quantify such material. Calculating a minimum number of individuals based on the presence of certain diagnostic skeletal features is, perhaps, the most accurate method, but it skews wildly when employed on small assemblages, and is, at any rate, rarely provided in the data sets used below. Following Groot (2016, p. 72) and King (1999, p. 168), I have counted all bone fragments diagnostic at the species level in order to produce the numbers in this section. This is the data most often provided in the articles used here.

<sup>333</sup> Horses (*Equus caballus*), dogs (*Canis familiaris*), cats (*Felis catus*), and chickens (*Gallus domesticus*) were also recovered in lesser numbers, as well as a small number of bones from a diverse selection of wild creatures (Bartosiewicz 1996, pp. 370–377).

food-producing mammalian domesticates in most past (and present) Eurasian societies,<sup>334</sup> and the proportions of each species can tell us much about the subsistence practices of a population. When we compare faunal assemblages from different areas and periods, we can begin to reconstruct regional and temporal patterns of food consumption and subsistence as well as – under certain circumstances – networks of cultural and material exchange between regional groups. Together, the evidence for habitation surveyed above, and the faunal remains from Gyoma 133 provide us with two pillars upon which we can reconstruct the general lifeways of the people living in the Roman-era Hungarian Plain.

※ *Cattle* represent the largest percentage of the faunal remains from Gyoma 133 (47 percent of the total bone assemblage by fragment number, and 60.5 percent of the four main domesticates). The skeletal material describes a fairly homogenous herd of small-medium sized (withers height appx. 110–125 cm.) stock, suggesting local origins with limited genetic influence from larger, ‘improved’ Italian breeds. Based on the percentage of highly gracile specimens among the preserved metacarpals, Bartosiewicz identifies a herd composition dominated by female animals. Epiphyseal fusion was advanced, even in most late-fusing bones, suggesting that a majority of the cattle at Gyoma 133 were slaughtered as mature animals.<sup>335</sup> These features of the bovine skeletal assemblage can tentatively suggest how the people of Gyoma 133 used their stock. The over-representation of females, together with a mature slaughter-pattern suggests the animals killed at the site had

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<sup>334</sup> Pigs are only used for their meat, but are extremely prolific and can live well off little more than domestic trash such that they are common in many settled cultures. The other three species are multi-purpose domesticates, capable of being slaughtered for meat and milked for dairy products. Cows are also important as draught animals, while sheep produce valuable fiber for cloth manufacture. Goats, which produce a lesser-quality fiber, lack a clear third function and this is reflected in their usual lesser value compared to sheep and cows. They make up for it, somewhat, with their ability to live in harsher, more arid conditions (Khazanov 1994, pp. 26–27).

<sup>335</sup> Bartosiewicz 1996, pp. 370–371.



previously been used for dairy and breeding purposes. The underrepresentation of young animals is extremely important, strongly hinting that the inhabitants sold or exchanged stock –particularly male steers – at markets located away from the settlement. A pattern of purely internal consumption might still retain maturely-slaughtered females, but we would expect to find even more remains from young animals, killed for meat at one or two years of age.<sup>336</sup>

※ *Pigs*, despite being an important domesticate in many parts of Europe (see below), do not feature prominently in the faunal material from Gyoma 133, making up only about ten percent of the total faunal assemblage and 13.5 percent of the major domesticate quartet.<sup>337</sup> Of the material conducive to age-determination, we find a high percentage of juvenile and sub-adult animals. This slaughter pattern is in keeping with an animal exploited exclusively for meat.<sup>338</sup>

※ *Sheep and Goats (Caprinae)* must, by necessity, be dealt with together because of the great difficulty in distinguishing between the species based on skeletal evidence. While a majority of the 2,345 sheep-goat (caprinae) bones recovered from Gyoma 133 could not be so differentiated, a mere 48 specimens could be definitively identified as goat. This strongly suggests, but does not prove, that the vast majority of the caprine bones come from sheep.<sup>339</sup> Within the assemblage, sheep/goats account for 20 percent of the total and 26 percent of the major quartet.<sup>340</sup> While of

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<sup>336</sup> Groot 2016, p. 19. In particular, dairy cattle must be bred regularly in order to assure a steady flow of milk, meaning new calves would be an annual feature. Some of the female calves would be earmarked for future dairy use, but the remainder, together with nearly all the male offspring would only be useful for meat, since only very small numbers of new draught oxen would be required each year to replace deaths from old age. In a fully self-contained society, we would expect to see these ‘surplus’ steers and heifers consumed, and their bones deposited. The lack of young animals, then, strongly suggests that Gyoma did not exist as a self-contained community and got rid of their extra cattle somewhere other than the stew pot.

<sup>337</sup> Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2015, p. 53, table 3.

<sup>338</sup> Bartosiewicz 1996, p. 372.

<sup>339</sup> Bartosiewicz 1996, pp. 371–372.

<sup>340</sup> Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2015, p. 53, table 3.

secondary importance among the domesticates, these percentages indicate that sheep/goats were still of major importance to the people of Gyoma 133. The slaughter-age profile shows a fairly balanced mix of mature and young animals,<sup>341</sup> indicating that sheep were exploited equally for their meat, milk, and fleeces, and also that the majority of the settlement's flock was probably consumed locally rather than driven to market outside the community.

※ *The Other Domesticates* present in the Gyoma 133 assemblage in significant numbers are horses and dogs. Horse remains account for 18.6 percent of the total faunal assemblage meaning they were a common feature of the livestock profile.<sup>342</sup> The age range for the equine remains shows a surprising breadth, including newborn, young, and elderly specimens. From this we can suggest that horses were – at least occasionally – exploited for their meat at Gyoma 133, although transportation would still have been their primary purpose within the community.<sup>343</sup> Dogs represent only 3.7 percent of the faunal assemblage,<sup>344</sup> and while these individuals were large enough for use as herding animals,<sup>345</sup> their small numbers compared to horse remains can perhaps indicate that management of the community's cattle, sheep, and goats was mainly done by mounted riders rather than by humans on foot using herding dogs.<sup>346</sup> Taken as a whole, the size of the recovered faunal assemblage from Gyoma 133 (9,695 identifiable bone fragments in total) indicates a community

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<sup>341</sup> Bartosiewicz 1996, p. 371. The same multi-use husbandry applies here, for sheep and goats as discussed above for cattle.

<sup>342</sup> Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2015, p. 53, table 3. This is a slightly lower percentage than the 19.5% seen on the table in Appendix 3.2 where we are only comparing horse numbers to those of cattle, pigs, sheep, and goats. Dogs and other rare animals are left out of the analysis for simplicity and ease of comparison between sites.

<sup>343</sup> Bartosiewicz 1996, pp. 372–373. Horses may also have been exploited for their milk, a practice common among later Eurasian nomadic societies (Bruun 2006, pp. 58–60), although there is no clear evidence to suggest this, one way or another, based on the faunal remains alone. We will revisit this question below.

<sup>344</sup> Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2015, p. 53, table 3.

<sup>345</sup> Bartosiewicz 1996, pp. 373–374.

<sup>346</sup> These numbers are roughly comparable to the canine remains from other Roman-era settlements of the Hungarian Plain. Likewise, large herding-type breeds are also known elsewhere (Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2015, pp. 61–62).

which placed great importance on animal husbandry, particularly the raising of cattle and sheep. Both of these chief domesticates were exploited for multiple purposes (meat, milk, and traction for cattle, meat, milk, and fleece for sheep), and while there is evidence to suggest that cattle were traded abroad, the more balanced slaughter-age profile of produced by the sheep remains points towards mainly internal consumption.

※ *Other 'Sarmatian' Sites*

Gyoma 133 provides a good beginning point for a broader study of settlement and subsistence in the Roman-era Hungarian Plain because of the size of the excavated area and the detail of its publication, but in order for our findings there to assume any real meaning, they must be compared to other contemporary sites. Our survey of settlement architecture and organization has already painted Gyoma 133 as a fairly typical village among the people Romans identified as Sarmatians; a survey of faunal assemblages from other Roman-era Sarmatian sites further strengthens this impression. For simplicity of visualization and ease of comparison with other existing regional analyses,<sup>347</sup> we will focus on the relative proportions of the three major classes of domesticates: cattle, pigs, and sheep/goats, although we should keep the relative frequency - or paucity - of horse remains in mind as well.<sup>348</sup> Of the eighteen surveyed Sarmatian settlements, cattle remains are most numerous in all but two, represent clear majorities (55% or higher) at nine sites, and hover around 50 percent (45-55%) in the remaining seven cases. Gyoma 133's 60.5% appears towards the higher end

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<sup>347</sup> Most notably, the work of Anthony King who has conducted extensive research on the evidence for animal husbandry and diet in the Roman West. King (1984) introduced the triplot approach to visualizing the percentage relationships between cattle, pigs, and sheep/goats in faunal assemblages. This method was further adopted by Groot (2016) and will be used here, as well, as it allows for easy visualization of regional clustering in faunal breakdowns.

<sup>348</sup> See **Appendix 3.1** for a complete table of the data discussed in the following sections, including references. See **Appendix 3.2** for the relative percentage of horse remains within the settlements of the Hungarian Plain.

of the series, but hardly at the extreme. The picture here is clear: with the exception of a couple of outliers, cattle were the most important domestic species at Roman-era settlements throughout the Hungarian Plain.

Sheep and goats dominate in both of the outlying samples mentioned above (52.4 and 57%), and represent large minorities in the rest of the assemblages, ranging between 21.8% and 45.5% with only two low outliers under twenty percent.<sup>349</sup> Once again, the trend is very clear: sheep and goats are clearly of secondary importance among the village communities of the Hungarian Plain, but that secondary position is still one of great importance, even crossing over into dominance in two instances. Here, too, Gyoma 133's 26% falls well within the expected range. Pigs, meanwhile, are the clear losers among the region's domesticates. They never dominate in the recovered faunal assemblages and only break twenty percent in two instances. Of the remaining sixteen assemblages, pigs are present in single-digit percentages in six cases while the other ten samples range from 10.9% to 19% with more sites towards the lower end of that spectrum. The relative percentages of the three main domesticate groups can be visualized on a three-axis 'triplot,' with each axis representing the percentage of cattle, pigs, or sheep/goats. Among the assemblages from the Roman-era Hungarian Plain, we see a clear clustering with the only two significant sheep-heavy outliers.

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<sup>349</sup> Although the site of Szirmabesenyő produced a mere twelve percent caprine remains, and Örménykút only 18.6%, this is less anomalous when one takes into account the overwhelming dominance of cattle bones at the two sites (73.6% and 70.5%).

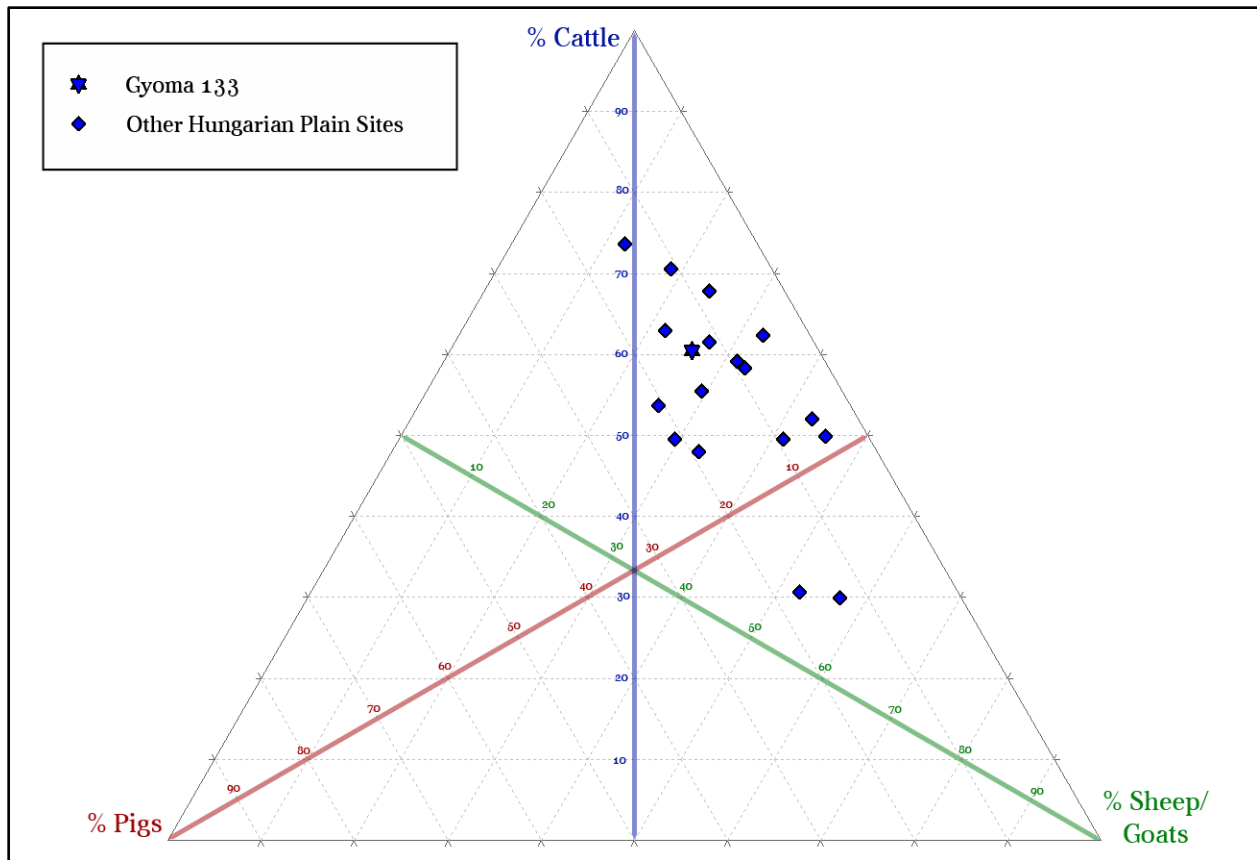


Fig. 3.2 Triplot showing proportion of cattle, pig, and sheep/goat bones from Roman-era Hungarian Plain assemblages.

### 3.3.5. Food and shelter: the Iron Age background

The patterns of animal-keeping observed at Gyoma 133 and the other ‘Sarmatian’ settlements from the Hungarian Plain clearly describe a settled, agricultural society, but one, perhaps, with some roots in a nomadic past. Permanent domestic architecture, storage facilities for agricultural surpluses, and workshops for the production of ceramics, metal items, and other skilled crafts all point towards a sedentary population inhabiting Gyoma 133 and the other Sarmatian villages. The cattle-heavy faunal assemblage further supports this picture of peasant society. Cattle-dominant husbandry is a common, although not universal feature of Iron Age Northern European subsistence, from

neighboring Pannonia, through Gaul and Germany, to the British Isles.<sup>350</sup> Such patterns are usually labeled as ‘Celtic,’ a problematic term, but not wholly inappropriate if used in a weak sense only to refer to people influenced by La Tène material culture, which is well documented from Britain to Transylvania during the Iron Age.<sup>351</sup> The Iron Age, ‘Celtic’ pattern of animal exploitation seen here is broad to the point of almost appearing bimodal. While a fairly sizeable number of sites display pigs as the dominant domesticate,<sup>352</sup> cattle are important in all the assemblages and dominant in a majority of the cases.<sup>353</sup> The Roman-era Sarmatian data set falls squarely within this cattle-dominant majority of the Iron Age faunal assemblages.

Nomadic husbandry patterns, by contrast, rarely feature cattle as the dominant species within the Eurasian steppe zone. Reliable faunal assemblage data from *ancient* steppe societies is virtually non-existent. Not only have most excavation efforts in the Pontic Steppe focused on graves (kurgans and cemeteries), but even locating sites inhabited for long enough to generate a large faunal sample, representative of actual husbandry practices has proven extremely challenging. At the mercy

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<sup>350</sup> For Pannonia, Bökönyi 1984, Lyublyanovics 2010; for Northern Gaul (Batavia), Groot 2016; for the Rhineland, Gaul in general, and Britain, King 1984, 1999, 2001.

<sup>351</sup> The distribution of ‘Celtic’ material culture across most of continental Europe and the British Isles has proven difficult to interpret once the old Kossinna-esque orthodoxy was challenged in the later twentieth century. We have a far-flung material culture that appears to match attested historical migrations fairly closely, which led to early assumptions of large-scale Celtic migrations. The current task for scholars of this material is to step back from the strong ethnic ascription theories previously used in order to highlight a more reasonable model of small-medium scale migration and broad cultural diffusion and mixing. See Wells 1999, chs. 2 and 3 for a survey of Celtic/La Tène archaeology, the state of the debate, and the road forward.

<sup>352</sup> See King 2001, pp. 6-7.

<sup>353</sup> See King 1984 and 2001 for a breakdown of the Iron Age assemblages by region. The distribution does not appear to follow regional lines with two possible exceptions. The most pig-heavy assemblages come from Gaul, and all of the sites from that regions produced assemblages where pigs dominated to one extent or another. The Iron Age sites from Batavia, by contrast, are all extremely cattle-dominated (Groot 2016). The remainder, from Britain, Germany, and the Danubian region fall somewhere in between. This lack of clear regional clustering probably reflects the decentralized and fluid nature of Iron Age European society and need not concern us overly. The main point to take away from this is that in the majority of cases, cattle represent the most common domesticate. This is in contrast to the situation in Roman Italy where pigs always represent a strong majority (King 2001, pp. 2-4).

of the evidence, the leading experts on ancient steppe societies have turned to ethnographic parallels from current and recent nomadic societies of the Eurasian Steppe.<sup>354</sup>

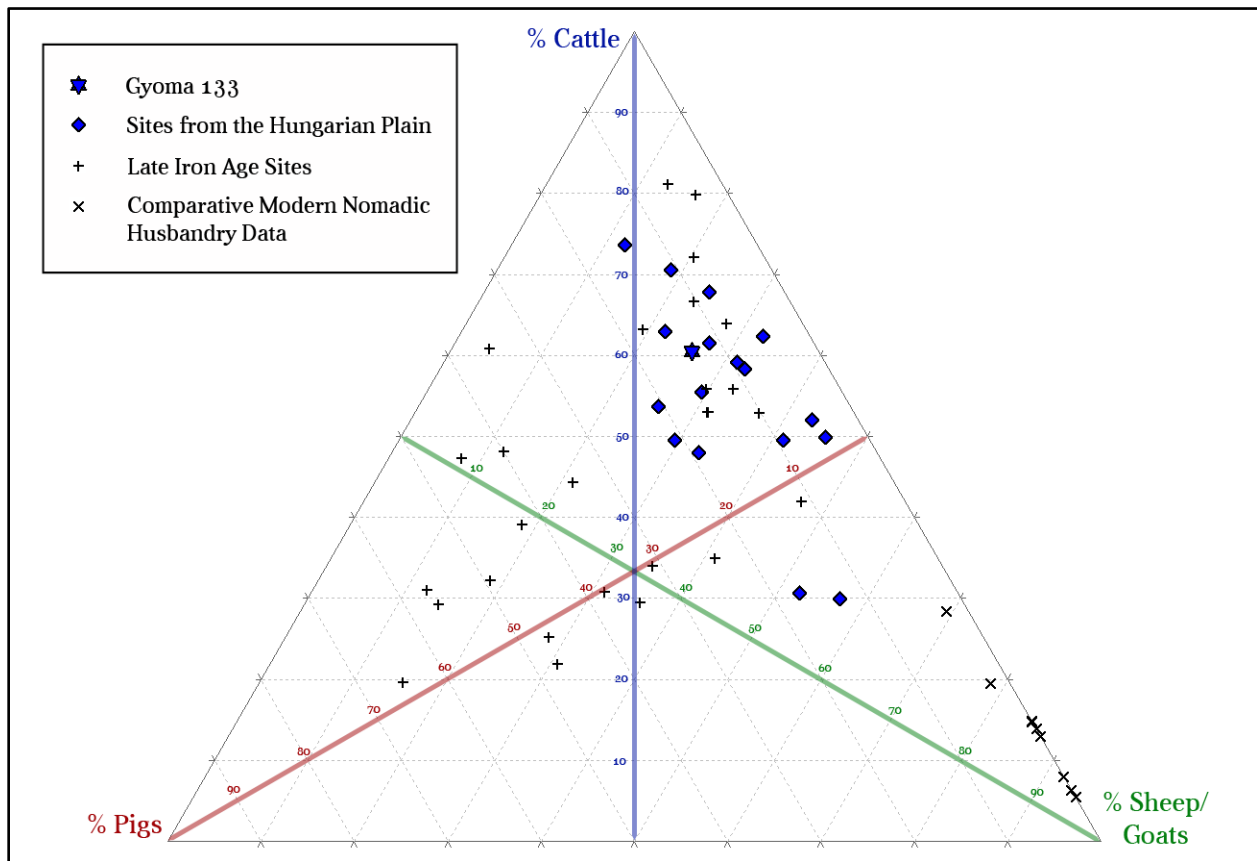


Fig. 3.3 Triplot showing species proportions from recent steppe societies in comparison with Iron Age and Roman-era Hungarian Plain faunal assemblages.

The picture that emerges is very clear: among nearly all the Eurasian nomads for whom we have data, sheep are – and always have been – vastly dominant in their herds. Cattle are usually

<sup>354</sup> On the difficulties of tracking down steppe assemblages, see Bartosiewicz and Gál 2010 for a revealing study. The authors aim to look for ‘Scythian’ (ie: steppe) influences in faunal assemblages from the Hungarian Plain. Not only must they limit themselves to assemblages from settled communities, because there are no comparable corpora able to be clearly linked to fully nomadic communities, but they also fail to cite any actual steppe comparanda, again, because such material does not exist.

For the comparative ethnographic approach, see Khazanov 1994, ch. 1; Golden 2003, pp. 5–6. The reasonable justification is made most clearly by Khazanov, the gist of which is that nomadic subsistence in the absence of modern technology is quite homogenous in its livestock profiles based on the underlying environmental constraints of specific climatic zones. Pre-modern technological advancement can do little to increase the number of livestock a region can support because of the continuous mobility. While this logic is a bit environmentally-deterministic, it appears to be borne out in Khazanov’s comparative analyses.

present as a small, but important minority in nomadic herds, and may have been somewhat more important in the past when ox-drawn wagons seem to have been the preferred means of household mobility as opposed to more recent preference for pack animals, such as camels. The climate and topography of most Eurasian steppe zones, however, makes it challenging for a nomadic society to follow a cattle-dominant form of husbandry because cattle require much more water than either sheep or goats. Pigs, meanwhile, play virtually no role in nomadic husbandry because they cannot be herded over long distances.<sup>355</sup>

### **3.3.6. Nomad and farmer**

While it would be ill-advised to use the faunal assemblage data on their own to argue for a particular ethnic or cultural makeup of the Roman-era settlements of the Hungarian Plain, the patterns of domestication seen here are nonetheless revealing of an important general trend. The people who inhabited the region's settled villages had foodways that were much more like those of the preceding European Iron Age than what we would expect to be the husbandry and culinary habits of nomadic Sarmatian immigrants from the Pontic Steppe. This can suggest three potential scenarios. First, this evidence could indicate that while nomadic and settled people both lived in the region of the Hungarian Plain, they kept apart from each other, practicing different, largely separate forms of subsistence. In this scenario, the material thus far reviewed would reflect only the remains of the settled population. The faunal remains of the nomads, by this model, must lie scattered across

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<sup>355</sup> Cribb 1990, pp. 27-34; Barfield 1993, pp. 136-140; Khazanov 1994, pp. 69-84; Kradin 2015, pp. 47-53. A visual comparison of the feces of the three species makes the water-requirements point abundantly clear. The water content of fresh cow manure is much greater than in sheep excrement, which in turn is wetter than the pellet-like goat droppings.



the regions between settled communities where we can assume the hypothetical nomadic communities held sway.<sup>356</sup>

A second interpretation of the evidence would be a model of mass immigration followed by rapid acculturation and sedentarization. In this case, we would posit a high degree of interaction between nomadic Sarmatian immigrants and existing Iron Age farming communities in the Hungarian Plain, with the bulk of the nomadic newcomers settling down and merging with existing populations of agriculturalists. This model would require a power-imbalance in favor of the settled community such that settled life and adoption of existing cultural practices (at least within the realms of food and shelter) would have been appealing to the newcomers. While such an outcome is not impossible, it would buck the trend of usual power dynamics between settled and nomadic communities. With their greater mobility and powerful equestrian military, steppe nomads have usually come out on top in hostile interactions with settled peoples throughout premodern times.<sup>357</sup> Even if we discard the notion of hostile relations between nomad and peasant in favor of some more cooperative form of interaction, we would expect some significant additional factor to be in play in order to trigger mass-sedentarization and acculturation. The ecological limits of the Hungarian Plain when compared to the vast Pontic Steppe might serve as such a catalyst, but only if both the incoming population were much larger than what the non-cultivated parts of the Hungarian Plain could support, *and* emigration back to the greater steppe was also not a feasible option. In our case,

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<sup>356</sup> Cribb 1990, p. 26. C. labels this type of society a 'dimorphic state' or 'dimorphic chiefdom.' It is characterized by one ruler, or ruling elite with hegemony over both a nomadic/semi-nomadic population and a sedentary, agricultural population. Levels of control and interaction between the sectors could vary, and while in theory the ruler could come from either sector, historical cases nearly always show rulers whose background and power base comes from the nomadic sector.

<sup>357</sup> Cribb 1990, p. 26; Golden 2003, pp. 16-20; Kradin 2015, pp. 56-59.

while movement back and forth between the Hungarian Plain and the Pontic Steppe would have been fairly free prior to the annexation of Dacia, Trajan's annexations resulted in greater Roman control over the Iron Gates/Cerna-Timiş connection point between the north/west and south/east divisions of the Danubian Basin, severely limiting future freedom of movement.

The third possible scenario involves a more equitable merging of the two hypothetical population groups. In this model, perhaps prompted by diminished grazing land and/or a desire to integrate into existing power and economic networks, immigrant Iazyges would intermarry with existing settled communities but not wholly abandon their nomadic ways. Were this the case, we might expect the development of a hybrid, semi-nomadic society with some members of the community engaged in agriculture and sedentary animal husbandry and others pursuing some form of limited nomadic transhumance, with the region's settled villages serving as stable population and resource bases. There are plenty of ethnographic and historical examples of this kind of hybrid society. In some cases different clans or families within the community have permanent roles as farmers or herdsman, with ties of intermarriage and exchange ensuring continued symbiosis between the two divisions. In other cases, individual families or kinship groups each contain nomadic and sedentary elements with blood ties ensuring continued cooperation between the subsistence divisions. In some such societies, the nomad/farmer division is stable and hard to transgress, while in others, individuals or families may transition from one role to another - sometimes multiple times - over the course of a lifetime.<sup>358</sup> Were we to posit such a hybrid society for the population of the Hungarian Plain, we would want to look for material elements reflecting both steppe and Iron Age,

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<sup>358</sup> Cribb 1990, p. 25.

‘Celtic’ origins within individual settlements and burial grounds. Moreover, to move beyond evidence of cultural exchange to a model of nomadic-sedentary hybridity, we would expect to find some traces of steppe subsistence practices within the settled communities, even as traditional sedentary ways predominated. Looking more closely at the evidence for subsistence from Gyoma 133 and other Sarmatian settlements we find some intriguingly suggestive details, although the picture remains far from clear.

First, when the Sarmatian faunal data are plotted against contemporaneous assemblages from neighboring Pannonia, Dacia, and Moesia, it becomes clear that the people of the Hungarian Plain ate more mutton and less pork than the inhabitants of the surrounding Roman provinces.

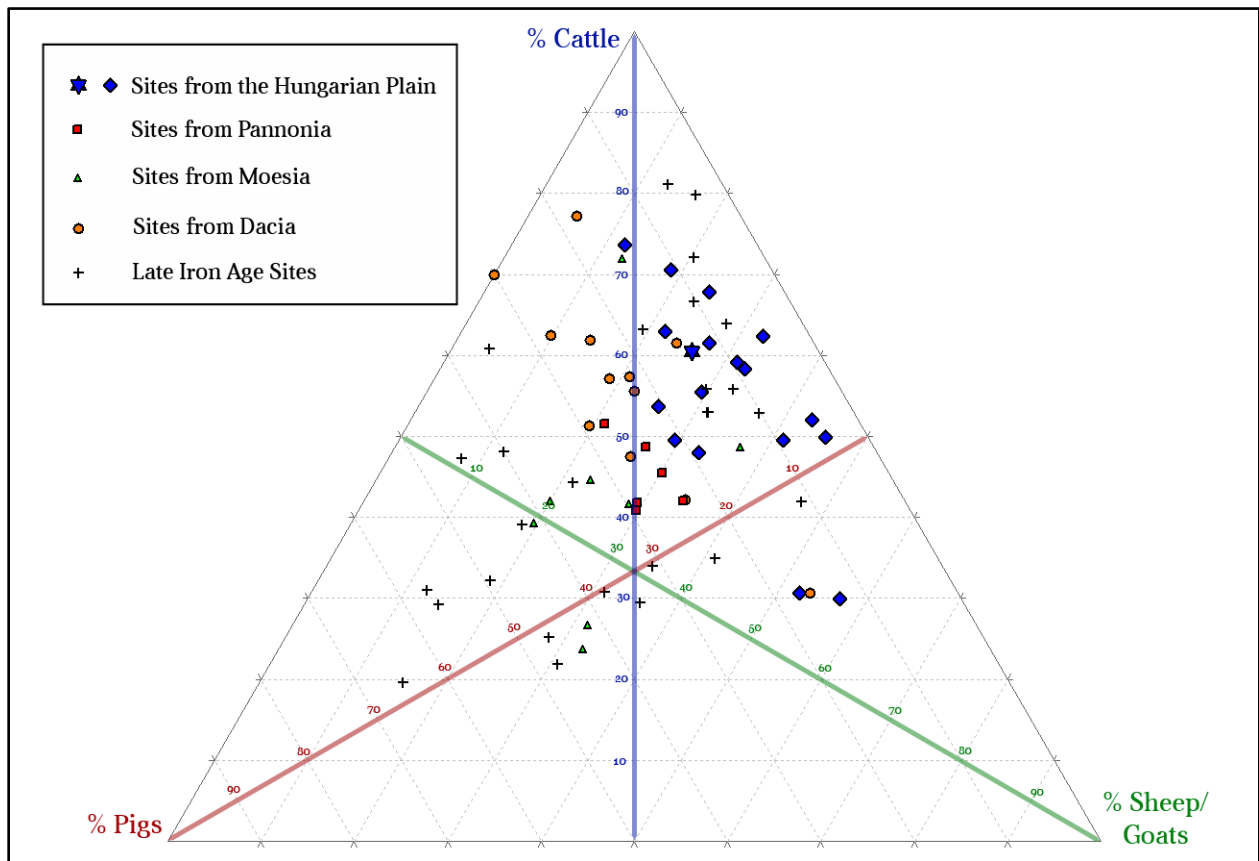


Fig. 3.4 Triplot illustrating the faunal patterns from the Hungarian Plain and surrounding Roman provinces.

The differences in percentage are not dramatic, but the pattern emerges clearly enough. While the relatively cattle-poor pattern observed in the Moesian material may indicate the influence of a Hellenic pattern of animal consumption,<sup>359</sup> the Dacian and Pannonian assemblages represent Roman influences overlaid on essentially the same Northern European, Iron Age substrate postulated for the Hungarian Plain. This is exactly what we would expect given the connected nature of the Middle Danube Basin before the imposition of the Roman *limes*.

Looking more closely, the fact that we see a fairly clear division between the Sarmatian and Pannonian/Dacian material along pig-sheep lines suggests that something in the cultural history of the provinces vs. the *barbaricum* pushed Roman and Sarmatian populations towards slightly different husbandry patterns sometime *after* the establishment of the *limes*. While the legacy of Roman Italy's pig-dominated diet may partially be to blame, this influence should not be overestimated. King's exhaustive surveys of faunal assemblages from across the Roman world clearly indicate that in the Northern European provinces, it was the Roman military diet which exerted the strongest influence, and that pattern - characterized by high levels of beef consumption with relatively equal minorities of pork and sheep/goat - appears to have emerged directly out of preexisting Iron Age practices during Rome's conquest of continental Europe in the first century BCE.<sup>360</sup>

One possible interpretation of the preference for sheep over pigs in the Sarmatian material would be cultural influence of sheep-herding immigrants from the Pontic Steppe.<sup>361</sup> The importance of horses at Gyoma 133 and other Sarmatian settlements, including scattered evidence of

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<sup>359</sup> King 1999, fig. 13.

<sup>360</sup> King 1999B.

<sup>361</sup> Bartosiewicz 1996, p. 378.

horse butchery and ritual deposition,<sup>362</sup> may also hint at some degree of steppe influence on husbandry practices in the Hungarian Plain.<sup>363</sup> This evidence is suggestive but not entirely conclusive. Even if we accept steppe elements within the cultural complex(s) responsible for the preserved faunal material from the Roman-era Hungarian Plain, we must admit that the influence of these elements on husbandry patterns is greatly outweighed by traditions derived from the sedentary European Iron Age and, as we will discuss below, the demands of the Roman military meat market. Our ‘Sarmatian’ faunal assemblages much more closely resemble Iron Age, ‘Celtic’ patterns than they do our best proxies for ancient steppe husbandry practices, and, as we have seen, the evidence for habitation appears to broadly reflect earlier Iron Age traditions as well.

### **3.3.7. Food and shelter: conclusions**

The evidence for subsistence and habitation we have surveyed paints a clear, general picture of society in the Roman-era Hungarian Plain as a collection of nucleated villages practicing traditional agriculture and stock-raising. Material evidence of the textually-attested migration of Sarmatian Iazyges into the region is limited in these spheres to some possible steppe influences in husbandry practices, namely the strong preference for sheep over pigs as the main secondary domesticate (after cattle), and the relatively high number of horse bones found in the faunal assemblages of ‘Sarmatian’ settlements. Based on this evidence alone, we can reasonably posit at least minor Pontic immigration into the region during the first 4 centuries CE. To refine the picture,

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<sup>362</sup> Vaday 1996C, p. 152; Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2015, pp. 59–60.

<sup>363</sup> See Appendix 3.2 for a table showing the number and percentage of horse remains from the Hungarian Plains sites studied in the present analysis. The numbers show much greater variation than do the food-bearing domesticates which probably relates to differing levels of wealth and status between settlements and, perhaps, different relationships with any hypothetical nomadic communities within the region. At Gyoma 133, horses represent 19.5% of the faunal assemblage of horses, cows, pigs, sheep, and goats, one of the highest percentages among the surveyed assemblages.

however, we will need to look at more than animal bones and post-holes. Unfortunately, ceramic finds from the region's settlements do little to further elucidate the situation. Like the faunal remains, the ceramic corpora from Gyoma 133, and other settlements from the Hungarian Plain show strong Iron Age/Dacian influence, and while Roman imports become more prominent over time, there is nothing here of steppe origin.<sup>364</sup> Elite goods, meanwhile, such as jewelry, weapons, glass, and coinage, are few and far between at Gyoma 133, a situation common to all the excavated Sarmatian settlements,<sup>365</sup> so we must turn to the other great body of Sarmatian material evidence – burials – to further our discussion and, perhaps, locate our elusive Iazyges.

#### ***IV. Networks of Production and Exchange***

At this juncture, we must brave the troubled waters of Sarmatian burial research from the region of the Hungarian Plain. While we do need to get our feet wet, we will endeavor not to get in over our heads. The basic difficulty has to do with the interpretive framework employed by most past and current researchers. In most Hungarian and Romanian scholarship, the old model of stable tribal units and persistent, strong ethnic group identities remains the underlying assumption, leaving scholars free to identify different waves of Sarmatian immigration based on small changes in burial orientation or construction, and the presence of stylistically-Pontic grave goods.<sup>366</sup> These migration models may not be wrong, even if the understanding of ancient ethnicity underlying them is

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<sup>364</sup> Vaday 1996C, pp. 111-138, 157. We will consider the ceramic evidence more closely below, because while it does little to address the issue of steppe vs. local cultural influence, it can tell us much about networks of exchange between the Hungarian Plain and the adjacent Roman provinces.

<sup>365</sup> Vaday 1996C, pp. 149-153; Vaday 1999, pp. 553-554.

<sup>366</sup> *Sarmatians: History and Archaeology of a Forgotten People*, a detailed synthesis of the Hungarian archaeological evidence by Istvánovits and Kulcsár (2017), stands as the most recent example of this mindset. Despite the work's wealth of detailed, valuable data derived from the authors' decades of excavation experience, the underlying assumptions about group identity and the nature of ancient ethnicity remain largely traditional.

questionable, but there needs to be more consideration given to non-migratory explanations for observed changes in material culture and ritual. As mentioned above, study of burials and funerary remains dominated the early decades of scholarly interest in the Roman-era inhabitants of the Hungarian Plain. Mihály Párducz was of particular importance, accounting for over seventy percent of all scholarly publications on the Sarmatians between the 1930s and 1970s.<sup>367</sup> His *magnum opus*, three-volume catalogue and typology of Sarmatian grave goods is divided, by volume, according to what he saw as three major chronological divisions: 1) an initial period covering the earliest first century burials associated with Pontic material up to the Marcomannic Wars, 2) a short period covering the final decades of the second century, and 3) a long third period encompassing the third through fifth centuries.<sup>368</sup> Since the final volume appeared in 1950, the corpus has been continually expanded, most notably through Andrea Vaday's 1989 *Die sarmatischen Denkmäler des Komitats Szolnok*, which contributed material from 152 additional cemeteries (more than double Párducz's 69 sites) and refined the chronological divisions.<sup>369</sup> These scholars, and virtually all others to this day,<sup>370</sup> began from the texts and attempted to identify matching waves of Sarmatian immigration into the Hungarian Plain based on changes in burial ritual (orientation, coffin use, position of body) and material culture (items of personal adornment and other grave goods). Some of the evidence of eastern, Pontic connections is compelling, but overall most previous scholarship relies too heavily on notions of large-scale immigration and stable tribal identities over other forms of cultural exchange

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<sup>367</sup> Vaday 1989, p. 36.

<sup>368</sup> Vaday 1989, pp. 36-37.

<sup>369</sup> Vaday 1989, p. 39.

<sup>370</sup> eg: Vaday et al. 1989; Istvánovits and Kulcsár 1998; Dobrzańska 2001; Simonenko 2001.

### 3.4.2. Nomad and farmer: funerary evidence

While we will attempt to avoid the ‘ethnicity question,’ one feature of the burial evidence does seem clear enough: the earliest Roman-era cemeteries from the Hungarian Plain include a number of stylistic features unknown from previous Iron Age burials (which are, admittedly, rather rare) and also unlike contemporary funerary patterns in Dacia and Pannonia, but with clear stylistic and ritual similarities to contemporary burials from the Pontic Steppe. A brief summary and analysis of this evidence is in order since it appears to indicate that regardless of how we interpret later burials, the Hungarian Plain did witness some degree of immigration from the Pontic Steppe during the first century CE, in line with the historical narrative.

Pre-Roman Iron Age burials are known from across the Carpathian Basin and show clear indications of La Tène cultural influence. Weapons (broadswords, spears, javelins, shields) are common in elite male burials and are stylistically similar to Celtic types known from across Northern Europe. Elite female burials include particularly characteristic La Tène bronze girdles. Fibulae in styles known from across the La Tène world are common accessories in male and female graves at all social levels.<sup>371</sup> Exactly what these trends can tell us about Celtic immigration vs. La Tène cultural diffusion in the Iron Age Carpathian Basin falls outside the scope of this project,<sup>372</sup> but for our purposes it is crucial to note that all three features (male weapon burials, female girdles, and widespread fibula use) are greatly diminished in burials from the Hungarian Plain dated to the first century CE, that is, from the first century after the historical date given for the migration of the Sarmatian Iazyges into the region.

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<sup>371</sup> Szabó 1971, pp. 24–25; Rustiou 2011, pp. 95–96; Hellebrandt 1999, *passim* (but particularly pp. 9–10 for an overview).

<sup>372</sup> See Wells 1999, pp. 35–36, 57–58, 171.



Instead of Celtic/La Tène material, the first century graves feature elements known from contemporaneous Pontic burials convincingly associated with Pontic Sarmatian culture. Male graves are conspicuous for their lack of ornamentation or weaponry, although knives are sometimes found. Gone are the Celtic girdles from elite female burials, replaced by necklaces of twisted wire, golden torques, and characteristically Pontic granulated gold earrings and beaded necklaces finished with golden crescent (lunula) pendants or perforated cowrie shells. Fibulae, of any style, are rare.<sup>373</sup> In the following centuries, Sarmatian burial material continues to evolve, usually towards greater inclusion of Roman provincial imports and away from explicitly Pontic material – a topic we will revisit below – but the La Tène traditions known from earlier centuries never reappear.

There is broad scholarly consensus that the disappearance of La Tène features from burials in the Hungarian Plain followed by the abrupt introduction of new material of identifiably-Pontic origins, all at roughly the same time as the historically-attested Iazyges migration, strongly suggests the arrival of a new group of people, at least at the upper level of society where we see the clearest trends in burial evidence.<sup>374</sup> Indeed, Michael Kulikowski cites the example of the Iazyges as a rare example of a clear case of immigration over acculturation within the material record, while discussing the impossibility of making such a case from the archaeological remains of the neighboring ‘Gothic’ Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov Culture.<sup>375</sup>

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<sup>373</sup> Vaday 1989; Vaday et al. 1989; Kovács and Vaday 1999. For the Pontic evidence, Häusler 1986; Lebedynsky 2002, ch. 3; Barca 2006.

<sup>374</sup> I have not found a single source (both within the Danubian academies and wider Romanist circles) which denies the basic reality of the Iazyges migration. The clear, abrupt changes in burial ritual observed above are convincing, particularly in conjunction with the numerous textual references to the Iazyges migration (see Chapter Two). Where skepticism is warranted, and where further questions lie are around issues of the migration’s scope and the subsequent relationships between the incoming minority and the existing population, as well as the identity/organization of the immigrants labeled Sarmatian Iazyges by the Romans.

<sup>375</sup> Kulikowski 2007, p. 65. We will return to the Sântana-de-Mureş/Chernjachov Culture in the following chapters.

The early Sarmatian cemeteries, with their clear evidence of immigration, present us with a conundrum when put in dialogue with the settlement evidence. The strong steppe influence in the former, and the overwhelming dominance of Iron Age traditions in the latter would appear to support a model where nomads and farmers lived separate, discrete lives with only limited interaction, the former leaving few marks on the region's settlements, the latter virtually absent from the cemeteries. This picture is complicated, however, by the absence of any burials from the first centuries CE more closely in line with the trends seen in the settlements. Iron Age burials are rather rare in the preceding period, but they vanish altogether with the apparent arrival of the Iazyges and their burial grounds.<sup>376</sup> If we were to see a corresponding shift in habitation and subsistence patterns (or the abandonment of settlements in favor of archaeologically-invisible nomadism) we might be justified in postulating a model of large-scale immigration and population replacement, but the settlement evidence clearly contradicts this model. The people living in the Sarmatian villages unquestionably had cultural links to the pre-Sarmatian, Iron Age population, as indicated by their dietary patterns and domestic architecture. In light of this, our first suggestion of two separate societies inhabiting different ecological and social niches also appears less convincing. Where, we might ask, are the village people buried, in such a scenario? There are two possible answers to this question. On the one hand, we can posit the existence of yet-undiscovered burials containing the remains of the village populations (probably due to an ephemeral burial ritual and lack of grave goods), or, on the other hand, we can conclude that the known Sarmatian cemeteries represent the bulk of both the immigrant and settled communities together. The first option appears less

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<sup>376</sup> Vaday 1991, p. 78.

convincing in light of the burial evidence from the preceding, late Iron Age period when sub-elite burials displaying a mixture of La Tène and pre-Celtic, early Iron Age material are known from the region.<sup>377</sup> What this means is that we should, in theory, be able to identify backward-looking graves of the village population, if they existed. What the evidence seems to suggest is that, with the probable exception of the very earliest immigrant Sarmatian burials, the known cemeteries do represent both indigenous and immigrant populations together. This interpretation remains somewhat speculative but is strengthened by the location of cemeteries within close proximity of a number of settlements in the Hungarian Plain proper (Gyoma 133, Üllő), and the Banat (Arad-*Barieră*, Giarmata-*Sit*, Hunedoara Timișană, Timișoara-*Freidorf*).<sup>378</sup>

### 3.4.3. The ‘Sarmatian’ clothing *koine*

The likelihood that the known cemeteries of the Roman-era Hungarian Plain represent the people of the villages becomes stronger over time as we continue to find no alternative burial tradition within the region<sup>379</sup> and observe in the known cemeteries a decrease in Pontic-derived artifacts and an ever-greater presence of imported luxury goods from the surrounding Roman provinces, particularly after the first century. What these developments imply for the continuation of Pontic-style nomadism among the historical Iazyges will be discussed below, but first a few words are in order regarding the developing regional clothing *koine*. By the late second century CE, men and women living in the Hungarian Plain had adopted the habit of fibula-wearing, preferring styles imported from the Roman world over older, Iron Age/La Tène types.<sup>380</sup> For men, decorated belt-

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<sup>377</sup> Hellebrandt 1999, pp. 9–10.

<sup>378</sup> Vaday 1996; Kulcsár and Merai 2011, p. 62; Grumeza 2015, pp. 76–77.

<sup>379</sup> Vaday 1991, p. 78.

<sup>380</sup> Vaday et al. 1989, pp. 111–113; Grumeza 2011, pp. 186–187.

fittings – another trend imported from Rome’s Danubian provinces – begin to appear regularly during the second half of the second century, while burials with knives and weapons gradually become more common over time, although never dominating as they do in the elite male graves of some contemporaneous cemeteries within the trans-Rhenish *barbaricum*.<sup>381</sup> *Lunulae* pendants continue in female graves, but they are overshadowed by a massive increase in beads. These come in many shapes and materials, but glass is the most common type, representing, for example, 89 percent of the 1594 beads excavated at the Foeni necropolis in the Banat.<sup>382</sup> Beaded necklaces and bracelets were common accessories, but based on their positioning within undisturbed burials, we know that beads were even more frequently sewn directly onto female clothing as a form of decoration.<sup>383</sup> In general, the presence of large numbers of glass beads, particularly as sewn decoration, appears to be an innovation of the people of the Roman-era Hungarian Plain as this style of décor was not widely used in the provinces nor elsewhere in the *barbaricum*.<sup>384</sup> These ubiquitous, simple, glass beads known from ‘Sarmatian’ graves across the Hungarian Plain and the Banat were Roman-produced especially for trade with the Iazyges. One production center has been excavated in the *vicus* of the important auxiliary fort of Tibiscum, located near the blurry border between the Sarmatian Banat and southern Dacia; it must have been one of many such workshops, given the ubiquity of imported glass beads in female costume during the second through fourth centuries.<sup>385</sup> The existence of the Tibiscum bead workshop is clear testament to a thriving trade between the Hungarian Plain and the

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<sup>381</sup> Vaday et al. 1989, pp. 111-113.

<sup>382</sup> Grumeza 2011, p. 184.

<sup>383</sup> Vaday et al. 1989, p. 111; Grumeza 2011, p. 185; Szekeres 1999, p. 509.

<sup>384</sup> Vaday et al. 1989, p. 113.

<sup>385</sup> Grumeza 2011, p. 186; Benea et al. 2006, pp. 173-174; Doina Benea, personal communication, July 2014.

Roman provinces, and the location of production at a major military site is not insignificant, a point to which we will return below.

Looking at the entire corpus of Sarmatian clothing items, Vaday identified two moments of renewed Pontic influence in the burial material. These broadly equate to the period in the later second century after the Marcomannic Wars – when we know Marcus Aurelius granted permission for the Iazyges to trade with the Sarmatians of the Pontic Steppe by passing through Dacia, probably along the Cerna-Timiş route and through Wallachia<sup>386</sup> – and the end of the third century, following Aurelian’s evacuation of the Roman army from north of the Danube.<sup>387</sup> Whether this material reflects periods of renewed immigration from the Pontic region, as Vaday suggests, or rather indicates increased economic interaction between the Pontic and Danubian realms during periods of lesser Roman control, remains unclear – and we will return to this question below – but it is important to note that the later Pontic material never dominates in burials from the Hungarian Plain. In general, we can track an ever-increasing dependence on Roman imports for markers of elite status among the Sarmatians of the Hungarian Plain. A powerful example of this relationship is the practice of depositing Roman coins within burials. Although not common in any cemetery, coin burials are known from across the region and appear to be deposited as status-symbols rather than simple indications of wealth or payment for passage to the underworld. Large-denomination, old

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<sup>386</sup> Dio 72.19: *When the Iazyges proved most useful to him, [Marcus] released them from many of the terms that had been imposed upon them, or rather, from all of them except those limiting their assemblies and commerce, and also the requirement that they should not use their own boats and should keep off the islands in the Danube. But he permitted them to trade with the Roxolani [other Sarmatians living on the Pontic Steppe] by way of Dacia, as often as the governor should give them permission.* Καὶ ἐπειδὴ οἱ Ἰάζυγες χρησιμώτατοι αὐτῷ ἐγίνοντο, πολλὰ καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἐπιτεταγμένων σφίσιν ἀφήκε, μᾶλλον δὲ πάντα πλὴν τῶν κατὰ τε τὰς συνόδους αὐτῶν καὶ κατὰ τὰς ἐπιμιξίας συγκειμένων, τοῦ τε μὴ ἰδίους πλοίοις σφᾶς χρῆσθαι καὶ τοῦ τῶν νήσων τῶν ἐν τῷ Ἰστρῷ ἀπέχεσθαι. καὶ ἐφῆκεν αὐτοῖς πρὸς τοὺς Ροξολάνους διὰ τῆς Δακίας ἐπιμίγνυσθαι, ὡς ἂν ὁ ἄρχων αὐτῆς ἐπιτρέψη σφίσιν

<sup>387</sup> Vaday 1989, pp. 190–191.

issues, most frequently denarii of the Antonine age, are the most common depositions. They appear singly in burials, being either grasped or held in a pouch in male graves, and most often used as pendants in elite female contexts.<sup>388</sup> These practices are not unique to the Iazyges, but they do suggest that possession of Roman currency was seen as a marker of elite status in the Hungarian Plain, as in other European borderlands of the Roman Empire.<sup>389</sup> As the immigrant Iazyges and settled village population of the Hungarian Plain continued to coexist and interact, they developed their own unique form of material self-presentation within their Danubian home, and over time the building blocks of that clothing display became ever-more connected with the Roman provinces and their markets. In short, by the fourth century, Rome was the source of all things flashy and luxurious within Sarmatian society.

#### **3.4.4. Roman imports at Gyoma 133 and other settlements**

Returning to the settlement of Gyoma 133, we find the trend towards Roman-imported luxury goods over steppe-inspired items supported in the material remains from the settlement, which, as usual, closely follows patterns seen across the Sarmatian *barbaricum*. First, it must be admitted that imported goods of any variety are not common at any Sarmatian settlement. Based on its size, numerous workshops, and evidence of metalworking, Gyoma 133 was a prosperous village by Sarmatian standards, but even here, imported goods represent only a tiny fraction of the recovered artifacts. The most common, archaeologically-visible Roman import was *terra sigillata* – the red-slip pottery and moderate luxury good found across the early Empire and beyond – but the 124 recovered sherds are dwarfed by over fourteen *thousand* sherds of various Sarmatian wares

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<sup>388</sup> Grumeza 2013, pp. 121–123; Vaday 1989, pp. 186–187.

<sup>389</sup> Grumeza 2013, p. 122.

acquired from local sources within the *barbaricum*.<sup>390</sup> Other Roman ceramic wares are present in single-digit quantities, glass vessels are represented by only five shards, and metal imports are equally scanty: two coins, two bronze fibulae, and one sheet-bronze bracelet, as well as a few unidentifiable bronze fragments that may have come from other jewelry items. Glass beads of the Tibiscum type are known from the site, but also in very small numbers.<sup>391</sup> The import trends observed at Gyoma are not unique. The number and vessel-type breakdown of the *terra sigillata* closely matches the general pattern obtained from the Sarmatian *barbaricum*,<sup>392</sup> and the paucity of metal and other luxury objects is also typical.<sup>393</sup> Common ceramics are always over-represented in domestic archaeological assemblages because broken vessels were usually discarded, while valuable objects – already less common – were frequently passed on from generation to generation and often repaired rather than thrown away. None the less, small pieces of jewelry and coinage are prone to loss, meaning they tend to predictably turn up in domestic assemblages. The infrequency of such chance finds among the Gyoma material suggests a village where Roman imports were either quite rare, especially well guarded, or kept in such a way as to decrease their prevalence within the refuse of settled life, as might be the case with a hypothetical semi-nomadic, semi-separate Iazyges elite.

### **3.4.5. Technical and economic exchange in the Sarmatian ceramics industry**

The paucity of luxury Roman imports within Sarmatian settlements should not be interpreted as evidence for economic isolation or stagnation. While fibulae, beads, and *sigillata* vessels were mainly directed towards the social elites who kept them in such a way that they largely

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<sup>390</sup> Vaday 1996C, pp. 109-110, fig. 48.

<sup>391</sup> Vaday 1996C, pp 107, 110, 149-151

<sup>392</sup> Vaday 1996C, pp. 111-112, fig. 48.

<sup>393</sup> Vaday 1999, pp. 551-553; Simon 2006, p. 42.

do not turn up in the villages, there is good evidence of significant sub-elite technical – and probably economic – exchange with the Roman provinces among the village remains. At Gyoma 133, this exchange appears in the evidence for iron smelting within the settlement. Since the Hungarian Plain lacks mineral resources, raw materials had to be imported, either as ore from Dacia, or scrap from the surrounding regions.<sup>394</sup> At other sites, most notably the large villages of Üllő and Beregsurány, located close to the Pannonian and Dacian *limites*, respectively, major ceramics industries show a vibrant mixture of local, Roman, and Northern European traditions, both reflecting the heterogenous nature of the village cultures of the Roman-era Hungarian Plain and adjacent lowlands, and testifying to strong networks of intellectual and economic exchange in addition to the elite trade responsible for the bulk of Sarmatian grave goods.

The site of Üllő is located about fifteen kilometers from the Danube, directly east of Aquincum, the capital of Pannonia Superior.<sup>395</sup> The settlement was inhabited beginning sometime in the second half of the second century CE, and was very large by Sarmatian standards.<sup>396</sup> The village's location – as close to the river as allowed by the treaty of 175 between Marcus Aurelius and the Sarmatians<sup>397</sup> – allowed the inhabitants easy access to the people and markets of the Roman

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<sup>394</sup> Vaday 1996C, p. 157; but note Vaday's knee-jerk assumption that the presence of iron-working means an 'ethnically mixed' population because apparently Sarmatians cannot work iron, but Dacians can. This may, indeed, be the correct interpretation, but there is nothing inherently 'Dacian' about the iron slag and scrap found at Gyoma 133. On the importation of raw materials, see Tacitus (*Germania* 43) who describes Sarmatians exacting it from the Cotini of the Northern Carpathian highlands, together with their perpetual allies, the Quadi: *partem tributorum Sarmatae, partem Quadi ut alienigenis imponunt: Cotini, quo magis pudeat, et ferrum effodiunt.*

<sup>395</sup> Kulcsár and Merai 2001, p. 61.

<sup>396</sup> Kulcsár and Merai 2001, pp. 62–3.

<sup>397</sup> Dio. 72.15–16: *Since they had fulfilled all the prerequisite terms imposed on them (although grudgingly and only to the letter of the law), when the Marcomanni sent a delegation to him, [Marcus Aurelius] restored to them half of the demilitarized zone along the frontier meaning they could now extend [their control] to within five miles [30 stadia] of the Danube. He also stipulated the places and days for trade with Rome (which had previously [before the war] not been so controlled), and received hostages in exchange [for the better terms]. (16) The Iazyges, who were in a bad way [because of the war] also came to terms, with Zanticus [their leader] appearing in person before [Marcus Aurelius] Antoninus. [...] And they agreed to the same terms as the Quadi and Marcomanni, except that they had to dwell twice the distance away from the Danube. ὅτι τοῖς Μαρκομάνοις πρεσβεύσασιν, ὅτι πάντα τὰ*



province. Indeed, we may reasonably speculate that Üllő served as one of the treaty-mandated trade hubs established within the *barbaricum* to facilitate and control economic exchange between the Roman army and the Sarmatian tribes at the end of the Marcomannic Wars.<sup>398</sup> The most archaeologically-visible manifestation of economic activity at the site comes in the form of a large ceramics industry. From 48 known kilns, the inhabitants of Üllő produced thousands of cooking vessels from the coarse local clay.<sup>399</sup> Both the products and the means of production attest to a vibrant technical exchange between the people of Üllő and Aquincum, and hint strongly at economic exchange as well. The vessels produced at Üllő were almost all cooking vessels in shapes originally designed in the workshops of Roman Pannonia. Indeed, pots from either side of the river are visually almost identical, although the Üllő clay is a bit coarser.<sup>400</sup>

Whereas Pannonian cookware was mainly produced on a fast potter's wheel, however, petrographic analysis of the Üllő cookware had shown that despite outward appearances of fast-wheel production, nearly all the vessels were actually produced using a hybrid technique where coil-made vessels were finished and refined on a slow potter's wheel.<sup>401</sup> In essence, the Üllő potters were producing local knock-offs of popular Pannonian vessel types, adapting Roman styles to local

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προσταχθέντα σφίσι χαλεπῶς μὲν καὶ μόλις, ἐποίησαν δ' οὖν, τό τε ἡμισυ τῆς χώρας τῆς μεθορίας ἀνήκεν, ὥστε αὐτοὺς ὀκτώ που καὶ τριάκοντα σταδίου ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἰστρου ἀποικεῖν, καὶ τὰ χωρία τὰς τε ἡμέρας τῆς ἐπιμιξίας ἀφώρισε ἄπρότερον γὰρ οὐ διεκέκριτό, τοὺς τε ὁμήρους ἠλλάξατο. (16) ὅτι οἱ Ἰάζυγες κακωθέντες ἐς ὁμολογίαν ἦλθον, αὐτοῦ Ζαντικοῦ τὸν Ἀντωνῖνον ἰκετεύσαντος. [...] καὶ συνέθεντο τὰ αὐτὰ τοῖς Κουάδοις καὶ τοῖς Μαρκομάνοις, πλὴν καθ' ὅσον τὸ διπλάσιον αὐτῶν ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἰστρου ἀποικίσειν ἡμελλον. This seems to indicate that the treaty with the Iazyges established a 'neutral zone' of ten Roman miles on the east side of the Danube. Such a distance translates almost exactly to the 15 km. separating Üllő from the river.

<sup>398</sup> Dio 72.19; 73.2.

<sup>399</sup> Kulcsár and Merai 2001, pp. 62-67; Istvánovits et al. 2011, p. 347. Interestingly, the ceramics industry didn't take off until the later third century, after the settlement had been well established for over a century. This detail has extremely important ramifications for our understanding of the history of the economic and political relationship between Rome and the Sarmatians, and we will return to this issue below.

<sup>400</sup> Istvánovits et al. 2011, pp. 346-348

<sup>401</sup> Kulcsár and Merai 2001, pp. 66-67; Istvánovits et al. 2011, pp. 348-349.

techniques and materials. Üllő-ware has been found at many Sarmatian settlements within the central Hungarian Plain, and the general style is known across the entire Carpathian Basin, and even beyond at sites of the so-called Przeworsk and Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov Cultures.<sup>402</sup> This distribution pattern points towards a common pan-Danubian cooking culture during the third and fourth centuries (and probably before) that appears to have transcended divisions between Romans and barbarians, and between different observable archaeological cultures in the *barbaricum*.<sup>403</sup> At the same time, the location of the industry so close to the frontier strongly suggests that the Üllő potters not only sold locally, but also sent their wares across the river in direct competition with the Pannonian industries. Because of the visual similarity between Üllő-ware and Pannonian products, however, we cannot clearly assess the extent of trade with the provincial market.<sup>404</sup>

Further evidence for technical exchange between Pannonian and Sarmatian potters at Üllő can be seen in the kiln technology employed at the site. The majority of the 48 kilns were built in the Pannonian style, rather than using La Tène techniques more common to Sarmatian potteries, but there is enough variety in type and evidence of ad-hoc experimentation – not to mention the unusual throwing technique – to argue against reading the site as a mere ‘franchise’ of the Pannonian cookware industry.<sup>405</sup> There is no evidence to suggest Roman potters were outsourcing production

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<sup>402</sup> Kulcsár and Merai 2001, pp. 66–67. In particular, the technique is documented at the Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov Culture center of Zofipole, near Kraków (Dobrzanska and Piekarczyk 1999–2000, pp. 107–108).

<sup>403</sup> Of course, as noted at the beginning of the chapter, having the same kind of pot does not imply using it to cook the same type of stew. None the less, the wide distribution of identical cooking technology should still reflect some basic, low-level similarities in cultural practice across borders and between regions.

<sup>404</sup> The problem is that the Üllő potters were too good at faking Pannonian-style cookware. The different manufacturing technique used at Üllő was not identified until sherds were subjected to careful petrographic analysis. In all likelihood, cookware imported from the *barbaricum* has probably been overlooked at Pannonian sites and grouped in with the rest of the locally-produced wares.

<sup>405</sup> Kulcsár and Merai 2001, pp. 63–66. For the Pannonian originals, see Vámos 2010.

beyond the *limes*, and much to suggest a genuine Sarmatian industry combining Roman, Celtic, Dacian, and Northern European techniques in order to create a product with broad regional appeal.

The Üllő ceramics industry is mirrored on the other side of the Hungarian Plain by a number of ceramics centers located near the Dacian border in the Upper Tisza valley. The most notable of these sites is found at the village of Beregsurány where 52 kilns were excavated and a further 52 identified through geophysical survey. While the specific wares produced at Beregsurány and the surrounding workshops differ from the Üllő cookware, they show very similar trends in technical and economic relations with the Roman provinces and surrounding barbarian peoples. As at Üllő, large-scale production began during the third century, well after the founding of most of the villages housing ceramics workshops.<sup>406</sup> Here too, barbarian<sup>407</sup> potters tended to specialize in particular wares stylistically derived from the Roman provinces. In this case, stamped, gray tableware in the style of a popular workshop from Porolissum, just over the Dacian *limes*, was the major product during the floruit of the Upper Tisza workshops in the third and fourth centuries. While throwing techniques among the barbarian potters mirror the fast-wheel method employed at Porolissum, rather than showing local innovation, the kiln technology at Beregsurány and the surrounding workshops shows a familiar mixture of Roman, Przeworsk, and La Tène influences.<sup>408</sup>

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<sup>406</sup> Gindele and Istvánovits 2011, p.88.

<sup>407</sup> Much ink has been spilled (largely in vain) over the group identity of these people. Some identify them as Vandals, some Dacians, others Sarmatians. All we really can (and ought) to say is that the people living beyond the North-West Dacian *limes* were heterogenous in their material culture more than those living further south in the Hungarian Plain. At the same time, as we have seen, their architecture is basically the same as what we see further south. Regardless, they formed part of the larger world of the Hungarian Plain and were frequently lumped in with the Sarmatians by Roman writers (eg: *Scyth.* fr. 34, *Aurel.* 18.2, 30.2, 33.4, *Zos.* 1.48–50, *Pet. Pat.* fr. 11), suggesting that Rome enjoyed similar political and economic relations with these people. The material evidence explored in this chapter bears this out.

<sup>408</sup> Gindele and Istvánovits 2011, pp. 86–90.

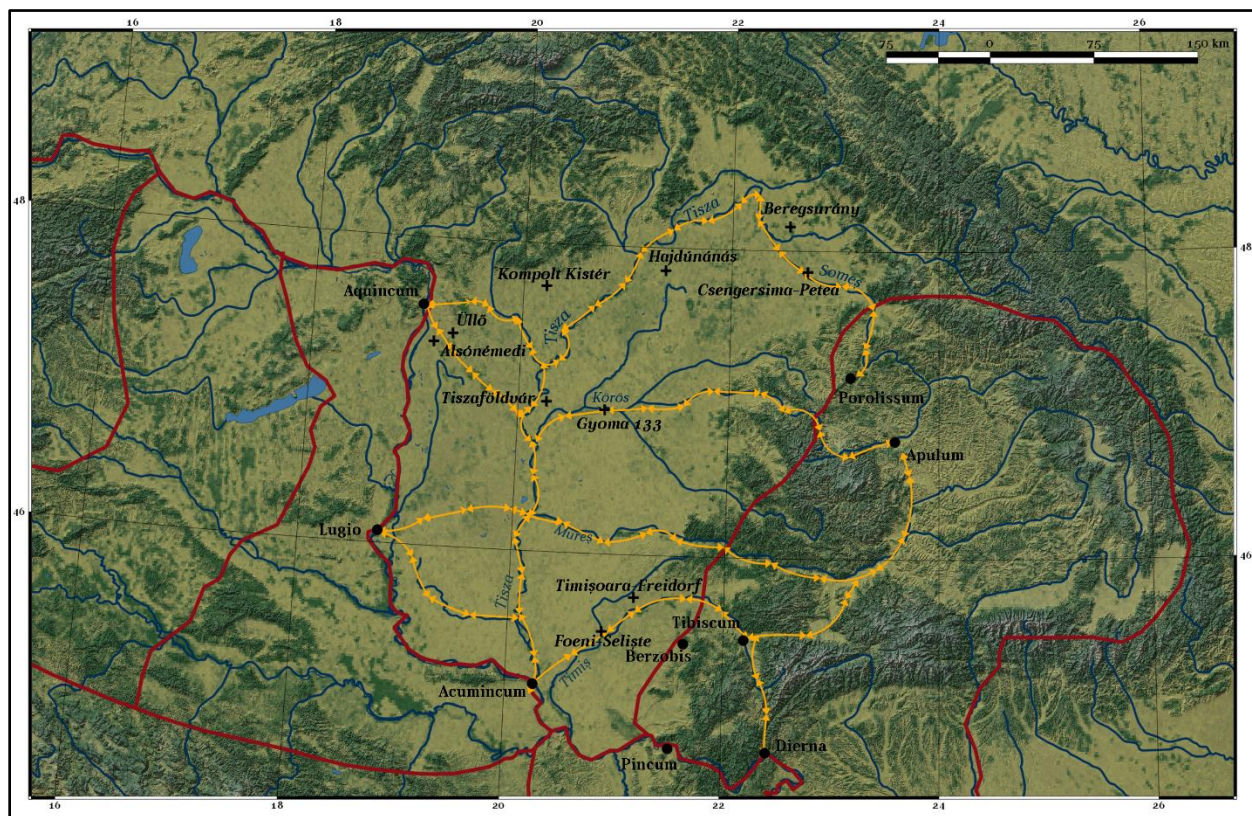
## *V. Explaining the Evidence: A Model of Sarmatian Borderland Dynamics*

### **3.5.1. Mapping networks of connection: roads, settlements, and economic integration**

Based on the material and textual evidence surveyed thus far, we are at a position to assess the nature of Sarmatian–Roman economic interactions more holistically. To briefly review, the evidence from Sarmatian burials in the Hungarian Plain shows an ever-greater presence of materials from the Roman provinces, beginning in the early second century, and an overall decrease in objects from the Pontic Steppe, despite some limited resurgences following the Marcomannic Wars and Aurelian’s withdrawal of the Roman army from Dacia in the late third century. Much of the archaeologically-visible evidence for trade appears aimed at elite consumption (*terra sigillata*, fibulae, beads, worked metal, etc.), but there was also a thriving sub-elite exchange in plain ceramics and, in all likelihood, archaeologically-invisible agricultural products. The trade networks that brought these objects into the Hungarian Plain were extensive, and facilitated by the region’s open landscape and easy riverine mobility.

Unsurprisingly, Üllő and Beregsurány, some of the largest Sarmatian settlements, and the most developed ceramics centers, are located on either end of a well-attested trade route across the upper Hungarian Plain and along the Upper Tisza between Aquincum and Porolissum. More southerly sites, such as Gyoma 133 and the villages of the Sarmatian Banat were located on or near navigable rivers like the Körös and Mureş which would have allowed easy access to the region’s major southern trade route from Lugio, across the lower plain, and up the Mureş River to Apulum. For the central plain, the Tisza itself served as an important north–south movement corridor, both allowing the two east–west routes to communicate with each other, but also facilitating movement

between the plain and Acumincum, the entrepôt to Moesia Superior at the confluence of the Tisza and Danube.<sup>409</sup> and Danube.



*Fig. 3.5 Major riverine and overland movement routes in the Hungarian Plain.*

That the Aquincum–Porolissum axis, and the Tisza and Mureș river routes represented the prosperous and regionally-connected core of the region is reflected by the distribution of weapon-bearing graves within the Hungarian Plain. Burials with weapons are not ubiquitous in Sarmatian cemeteries, as discussed above, and only begin to appear in any number in the early second century, but when they do show up, they cluster along the major riverine and overland routes. Initially, the Aquincum–Porolissum route and the Tisza valley north of Szeged feature the densest distribution,

<sup>409</sup> Vaday 2003.

but by the fourth century, we see the pattern extended to the southern Mureş route as well.<sup>410</sup> This clustering is significant since burial with weapons represents one of the most potent displays of elite status and wealth known from the region.<sup>411</sup>

Overall, we see a clear, progressive integration of the Hungarian Plain into Roman economic networks both in the realm of elite consumption, and sub-elite trade in ceramics and commodities. This integration is hardly surprising. The widespread distribution of La Tène material culture across the Iron Age Carpathian Basin shows that the autochthonous population of the Hungarian Plain was already linked into regional exchange networks, and these would have continued – after some adjustment – following the solidification of Roman and Iazyges control of either bank of the Danube. The Iazyges migrants who arrived in the region in the early first century probably initially approached the settled population in the typical nomadic manner of living apart and obtaining sedentary goods through some combination of exchange and exaction.<sup>412</sup> Traditional nomadic raiding or extortion of goods from the settled communities would have proven much more difficult,

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<sup>410</sup> Vaday 2001, pp. 177–179, 188–189.

<sup>411</sup> A family weighing the decision to bury a member with or without weapons had to consider the great value of iron within the mineral-poor Hungarian Plain. The decision to literally place such wealth out of reach of future generations through burial deposition would only be possible for families with secure economic networks and significant surplus resources. The social payoff from such a display, where the deceased's status as a warrior and the family's economic power were both made public during the funeral, must have been great in order to justify the great resource sink. The relative scarcity of such displays in the Hungarian Plain stands in contrast to the roughly contemporary Sântana-de-Mureş/Chernjachov Culture beyond the Carpathians to the east where better access to metals allowed for even farming implements to be deposited in graves from time to time (Heather and Matthews 1991, p. 84). We will discuss this aspect of the S-M/C Culture in the following chapters.

<sup>412</sup> For analysis of this nomad-farmer dynamic, see Khazanov 1994, pp. 202–212, 222–227. Strabo also captures the essence of this dynamic when discussing the nomadic peoples living on the Pontic Steppe. His analysis is tinged by the 'noble savage' trope, but none the less appears to accurately describe the typical relationship between nomads and farmers in the steppe lands: *Now, although the Nomads are warriors rather than brigands, they still only go to war in order to exact the tributes due to them, for they hand over their land to anyone who wishes to till it and are satisfied to receive in return the tribute that they have assessed, which is moderate and assessed not with the goal of abundance, but only of supplying the daily necessities of life* (7.4.6). Note also Strabo's insistence that these nomads are not bandits. This stands in contrast to the post-Marcomannic consensus regarding the Sarmatians of the Hungarian Plain.

and less rewarding within the confines of the densely-populated Hungarian Plain than it had on the wider Pontic Steppe, since the danger of upsetting the local socio-political equilibrium was intensified by the physical constraints imposed on all sides: to the west and south, the Roman *limites*, to the north, mountains inhospitable to nomadic mobility, and to the east, first the Dacian Kingdom and later the Roman province. Raids across the Roman *limites* offered a tempting way to maintain the traditional way of life, but proved a poor option since they inevitably provoked violent reprisals by Rome.

The patterns of elite exchange seen in the Sarmatian cemeteries reveals the solution to the Iazyges' precarious political and economic situation at the moment of their immigration. Whether or not they settled permanently in the region's villages, the newcomers clearly turned to trade with Rome as the best alternative to an unsustainable Pontic raiding/tribute culture. This turn is indicated in the burial evidence by the replacement of Pontic jewelry and elite goods with alternatives obtained from the Roman provinces. So much is clear, but a great question remains: what did Rome get in exchange for the baubles it sent out into the *barbaricum*? The answer, as far as our lacunose evidence can indicate, was livestock. There is good reason to believe that after an initial period of immigration and adjustment, the Sarmatian elite relied on large-scale export of cattle and sheep to the Roman army in exchange for political support and the material trappings of status found in their elite burials. This cattle trade, however, was not without its downsides for the Iazyges elite.

### **3.5.2. The ecological limitations of the Hungarian Plain**

To understand the Sarmato-Roman livestock trade and construct a general model for the social, political, and economic relations between Rome and the people of the Hungarian Plain, we must briefly revisit the issue of the topography of the Carpathian Basin. As discussed in Chapter

One, the Hungarian Plain represents the furthest western annex of the Eurasian steppe system. That said, as far as steppe goes, it is not a very good one. The Danube drainage basin is heavily influenced by the continental climate of Central Europe, meaning that the weather is too wet, and the loess coverage too spotty to foster the development of true steppe of the sort found across the great Eurasian belt. Instead, most of the Hungarian Plain is a mosaic of grasslands, forests, and riverine marshlands. There is good grazing land, to be sure, but much less than what an equivalent area of true steppe could produce. The limited grazing land available on the Hungarian Plain must, in turn, have had profound implications for any nomads who decided to settle there. Assuming a full half of the plain's area consisted of good-quality, available, grazing land, Lindner estimated it could support a maximum of 150,000 horses, which in turn could support a mere 15,000 fully nomadic Huns - the objects of his research - each leading nine remounts.<sup>413</sup>

Ammianus Marcellinus says that Sarmatian raiders led only one or two remounts on their expeditions,<sup>414</sup> so by Lindner's numbers, the plain may have been able to support around 60,000 Sarmatian warriors, say 300,000 men, women, and children,<sup>415</sup> or 7.5 percent of the probable population of the surrounding Danubian provinces.<sup>416</sup> The reality is that the number of Iazyges actually able to practice a nomadic lifestyle in the Hungarian Plains was probably much lower than this. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the numerous settlements indicate that some significant, if unquantifiable, portion of the plains must have been devoted to agriculture and sedentary stock-

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<sup>413</sup> Lindner 1981, pp. 14-16.

<sup>414</sup> A.M. 17.12.7.

<sup>415</sup> Following the mortality tables used by Frier (2013, p. 795, table 3), we can roughly estimate that about 40% of the male population would have been of military age (appx. age 18-45). If the population was equally divided between men and women, then we can estimate a total military population of about 20%.

<sup>416</sup> With a hypothetical population of about 4 million in the mid second century, the Danubian region was the Roman Empire's most sparsely populated region - 9.3 people per km.<sup>2</sup> - and yet the region's total population would still have dwarfed the largest possible nomadic population in the Hungarian Plain (Frier 2013, p. 814, table 6).



raising. The faunal assemblages examined above clearly testify to a thriving tradition of settled animal husbandry centered around the raising of cattle and sheep, while the remains of storage facilities indicate a subsistence base centered on the cultivation of cereals. Additionally, as discussed in Chapter One, more of the region was probably forested or otherwise unimproved than reflected in the modern statistics underlying Lindner's calculations. Let us assume - arbitrarily - that half of the region's area was either under cultivation or otherwise unsuited for pastoral use, leaving us about 21,000 square kilometers of useable grassland.<sup>417</sup> No nomadic society could exist without its flocks of sheep, and while the percentage of horses vs. sheep and cattle in most steppe societies skews very heavily towards the non-equine,<sup>418</sup> within the smaller setting of the Hungarian Plain we are, perhaps, permitted to envision our Sarmatians drawing more heavily - either peacefully or through exactions - on the animal and agricultural products of the settled population, allowing them to devote more grass to prestige animals like horses. If we grant a full third of the available grassland to horse raising - a highly optimistic scenario<sup>419</sup> - we come up with an absolute maximum equine population of around 70,000 animals.<sup>420</sup> Continuing our speculative math, if we accept Ammianus that Sarmatian

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<sup>417</sup> Working from a total area of contiguous lowlands in the central Hungarian Plain (Alföld) of 42,400 km.<sup>2</sup>, based on modern statistics, Lindner ends up concluding that a full half of that area could be devoted to the raising of horses. This is far too much since his grasslands estimates are based on modern statistics rather than the unimproved Hungarian Plain of antiquity.

<sup>418</sup> Of the recent steppe societies surveyed by Barfield, the highest percentage of horses was only 12.8% (Barfield 1993, p. 138, table 5.1).

<sup>419</sup> See Table 3.2 for the percentage of horses within faunal assemblages from the Roman-era Hungarian Plain. The numbers range wildly with Gyoma 133's 19.5% close to the largest percentage known. Interpreting these numbers in the context of the current discussion is rendered even more challenging because these assemblages all reflect the husbandry patterns of settled village communities whose relationship to the Iazyges immigrants, as we have seen, remains rather murky.

<sup>420</sup> Again, based on Lindner's calculations which estimate 10 horse per km.<sup>2</sup> as the carrying capacity of the Hungarian Plain (Lindner 1981, p. 14).

warriors each owned – on average – 2.5 horses, we come up with a *maximum* of about 28,000 warriors for a total population of about 150,000 souls, but perhaps many fewer.<sup>421</sup>

We will return to social implications of these admittedly crude numbers below. For the moment, all we need to take from them are two important realities: first, the Hungarian Plain could not support a large population practicing traditional steppe nomadism, and second, in order to maximize the military and status benefits of nomadic life, our hypothetical Iazyges immigrants would have needed to dedicate as much grazing land to horse-rearing as possible. Any land taken from horses and given to other livestock would have – perhaps inadvertently – led to a reduction in the potency of the Iazyges cavalry and the status it conferred.

### 3.5.3. The livestock trade

While we know that ceramics were exported from certain Sarmatian villages, and can assume that some elite Roman goods were acquired outside the general market as subsidies for good behavior, I find Andrea Vaday's suggestion persuasive that livestock was the chief product of the region.<sup>422</sup> Not only is Roman military acquisition of cattle from beyond the frontier archaeologically supported in other Roman borderlands,<sup>423</sup> but stock-rearing was also something the initial Pontic immigrants were culturally prepared to engage in without major changes to a steppe lifestyle. Finally, there was a truly prodigious demand for animals on the hoof right across the river. The Roman army, stationed along the Danube and Dacian *limites* ate a lot of beef, as faunal remains from

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<sup>421</sup> If we run the same calculus based on Barfield's maximum horse percentage of 12.8%, we get only 2,700 km.<sup>2</sup> reserved for horses, equating to 27,000 head, 10,800 warriors, and a total population of a mere 54,000. Using this math, even if we posit a larger total population, the maximum number of *warriors* capable of maintaining their horses would remain capped.

<sup>422</sup> Vaday 1989, pp. 189–192. See also Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2015, p. 56 for citation of additional Hungarian scholarship on this theory.

<sup>423</sup> Kooistra 1996, pp. 17–22, 354; Roth 1999, p. 239.

military sites all over Northern Europe abundantly testify.<sup>424</sup> Further, massive amounts of leather would have been needed for tents, shield-covers, equipment straps, and – most importantly – shoes.<sup>425</sup> While it is difficult to identify clear faunal evidence of cattle importation at Roman military sites in the Danubian region, this is not necessarily surprising since large-scale butchery and tanning were smelly, messy business and may simply have been undertaken away from the inhabited centers most frequently excavated. Meanwhile, on the barbarian side of the river, the slaughter-age and gender profiles for Sarmatian cattle from the settlements of the Hungarian Plain shows a clear bias towards adult females, suggesting exploitation for dairy, and, crucially, a missing male population.<sup>426</sup> This pattern could reflect exactions by an Iazyges elite, or direct exchange between the villages and the Roman army, but in either case, the army was probably the ultimate destination for the missing steers. Based on the preponderance of this evidence, it seems highly likely that the Sarmatian elite, and perhaps elements of the village populations, too, engaged in a regular cattle trade with the Roman army in exchange for luxury goods and other, archaeologically-invisible products of the provinces.

Trading in cattle would have been lucrative for the Sarmatian elite, but it also would have brought them progressively further under the thumb of the Roman military. Roman demand for meat and leather would have encouraged the elite to dedicate more of their precious grazing land to cattle as opposed to horses, resulting, over time, in the weakening of the Sarmatian cavalry: the only

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<sup>424</sup> King 1999B; Roth 1999, pp. 25–32.

<sup>425</sup> van Driel-Murray 1985. This article, to my knowledge, remains the only comprehensive archaeological discussion of leather as an important commodity for the Roman military. There are certainly interesting avenues of research to be followed in this direction.

<sup>426</sup> Bartosiewicz 1996, pp. 370–371 (Gyoma 133); Gál 2010, pp. 210–211 (Hajdúnánás–Fűrjhalom–Dűlő); Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2015, p. 57 (regional trends); Groot 2016, p. 19; Kooistra 1996, pp. 17–22, 354 (theory).

thing the Iazyges had which could, on occasion, stand up to Roman arms, and also the source of what dominance they may have had over the indigenous population. Once established, large-scale trade in cattle would also have given the Roman military great economic leverage over the Iazyges elite; such leverage could be wielded for political effect. Roman authorities could open and close the large military markets and major bridges over the river. Such actions were naturally taken during times of war, and reinstating the markets were always part of the treaties that followed.<sup>427</sup> Should the military markets be closed, the Sarmatian elite would be in a tight place indeed. Not only would they lose the source of the elite goods with which they advertised their status, but more crucially their herds could easily collapse. For pastoralists, the limiting factor is not so much how many animals the land can support in summer, but rather how many it can nurture through the lean months of winter. In a system of regular, annual markets, our Iazyges elite would be free to raise herds to the full capacity of the summer pastures, expecting to sell enough animals in the autumn to bring the numbers down below winter limits.<sup>428</sup> If the markets closed, there were only two options, neither of them favorable. One would be to try and winter over a herd too large for the reduced resources of winter pastures and thereby risk losing the entirety to starvation. The other option would be to cull (or eat) the percentage intended for market, thereby losing significant animal capital.<sup>429</sup>

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<sup>427</sup> The best example of this phenomenon comes from Dio's discussion of Marcus Aurelius treaty negotiations with the Marcomanni and Iazyges in 175 CE (72.15-16), but this was hardly an anomalous practice. Aurelian imposed the same sort of military markets on the Vandals and Sarmatians he defeated in the late third century (*Scyth. fr.* 34), and Valens attempted to impose similar controls on trade in his disastrous treaty with the Tervingi Goths in 369 (*Them. Or.* 10.205/135ff.). We will return to both of these treaties in the following chapter.

<sup>428</sup> Khazanov 1994, p. 29.

<sup>429</sup> Those in the prosperous villages may have had more options, and the site of Üllő may offer a good example. As noted above, the ceramics industry arose long after the settlement had gotten large and rich, almost certainly off the cattle trade. Ceramics production only took off during the later third century when much of the Roman forces were engaged elsewhere dealing with the chaos of raids and rebellions, and the ongoing splintering of the Palmyrene and Gallic breakaway states

### 3.5.4. Conclusions: the balance of power between nomad and farmer

The pressures of the livestock trade, combined with the limited area available for grazing essentially put a hard-cap on the number of people capable of practicing nomadic ways within the Hungarian Plain. This has some interesting implications. For one, these limiting factors would have made it more difficult for members of the indigenous population to acculturate to the initial nomadic ways of the early Iazyges elite. That these immigrants practiced a fully nomadic lifestyle after the first generation seems unlikely, but they do appear to have maintained elements of their Pontic past, including extensive raising of horses for their warrior aristocracy and almost certainly cattle for trade with the empire. They may have lived in the villages we know from across the Hungarian Plain or elsewhere, but there is good reason to believe that they dominated the fully-sedentary population they found on their arrival. As for that agricultural majority, members might have been able to dress like a Iazyx - and as we have seen, a Danubian Sarmatian clothing *koine* did become popular across the entire population - but their ability to fully 'join up' must have been limited if the horse-raising lifestyle that went along with the look remained inaccessible for reasons of ecology, if not also politics.

Secondly, further immigration from the steppe would be traumatic once the Hungarian Plain reached its carrying capacity. In the event of new immigration such as appears to have taken place to some extent after the abandonment of Dacia at the end of the third century,<sup>430</sup> we can expect that

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ensured a shortage of cash anyway. All this means that the late 200s almost certainly saw a reduction in the imperially-sanctioned cattle trade which had made Üllő rich. Faced with this situation, the town appears to have reinvented itself as a ceramics center, drawing on know-how obtained, in part, from across the river. At the same time, the villages and elites would both have had more animal capital at their disposal with which to purchase the Üllő goods, as trade with the empire slackened.

<sup>430</sup> Vaday 2001, pp. 179-180.

the sedentary population would be the first to suffer, pushed out of the plains and into less-ideal marshy landscapes, where indeed we find them living in villages that closely match the material remains, and now known as Limigantes, in Ammianus' late fourth century narrative with which we began this chapter. Perhaps we should not be shocked that such a population, with limited options for entering the cadre of the elite and pressure to cede their herds and lands to the rulers they couldn't fully join, opted to throw out their overlords in the great rebellion Ammianus and other ancient authors date to the reign of Constantine.<sup>431</sup>

The nature of the economic relations between the Iazyges and the Roman army also pushed the Sarmatian elite towards greater exploitation of the agricultural population. Initially, trade and perhaps further migration from the steppe was conducted over the Carpathians and through the Wallachian Plain, but following the annexation of Dacia such movement was only possible at the discretion of Roman officials,<sup>432</sup> and we see a resultant decrease in Pontic material among the burials. The limiting of these economic routes forced the Sarmatians into ever more intimate economic relations with Rome, as illustrated by a rise in Roman imports among grave goods. At the same time, dependence on Roman trade weakened the Sarmatian cavalry and potentially destabilized the Iazyges elite's dominant position in the Hungarian Plain as more land was used to raise the cattle always in demand at the Roman military markets. This constant demand for more beef and leather would also have encouraged the elites - whether we picture them lording it from within the villages

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<sup>431</sup> A.M. 18.13.1; *Orig. Const.* 6.32.

<sup>432</sup> The clearest textual evidence for this control is the treaty Dio describes between Rome and the Iazyges near the end of the Marcomannic Wars (72.19). Part of the agreement was a clause allowing the Iazyges to have economic interactions with the Roxolani Sarmatians of the Pontic Steppe at the discretion of the governor of Dacia. Given how Marcus' entire policy during the Marcomannic Wars was aimed at restoring the status quo, as discussed in Chapter Two, we can confidently assert that this treaty reflects the post-war reestablishment of trade relations dating back at least to the period of Trajan's annexation and Hadrian's settlement of Dacia.

or living separate, steppe-inspired lives – to lean more heavily on village populations, either by confiscating land for elite herds, or by simply demanding more livestock as tribute. Such an unstable political situation made the people of the Hungarian Plain easy prey for Roman leaders wishing to shine up a tarnished military reputation. Resistance to invasion was comparatively feeble, and the search for a convincing *casus belli* was not helped by the Iazyges' penchant for small-scale raiding over the river in the style of their nomadic ancestors.<sup>433</sup> Under these conditions we can understand why Commodus described the Iazyges as mere brigands at the end of the Marcomannic Wars in his series of refortification inscriptions from the Danube *limes*.<sup>434</sup>

The socio-political situation had apparently only gotten worse by the time Ammianus used similar language in the late fourth century, describing the Sarmatians as a people “more suited to banditry than open warfare,” and decrying their habit of long-distance raiding.<sup>435</sup> By then, it would seem, the effects of centuries of subjugation as an exploitable client state had reached a breaking point. The settled majority, labeled Limigantes or *servi*, expelled the elites, leading to a general rebellion and the inevitable Roman reprisals designed to punish and reestablish the status quo. These events only make sense in the setting just described where a local elite perpetually defeated by, yet at the same time dependent on Rome, could only maintain its grip on power through less-than-benevolent treatment of its own peasant majority.

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<sup>433</sup> Such raids feature prominently in Ovid and Strabo's characterizations of the Sarmatians (including Iazyges, pre-migration) as discussed in Chapter Two, but Tacitus (*Hist.* 1.79), Dio (72.7), Dexippus (*Scyth.* fr. Mec. 40/Mar. 34), and Ammianus (17.12.2-3) all describe similar forays.

<sup>434</sup> See Chapter Two, section 2.4.6 for the text and translation. See also Kovács 2014, p. 161 for a cogent discussion.

<sup>435</sup> A.M. 17.12.2-3: (2) *Quibus ad latrocinia magis quam aperto habilibus Marti, hastae sunt longiores et loricae ex cornibus rasis et laevigatis, plumarum specie linteis indumentis innexae. [...] (3) Et per spatia discurrunt amplissima, sequantes alios vel ipsi terga vertentes, insidendo velocibus equis et morigeris, trahentesque singulos, interdum et binos, uti permutatio vires foveat iumentorum, vigorque otio integretur alterno*

TABLE 3.1

Faunal data discussed in Chapter Three, and citations.

REGION	SITE	PERIOD	TYPE	NISP	% CATTLE	% SHEEP/GOAT	% PIG	HORSE NISP (not in n-value)	CITATION	SECONDARY CITATION
<b>ROMAN-ERA</b>										
Sarmatia	Groma 133	c.150-250 CE	Settlement	7459	60.4	26	13.6	180	Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2016 - table 3	Bartosiewicz 1996
Sarmatia	Hajföldvár	2nd-6th CE	Settlement	4904	62.9	21.8	16.3	796	Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2016 - table 3	Gál 2010 - table 1
Sarmatia	Budód 170	4th-6th CE	Settlement	784	49.5	41.2	9.3	97	Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2016 - table 3	Bartosiewicz and Choyke 2011 - table 1
Sarmatia	Danavese	Roman	Settlement	626	59.1	31.6	9.4	151	Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2016 - table 3	
Sarmatia	Ártánd-Nagyf	Roman	Settlement	230	49.6	29.6	20.9	47	Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2016 - table 3	
Sarmatia	Alsónémedi	Roman	Settlement	4534	56.5	29.6	16.1	280	Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2016 - table 3	
Sarmatia	Kompolt	Roman	Settlement	739	6.2	4.3	6	58	Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2016 - table 3	
Sarmatia	Kiszállás	2nd-4th CE	Settlement	418	30.6	62.4	17	41	Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2016 - table 3	Bartosiewicz 2003 - appendix, table 1
Sarmatia	Pöcspe 1	Roman	Settlement	828	63.6	26.7	20.7	180	Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2016 - table 3	
Sarmatia	Szegvár	Roman	Settlement	1518	30	57	13	64	Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2016 - table 3	
Sarmatia	Tátlár	4th-6th CE	Settlement	1460	49.9	46.6	4.6	26	Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2016 - table 3	Bartosiewicz 2003 - appendix, table 1
Sarmatia	Tisza-földvár	4th-6th CE	Settlement	4227	61.8	27.2	11.2	408	Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2016 - table 3	Bartosiewicz 2003 - appendix, table 1
Sarmatia	Újváryán	2nd-3rd CE	Settlement	438	62.3	32.6	6	36	Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2016 - table 3	Bartosiewicz 2003 - appendix, table 1
Sarmatia	Sztrabonesyó	2nd-3rd CE	Settlement	898	73.6	12.1	14.2	20	Bartosiewicz 2003 - appendix, table 1	
Sarmatia	Biharkeresztés	2nd-3rd CE	Settlement	298	48	32.9	19.1	70	Bartosiewicz 2003 - appendix, table 1	
Sarmatia	Kompolt 14+15	2nd-3rd CE	Settlement	4136	68.3	32.7	9	252	Bartosiewicz 2003 - appendix, table 1	
Sarmatia	Ormenyökút	4th-6th CE	Settlement	866	70.5	18.6	10.9	0	Bartosiewicz 2003 - appendix, table 1	
Sarmatia	Tiszaszavár-Lárosföld	6th CE	Settlement	407	67.8	24.1	8	26	Bartosiewicz 2003 - appendix, table 1	
Sarmatia	Tinlyoara-Freldorf	Roman	Settlement	64	42.2	23.4	23.4	16	Gudea and Gudea 2000 - table 3.1.10	El Sus1988
Fannonia	Ács-Vaspuszta	1st-6th CE	Military	167	61.6	21	27.4	0	Bartosiewicz 1989 - table 1	
Fannonia	Táo-Gorsutum	1st-6th CE	Urban Domestic	36867	48.7	26.9	24.6	3072	Bokonyi 1984 - table 1	
Fannonia	Albertfalva-Vlous	Roman	Military/Domestic	344	41.9	29.4	28.8	31	Choyke 1998 - table 3	
Fannonia	Szrhun	1st-6th CE	Urban Domestic	10607	42.1	34.2	23.7	656	Markovl et al. 2014 - table 1	
Fannonia	Wanj (outside 3km)	3rd-4th CE	Villa	1341	40.9	29.7	29.4	0	Markovl et al. 2014 - table 1	
Fannonia	Davidoava-Gradiste	3rd-6th CE	Settlement	718	46.5	30.2	24.2	32	Mladinovic-Radmilovic et al. 2016 - table 6	
Fannonia	Sopron	4th-6th CE	Urban Domestic	1419	70.3	11.7	18.0 n/a	0	King 1999 - appendix	Bokonyi 1986
Fannonia	Szakaly - Roman Imperial	1st-3rd CE	Settlement	726	66.2	17.4	17.4	46	Vörös 1982 - table 1	
Fannonia	Szakaly - Late Roman	4th CE	Settlement	137	62.8	10.2	27	0	Vörös 1982 - table 1	
Moesia	Iatrus (B-C)	late-4th-mid-6th CE	Settlement	1066	71.8	12.8	16.6	28	Bartosiewicz and Choyke 1991 - table 2	
Moesia	Iatrus (A)	mid-4th CE	Military	126	44.4	23	32.6	4	Bartosiewicz and Choyke 1991 - table 2	
Moesia	Bela voda	3rd-6th CE	Settlement	330	41.8	20	38.2	18	Beech 2007 - table 10.24	Ilev et al. 1992
Moesia	Diohin	6th-8th CE	Urban Domestic	3693	26.6	31.7	41.8	6	Beech 2007 - table 10.24	
Moesia	Novae, areas X, IX, V	2nd-6th CE	Urban Domestic	6768	41.4	28.7	29.9	254	Beech 2007 - table 10.24	Schramm 1976, 1979
Moesia	Novae, prinicipium, seannum	1st-6th CE	Military	808	39.1	19.7	41.2	20	Beech 2007 - table 10.24	Makowhek 1999
Moesia	Rutarla	2nd-4th CE	Urban Domestic	97	48.6	37.1	14.4	7	Beech 2007 - table 10.24	Ilev et al. 1993
Moesia	Nicopolis 1	100-176 CE	Urban Domestic	361	28.8	36.2	37	0	Beech 2007 - table 10.1	
Moesia	Nicopolis 2	176-260 CE	Urban Domestic	31.3	16.9	30.4	62.7	6	Beech 2007 - table 10.1	
Moesia	Nicopolis 3	260-460 CE	Urban Domestic	4693	23.7	32.6	43.7	98	Beech 2007 - table 10.1	
Moesia	Nicopolis 1-3	2nd-6th CE	Urban Domestic	6267	23.6	32.7	43.6	112	Beech 2007 - table 10.1	
Moesia	Kivlina C	6th-8th CE	Military/Domestic	9	66.6	12.9	20.8 n/a	0	King 1999 - appendix	Bartosiewicz and Choyke 1991
Dacla	Bráncovenesti	Roman	Military	113	67.1	18.8	24.1	23	Gudea and Gudea 2000 - table 3.1.1	Hahnovici 1986 - pp. 297-301
Dacla	Hinova	Roman	Military	106	61.9	14.3	32.8	4	Gudea and Gudea 2000 - table 3.1.2	El Sus 1999
Dacla	Miele-Hunedoara	Roman	Military	1568	67.4	20.8	24.8	60	Gudea and Gudea 2000 - table 3.1.3	Jones and Bralleanu 1979; Uddresou 1986
Dacla	Pojena	Roman	Military	1178	61.4	19.5	29.2	44	Gudea and Gudea 2000 - table 3.1.4	El Sus 1998
Dacla	Bologa-Jud. Cluj	Roman	Military	1069	61.5	23.8	14.7	46	Gudea and Gudea 2000 - table 3.1.6	Georocanu et al. 1979
Dacla	Apulum	Roman	Urban Domestic	1426	56.6	23.2	22.2	220	Gudea and Gudea 2000 - table 3.1.6	Georocanu et al. 1992
Dacla	Forolissum-Vama	Roman	Urban Domestic	1480	30.7	63.4	16.9	69	Gudea and Gudea 2000 - table 3.1.7	Ilovoschi and Gudea 1996
Dacla	Forolissum (taberna)	Roman	Urban Domestic	781	69.0	0	30.1	488	Gudea and Gudea 2000 - table 3.1.8	Gudea 1998; Gudea et al. 1998
Dacla	Ulpia Traiana Sarmisegetusa	Roman	Urban Domestic	213	62.4	9.0	27.7	0	Gudea and Gudea 2000 - table 3.1.9	Gudea and Ilovoschi 1997
Dacla	Sálsite-Jud. Alba	Roman	Settlement	67	77.2	6.3	17.6	16	Gudea and Gudea 2000 - table 3.1.11	Georocanu et al. 1978
Dacla	Stolniceni-Váloca	Roman	Urban Domestic	728	47.5	26.8	26.6	67	Gudea and Gudea 2000 - table 3.1.13	Uddresou 1990; Uddresou 1979
Dacla	Cloau	2nd-4th CE	Settlement	67	77.2	6.3	17.6 n/a	0	King 1999 - appendix	Georocanu et al. 1978
Dacla	Micasasa	2nd CE	Military/Domestic	208	68.3	26.0	4.6 n/a	0	King 1999 - appendix	Rajan et al. 1978
Dacla	Trnavaora	2nd CE	Military/Domestic	101	61.4	37.6	1 n/a	0	King 1999 - appendix	Chkreo et al. 1992
<b>IRON AGE</b>										
Batavia	Tiel-Panwaas/De Hogeweg 1	400-176 BCE	Settlement	289	62.9	31.6	16.6	18	Groot 2016 - sup. tab. E6.1	
Batavia	Tiel-Oude Thelweg 1	300-176 BCE	Settlement	214	66.7	23.1	10.3	34	Groot 2016 - sup. tab. E6.1	
Batavia	Likh-De Bergen	200-100 BCE	Settlement	879	63.9	27.9	8.2	60	Groot 2016 - sup. tab. E6.1	
Batavia	Geldernelsen-Hondeseemet 1	120-60 BCE	Settlement	921	79.8	16.7	3.6	76	Groot 2016 - sup. tab. E6.1	
Batavia	Houten-Doornkade a	IAA	Settlement	154	81.2	13	6.8	16	Groot 2016 - sup. tab. E6.1	
Batavia	Bumk-Werkhoven	IAA	Settlement	138	62.0	37	10.1	16	Groot 2016 - sup. tab. E6.1	
Batavia	Odijs-Singel West/Schoudermante	IAA	Settlement	316	63.2	19.4	17.6	21	Groot 2016 - sup. tab. E6.1	
Brlahn	Nazeburgury	IAA - 1st BCE-1st CE	Settlement	197	72.1	20.3	7.6 n/a	0	King 1984 - appendix	Croft 1979
Brlahn	Puckerlge A	IAA - 1st CE	Settlement	188	21.8	30.0	47.3 n/a	0	King 1984 - appendix	Croft 1979
Brlahn	Puckerlge B	IAA - 1st CE	Settlement	69.2	34	36	31 n/a	0	King 1984 - appendix	Croft 1979
Brlahn	Puckerlge C	IAA - 1st CE	Settlement	407	29.5	36.0	34.6 n/a	0	King 1984 - appendix	Croft 1979
Brlahn	Skeleton Green	IAA - 1st CE	Settlement	2439	32.2	18.6	49.3 n/a	0	King 1984 - appendix	Ashdown and Evans 1981
Brlahn	Wakerly	IAA - 1st BCE - 1st CE	Settlement	46.8	41.9	47	11.1 n/a	0	King 1984 - appendix	Jones 1978
Germania	Bad Nauheim	IAA - 1st BCE	Settlement	9233	48.1	1.2	39.9 n/a	0	King 1984 - appendix	Gelhausen 1967
Germania	Basel, Museum	IAA - 1st BCE	Settlement	631	26.2	28.2	46.6 n/a	0	King 1984 - appendix	Schmidt and Zeller 1979
Germania	Basel, Volstr.	IAA - 1st BCE	Settlement	41.2	47.3	7.8	44.9 n/a	0	King 1984 - appendix	Schmidt 1973
Germania	Berne, Enge A	IAA - 1st BCE	Settlement	607	34.9	41.2	23.9 n/a	0	King 1984 - appendix	Stampfl 1962
Germania	Berne, Enge B	IAA - 1st BCE	Settlement	300	6.3	31.3	16.7 n/a	0	King 1984 - appendix	Stampfl 1962
Germania	Chur-Welschdorf	IAA - 1st BCE	Settlement	616	60.9	4.1	36.4 n/a	0	King 1984 - appendix	Stampfl 1967
Germania	Manching	IAA - 1st BCE	Oppidum	36607	44.4	21.3	34.8 n/a	0	King 1984 - appendix	Boessneck et al. 1971
Gaul	Aix	IAA - 1st BCE	Settlement	2341	30.8	31.4	37.8 n/a	0	King 1984 - appendix	Poulain 1979
Gaul	Beaurvals	IAA - 1st BCE	Settlement	2246	31	12.2	66.7 n/a	0	King 1984 - appendix	Meniel 1983
Gaul	Mont Avrolat	IAA - 1st BCE	Settlement	243	29.2	14.4	66.4 n/a	0	King 1984 - appendix	Poulain 1977
Gaul	Vielle-Toulouse	IAA - 1st BCE	Settlement	233	39.1	18.6	42.6 n/a	0	King 1984 - appendix	Poulain-Josen 1968
Gaul	Villeneuve-St. Germain	IAA - 1st BCE	Settlement	1632	16.9	16.4	66 n/a	0	King 1984 - appendix	Classen 1977
Fannonia	Szakaly - La-Tene	1st BCE-1st CE	Settlement	401	59.6	32.7	11.6 n/a	0	Vörös 1982 - table 1	
Fannonia	Velens-Szent-Vid	IAA - 2nd-1st BCE	Settlement	209	63.2	17.1	19.7 n/a	0	King 1999 - appendix	Horard 1992
Fannonia	Gellerthezy-Taban (Bdpst)	IAA-2	Settlement	60	38.3	26	26.7 n/a	0	King 1999 - appendix	Matolsel 1979
Sarmatia	Sajópetri	Celtic (3rd BCE)	Settlement	1761	66.9	29.8	14.3	108	Bartosiewicz and Gál 2010 - table 9.1	
				(% Total Corpus)				(% Horse (out of full corpus))		
Burasia	Kradin's Steppe avg.	diachronic	Nomadic	80	25	76	0	20	Kradin 2016 pp. 47-48	
Mongolia	Eastern Steppe	1940s	Nomadic	84.3	13.9	86.1	0	12.8	Barfield 1993 - table 6.1, p.138	
Mongolia	Khangai Forest-Steppe	1940s	Nomadic	87.7	14.8	86.2	0	11.1	Barfield 1993 - table 6.1, p.138	
Mongolia	Gobi Desert Steppe	1940s	Nomadic	83.2	6.4	94.6	0	9.2	Barfield 1993 - table 6.1, p.138	
Mongolia	Altai Mountain Steppe	1940s	Nomadic	90.8	6.3	93.7	0	2.7	Barfield 1993 - table 6.1, p.138	
Turkistan	Xinjiang	1933	Nomadic	93	12.0	87.1	0	6	Barfield 1993 - table 6.1, p.138	
Turkistan	Kulja	1877	Nomadic	88	8	92	0	11	Barfield 1993 - table 6.1, p.138	
Turkistan	Kazakhstan	1920s	Nomadic	83.8	29.1	70.9	2.4	12	Barfield 1993 - table 6.1, p.138	
Turkistan	Kirghizia	1920s	Nomadic	86.6	19.0	80.1	2.1	11.4	Barfield 1993 - table 6.1, p.138	
Turkistan	Turkmenia	1920s	Nomadic	86.8	14.7	86.3	0	6.9	Barfield 1993 - table 6.1, p.138	



TABLE 3.2

Percentage of horse remains within faunal assemblages of the Roman-era Hungarian Plain.

REGION	SITE	CATTLE NISP	SHEEP/GOAT NISP	PIG NISP	HORSE NISP	TOTAL NISP	% HORSE
Sarmatia	Gyoma 133	4511	1937	1011	1802	9261	19.5
Sarmatia	Hajdúnánás	3084	1069	751	795	5699	13.9
Sarmatia	Endrod 170	388	323	73	97	881	1.1
Sarmatia	Dunavecse	370	197	59	151	777	19.4
Sarmatia	Ártánd-Nagyf.	114	68	48	47	277	1.7
Sarmatia	Alsónémedi	2515	1336	683	280	4814	5.8
Sarmatia	Kompolt	384	318	37	58	797	7.3
Sarmatia	Kunszállás	128	219	71	41	459	8.9
Sarmatia	Pócspetri	444	213	171	180	1008	17.9
Sarmatia	Szegvár	455	865	198	54	1572	3.4
Sarmatia	Tázar	724	660	66	25	1475	1.7
Sarmatia	Tiszaföldvár	2602	1151	474	408	4635	8.8
Sarmatia	Ujhartyán	273	143	22	36	474	7.6
Sarmatia	Szirmabesenyő	661	109	128	29	927	3.1
Sarmatia	Biharkeresztes	143	98	57	70	368	1.9
Sarmatia	Kompolt 14+15	2412	1352	371	252	4387	5.7
Sarmatia	Örménykút	603	159	93	0	855	0
Sarmatia	Tiszavasvári-Városföld	337	120	40	25	522	4.8
Sarmatia	Ludányhalászi	95	98	81	4	278	1.4
Sarmatia	Salgótarján	1695	1669	454	119	3937	3
Sarmatia	Balassagyarmat	88	103	49	6	246	2.4
Sarmatia	Jászfelsőszentgyörgy	58	17	5	23	103	22.3
Sarmatia	Timișoara-Freidorf	27	22	15	15	79	19

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONSTANTINE'S GOTHIC TREATY AND THE SÂNTANA-DE-MUREȘ/ČERNJACHOV CULTURE

#### *I. Introduction to Part II: Meanwhile, in the Lower Danubian Borderland...*

The previous three chapters explored the natural world of the Danube drainage basin, examined how Romans thought about the people living beyond the Danube during the first three centuries CE, and analyzed how those ethnographic ideas shaped the development of the society in the Hungarian Plain which Rome labeled Sarmatian. In the second half of this dissertation, the focus shifts noticeably to the east, to the south/east division of the Danube Basin. While most of the events to be discussed in chapters Five and Six took place in the Roman provinces of Moesia, Scythia Minor, and Thrace, Chapter Four begins by focusing on the region north of the Lower Danube, including Trajan's Dacian provinces and what I have dubbed the 'Scythian Corridor,' that is, the Moldavian Plain leading from Wallachia north into the Pontic Steppe. During the fourth century, this region was home to people the Romans called alternatively Scythians and Goths, most notably the sub-group called Tervingi in our sources. Rome's relationship with the Tervingi has been studied extensively, and so while it will not be our task to fundamentally rewrite our understanding of who these people were, or what the material aspects of their culture looked like, we will add our voice to the chorus by placing the Tervingi into our larger discussion of the Roman Scythian Logos and its impact on Roman policies and actions towards transdanubian peoples.

Together, Chapters Four and Five will put the Roman–Tervingian relationship into this broader Danubian context by examining how traditional ethnographic ideas about Scythians and Sarmatians shaped Rome’s treatment of the Tervingi and other ‘Gothic’ groups, and how ideas derived from Rome’s older relationship with the Sarmatians of the Hungarian Plain failed to map onto the society of the Lower Danubian Borderland known to us from archaeological excavation. Two treaties between Rome and the Tervingi, the first struck by Constantine in 332, and the second by Valens in 369, exerted a particularly strong influence over Roman–barbarian interactions during the fourth century. In this chapter, we will attempt to unravel the details of Constantine’s treaty and what it can tell us about how he viewed the lands north of the Lower Danube *limes*, in particular the territory of Trajan’s Dacian provinces, which had existed in an ambiguous state since Aurelian withdrew the military and civil infrastructure in the 270s. In order to fully appreciate the importance of Constantine’s treaty, however, we will need to consider its impact on the people with whom it was struck. In the final sections of this chapter, we will examine the material evidence for barbarian, ‘Gothic,’ life from the fourth century Lower Danubian Borderland. The picture that emerges from text and trowel is of a society that benefitted greatly from Constantine’s ‘neo-Trajanic’ worldview, a situation that made Valen’s antithetical treaty of 369, which we will dissect in Chapter Five, particularly destabilizing for the communities north of the Lower Danube.

## ***II. All Quiet on the Sarmatian Front: The Antonine Treaty System in Action on the ‘ripa Sarmatica’***

Before we can approach affairs in the Lower Danubian Borderland, we must first revisit the river’s middle course because the treaties we will be examining in this and the following chapter were both shaped, albeit in different ways, by the sort of treaties that bound the Sarmatian Iazyges to

Rome and created the situation of exploitative clientage we examined in depth in chapters Two and Three. In the Middle Danube theater, the treaties that ended the Marcomannic Wars established a template for future Roman-Sarmatian relations, the most important elements of which were:

- 1) The establishment of a neutral zone on the far side of the river where barbarian habitation was forbidden.
- 2) Strict controls over trade and movement across the *limites*.
- 3) The giving of hostages and sometimes troops as part of the initial settlement.
- 4) The payment of subsidies by Rome to support friendly barbarian rulers.

As we have already seen, such treaties were strongly favorable to Rome and the select barbarian elites the empire chose to support. Trade was encouraged but remained largely under Roman control, giving provincial and imperial authorities great economic leverage over the Sarmatian Iazyges and other client tribes. By decreasing or closing the military markets, Roman officials could 'put the squeeze' on any tribe that attempted to get out of line by cutting their leaders off from the sources of wealth through which they maintained their often-tenuous networks of power.

Another important aspect of the treaty system was its direct connection to Roman rulers. Barbarian kings were appointed directly by Roman emperors, and it appears that the treaties in general were seen as existing between specific rulers.<sup>436</sup> This personal dimension meant that affairs could get messy when an emperor died without providing for an orderly transfer of power. Given these dynamics, it should not surprise us that we hear very little about events beyond the Danube from the reign of Commodus until the death of Alexander Severus in 235 CE, when the transition

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<sup>436</sup> We will discuss this 'personal factor' below. See also Braund 1984, pp. 57-58, 185.

from one ruler to the next was fairly stable and the treaty system initiated by the Antonines was working more-or-less seamlessly. There is some vague mention of negotiations around the beginning of Septimius Severus' reign, but no evidence of raiding or a Roman campaign.<sup>437</sup> The only moment of unrest appeared during the reign of Caracalla, when the emperor executed the king of the Quadi.<sup>438</sup> In this case, the problem appears to have involved Quadic royal support for free Dacians making trouble in the Upper Tisza valley. Such actions evidently voided the treaty between Rome and the Quadi and required the removal of the offending party. The lack of any retribution against the Quadic population at large strongly argues that the whole thing was a diplomatic matter.<sup>439</sup> Gaibomarus, the Quadic king, was summoned to the emperor's presence and executed along with his chief retainers. Without Quadic support, the Dacian partisans were eager to offer hostages to Rome, presumably Dio's way of indicating renewed client treaties with the tribes in the northern Carpathian highlands beyond the Porolissum *limes*, as well as with the Quadi.

Affairs between Rome and the people of the Hungarian Plain took a turn for the worse after the death of Alexander Severus, and the patterns that emerged during the chaotic bulk of the third century prove to be extremely important for understanding later policy towards all the people the Romans considered Scythians/Sarmatians. As soon as Maximinus Thrax was done slaughtering Alexander Severus and his mother, he took the assembled army on a several-year tour of the *barbaricum*, mainly beyond the Rhine, but also against the Sarmatians of the Hungarian Plain.<sup>440</sup> The evidence is too sparse to assess whether the brief Sarmatian campaign was conducted out of necessity

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<sup>437</sup> Dio 73.6.1; Hdn. 2.2.8, 2.4.3.

<sup>438</sup> Dio 77.20.3-4, 78.27.5.

<sup>439</sup> Kovács 2014, pp. 195-198.

<sup>440</sup> *SHA, Max.* 13.3-4.

or for other reasons, but given Maximinus' fairly flimsy claim to the Purple, we should probably read all Maximinus' wars as designed – at least in part – to prove the military reputation upon which he had based his usurpation. In short, this is the first example of an emperor campaigning against Sarmatians in order to shine up his laurels since Marcus Aurelius' unnecessary prolongation of the Marcomannic Wars.<sup>441</sup> It would hardly be the last.

Beginning with the sack of Olbia in 238,<sup>442</sup> the sources – when not detailing the near-constant civil wars – are dominated by tales of raids by Scythians from beyond the Black Sea. We do not need to rehash these Scythian Wars here, but it is crucial to note that the Sarmatians and other tribes from beyond the Middle Danube play a puzzlingly-ambiguous role in the narrative of this third century crisis. In an age dominated by barbarian raids into Roman territory, we know of only one major Sarmatian offensive. It happened in 260, appears to be backed up by material evidence,<sup>443</sup> and is mentioned frequently enough in the sources to appear genuine.<sup>444</sup> The matter appears to have been cleared up during the reign of Gallienus, but the lack of a detailed narrative makes reconstruction fruitless.

We are on a better footing when, a decade later, in 271, Aurelian campaigned briefly against the Vandals and Sarmatians in Upper Pannonia.<sup>445</sup> From Zosimus we hear that the emperor fought an indecisive battle with raiders in Pannonia, identified only as Scythians, while Dexippus provides a full account of the succeeding peace negotiations. The picture that emerges is entirely typical of the

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<sup>441</sup> For this particular impetus for war, see Drinkwater 2007, *passim*, but particularly ch. 1; Mattern 1999, ch. 5.

<sup>442</sup> *Scyth. frs.* 14, 16.

<sup>443</sup> 30 hoards datable to 260 are known from Pannonia. There are also destruction layers at Aquincum, Gorsium, Intercisa, Albertfalva, and Annamatiia which date to this period (Kovács 2014, pp. 251–252).

<sup>444</sup> *Pan. Lat.* 8.10.2; *Eutr.* 9.8; *Jer. Chron.* 3021; *Oros.* 2.22.7; *Prosp. Chron. Min.* 1 p. 441 873.

<sup>445</sup> *Scyth. fr.* 34; *SHA, Aurel.* 18.2, 30.2, 33.4; *Zos.* 1.48–50; *Pet. Pat. fr.* 11.

Antonine system, with one exception: Aurelian opted not to pursue the barbarians back over the river, apparently at the request of his troops. This, however, is a believable modification considering the extensive campaigns just concluded against the Iuthungi.<sup>446</sup> Instead, a new, and entirely traditional treaty of clientage was struck under which the Vandals were required to furnish hostages and 2000 cavalry troopers for the Roman army. In addition, Aurelian imposed limits on their trade with the empire by establishing a specific military market on the far side of the Danube. This short, negotiated victory apparently earned Aurelian the title *Sarmaticus Maximus*,<sup>447</sup> suggesting not only that it was successful in restoring stability to the region, but also indicating that the Vandal raiders mentioned by Dexippus fell within the larger Sarmatian category according to third century thought. The presumably east-Germanic-speaking Vandals<sup>448</sup> could be labeled Sarmatians by virtue of their geographic location beyond the *ripa Sarmatica*, most likely in the Upper Tisza Valley.<sup>449</sup> Whether or not any Iazyges, or other tribes more commonly labeled as Sarmatians, took part in the raid is unknown, but not improbable.

The next Sarmatian war happened under Probus,<sup>450</sup> but since it is only known from the *Historia Augusta*, we should treat it with caution. If it did happen, it would have taken place in the 278-279 window when coinage indicates Probus was in the Pannonian region.<sup>451</sup> From this point

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<sup>446</sup> *Scyth.* fr. 28.

<sup>447</sup> White 2005, pp. 80-81.

<sup>448</sup> The language of the Vandals was almost certainly an east-Germanic dialect closely related to Gothic. Naming conventions make so much clear, but there is little more we can say. The only possible surviving fragment of Vandalic comes from an epigram attributed to a Carthaginian poet of the fifth century named Bonosus (*Anth. Lat.* 279), affectionally entitled *de convivii barbaris* in the manuscripts: *Inter 'eils' Goticum 'scapia matzia ia drincan' / non audet quisquam dignos edicere versus!* ("Amidst Gothic cries of 'cheers! Let's eat and drink!' nobody dares to write decent poetry!"). The '*eils Goticum*' here probably still refers to the Vandalic language, but the association is by no means certain.

<sup>449</sup> Zosimus' reference to the barbarians as Scythians, meanwhile, shows the continued importance of the macro-level Scythian label in his own, late fifth century context.

<sup>450</sup> *SHA, Prob.* 16.2, 11.9, 12.4, 19.8.

<sup>451</sup> Kovács 2014, pp. 265-266.

on, every would-be emperor saw fit to wage some sort of war against the barbarians beyond the Middle Danube, most notably the members of the First Tetrarchy, who racked up impressive numbers of *Sarmaticus Maximus* honorifics for wars about which we know next to nothing.<sup>452</sup>

What is remarkable about nearly all of the third century Sarmatian wars is the lack of detail used to describe them, particularly in contrast to the ongoing Scythian troubles dealt with at great length by Dexippus. Part of this paucity of interest in Sarmatian matters no-doubt stems from the extensive use of Dexippus by later historians, yet this fails to address why the historian himself had so little to say about Pannonian affairs in the *Scythica*. Part of the problem may stem from the loss of much of Dexippus' text, but the fact that later ancient authors who had and used the full *Scythica* (Zosimus, Jordanes, etc.) also offer few details on third century Sarmatian affairs suggests that textual loss is not the main problem. It is also not enough to suggest that Dexippus' interests did not extend as far west as Pannonia since he included an extended discussion of Iuthungi raiders who operated even further west in Noricum and Raetia,<sup>453</sup> as well as the single section on the Vandal/Sarmatian treaty just discussed. In this situation, we must conclude that compared to events in Moesia and Asia Minor, Sarmatian affairs were simply not that interesting to Dexippus.

In general, as far as we can tell, major Sarmatian raids were quite rare during the third and fourth centuries. Rather than implying a textually-invisible invasion behind most of the poorly-documented Roman expeditions into the Sarmatian *barbaricum*, we should see these adventures as driven by imperial politics. Dubious emperors like Maximinus, Probus, Carus, and Carinus were probably looking to score easy victories when they led their troops into the Hungarian Plain. The

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<sup>452</sup> For a summary of the sources and events for this period, see Kovács 2014, pp. 264-284; 2016, pp. 1-28, and Table 2 (for the Tetrarchic titles).

<sup>453</sup> *Scyth.* fr. 28.



region's population was hemmed in by a ring of mountains and provincial spears and anyway was – as we have demonstrated archaeologically in the previous chapter – too settled to flee, while its elites were too weak to offer meaningful resistance. There may well have been frequent, small-scale raiding in third century Pannonia, as Roman troops were busy slaughtering each other – with occasional breaks to deal with the latest rampaging Boranoi – but given how Dexippus' *Scythica* was entirely devoted to the topic of nasty barbarians, we would expect to know more about the vaguely-attested Sarmatian events had they been significant enough to register on Dexippus' radar in the same category as the campaigns of the Gothic leader Cniva and the high-seas adventures of the Black Sea tribes.

When Diocletian secured the throne in 284, he was faced with rampant civil strife and the remnants of the Scythian wars in Thrace and Asia Minor. Indeed, Pannonia may have been one of his least problematic regions. The passing way in which the sources deal with the Sarmatian wars of the Tetrarchy strongly suggests that they were not conducted in response to major threats. There were two goals: first, to reestablish order through renewed client alliances, and second to prove the martial legitimacy of the new rulers, as testified by the regular stream of honorifics.<sup>454</sup>

### ***III. How do you Solve a Problem like Dacia (Again)?***

#### **4.3.1. Chaos along the Lower Danube, and Aurelian's big decision**

While Roman relations with the barbarians of the Hungarian Plain had been proceeding more-or-less according to the Antonine playbook throughout the third century, the same could not

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<sup>454</sup> Kovács 2016, p. 28, table 2. There are 4 total *Sarmatici* for Diocletian, 3 for Maximian, and 2 for Galerius. Diocletian and Maximian get one *Gothicus* each. Galerius earned a surprising 6 *Carpici*, but the other members of the college only took that title once. This seeming anomaly is probably related to Tervingi political expansion in Moldavia and Wallachia at the expense of existing Carpic/Free Dacian groups. These eventually petitioned for resettlement inside the empire (see below).

be said for the areas further downstream, along the Lower Danube in the region later known, at least in one source, as the *ripa Gothica*.<sup>455</sup> By the time Claudius II won his decisive victory at Naissus in 270, defeating barbarians Zosimus calls Scythians and thereby earning the cognomen *Gothicus*, the provinces of Moesia and Thrace, as well as many parts of Macedonia, Achaëa, and the provinces of Asia Minor, had endured a solid twenty years of near-constant raiding and chaos.<sup>456</sup> Aurelian appears to have delivered the knock-out punch in Europe with a decisive victory in 271, earning the title *Gothicus Maximus*, for his efforts,<sup>457</sup> but it was up to Tacitus in 276 to handle the final round of Black Sea raiders.<sup>458</sup>

Out of the later phases of this chaotic period came Aurelian's decision to withdraw the Roman troops and administrative apparatus from the Dacian provinces beyond the Danube. The *Vita Aureliani* and Eutropius record the basics, namely, that the emperor relocated both soldiers and civilians to a new Dacian province carved out of Moesia. He took the action because the old Dacia had become militarily untenable, and in order to help repair the ruinous state of Illyricum by

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<sup>455</sup> *Orig. Const.* 35.

<sup>456</sup> Zos. 1.43, 45. The first attested raid into Moesia occurred in 249 and resulted in the unsuccessful siege of Marcianople, an important Thracian city (*SHA, Gord.* 31.1, *Jord. Get.* 91, *Scyth. fr.* 22). This was followed by the large-scale raids of Cniva and Ostrogotha (250–251) which culminated in the sack of Philippopolis, an even more important city, and the death of Decius at Abrittus (Zos. 1.23, *Lactant. De mort. pers.* 4.1, *Scyth. fr.* 24). The remainder of the 250s and the whole decade of the 260s witnessed widespread seaborne raiding by a number of 'Scythian' tribes, including Boranoi, Heruli, and Goths. The social effects of these raids are on display in the *Canonical Epistles* of Gregory Thaumaturgus, and the many individual raids and sieges account for the bulk of the preserved fragments of Dexippus' *Scythica*, including his own role in the defense of Attica from Herulian raiders (*Scyth. fr. Mec.* 31/Mar. 25). See also, Zos. 1.31–46.

<sup>457</sup> *SHA, Aurel.* 22 is the main source, but the campaign is also attested in Orosius (7.23.4), Eutropius (9.13.1), and Jordanes, *Romana* (290). The *Historia Augusta* preserves the name of the defeated Gothic leader as Cannabas, and it has been suggested that this may be a corruption of the Cniva known from Dexippus' *Scythica*, referring here either to the famous warleader or one of his descendants (Groag 1903, p. 1378; Barnes 1978, p. 70).

<sup>458</sup> For Tacitus' campaign see Zos. 1.63. The *Vita Probi* records additional warfare against various transdanubian tribes (18), but given the vagueness of the biography's description and their absence from any other source, I am inclined to regard these events as largely fictitious. Both the *Historia Augusta* (*Prob.* 18) and Zosimus (1.71), however, mention resettlement of Danubian barbarians inside the empire under Probus, and the campaigns mentioned in the *Historia Augusta* may stem from some unrest associated with this process. We will return to Probus' resettlements below.

consolidating the greater Danubian region's population south of the river.<sup>459</sup> The basic reality of Aurelian's withdrawal is not in question, but there has been much controversy over the details. One particularly fraught issue has had to do with the supposed civilian evacuation. While no one doubts that some of the Daco-Roman population opted to leave the region along with the army, there was until recently a (largely Hungarian and German) school of thought that pictured the evacuation as near-total. The staggering logistics of removing an entire population - urban and rural - should be enough to dismiss the notion, but the idea that the Daco-Roman population left with the legions was politically useful for Austro-Hungarian (and later just Hungarian) pundits eager to sever any perceived ethnic links between their Transylvanian holdings and the 19<sup>th</sup> century Romanian state in Wallachia and Moldavia, and so the idea of post-Aurelian Dacia as a *terra deserta* lived on for far too long.<sup>460</sup> The picture that emerges from the material remains of post-Aurelian Dacia, however, is one of partial continuity, and before dealing with the ideologies behind Aurelian's withdrawal, we must briefly consider this evidence.

#### 4.3.2. Post-Aurelian Dacia: the material evidence

The Dacian provinces in 271 had undergone over 150 years of Roman occupation and extensive colonization by military veterans and civilians from across the empire, although older models that saw little continuity with earlier Dacian populations are probably overstated.<sup>461</sup> The

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<sup>459</sup> *SHA, Aurel.* 39.7; *Eutrop.* 9.15. See also *Festus* 8; *Jord. Rom.* 217; *Syncr.* 722; *Mal.* 12.30. For a succinct, recent assessment of the evidence, see *Watson* 1999, pp. 154-157.

<sup>460</sup> *Ellis* 1998, pp. 221-225. It is worth noting, however, that Romanian claims for direct continuity between the Roman-era population of Dacia and the modern Romanian ethnicity are just as ideologically compromised, even if their position does appear to lie somewhat closer to the picture produced by the ancient textual and archaeological evidence.

<sup>461</sup> While the free Dacian elite was probably largely destroyed, or forced to flee during and after Trajan's conquest, there is significant evidence indicating that the rural majority population continued to live in the new Roman provinces alongside immigrants from south of the Danube. This evidence largely comes in the form of ubiquitous Dacian ceramics at Roman sites, as well as some limited epigraphic evidence. The lack of large indigenous settlements is not unique to the Roman

region was characterized by extensive urbanism with a fairly heavy military flavor, reflecting the 55- to 60-thousand soldiers stationed in Roman Dacia throughout most of its history. These troops were paid in cash, which created a province that took in much more wealth than it produced, explaining perhaps why there is virtually no evidence of strife between the military and civilian elements of provincial Dacian society.<sup>462</sup> Agricultural villas in a Moeso-Pannonian style, and rural settlements in near the region's iron, gold, salt, and timber resources, indicate that the empire was eager to exploit the plentiful natural resources of the region, from the fertile agricultural land of Wallachia and the Transylvanian plateau, to the minerals of the Apuseni and Carpathian mountains.<sup>463</sup>

During the chaos of the third century, there were, perhaps surprisingly, no major recorded barbarian incursions into Dacia,<sup>464</sup> suggesting that prior to Aurelian's withdraw, Dacia was still effectively serving its key function of redirecting hostile raiders east and south into Moldavia and eastern Wallachia, or - less frequently - west over the Carpathians into the Hungarian Plain.<sup>465</sup> In this light, Aurelian's retreat looks even more like a regional strategic move rather than the disposal of a mortally-wounded province. One way Dacia felt the third century crisis, however, was in terms of cash flow. Coin finds taper off precipitously in the two decades prior to Aurelian,<sup>466</sup> and the resultant economic slump may well have encouraged more of the population to leave with the troops.

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period, and may reflect a cultural aversion to settlement nucleation among the Dacians (Diaconescu 2004, pp. 121-125; Oltean 2004).

<sup>462</sup> Diaconescu 2004, p. 120.

<sup>463</sup> Oltean 2004, pp. 147, 154-155; Mitrofan 1974, p. 46.

<sup>464</sup> Diaconescu 2004, p. 129. This is not to say that there were no raids into Dacia during this period, but rather that - like the Hungarian Plain and Pannonia - Dacia suffered less than did the provinces of the Lower Danube, and the regions raided by the Black Sea Scythians.

<sup>465</sup> While this 'Dacian wedge' worked as advertised, the same cannot be said for the *limes* along Scythia Minor/Dobrogea and eastern Wallachia. No Roman linear frontier was designed to stop large-scale raids, but the rapid-response system envisioned for this *limes* was supposed to interdict and defeat raiders before they penetrated much beyond the river. This system repeatedly failed to do its job as troops were relocated to deal with the usurpations and other foreign conflicts.

<sup>466</sup> Diaconescu 2004, p. 130; Gazdac 1998.

Evidence for population continuity after the withdrawal is spotty, but present. In Transylvania, Sarmizagetusa shows domestic refurbishment into the fourth century, as well as a fifth century fortification of the civic amphitheater, suggesting there was still something worth defending there over a century after the withdrawal.<sup>467</sup> At Napoca, the urban center appears to have declined shortly after the retreat, but a new village that appeared nearby in the early fourth century shows Roman material continuity, including late Roman coinage. A sub-Roman population has also been identified in the Someș Valley as late as the seventh century.<sup>468</sup>

South of the Carpathians, there is evidence of much more intense late Roman activity. Constantine reoccupied Romula, the former capital of Dacia Malvensis, located in the central Wallachian Plain,<sup>469</sup> and a large number of Tetrarchic and Constantinian *quadriburgia* have been located and excavated along the entire north bank of the Lower Danube. In general, these forts served as bridgeheads for adjacent garrison posts on the southern bank, but some, like the fort at Pietroasele, and possibly Tibiscum, were located well beyond the river.<sup>470</sup> Some of the major north-south river routes also saw continued Roman military presence throughout the fourth century, suggesting that Rome maintained a continued interest in controlling movement into and out of Transylvania.<sup>471</sup> The lynchpin for the entire late Roman Lower Danube *limes* was located at Sucidava/Oescus, where Constantine constructed a new bridge over the river. Here, naturally, enough, developed the main commercial entrepôt for the region, which was maintained through at

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<sup>467</sup> Diaconescu 2004, pp. 131-132.

<sup>468</sup> Diaconescu 2004, pp. 133-134.

<sup>469</sup> Diaconescu 2004, p. 130.

<sup>470</sup> Bondoc 2009, ch. 3.

<sup>471</sup> Bondoc 2009, pp. 53-68. The most important of these routes were located along the Cerna River north from Dierna (the Cerna-Timiș route), and north from Drobeta where Trajan's original bridge had stood (the Olt route).

least the sixth century.<sup>472</sup> Taken together, the evidence for post-Aurelian Dacia seems to depict a strong Roman desire to maintain control over the river, and access to the lands beyond. As for the provincial population, it appears legitimately diminished in size and resources, but still with an appetite for Roman goods, both homemade and imported. Overtop this post-provincial substrate, we will need to consider barbarian immigrants well known from both settlement and burial evidence in the region, but first we must return to our question of how Roman minds conceived of Aurelian's withdrawal, and the status of Dacia in the following century.

### 4.3.3. Conceptualizing Dacia, post-withdrawal

We may now return to the question of how Aurelian and his successors perceived the territory north of the Danube following his removal of Roman troops and administrators. Ceding territory was a rare event throughout Roman history. When it had occurred in the centuries prior to Aurelian's reign, it had followed a fairly clear pattern. Hadrian opted to abandon much of Trajan's Mesopotamian conquests (and perhaps part of his Dacian annexation as well<sup>473</sup>), but in this case, the evacuated regions had only recently been conquered, and had not yet been fully integrated into the imperial administrative system.<sup>474</sup> Augustus' earlier decision to abandon the conquest of Germania between the Rhine and Elbe following the Varus disaster in 9 CE set the precedent for this sort of strategic retrenchment.<sup>475</sup> The example of the so-called Antonine Wall in Scotland represents the third main example. This northernmost *limes* was held for only a few years after its completion in 142. Septimius Severus' equally-abortive attempt to re-establish the Antonine *limes* there, about

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<sup>472</sup> Bondoc 2009, pp. 76-81.

<sup>473</sup> Gudea 1979.

<sup>474</sup> Isaac 1992, pp. 23-26; Mattern 2002, p. 94.

<sup>475</sup> Luttwak 1976, pp. 46-50.

sixty years later, is particularly telling.<sup>476</sup> Despite Rome having only ever held the territory between the Hadrianic and Antonine walls for a few years, Severus' effort to reestablish the abandoned frontier suggests that to Roman minds, the territory between the walls had never been ceded to anyone, even if control had lapsed.<sup>477</sup>

Aurelian's withdrawal from Dacia is somewhat different from the preceding examples because the region had been provincially administered for nearly 200 years.<sup>478</sup> After this protracted 'Roman interlude,' Dacia was too intimately connected to the rest of the empire, both ideologically and socio-economically, to be abandoned outright. In all likelihood, Aurelian did not conceive of his withdrawal as a cession of territory at all. Rather, we should see the move as a strategic, military decision reflecting the specific, unprecedentedly chaotic circumstances of the Lower Danube region in the late third century. Looking forward, in 363, the unfortunately-timed demise of Julian forced his successor, Jovian, to strike a humiliating treaty with Persia. In this case, peace was bought at the price of official cession of a number of fortified cities and their territories in the disputed borderland of northern Mesopotamia, most importantly the bastion-city of Nisibis.<sup>479</sup> Ammianus's comments

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<sup>476</sup> Mattern 2002, pp. 94,

<sup>477</sup> The loss of the Agri Decumates and parts of Raetia beyond the Danube during the 260s have often been seen as precedents for Aurelian's retreat, but Okamura convincingly argues that we should see these losses as the result of the period's chaos and civil war rather than an intentional retrenchment (Okamura 1996).

<sup>478</sup> The legacy of Dacia's provincial period had important implications for the Tervingi Goths who assumed hegemony over the region later in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, as we will discuss further below.

<sup>479</sup> Blockley 1992, pp. 24-30. Ammianus (25.7.11) records that part of the agreement permitted Rome to evacuate the population from the cities prior to their surrender, but notes that the effected people had to be forced to move out (25.9.1-5). This clause is crucial to our understanding of how Rome conceived of its rule in the fourth century. Under exceptional circumstances, territory could be ceded, but the people of those areas had to remain under Roman control. Romans generally thought about their empire as a patchwork of peoples (*gentes, civitates, ethnoi, phylai*) subservient to Roman power (Mattern 2002, especially chs. 2 and 5). While geographic divisions were crucial for organizing these peoples for the purposes of taxation and governance (Potter 1996), the territorial map was generally secondary to the ethnic/tribal network. Initially, this system consisted of two classes of dependent peoples: those with Roman citizenship, bound to the apparatus of state through ties of patronage, and those without citizenship, bound to the state through treaty. After the *Constitutio Antoniniana* of 212 granted citizenship to all free inhabitants of *Romania*, new forms of citizenship (provincial, *civitas*, religious) assumed greater salience for conceptualizing Roman political authority (Matheisen 2006, pp. 1013-1018).

on this humiliating slight against the *maiestas* of Rome, namely that it was the first time *ab urbe condita* that a Roman emperor or consul had ceded territory to an enemy,<sup>480</sup> reflects the outlook of someone who had lived through the debacle and surely mirrored popular sentiment. As far as our sources allow, there was no such outcry in response to Aurelian's actions; what he did in Dacia was seen as something other than the loss or abandonment of Roman territory. A subtler question, and one much more difficult to answer, would be exactly how Aurelian and his successors positively conceived of the old Dacian provinces after the withdrawal. The construction of a new Dacia south of the river may indicate that the old territory was no longer considered 'Dacian,' even if it remained nominally under Roman jurisdiction. The whole region beyond the river remained Scythia in Roman minds, of course, but this does not preclude a more specific designation. Positive evidence is rather scanty, but it is only after Aurelian that we first hear the region referred to as 'Gothia,' and the Lower Danube labeled the *ripa Gothica*.<sup>481</sup>

#### ***IV. Constantine's Neo-Trajanic Vision for the Danubian Borderland***

##### **4.4.1. Constantine's Sarmatian and Dacian wars, 322–332 CE**

Material evidence from the Dacian military sites of Drobeta, Sucidava, Gornea, and a number of smaller 'bridgeheads' show Tetrarchic occupation, and in 328, Constantine built an elaborate new bridge over the Danube between Oescus and Sucidava, which he celebrated with commemorative

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Under these circumstances we can understand why Rome felt compelled to evacuate as much of the population of Nisibis and the other surrendered cities as possible in 363, and also why Aurelian had to create a new Dacia south of the Danube rather than simply merging those he evacuated from over the river into the existing population of Moesia. Changing notions of citizenship may have allowed Rome to cede territory under situations of extreme necessity, but this did not diminish the damage to imperial prestige caused by such actions. Dacia was not like Nisibis, as there was no overwhelming enemy to compel cession, so we should look for other ways of thinking about the evacuation.

<sup>480</sup> A.M. 25.9.9

<sup>481</sup> For *Gothia*, see *Pas. Sab.* 1.1, 3.1. For the *ripa Gothica*, see *Orig. Const.* 35.



coins.<sup>482</sup> It seems clear that in the early fourth century, emperors continued to view the old Dacian provinces as part of the empire, whether Dacian or not, and this continued territorial claim can help us understand a watershed moment of fourth century history: Constantine's treaty of 332 with the Tervingi Goths. Prior to 332, Constantine's Danubian policies had followed the expected pattern. In 322 or 323, the emperor battled Sarmatian raiders in Pannonia, whom he pursued into the Hungarian Plain, killing their king during the course of the campaign.<sup>483</sup> The contemporary poetry of Optatianus Porphyrius adds some additional information, allowing us to determine that the bulk of the campaign was fought in the *barbaricum* after an initial skirmish near the fort of Campona in Pannonia Superior,<sup>484</sup> and that following the defeat of *indomiti reges*, Constantine, *victor Sarmatiae totiens*, concluded the war with a *foedus*,<sup>485</sup> before divvying up the spoils at Bononia/Vidin back in Moesia.<sup>486</sup> Whether it was the handling of this entirely typical Sarmatian war, or an even more obscure, hypothetical Gothic incursion further east in Moesia, some sort of anti-barbarian action by Constantine prompted Licinius to claim a breach of his territory,<sup>487</sup> and Constantine soon found himself engaged in a brutal civil conflict with his eastern rival.<sup>488</sup> On his eventual victory in 325, the emperor of the reunified Roman state found fresh Danubian troubles just around the corner.

Even though Aurelian's withdrawal from Dacia did not amount to an ideological relinquishment of Rome's claim to the transdanubian provinces, his pragmatic removal of the legions did create a power vacuum in Wallachia and Transylvania. There is broad consensus that by 332,

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<sup>482</sup> Bondoc 2009, ch. 3.

<sup>483</sup> Zos. 2.21.

<sup>484</sup> Opt. Por. 6.18-21.

<sup>485</sup> Opt. Por. 7.20-32.

<sup>486</sup> Opt. Por. 6.26-28. See Kovács 2016, pp. 45-50 for a more detailed assessment of the patchy evidence from Porphyrius and Zosimus.

<sup>487</sup> *Orig. Const.* 5.21.

<sup>488</sup> See Potter 2017, pp. 98-99 for an assessment of the sources for Constantine's war with Licinius.

hegemony in at least part of Trajan's Dacia had been assumed by a barbarian society the Romans identified as Scythian, and which most modern historians call Gothic.<sup>489</sup> However these new hegemonies thought about themselves – some of them, at least called themselves Tervingi – they had evidentially created during the course of the third century, a stable enough political system in the broad region between the Don River and the mouth of the Danube to allow for the development and proliferation of a predictable, coherent material culture complex, both in terms of settlement and burial practice. Constantine's treaty with the Tervingi, as we will discuss below, only aided this regional florescence. The specific characteristics of this Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov Culture can tell us much about how the society worked, and we will consider this evidence below, but for the moment it is enough to note that there is good evidence to accept at least a loose association between the material complex and some of the barbarians Roman writers of the third and fourth centuries labeled as Scythians and Goths.<sup>490</sup> We don't know enough about the poorly-documented Scythian wars of the Tetrarchy, to determine much about how the Tervingi and other 'Scythians' fit into the Danubian vision of Diocletian and his colleagues, but it appears clearly enough – from both material and textual evidence – that while the Tetrarchs were busy putting the Roman house in order, the barbarians were doing their own housecleaning north of the Danube, from which the Tervingi eventually emerged as the most powerful unit in and around former Dacia.

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<sup>489</sup> Thompson 1966, pp. 1-7, Wolfram 1988, pp. 57-61; Heather 1991, pp. 84-97; Heather 2007, pp. 165-167; Kulikowski 2007, pp. 71-83.

<sup>490</sup> As emphasized in Chapter Three, however, association between a material culture complex and an historically-attested group is never absolute and also tells us much less about internal group identities than it does mechanics, and about how the authors saw and classified the groups they described. If my terminology surrounding the Scythians/Goths/Tervingi seems vague, it is in order to emphasize the fact that we don't actually have a firm grasp on exactly what those labels of group identity meant (if anything) to the people they purported to describe.

Pushing out Bastarni and Carpi from the plains and hills of Moldavia was one thing,<sup>491</sup> but when Goths – who aren’t given a more precise label, but were almost certainly Tervingi – attempted to extend their influence into the Sarmatian lands of the Hungarian Plain, they ran into a serious complication in the form of the treaty struck between Constantine and the Sarmatians in 322.<sup>492</sup> The sequence of events is clear enough: hard pressed by Gothic enemies, the Sarmatians called on Roman aid, citing their status as imperial dependents. In response, Constantine dispatched his eponymous son at the head of an army, which marched across the Danube, engaged the Gothic forces, and inflicted on them a crushing defeat, even if we disbelieve – and we should – the 100,000 casualties listed in the *Origo Constantini*.<sup>493</sup> The war was brought to an end with a new *foedus* between the

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<sup>491</sup> For a detailed discussion of this period, see Wolfram 1988, pp. 56–60. Although much of W.’s analysis is sound, he is wrong to identify the Rausimodus that Zosimus records leading the Sarmatian raids of 323 (2.21) as a Goth based only on his Germanic name. The longstanding friendship between the Iazyges and Germanic Quadi, not to mention the exempla of other contemporary Sarmatian leaders with Germanic names (eg: Fragiledus and Araharius, A.M. 17.12.11–12) make it clear that onomastics cannot be used to identify Sarmatians. For the period between Aurelian and Constantine more generally, there is strong textual evidence for a shifting political landscape among the transdanubian barbarians. First, Maximian’s birthday panegyric of 291 (*Pan. Lat.* XI.17) gives us our earliest attestation of three barbarian groups well known from later decades: the Tervingi, Taifali, and Gepids, all of which are described as battling for supremacy north of the Danube, along with Vandals, Alamanni, and Burgundians (the Sarmatians are noticeably absent from this list, as are other ‘pacified’ client tribes like the Quadi and Marcomanni). While one suspects that the panegyricist may have simply listed off all the barbarian tribes currently ‘in the news,’ it does make sense to imagine a period of chaos north of the River in the decades following the evacuation of Dacia. Probus’ war with the Bastarni (*SHA, Prob.* 18.1) and Galerius’ campaigns against the Carpi, for which he assumed no less than six *Carpicus Maximus* honorifics (Kovács 2016, pp. 1–6, 23, table 2), should also be seen as part of the shifting power dynamics after Aurelian. Both tribes petitioned for resettlement south of the Danube, which was accomplished in multiple stages between 280 and 303 (*SHA, Prob.* 18.1; Zos. 1.71.1; Aur. Vict. 39.43; Jerome, *Chron.* 226b Helm; *Chron. Min.* 1, p. 230; *Pan. Lat.* 8.5.2; A.M. 28.1.5). Taifali raids across the Danube in 330 (Zos. 2.31.3) may also have stemmed from consolidation of Tervingian power in Dacia (Kulikowski 2007, pp. 83–84).

<sup>492</sup> The conflict between the Sarmatians and Goths also appears to have been the catalyst for the Limigantes revolt discussed at length in the previous chapter. To briefly reiterate, the *Origo Constantini* records that the Sarmatian ruling elite (which had always also been the warrior class) was forced to arm their ‘slaves’ in order to resist the Gothic menace. These Limigantes, in turn, threw out their rulers, most of whom sought resettlement inside the empire. As with the Gothic casualties, the figure of 350,000 refugees must be wildly exaggerated. There does not appear to have been any Roman military response to the initial Limigantes revolt. Presumably, Constantine considered the problem to have solved itself. (*Orig. Const.* 6.31; A.M. 17.12.18, 19.11.1; *Chron. Min.* 1, p. 234; Euseb. *v. Const.* 4.6, Soz. 1.8.9). We should not take the labeling of the Limigantes as slaves too literally. As argued in the previous chapter, this probably represents a long-simmering conflict between the settled, village population and the Roman-supported warrior-elite which was a fairly exclusive group with some residual habits from their ancestors’ days on the Pontic Steppe.

<sup>493</sup> *Orig. Const.* 6.31; Julian, *Or.* 1.9D. For a full list of the sources relevant to this war, see Kovács 2016, pp. 53–61.

Tervingi and Constantine, the terms of which seem to reflect both an accurate assessment of the current transdanubian balance of power, and the enduring ideology of imperial control over Dacia.

#### 4.4.2. Reconstructing Constantine's Gothic treaty of 332

The terms of Constantine's treaty with the Tervingi are not preserved in any detail, but the main elements can be worked out deductively. First, despite its acceptance at face-value among non-specialists, Jordanes' claim that the Constantinian *foedus* required the Goths to maintain a 40,000-man presence within the Roman armies is clearly nonsense, reflecting both an exaggerated number, and a retrojection onto the world of the fourth century, of the sort of relationship sixth century *foederati* enjoyed with the Roman Empire.<sup>494</sup> The facts appear to be these:

- 1) the Gothic defeat was total, so the Romans would have dictated the treaty from a position of strength. Indeed, the victory was decisive enough that Julian thought it worth mentioning three decades later while singing the dynasty's praises in a panegyric to Constantius II.<sup>495</sup>
- 2) Rome demanded high-ranking hostages, including the son of the Gothic king.<sup>496</sup>
- 3) The initial agreement did not involve payment of subsidies, a fact Eusebius praises highly in his biography of Constantine.<sup>497</sup>

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<sup>494</sup> Jord. *Get.* 112, 115; Heather 1991, pp. 108-109; Kulikowski 2007, pp. 84-86. Wolfram (1988, pp. 61-62) never cites Jordanes, but accepts his underlying narrative that with the treaty of 332, the Tervingi became *foederati* of the sort known from later sources (eg: Procopius, *Wars* 3.11.3-4) whose treaty obligations with Rome centered on the provision of a permanent levy of troops. Blockley, a very intelligent scholar, but non-specialist in the field of Gothic studies, is even more explicit in his use of Jordanes (1992, p. 8).

<sup>495</sup> *Orig. Const.* 6.31; Julian, *Or.* 1.9D.

<sup>496</sup> *Orig. Const.* 6.31.

<sup>497</sup> Euseb. *v. Const.* 4.5. Some sort of subsidy appears to have begun sometime between 332 and 369 when Themistius praises Constantius II for reversing the policy in his own treaty with the Goths (*Or.* 8.179/119). The most logical beginning for the payments would have been in the 340s when an obscure period of Gothic unrest was apparently resolved diplomatically (Lib. *Or.* 59.89-93; Heather 1991, pp. 115-116).

- 4) The Goths were allowed to trade freely across the Danube.<sup>498</sup>
- 5) After the treaty, the Goths were considered to be dependents of Rome.<sup>499</sup>
- 6) No initial levy of troops appears to have taken place,<sup>500</sup> although we find Gothic contingents serving in all the major wars of the following decades.<sup>501</sup>
- 7) The treaty apparently allowed the Constantinian dynasty to brag that it had restored Trajan's Dacia.<sup>502</sup>

What should we make of this scattered material? Without a doubt, the most unusual feature is the free-trade agreement. As we have discussed in the previous chapter and seen illustrated above in Aurelian's Vandal *foedus*, tight control over exchange with the empire was a hallmark of Antonine-style client treaties with northern peoples. Additionally, Constantine's decision not to levy troops from the defeated Tervingi as part of the initial treaty also went against normal practice. In light of these abnormalities, I would argue that Constantine's treaty with the Tervingi bears a closer resemblance to a resettlement than it does to a traditional treaty of clientage.

Resettlement of barbarians on Roman soil began in the very earliest days of the Principate, when Agrippa settled the Ubii on the left bank of the Rhine,<sup>503</sup> and the practice continued periodically throughout the next three centuries.<sup>504</sup> Most resettlements came about as the result of

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<sup>498</sup> Them. *Or.* 10.135/206.

<sup>499</sup> Euseb. *v. Const.* 4.5.

<sup>500</sup> Euseb. *v. Const.* 4.5-6. The main evidentiary argument against Jordanes' claims of an initial 40,000-man levy relate to its absence from earlier, contemporary sources, most importantly Eusebius. In 4.5 he describes the Gothic victory, making no mention of a levy, while in 4.6 he describes the subsequent Sarmatian war, and the terms of its treaty, including the levy of troops. For further analysis, see Kulikowski 2007, pp. 85-86, note ch. 4.23.

<sup>501</sup> In 348, Libanius, *Or.* 59.89; in 360, AM 20.8.1; in 363, AM 23.2.7.

<sup>502</sup> Julian, *Caes.* 329B-C; Opt. Por. 18.5-10. Note, however, that Optatianus' language here is obscure and the interpretation of this passage as a reference to repopulating Dacia should remain tentative.

<sup>503</sup> Strabo 4.3.4.

<sup>504</sup> For a complete catalog of attested resettlements, see de Ste. Croix 1981, Appendix III (pp. 509-518).

Roman victories against barbarians both inside and outside the *limites*, although there were occasions where tribes spontaneously petitioned Rome for admittance.<sup>505</sup> The *Panegyrici Latini*, imperial mouthpieces that they are, suggest that resettlement was a particularly favored tactic of the Tetrarchs, who, building on the examples of Claudius II following his Gothic victories, and Probus' handling of the Bastarnae,<sup>506</sup> appear to have repeatedly settled defeated tribes on lands left abandoned or underpopulated by the upheavals of the third century.<sup>507</sup> These resettlements were designed both to bring areas back into cultivation, and thereby provide new tax revenue, and also to create new bodies of men for recruitment into the Roman army. The twin aims are most clearly spelled out in the panegyric delivered to Constantine in 310:

*What more shall I say about those nations from deepest Francia [ie: east of the Rhine], now plucked out not just from those areas which we Romans had previously invaded, but even from their original homeland and from the farthest shores of the barbaricum, so that, once settled in the depopulated regions of Gaul, they now both bolster the pax Romana by cultivating the land and Roman arms through recruitment?*<sup>508</sup>

The terminology used to describe such settled barbarians is not wholly consistent, but most often we find them called *laeti* or *tributarii*. Resettled groups identified by these titles appear to bear similarities in status to Constantine's Tervingi, and an examination of this evidence can help us reconstruct the relationship established by the treaty of 332. To begin with, in Ammianus we find defeated Sarmatians in 359 promising – treacherously, as it turns out – to assume the name and status of *tributarii* as the condition of their resettlement inside the *limes*.<sup>509</sup> The historian uses the same term

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<sup>505</sup> eg: Appian, prf.7.

<sup>506</sup> For Claudius II: Zos. 1.46.2, *SHA, Claud.* 9.4. For Probus: *SHA, Prob.* 18.1; Zos. 1.71.1.

<sup>507</sup> *Pan. Lat.* 4/8, 1.4, 5.2, 8.4, 9.1–4, 21.1; 7/6.6.2. See also *Aur. Vict.* 39.43; Jerome, *Chron.* 226b Helm; *Chron. Min.* 1, p. 230; *A.M.* 28.1.5 on the Tetrarchic wars against barbarians.

<sup>508</sup> *Pan. Lat.* 6/7.6.2: *Quid loquar rursus intimas Franciae nationes iam non ab his locis quae olim Romani invaserant sed a propriis ex origine sui sedibus atque ab ultimis barbariae litoribus avulsas, ut in desertis Galliae regionibus conlocatae et pacem Romani imperii cultu iuarent et arma dilectu?*

<sup>509</sup> *A.M.* 19.11.6.

to describe Alamanni defeated and subjugated by Julian in the 350s, although these barbarians appear to have remained in the Agri Decumates where most of them had previously resided.<sup>510</sup> This fact presents a crucial parallel with the Gothic settlement of 332. Like Trajan's Dacia, the Agri Decumates – the triangle of land between the Upper Rhine and Upper Danube – had been administered as a Roman province during the second and third centuries, but had lapsed from imperial control during the chaos of the 260s.<sup>511</sup> Here, too, Rome would have retained a claim over the lost territory, so Ammianus' use of the same term for both the Sarmatians (who were offered a real resettlement) and the Alamanni (who merely had their previous squatting legitimated with a new label) makes sense: both treaties could be considered settlement of barbarians on Roman territory. By the same logic, the Tervingi could have been considered 'resettled' in Dacia, even though they had already been living there. Constantine's treaty would simply have made *de iure*, their existing *de facto* settlement in Wallachia and parts of Transylvania.

The alternate term for resettled barbarians, *laeti*, also appears in Ammianus, who places in the mouth of Julian, an offer to send Constantius certain *adulescentes laetos*, whom he conveniently defines as *cis Rhenum editam barbarorum progeniem*, that is, the youth of those barbarians living on the imperial side of the Rhine.<sup>512</sup> This definition is backed up by a law of 399 which defines laetic lands as those regions administered by the state and inhabited by "those seeking felicity from among many barbarian peoples."<sup>513</sup> A century earlier, we find *laeti* restored to the lands in Gaul granted them by

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<sup>510</sup> A.M. 20.4.1; Drinkwater 2007, ch. 7.

<sup>511</sup> Okamura 1996, pp. 12–17.

<sup>512</sup> A.M. 20.8.13. It is possible to read the references to *laeti* as indicating a particular tribal identity (Simpson 1977) but this does not make sense in light of the rest of the textual evidence (Mathisen 2006, pp. 1023–1028; Nixon and Rogers 1994, pp. 142–144, n. 76).

<sup>513</sup> *CTh* 13.11.10.

Rome, according to the right of *postliminium*,<sup>514</sup> the important Late Roman legal principal whereby citizens captured by barbarians and transported outside the empire, were restored to their prior status upon ransom or recovery. Not only does this vague passage hint at a possible human ‘tug of war’ across the Rhine between the Romans and free Franks, but it also indicates that *laeti* enjoyed at least some of the legal status of Roman citizens.<sup>515</sup> Another law from the Theodosian Code dealing with draft-dodgers, lists Sarmatian and Alamannic *laeti* as subject to the same service requirements as the sons of veterans.<sup>516</sup> Those terms meant compulsory service when troops were levied but should not be read as an indication that all *laeti* were soldiers all the time.<sup>517</sup> They were simply one more source of manpower the empire could draw on. When such manpower was needed, it could be marshaled in two different ways. The *Notitia Dignitatum* includes several military units labeled as *laeti* and further identified by an ethnic designation.<sup>518</sup> This seems to be clear evidence that some *laeti* served in ethnic units. Further, these bodies of soldiers are all located in Gaul, and based on the tribal names attached to each unit, probably had their main, peacetime posting at the place where they (or their ancestors) had originally been settled. Returning to Ammianus, we learn that Julian’s offer to send Constantius *laeti* was aimed at filling gaps in the ranks of two general-service regiments, the Gentiles

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<sup>514</sup> *Pan. Lat.* 8/5.21.1.

<sup>515</sup> Since the passage occurs in the context of other barbarian resettlements, we can – perhaps – read it as indicating a pattern wherein Rome would first settle defeated Franks in Gaul, only to have them recaptured (perhaps not unwillingly) during subsequent Frankish raids. Finally, the Roman retaliatory expedition not only retrieved the ‘abducted’ *laeti*, but also brought in a fresh batch of Frankish settlers. This process could, in theory, go on for many such ‘rounds.’

<sup>516</sup> *CTh* 7.20.12 (400 CE).

<sup>517</sup> Mathisen 2006, pp. 1026–1027.

<sup>518</sup> *Not. Dign. [occ.]* ch. 42. Twelve different *Praefecti Laetorum* are listed as serving under the western *Magister Militum Praesentalis*. Each unit includes one or more ethnic/tribal designation. While the unit of *Franci* reflects an existing late antique barbarian entity, most of the tribal labels are either generic (*Suevi*, *Teutonici*), oddly archaic (*Batavii*, *Lingones*, *Nervii*, *Tungri*), or simply obscure (*Actori*, *Lagensii*). The presence of old, ‘first generation’ tribes among the *laeti* may be evidence of the institution’s early existence as an otherwise-invisible organizational aspect of auxiliary recruitment.



and Scutarii (*et miscendos Gentilibus atque Scutariis adulescentos laetos quosdam*).<sup>519</sup> That *laeti* could be integrated into these existing bodies of soldiers suggests that they were not exclusively used in ethnic units, and were looked on as holding the same military potential as any other Roman recruits. The fact that we find Tervingi serving in all of the major wars occurring in the three decades that Constantine's treaty remained in force, but have no evidence of an initial levy in 332, seems to fit the first laetic recruitment pattern. When necessary, emperors could levy troops from the Tervingi, but, following the *Notitia*, these units probably went home across the Danube after each campaign.

Thinking about the Constantinian Tervingi as *laeti/tributarii*, or at least as having a similar, 'pseudo-laetic' relationship with Rome, can help us explain the mysterious free-trade clause, as well as Tervingian toleration of enduring Roman military installations within the old Dacian provinces. When Julian bragged that Constantine had restored Trajan's provinces with his Gothic war, he was correct.<sup>520</sup> By defeating the Tervingi and then establishing them (or, more accurately, legitimating their prior, independent settlement) in parts old Dacia as *laeti*, Constantine was following a proud Tetrarchic tradition of repopulating provincial lands left vacant by the vicissitudes of war. It hardly mattered that the new inhabitants were Goths instead of Dacians. The name for the region might have to change - to Gothia, say - but the status of the settlers was still within accepted parameters. Indeed, the expectation was that the Tervingi would quickly become model provincials as had nearly every previous group of resettled barbarians. As Julian pointed out in the same panegyric to

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<sup>519</sup> A.M. 20.8.13. These Gentiles should not be confused with the more generic military label of the same name. When used generically, *gentiles* were a specific type of ethnic regiment used for frontier defense and led by Roman officers (*CTh* 7.15.1). Their static location and Roman leadership sets this class of barbarian soldiers somewhat apart from our *laeti*.

<sup>520</sup> Julian, *Caes.* 329B-C. The fact that Constantine is something of a laughingstock in Julian's *Caesares* should not dismay us, regarding this passage. Even if the satirical Julian was poking fun at his predecessor, the joke of Constantine's Dacian restoration only makes sense if it was something the emperor had actually claimed in life. As we will see, the view over the Danube was considerably murkier when Julian composed his satire than it had been in the 330s.

Constantius in which he extolled the lasting peace brought by Constantine's Gothic settlement,<sup>521</sup> one of Rome's strengths - particularly since the issue of the *Constitutio Antoniniana* - was that "even if men are born elsewhere, they adopt her [Rome's] constitution and use the laws and customs she has promulgated, and by that fact become Roman citizens."<sup>522</sup> Within this context, free trade across the Danube should come as no surprise. Trajan's Dacia might be on its way to becoming Constantine's Gothia, but it was still imperial territory, and the new inhabitants enjoyed a status similar to, and perhaps in some ways higher than, provincial citizens across the empire. The fact that we only learn about the free trade policy when Valens rescinded it in 369 only strengthens the point. Discussion of trading policy was never a part of resettlement treaties because they involved bringing barbarians inside the *limites*, and for the most part, people living inside the Roman Empire were free to trade with whomever they liked. Only client barbarians dwelling on their own land outside the *limites* faced the possibility of limited access to Roman markets. Likewise, maintaining the Danube crossing and other military sites within the old Dacia would have seemed natural to Constantine. Even if much of the region's territory had been given over to the Tervingi, maintaining a defensive infrastructure against other hostile barbarians was only prudent policy. Constantine's transdanubian forts have usually been interpreted as a metaphorical blade aimed at the Tervingi's collective heart,<sup>523</sup> but it is perhaps better to see these redoubts as general elements of provincial defense. To Constantine, the forts, bridge, and newly settled *laeti* formed, together, the core support for his claim

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<sup>521</sup> Julian, *Or.* 1.9D.

<sup>522</sup> Julian, *Or.* 1.5C. See also Mathisen 2006, pp. 1021-1023.

<sup>523</sup> eg: Thompson 1966, pp. 10-11; Wolfram 1988, pp. 61-62; Heather 1991, pp. 107-108.

to have restored Trajan's province, which he duly celebrated in coinage<sup>524</sup> and by assuming the title *Dacicus Maximus* for the first time since Aurelian's withdrawal.<sup>525</sup>

## ***V. The Lower Danubian Borderland and the Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov Culture***

### **4.5.1. Introduction: Constantine's Tervingian 'laeti' and the material record**

Constantine's treaty of 332 helped create a greater degree of stability in the lands north of the Lower Danube than had been experienced there during the chaotic century prior. The free trade clause, in particular, opened the region to Roman commerce in a way not previously seen. In order to appreciate the impact of the Constantinian settlement, we must look beyond what Ammianus and Zosimus have to say to the world of the pick and shovel. The material remains of the peoples living north of the Lower Danube during this period have been studied extensively over the last hundred years, and for the last few decades, we have had a fairly clear, detailed picture of how they organized themselves and lived their lives. It is not my aim to significantly advance our understanding of this material culture complex. A summary of the major findings, however, is essential for our larger discussion as we work to interpret Roman interactions with the Tervingi and attempt to put the people of the Lower Danube in dialog with their 'Sarmatian' neighbors on the Hungarian Plain.

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<sup>524</sup> *RIC* 7, pp. 283-4, 331, 574-5. Some of the commemorative issues depict a kneeling barbarian. This figure probably refers to the Tervingi, but this need not threaten our model, since the bridge and initial period of transdanubian refortification (c. 328) predated the Gothic war and treaty of 332.

<sup>525</sup> For the honorific *Dacicus Maximus*, see Kovács 2016, p. 50. Picturing the Tervingi as resettled inside Constantine's notional *limes* also helps explain Ulfilas. When the Gothic Christian came to Constantinople on state business, Constantine (or possibly Constantius II\*) officially named him bishop to the Goths (Philost. 2.5). Part of fully joining the Constantinian empire was embracing the Christian faith of its ruling house, and so Ulfilas was duly dispatched to bring his people the good news. \*Philostorgius' claim that Ulfilas was consecrated during the reign of Constantine does not match the chronology given by Auxentius' letter. This has led to some debate on where the error lies. Clearly Ulfilas was appointed bishop to the Goths somewhere around the transition between Constantine and Constantius II. For a discussion, see Heather and Matthews 1991, pp. 132-134.

A coherent, although internally-diverse material culture complex has been identified in the large region extending from the Lower Danube north and east through the Scythian Corridor to the Dnieper and Don, including most of Transylvania and extending as far north as Kiev and Lviv in Ukraine. This complex is labeled the Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov Culture after two important cemeteries discovered in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century: Sântana de Mureş, located on the Mureş River in Transylvania, and Černjachov, near Kiev, neatly illustrating the culture's range.



Fig. 4.1 Approximate extent of the Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov Culture and important sites.

Based on Roman coins, imported ceramics, and diagnostic fibulae of Northern European and Roman types, the culture appears to have flourished for over a hundred years from the later third through the fourth century CE. The earliest recognizable manifestations of the culture appear in the early third century in the Volhynia region of the Ukraine, while the greatest spread appears to have occurred in the second half of the fourth century. The cultural complex appears latest in Transylvania, showing up in the south-east corner around the year 300, and only becoming entrenched in the central highlands by the middle of the century. Given the limitations of the dating methods, however, we should not attempt to impose strict chronological boundaries on the culture.<sup>526</sup>

Because the geographical spread of the culture and its chronology map closely onto the setting for both the third century Scythian raiders, and the Tervingi and Greuthungi Goths of the fourth century, it is generally accepted that there is some sort of meaningful connection between the material culture complex and these textually-attested peoples. Older scholars assumed a simple one-to-one relationship, and described the Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov Culture as the material manifestation of the unified Gothic state described by Jordanes.<sup>527</sup> Such models are to be avoided. Kulikowski offers a better way forward, suggesting that while we should shy away from drawing hard and fast connections between the producers of the material culture and the specific polities and dynasts described in the texts, we *can* feel confident that those attested groups and individuals represent the people who produced the excavated remains of S-M/C Culture life, filtered through

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<sup>526</sup> Heather and Matthews 1991, pp. 50–51; Diaconu 1975, p. 68; Horedt 1986, p. 8ff. The late arrival of the S-M/C Culture in Transylvania has important implications for our understanding of Roman-Gothic relations, as we will discuss below.

<sup>527</sup> eg: Thompson 1966, ch. 2.

the distorting lens of the Roman ethnography and historiography. Thus, even if the exact details remain fuzzy, analysis of the material culture complex can tell us a lot about the social systems and economic networks in play beyond the Lower Danube, which in turn can help us assess and contextualize what we learn from the textual sources.<sup>528</sup>

#### 4.5.2. Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov Culture: settlement and subsistence

The people of the Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov Culture lived in settled, nucleated villages characterized by modest post-and-beam houses, often arranged in parallel rows. Three different types of house are found in S-M/C settlements. The most common type is the familiar pit-house (*Grubenhäuser*), virtually identical to the dominant dwelling type found in the Sarmatian villages examined in Chapter Three. Less common are similarly-simple houses built on the surface. The third variety is the so-called *Wohnstallhaus*, a larger, rectangular structure built on the surface using post-and-beam construction, and containing at least one internal division to separate human living space from livestock stalls. While the first two house types are known from across the territory of the S-M/C Culture, *wohnstallhäuser* have only been identified at sites in the Ukraine. This last type is well known from Iron Age, Germanic-speaking Central Europe, while the former types probably reflect Iron Age Danubian traditions as in the villages of the Roman-era Hungarian Plain.<sup>529</sup>

Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov Culture villages were typically located on the high ground along the major rivers of the region, and have been found clustered most densely along the Don, Dniester, Prut, and Lower Danube.<sup>530</sup> This settlement pattern suggests that river-borne movement

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<sup>528</sup> Kulikowski 2007, pp. 60-70, 98-99. This is a very intelligent discussion.

<sup>529</sup> Heather and Matthews 1991, pp. 53-54; Diaconu 1975, pp. 69-70; Ionița 1975, p. 77.

<sup>530</sup> Heather and Matthews 1991, p. 52; Ionița 1975, p. 77.

served to link different communities across the region, and, in general, the easy mobility offered by these navigable streams probably helped facilitate movement of both people and ideas, and thereby abetted the rapid spread of the S-M/C Culture over so large an area. The settlements themselves were unfortified and could be quite large, up to 35 hectares.<sup>531</sup> Elite centers have been identified both in the Ukraine and in Wallachia, most notably at the site of Pietroasa/Pietroasele, in Wallachia, where S-M/C Culture houses and burials were excavated in and around a Roman fort of Constantinian origin.<sup>532</sup> In addition to houses, S-M/C Culture settlements feature numerous storage pits, indicating a grain-based, agricultural pattern of subsistence, while workshops for the production of ceramics, metal goods, and other crafts have also been identified.<sup>533</sup> Faunal remains from S-M/C Culture settlements show a fairly typical European pattern with cows predominant, and sheep/goats and pigs making up significant minorities. Horses, however, are rare except at sites well out on the Pontic Steppe.<sup>534</sup>

#### 4.5.3. Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov Culture: burials and material culture

The products of Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov workshops, as well as numerous imports from the Roman Empire, are most frequently recovered from the many cemeteries identified and excavated in the region. Indeed, the material culture complex was originally defined solely based on

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<sup>531</sup> This is, perhaps, about the size of Üllő, the largest ‘Sarmatian’ settlement examined in Chapter Three, but far larger than Gyoma 133, or most of the other villages from the Hungarian Plain.

<sup>532</sup> For the size of the settlements, Heather and Matthews 1991, p. 52. For the Ukrainian centers, Kulikowski 2007, pp. 92-94. For the settlement at Pietroasa/Pietroasele, Bondoc 2009, pp. 85-86; Heather and Matthews 1991, p. 54. The famous Pietroasa Treasure, an impressive array of Roman gold and silver vessels and jeweled fibulae of probable Pontic origin, was initially thought to date from the fourth century, but the current consensus, based mainly on stylistic arguments, places it in the mid fifth century (Harhoiu 1977, *passim*, but especially p. 36; Janes 1996, pp. 148-149). The treasure may not be Athanaric’s royal Gothic stash, as once postulated, but the deposition of so rich a hoard generations after the initial appearance of the S-M/C Culture settlement associated with the fort does hint obliquely at the site’s importance during the earlier period.

<sup>533</sup> Heather and Matthews 1991, pp. 81-82, Ionița 1966, pp. 253ff.

<sup>534</sup> Heather and Matthews 1991, p. 84; Häusler 1979, pp. 27ff.; Ionița 1966, p. 254; Diaconu 1975, pp. 69-70.

funerary remains, although in the last half-century, work on the region's settlements has allowed for a more nuanced picture to emerge. In general, S-M/C Culture cemeteries follow a predictable pattern, but one characterized by fairly significant internal diversity, providing strong evidence against characterizing the material culture complex as the product of a single cohesive ethnic group.

Burials themselves show a greater range of types than those found in the cemeteries of earlier or surrounding archaeological culture groups. Most individual S-M/C cemeteries include both cremation and inhumation graves, with the latter usually forming the majority.<sup>535</sup> By contrast, Moldavian cemeteries from the second and third centuries commonly associated with the Carpi show almost exclusive use of cremation,<sup>536</sup> while, as we have seen, inhumations dominate in the Sarmatian cemeteries of the Hungarian Plain, a ritual also followed by their Pontic cousins.<sup>537</sup> Burial orientation also shows considerable variation, with a significant minority of graves across the region bucking the dominant north-south trend in favor of east-west orientation.<sup>538</sup> Heather and Matthews are right to suggest that the observed diversity of burial ritual found in the cemeteries of the S-M/C Culture probably reflect a society where different ideas about the afterlife were common, as much or more than such diversity directly reflects different distinct ethnic communities within individual cemeteries.<sup>539</sup> Nonetheless, the overall picture is still one of greater diversity than what we see in other burial complexes from the same and adjacent regions.

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<sup>535</sup> Heather and Matthews 1991, p. 55.

<sup>536</sup> Bichir 1976, pp. 18-32.

<sup>537</sup> For the 'Sarmatians' of the Hungarian Plain, see our discussion in Chapter Three. For the Pontic Sarmatians, see Lebedynsky 2002, pp. 113-130.

<sup>538</sup> Heather and Matthews 1991, p. 55. Multiple orientations within single cemeteries is hardly a phenomenon unique to the S-M/C Culture, and rather too much has been made over the years about this exact feature of Sarmatian cemeteries (eg: Vaday 1989, p. 195; Kulcsár 1998, p. 109; Simonenko 2001, p. 117).

<sup>539</sup> Heather and Matthews 1991, pp. 55-58. Diaconu (1975, p. 70) presents the older way of interpreting this heterogeneous burial culture, suggesting that we can divide the members of the S-M/C Culture (all of whom he places under the general heading of Goths) into a 'Sarmatian branch' which practiced inhumation, and a 'Taifalic branch' which cremated its dead.



Regardless of the ritual employed, members of the Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov Culture tended to choose their grave goods from a consistent corpus of objects found across the entire extent of the culture.<sup>540</sup> We do not need to examine this burial complex in great detail, but a few features are worth noting. First, as in most Danubian graves, ceramics are the most commonly-deposited objects (and also make up the vast majority of non-architectural finds at settlement sites). These largely consist of wheel-thrown fine-ware vessels made from a grey fabric, and coarser storage vessels also produced on a potter's wheel.<sup>541</sup> In general, S-M/C Culture vessels reflect continuity from earlier Dacian/La Tène traditions, but these ceramic traditions appear to have reached the culture from two directions: both directly from Carpi/Dacian people living outside the *limites*, and through provincial Dacian pottery centers like the one at Porolissum.

Second, while many Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov Culture graves contain few or no luxury items, those that do feature elite objects most commonly feature items of personal adornment. Of those burials containing grave goods, fibulae are common in both male and female graves, although worn differently by the two genders.<sup>542</sup> Elite female burials also frequently feature pendants and beads, although only worn as necklaces.<sup>543</sup> The habit of decorating women's shoes and clothing with Roman-made glass beads that the Iazyges developed in the Hungarian Plain appears to have remained a quirk of their particular regional culture, neither reflected in S-M/C Culture burials nor Pontic Sarmatian graves. At the same time, S-M/C use of cowrie shell pendants appears to be a habit

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<sup>540</sup> In other words, since individuals living in different parts of the S-M/C world and practicing different burial rituals (inhumation vs. cremation) were still buried with similar grave goods, we should interpret the variations in quantity and quality of grave goods within individual cemeteries as reflecting differences in gender, status, and perhaps religious belief, rather than origin or ethnicity.

<sup>541</sup> Heather and Matthews 1991, pp. 64-65, 71-72.

<sup>542</sup> Gopkalo 2011 offers a thorough analysis of the different fibula use patterns between men and women. In general, women wore fibulae in pairs at the shoulders, while men generally only used a single brooch.

<sup>543</sup> Gopkalo 2011, p. 66; Heather and Matthews 1991, pp. 73-79.

taken from the Sarmatians of the Pontic Steppe by both the members of the S-M/C Culture, and the inhabitants of the Hungarian Plain.<sup>544</sup> Bone combs, an object-type with clear antecedents in Germanic Central Europe, are also frequently found in S-M/C graves, and workshops for producing these popular - and perhaps not too expensive - items have been located within S-M/C Culture villages.<sup>545</sup> Roman-imported grave goods include wine and oil amphorae, glassware, and fine Roman ceramics. Roman coinage is also occasionally found in burials, although hoards account for the bulk of known coinage from the region.<sup>546</sup> Finally, although weapons other than small knives are rare in S-M/C graves, iron tools of various types are not uncommon, suggesting a society rich enough to produce and employ such implements widely, in marked contrast to the metal-impooverished Sarmatians of the Hungarian Plain.<sup>547</sup>

#### 4.5.4. Modeling fourth century 'Gothic' society

##### ※ *Economic Life*

Based on the material evidence surveyed above, we can draw a fairly clear picture of fourth century social and political life north of the Lower Danube. The basics of village life appear to follow a pattern common across the Danubian world, with nucleated settlements dedicated to agriculture, stock-raising, and craft production of various kinds.<sup>548</sup> There is little evidence of social stratification within the villages of the Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov Culture, although fairly modest differences in material wealth are more easily identified in the cemeteries by the presence or

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<sup>544</sup> Kovács and Vaday 1999.

<sup>545</sup> Heather and Matthews 1991, p. 79; Palade 1966, pp. 261-277.

<sup>546</sup> Heather and Matthews 1991, pp. 85-87; Häusler 1979, pp. 54ff; Ionița 1975, p. 86.

<sup>547</sup> Heather and Matthews 1991, pp. 84-85; Häusler 1979, pp. 29-33; Vaday 1996C, pp. 80, 149-152.

<sup>548</sup> The description of village life within the *Passio Sabae* essentially rings true, but we must be careful when using it since the unknown authorship makes it unclear whether the description is based on a real understanding of village life beyond the Lower Danube or rather reflects the - admittedly similar - social system in rural villages inside the *limites*.

lack of grave goods, such as jewelry and farming implements. Although far from ostentatious in terms of architecture, the S-M/C Culture was quite affluent by the standards of the day. A culture that can afford to bury iron implements on a semi-regular basis is one in which such items – signs of great wealth in the neighboring Hungarian Plain – are both readily available and affordable enough for occasional deposition. We see the thriving condition of the S-M/C Culture also reflected in the great number of Roman coins discovered in hoards and single finds throughout the region. Preda's 1975 catalog of hoard and single finds within the territory of Romania, while not covering the entire territory inhabited by members of the S-M/C Culture, reveals a very clear and important pattern. Of the 7,768 bronze coins (6,272 from hoards, 1,496 from single finds) known from the period between 274 and 491, 65 percent of hoard finds (4,078) and 70 percent of single finds (1,038) were issued between 320 and 360, and the far less numerous silver finds follow the same pattern.<sup>549</sup> In other words, the vast majority of late Roman coins from the territory of the S-M/C Culture date to the period of Constantine's Gothic treaty, when trade with the empire was unrestricted and thriving.

There is material evidence of what Rome sold to the people beyond the Danube, namely fine-ware ceramics, glass, luxury objects like fibulae and belt-fittings, and amphorae used to transport wine, oil, and fish sauce.<sup>550</sup> What Roman merchants received in exchange, however, is less materially clear. We hear in Ammianus of slaves being a major export from Transdanubia,<sup>551</sup> and based on the village subsistence patterns among the Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov Culture just examined, we may reasonably speculate that cattle and other livestock were also important living

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<sup>549</sup> Preda 1975, p. 444; Heather and Matthews 1991, pp. 85–86. Gold coins were generally not used in regular economic transactions and would not necessarily be expected to follow the same pattern.

<sup>550</sup> Heather and Matthews 1991, ch. 3.

<sup>551</sup> A.M. 22.7.8. This is enthusiastically accepted by Thompson (1966, pp. 40ff.).

exports from the region as they were for the Sarmatians to the west. The metal and salt resources of Dacia may also have continued to produce in the century following Aurelian's withdrawal, although the evidence is non-existent and it is unclear whether the mines would have still been under Roman control or have come under the ambit of the Tervingi or other barbarian groups.<sup>552</sup> Regardless, the overall picture is one of thriving economic exchange, and we have textual evidence that Valens' decision to end the free trade policy not only disrupted the Tervingi, but was also unpopular on the Roman side of the Danube. A law of approximately 369 preserved in the *Codex Justinianus* explicitly forbids any transport of wine, oil, or fish sauce into the *barbaricum* for the purposes of commerce, and makes sure to also outlaw any transport 'for personal enjoyment,' the oldest trick in the smuggler's book.<sup>553</sup> That this law was deemed necessary in the immediate aftermath of Valens' new treaty should hardly come as a surprise, since the sanctions it imposed would have wrecked the finances of many on both sides of the river who had grown rich on the unrestricted commerce of the previous three decades.<sup>554</sup>

### ※ *Socio-Political Organization*

The distribution of villages and elite centers within the territory of the Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov Culture can also help us reconstruct the political and social systems that shaped the material remains. As discussed above, the clustering of villages along major, navigable rivers

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<sup>552</sup> For a solid overview of what we do know about Roman intentions during their post-Aurelian reoccupation, see Bondoc 2009, pp. 160-167.

<sup>553</sup> *Cod. Inst.* 4.41.1: *Imppp. Valentinianus Valens et Gratianus AAA. ad Theodotum magistrum militum. Ad barbaricum transferendi vini et olei et liquaminis nullam quisquam habeat facultatem ne gustus quidem causa aut usus commerciorum.* Mathisen dates the law to 369 or one of the next three years based on its inclusion of all three Augusti as issuing parties (2009, p. 141). Seeck dates it precisely to May 28, although Schmidt-Hofner suggest a range of 369-375. The Theodotus to whom the law is addressed is more likely a Theodosius (*PLRE*, Flavius Theodosius 3) (Frier et al. 2016, vol. 2, p. 993, n. 210).

<sup>554</sup> The decision to refer to the lands beyond the Lower Danube as *barbaricum* also reflects the new ideology of Valens' treaty.

speaks of significant movement within the region. The villages of the S-M/C Culture were each nodes in a vibrant social network, the existence of which helps explain the regionally-homogenous, yet internally-diverse nature of the culture's material manifestation. Individual elements of the region's material complex can be traced to other material cultures outside or predating the third-fourth century S-M/C. *Wohnstallhäuser* and bone combs, for example, have clear antecedents in Iron Age Central Europe, while *Grubenhäuser* and wheel-thrown gray ware reflect indigenous Danubian traditions. Pontic Sarmatian elements include cowrie-shell pendants and, perhaps, certain burial rituals.<sup>555</sup> The habit of consuming wine, oil, and fish sauce, in turn, surely reflects the provincial Roman tastes of the post-Aurelian population of Dacia.

The disparate origins of elements of Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov material culture strongly argue against viewing the complex as the product of a single, cohesive ethnic group. To find such disparate material elements mixed together across so large an area argues, instead, for a regional society where people practicing different traditions lived in close proximity to one another and communicated with each other regularly. There was probably a great deal of human movement, facilitated by the region's open topography and many navigable rivers, but the movement of ideas was surely even more extensive.<sup>556</sup> Such mobility would have required a degree of peace and stability rare for the region, yet there is no material evidence to suggest that a strong, centralized state existed in the region during the fourth century, regardless of what Jordanes might say. Scattered elite sites are known, like Pietroasele on the Danube, and Sobari in Moldova, between the Prut and Dniester rivers. There, far from both the Danube and the former Dacian provinces,

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<sup>555</sup> On the influence of Pontic Sarmatian burial ritual, see also Schwarcz 1999, p. 448; Kazanski 1991, pp. 55-57.

<sup>556</sup> Kulikowski 2007, pp. 96-99.

excavations have revealed a large fourth-century porticoed building built of stone and roofed with Roman tile, as well as some evidence for partial fortification.<sup>557</sup> Together, Sobari and Pietroasele represent the clearest evidence for the political elite of the S-M/C Culture, and the most striking features of that evidence are strong Roman influence, and a military/defensive nature. These sites were the headquarters of a military elite with Romanizing pretensions, but the scale of the sites and their numerical paucity in comparison to the unfortified villages speaks of limited elite authority. Further, there is no single S-M/C “capital” that stands out above all other sites. This lack, together with the existence of multiple, fairly modest elite sites strongly suggests that we should not view the entire region of the material culture complex as a single political unit. The texts speak of at least two Gothic tribes or confederations, the Greuthungi to the north, and the Tervingi to the south,<sup>558</sup> and there may well have been others within the vast territory of the S-M/C Culture. What we can say, is that the sub-regional hegemonies created by leaders like Athanaric and Fritigern created a patchwork of stable zones which together allowed for the regional development of the material culture complex common from the Dnieper to the Danube.

How individuals living within the world of the Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov Culture thought about their personal identities and group affiliations is nearly as difficult to pin down as it is for the region of the Hungarian Plain, as discussed in Chapter Three. The *Passio Sabae*, written in the early 370s, offers some glimmers of an insider’s perspective, but the unknown authorship of the work argues for caution. Saba, whose name appears to be Syriac or Cappadocian, rather than

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<sup>557</sup> Kulikowski 2007, p. 93.

<sup>558</sup> eg: A.M. 31.3.

Germanic,<sup>559</sup> is nonetheless identified as an ethnic Goth.<sup>560</sup> This personal identity can be compared to that of the more famous Bishop Ulfilas, who sports a Germanic/Gothic name and is identified by Philostorgius as the descendant of Cappadocians captured during the third century Scythian raids.<sup>561</sup> Taken together, these two examples warn us against assuming anything about the lineages of those we find labeled as Goths in the fourth century sources.

More important than descent, seems to have been connection to elite military leaders. Returning to the *Passio*, we find a sharp divide between the demilitarized, agricultural village in which Saba resides, and the local military elites who appear to dwell elsewhere and only interact with Saba's village when carrying out specific orders of their king. In this case, a certain Atharidus, a Goth of 'royal rank,' arrives in town with armed retainers and proceeds to visit all sorts of (entirely genre-typical) outrages on the pious Saba.<sup>562</sup> Thus, within this source we find two different types of 'Goth.' Saba, who appears to be a regular, if unusually pious, peasant is labeled a Goth, but so too are Atharidus and his men, who are soldiers living outside the community and enjoy an elevated status over the villagers. This clearly shows that the Roman author viewed the major criterion for 'Gothicness' to be very broad, namely residence (and probably also origin) in 'Gothia' rather than in 'Romania.' Under this broad, Roman-imposed umbrella, however, we see a clear distinction between the villagers and the royal military men. The latter can be seen as a distinct group with an identity likely related in some way to the Constantinian pseudo-laetic settlement, a situation supported by the existence of elite centers like Peitroasele and Sobari with their Roman and military

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<sup>559</sup> Heather and Matthews 1991, p. 104, n. 18.

<sup>560</sup> *Pas. Sab.* 1.1.

<sup>561</sup> Philost. *Church History* 2.5.

<sup>562</sup> *Pas. Sab.* 4.5-7.6.

aspects. Whether both of these social groups (the peasants and the soldiers) would have identified themselves as Goths, or Tervingi, or any of the other attested group labels must remain a matter of conjecture, but it does seem clear enough that the stability required to produce villages like Saba's throughout the range of the Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov Culture depended on men like Atharidus, and the power systems that maintained their local authority, as well as the sub-regional hegemony of his own superiors, that is, men like Athanaric and Fritigern.<sup>563</sup>

#### 4.5.5. Conclusions

When Constantine finally finished reuniting the Roman Empire in 325, he found the Danubian *limes* a shambles. While his dealings with the Sarmatians of the Middle Danube Borderland were traditional, Constantine adopted an innovative approach when treating with the Tervingi beyond the Lower Danube. This policy can rightly be called neo-Trajanic because it rested on an enduring worldview that saw Trajan's Transdanubian Dacia as part of the Roman Empire. Constantine did not attempt to reestablish the old Dacian *limes*, but instead followed the example of the Tetrarchs in Gaul and "resettled" the southern parts of the province with defeated barbarians. These Tervingi had already been living in Wallachia and parts of Transylvania, but Constantine's legitimation of their prior settlement could still be cast as a restoration of Dacia since it was expected that the new pseudo-*laeti* would quickly warm to the glories of Roman civilization and become model provincial citizens. As Romans-in-training, Constantine's Tervingi enjoyed free

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<sup>563</sup> The 'horse factor' represents an important difference between the military authority wielded by Atharidus (as described in the *Passio*) and that enjoyed by the Sarmatian elite on the Hungarian Plain. Nowhere in the *Passio* are Atharidus and his followers describe as horsemen. They may well have ridden, or at least their leader might have, but equestrian status does not appear to have been a defining feature of their status. This is rather different from how we have pictured the Iazyges elite on the Hungarian Plain, where their strength and social distinction appear to have relied heavily on the ownership of multiple horses. This difference will be discussed further below.



access to Roman markets, and this economic boom is reflected in the material culture from the regions they inhabited. From the Don to the Danube, evidence of the so-called Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov material culture complex reached its greatest extent during the three decades Constantine's treaty remained in force. The settlement also fostered regional stability and allowed Tervingi leaders like Athanaric to build strong networks of power based on Roman trade and periodic subsidies.

The new order was not to last, however. Two aspects of Constantine's Gothic policy, in particular, set it up for failure. First, the Tervingi's strong connection with the Constantinian dynasty meant trouble when someone unrelated found himself wearing the Purple. Second, and more fundamentally, Constantine's treaty reflected a worldview at odds with prevailing ethnographic thought about transdanubian barbarians. Nothing in his actions indicate that Constantine cared at all whether or not his Tervingian *laeti* were considered Scythians, but this was an unusual perspective. When someone with more traditional notions, or perhaps just less practical experience, ended up in charge, a policy that appeared to treat Scythians as prospective citizens seemed entirely inappropriate. That someone was Flavius Julius Valens, and his near total reversal of Constantine's policy in 369 both fundamentally destabilized the regions north of the Lower Danube, and ultimately brought chaos and disaster back to the Roman side of the borderland as well.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### VALENS' SCYTHIAN FOLLY

#### *I. An Old-Fashioned Scythian Treaty*

##### 5.1.1. Introduction: Valens takes a cruise on the Blue Danube, 369 CE

Constantine had gotten it all wrong. He had tried to deal with Dacia and the Tervingi as though they were part of the empire, part of the *oikoumene*, but that was nonsense!<sup>564</sup> Now, staring out at the little boat slowly making its way towards mid-stream from the northern bank of the Danube, Emperor Valens knew better. Three years of infuriating campaigns against Athanaric and his Tervingi were finally coming to an end. Three years spent marching back and forth through the plains and river valleys of Scythia; three years chasing an enemy always just out of reach in some Carpathian fastness or lost in the sea of grass beyond Olbia; three years and only one decisive victory. It was enough; it was time to go home. Scythia could go rot, for all he cared!<sup>565</sup>

Emissaries from Athanaric had had the temerity to claim that the Tervingian leader was forbidden by oath from setting foot on Roman soil. Negotiations would have to take place on the Scythian side, or through proxies. A meeting mid-stream had been his idea: neutral ground and

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<sup>564</sup> For later Roman conceptions of the *oikoumene*, see Fowden 1993, *passim*, but particularly pp. 12-19.

<sup>565</sup> The sources are silent on why Valens agreed to treat with Athanaric by boat in the middle of the Danube, but the move was not unprecedented (cf. A.M. 30.3.4-5). The reasoning suggested here is my own, and should not be taken literally. Valens' thoughts in this narrative are designed to reflect ideas about Scythia and Scythians current during his day, and are not based fully on specific textual information. We will spend the rest of this chapter fleshing out and analyzing the actual details of this pivotal treaty and its aftermath, which was likely based more on the views of Constantinopolitan power brokers like Themistius than those of the rather ineffectual Valens.

important symbolism – lost on the barbarians, of course. Dacia had always been both a thorn in the side of the Roman Empire, and an unsightly wart on the body politic. It was time to reaffirm what everyone knew anyway: the Danube was the real edge of the civilized world, the boundary between *Romania*<sup>566</sup> and the wilds of Scythia. Let the Tervingi chief bluster on about his oath; it was beneath Valens' dignity to set foot in that other, barbarous, topsy-turvy world anyway, if he could help it!

When Athanaric reached the imperial barge, that trumped-up chieftain would find out just what kind of negotiator a Roman emperor could be! Here, this day, Valens would secure peace for the age, and an end to Scythian wars. He had already rebuilt key fortresses along the *ripa Gothica*. Now, with a few words he, Flavius Valens, would end the disastrous policy of free trade across the Danube begun by Constantine. Let the Gothic traders henceforth sell their wares at times and places chosen – and controlled – by Rome. Meanwhile, subsidies to Athanaric and his cronies would stop immediately, and he'd be damned if he'd see even one more Tervingian recruit serving in his battle-lines. Fortuna may not have granted him the Scythian king's head on a plate, but with all Athanaric's sources of wealth and power flowing from Rome – from him! – Valens knew he could simply starve the hostile Goth into submission. After all, emperors had been handling the other Scythians living beyond Pannonia that way for centuries. What could possibly go wrong?

### **5.1.2. A new Gothic approach for a new dynasty**

When Valens was appointed eastern Augustus by his brother in 364, the Roman Empire was still reeling from the death of Julian, and with him the fall of the Constantinian dynasty. The Lower Danubian Borderland, in particular, must have appeared especially in need of reorganization to the

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<sup>566</sup> *Romania* was a common term for the Roman Empire in later sources. See, for example, *Pas. Sab.* 4.2, 7.1.

new emperor and his circle of advisors. While the ideology of Roman control over Trajanic Dacia had been strong at the court of Constantine and his successors, the reality on the ground was somewhat less impressive. Roman fortifications proliferated on the north bank of the Lower Danube, and a few strategic river routes into Transylvania appear to have also been refortified, but there is nothing to suggest that any sort of formal provincial administration was put in place, or that direct imperial military control extended much beyond the plains of Wallachia and the Banat. Literal recreation of the pre-Aurelian provinces, however, had never been Constantine's intent. As we have seen, his main goal – aside from the propaganda coup – was to reestablish the strategic bulwark of Dacia, and in this task, his Tervingian *'laeti'* proved loyal and capable. It soon became apparent to the new regime, however, that the loyalty of these Goths was to the Constantinian dynasty rather than the Roman state at large, and this fact eventually provided a pretext for dismantling the entire system established by the treaty of 332.

In the dynastic chaos following the death of Julian, Procopius, a member through marriage of the Constantinian dynasty, claimed the Purple in opposition to the newly-elevated Valentinian and Valens. Procopius was aided in his ultimately unsuccessful bid by 3000 Gothic troops, who, when later asked by Valens to justify their actions, explained that they had acted to support the claimant they had seen as legitimate from their perspective as signatories of the treaty with Constantine.<sup>567</sup> These Goths, it seems, viewed themselves much like any other Roman military unit of the time: willing to use their blades politically, and expectant of a fairly lenient reconciliation afterwards. Valens had other ideas. After intercepting Procopius' Tervingian auxiliaries (or perhaps

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<sup>567</sup> A.M. 26.10.3, 27.5.1; Eunap. fr. 37.

additional reinforcements to the original 3000<sup>568</sup>) on their way back to the Danube, the emperor divided them up and placed them under guard in various cities, presumably in preparation for absorption into the general army, or worse. When the unnamed Gothic king – who was almost certainly the Athanaric who would go on to feature prominently in Gothic affairs for nearly the rest of the century – wrote to Valens to demand the return of his soldiers, the Emperor replied that he was legitimately holding them as enemies of the state, and that no treaty existed between him and the Tervingi.<sup>569</sup>

Thus, citing Gothic support for Procopius as an excuse, Valens launched a three-year punitive campaign against the Tervingi in 367, something he may have been considering even before they threw in with the usurper.<sup>570</sup> The expedition was ill-starred from the beginning. Based on Ammianus' account, and supported by Themistius' official "damage-control," we know that the Goths successfully avoided pitched battle during the first year by hiding in inaccessible Carpathian valleys, while poor weather and flooding kept the legions mostly in camp during the second year. In 369, Valens managed to chase down the Tervingi *iudex*, Athanaric (whom Ammianus mistakenly names as the leader of the Greuthungi Goths),<sup>571</sup> but not before being led on a merry chase through the same Moldavian steppe and hills Herodotus had once labeled the "Scythian desert:" the very place where Darius' Persian host had – perhaps unrealistically – nearly died of thirst almost 900 years

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<sup>568</sup> Blockley argues that the Goths discussed in Eunapius fr. 38 were not the same as the original troops sent to aid Procopius (Blockley 1983, p. 138, n. 81). There seems to me no clear evidence one way or the other, but the exact identity of the troops in question does not change the interpretation of the passage significantly.

<sup>569</sup> Eunap. fr. 38.

<sup>570</sup> On Valens' preexisting plans for a Gothic war, see A.M. 26.6.11. For the campaign itself, see A.M. 27.4.1, 27.5.1-10; Zos. 4.10.11, Them. *Or.* 8 and 10.

<sup>571</sup> Ammianus' mistake is odd considering that he discusses the Greuthungi royal family in some depth in his final book while discussing the chaotic situation beyond the Lower Danube in the years after Valens' war. Athanaric is a crucial player in these events – which we will discuss below – but leads only the Tervingi (A.M. 31.3.1-6).

before.<sup>572</sup> Valens proved a bit more successful than his Achaemenid antecedent, and eventually managed to defeat Athanaric in a minor battle, but with a steppe winter looming, and the Goths yet unbroken, the Roman leader then opted for the pen, rather than another swing of the sword.

The treaty that Valens eventually struck with Athanaric after negotiating from their boats in the middle of the Danube, represented a major shift from Constantine's Gothic policy. It was, in almost every respect, a conservative, backwards-looking agreement, and it set in motion a chain of events leading, ultimately, to the emperor's battlefield death in 378. The terms are much better known than those of Constantine's earlier agreement, since Themistius' speech justifying the brokered peace survives intact. In addition to the inevitable hostage-giving, Valens ended both the free-trade policy initiated by Constantine, and the annual subsidies begun sometime later. The new order on the Lower Danube would emphasize a fortified *limes*, designed to keep the Tervingi at arm's length.<sup>573</sup> Henceforth, the Goths would be firmly excluded from the economic, political, and social life of the empire.

Because peace was concluded without an absolute Roman victory, scholars have generally seen Valens' isolationist treaty as the grudging recognition of a Tervingian desire to exempt themselves as much as possible from Roman entanglements.<sup>574</sup> Such a view, however, does not take into account the recent economic history discussed in Chapter Four, or the longer view of the ideologies that shaped Roman-barbarian interactions along the Danube during the previous four centuries. Considering Valens' treaty in these larger contexts, however, it becomes clear that the

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<sup>572</sup> Hdt. 4.18-19, 140.

<sup>573</sup> Them. Or. 10.205/135ff. Zosimus also provides a summarized version of the terms, emphasizing the total ban on Gothic traffic across the Danube (4.11).

<sup>574</sup> Blockley 1992, pp. 32-33; Wolfram 1988, pp. 68-69; Heather 1991, pp. 115-116.

terms he brokered in 369 reflect an extremely traditional attempt to punish the Goths through economic warfare, and have nothing at all to do with a supposed Gothic desire to keep out of Roman affairs.<sup>575</sup> The terms of the treaty Valens struck on the Lower Danube in 369 contain most of the elements of the sort of traditional client treaties still being used in the fourth century to deal with the Sarmatians and Vandals beyond the Middle Danube. As we have seen, however, the two regions differed in several crucial ways, both in terms of the local geographic situation, and the social organization of the barbarian population. Constantine appears to have at least partially recognized these differences as demonstrated by the differing policies he adopted towards the Sarmatians and Goths. Valens' worldview, on the other hand, was driven by older Scythian tropes that assumed an equivalence between all the people living beyond the river.

### **5.1.3. Recapitulation: the intellectual history behind Valens' Scythian mindset**

Not only did Valens' new order mark a major shift from the pseudo-resettlement policies of the Constantinian dynasty, but it also reflected - or rather, required for support - the lateral transfer onto the Tervingi (and the other Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov peoples identified by the Romans as Scythians) of ethnographic tropes commonly used to explain the Sarmatians of the Hungarian Plain and to justify their continued status as subjugated clients. The equation of Goths and Scythians began in the third century, from the moment they and other barbarian groups first appeared as troublemakers on the northern coast of the Black Sea. The equation of Scythians and Sarmatians, as we have discussed at length in Chapter Two, has an even older history, dating back to Herodotus, the original popularizer of Scythian ethnography in the Greek world. In the days of Ovid and Pliny,

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<sup>575</sup> For a lucid assessment of Valens' treaty of 369 within the larger context of Valentinian' foreign policy, see Lenski 2002, pp. 133-137.

Scythians and Sarmatians were seen as ethnographically-identical nomadic terrors, best controlled by a strong *limes* along the Danube, the 'natural' boundary between Thrace and Scythia since the days of Herodotus.

This worldview was modified by two historical events. First, Trajan's conquest and annexation of Dacia - previously considered part of Scythia - required its ideological 'relocation' into the *oikoumene* in order to justify a permanent Roman presence beyond the Danube. Trajan's column with its message of the noble, organized, town-dwelling Dacian barbarians reflects the new ethnography in support of Trajan's transdanubian provinces. The second innovation happened more subtly, and had to do with how Romans perceived the people of the Hungarian Plain whom they labeled collectively as Sarmatians. Defeated again and again from nearly their moment of their arrival on the Hungarian Plain in the early first century, and particularly during the second-century Marcomannic Wars, yet never incorporated into the empire, these 'lesser Scythians' required a different set of Roman-imposed characteristics. What developed were the tropes of the weak Sarmatian: nomads who, far from being a genuine threat to the empire, were instead, impoverished bandits whom farmers might rightly fear, but who fell back in terror at the first sign of the Roman eagles. This new type of Scythian reflected the sometimes-paradoxical merging of outdated tropes about Scythian nomadism and rapacity, with new military and political intelligence derived from real actions across the Pannonia *limes* during the first three centuries CE. Even if most of the people on the Hungarian Plain Rome identified as Sarmatians did not lead a nomadic lifestyle, the region's population was, indeed, no match for the Roman army, hemmed in as it was, by a metaphorical ring of provincial spears and hostile neighbors, and frequently suffering unrest between the immigrant



lazyges elite and the indigenous, agricultural majority. It was dangerous to assume, however, that all ‘Scythians’ would suffer from the same societal weaknesses.

During the third century troubles, the tribes raiding from across the Lower Danube and Black Sea were collectively identified as Scythians, and since the old Greek ethnographic tropes remained deeply engrained in both Latin and Greek literature of many genres, we can be fairly confident in imagining that those old ideas about Scythian mobility and fierceness exerted a strong influence over general Roman perceptions of the Boranoi, Heruli, and Goths who incessantly raided by land and sea, during the decades of chaos. Even if historians like Dexippus generally opted not to include traditional ethnographic details in their descriptions of the contemporary Scythians, those tropes were so ingrained that the label itself was enough to impose the corpus of stereotypes on any barbarian group identified as Scythian. By the early fourth century, the Scythians had been put back where they belonged, thanks to Claudius, Aurelian, and Probus, but with Dacia’s status ill-defined, a new way of viewing the land beyond the Lower Danube suddenly became imperative.

In cleaning up Aurelian’s Dacian mess, and dealing with aggressive Tervingi beyond the Lower Danube, Constantine opted to rely on Trajan’s old mantra of *Dacia devicta*, as expressed in his efforts to reassert Roman control over the old Dacian lands, and establish the Tervingi as the region’s new population core and protectors. While this approach worked well enough as long as the Tervingi remained friendly, it failed in one crucial respect. By ‘settling’ Tervingi on ostensibly Roman land in former Dacia where, in fact, they had already been living since sometime after Aurelian’s withdrawal, Constantine failed to cut off his would-be *laeti* from the major power-base represented by the bulk of the Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov Culture region which extended north far beyond the limits of Roman political and military control. Under these conditions, which we

will examine in more detail below, we can understand why upon his ascension, Valens, an emperor not genetically linked to Constantine and his treaty, might have seen the Tervingi and other Gothic groups as dangerously unconquered.<sup>576</sup> Gothic support for Procopius was the final proof that the Tervingi did not consider themselves bound to him – that is, to the Roman state – but instead viewed themselves as clients of Constantine and his descendants.<sup>577</sup>

Whether Valens initially viewed the hostile Goths as disloyal soldiers or dangerous barbarians, the terms of the treaty that eventually ended his first Gothic War indicate a clear shift away from Constantine’s neo-Trajanic worldview towards a conception of the Goths based on the example provided by the Sarmatians of the Hungarian Plain. Hailing from Pannonia – the ‘birthplace’ of the weak Scythian trope – and with limited education or military experience to broaden his perspective,<sup>578</sup> Valens’ attitude towards the Tervingi should come as no surprise. That the new emperor was also relatively isolated as a Latin-speaking monolingual attempting to rule the Greek East,<sup>579</sup> may have further prompted his desire to win a prestige-boosting victory. When circumstance made this outcome impossible, Valens reacted instinctively with the Rome’s other traditional tool for demonstrating dominance over the barbarians. The terms of the treaty, particularly its tight economic sanctions, reflect a traditional method used by Rome on the Middle

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<sup>576</sup> A.M. 26.6.11. Ammianus reports here that from the moment of his elevation, Valens viewed the Goths as dangerously ‘unassailed,’ and took seriously rumors that they were preparing for a new round of raids into Thrace. This supposed threat may have had more to do with their continued loyalty to the Constantinian house than to the Scythian raids of a century prior.

<sup>577</sup> There are two possible readings of the Tervingian support for Procopius and no good way to determine between them. First, the Tervingi could have seen themselves as Roman soldiers who happened to hold particular loyalty to Constantine’s house because of past patronage. In this scenario, their support for the usurper would look no different from previous examples of legions supporting, or even elevating particular imperial candidates during times of civil strife. The second interpretation would imply that they saw themselves as independent allies of the Constantinian house with no automatic obligation to the Roman state.

<sup>578</sup> Lenski 2002, pp. 86, 94–97.

<sup>579</sup> Lenski 2002, pp. 61–62.

Danube to break the spirit of potentially restive client tribes. This ‘Sarmatian’ policy, however, was to prove poorly suited for the socio-political setting of the fourth century Lower Danube, which begs the question why this policy of separation and economic warfare appeared viable in the first place.

## *II. Scythian-Danubian Themes in the Later Fourth Century*

### **5.2.1. Themistius and the ‘Sarmatian’ ideologies behind Valens’ Gothic policy**

The tenth oration of Themistius offers strong evidence to suggest that Valens’ Gothic treaty rested on an ideological foundation heavily influenced by long-standing ethnographic ideas about the Sarmatians of the Hungarian Plain. Casting the partially-defeated Goths of 369 as weak Scythians of the Sarmatian type was one of the main ways Themistius attempted to justify Valens’ brokered peace in the oration which was delivered in Constantinople as a quasi-official ‘press release’ designed to explain to the Constantinopolitan senatorial elite how they should think about (and promote) the new Gothic policy.<sup>580</sup> The orator’s task was not a simple one. In presenting Valens’ peace to the Constantinopolitan elite, Themistius needed both to justify three years of expensive warfare and also convincingly explain why the campaign had ended short of complete military victory. The audience had already been primed for less than total victory by a speech of the previous year in which Themistius had belabored the point that an emperor’s primary task was not just to smash up the barbarians, but also to ensure the welfare of the provincial population by limiting the burden of wartime taxation. Indeed, if we are to believe Themistius here, tax collectors were more of a menace to the farmers and townsmen of Thrace and Moesia than were the Scythians beyond the

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<sup>580</sup> Heather and Matthews 1991, p.22. For a more general discussion of Themistius and his connection to/influence on imperial authority, see Heather and Moncur 2001, preface.

Danube.<sup>581</sup> This speech was delivered in 368 as the legions idled in camp with the Danube made impassable by unseasonal flooding,<sup>582</sup> and should be read as an indication that even in the second year of the war, Valens was considering his exit strategies.<sup>583</sup> At the same time, peace was not yet the official policy, so we find Themistius also including standard boilerplate about the barbarian threats looming from every quarter.<sup>584</sup> A year later, a decision had been made. Valens opted against a fourth season of campaigning following his indecisive victory over Athanaric somewhere in the Moldavian plains north of the Danube in the summer of 369.<sup>585</sup>

Themistius begins his pitch in *Oration* 10 with some paternalistic language about how it is better for an emperor to rule over and protect the barbarians than to destroy them outright, an appropriate initial justification of a treaty designed to turn the Tervingi into subjugated, dependent clients.<sup>586</sup> From there, we hear a report of the treaty negotiations with an emphasis on the terrified state of the barbarian tribesmen lining the north bank of the Danube, as they watch Valens dictating terms to their chiefs.<sup>587</sup> The orator revisits the theme of Gothic terror later, noting that while fortifications can, in theory at least, be overcome, fear of Rome remains “an obstacle which no one has ever overcome, once he is convinced that he is inferior.”<sup>588</sup>

The themes of imperial *philanthropia/clementia* and barbarian terror are fairly generic, but Themistius includes some specific arguments which we can connect more securely to Middle

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<sup>581</sup> Them. Or. 8.172-173/114-115.

<sup>582</sup> A.M. 27.5.5.

<sup>583</sup> Heather and Matthews 1991, p. 22.

<sup>584</sup> Them. Or. 8.179/119.

<sup>585</sup> A.M. 27.5.7-8; Zos. 4.11.

<sup>586</sup> Them. Or. 10.199-200/131-132. The argument: There is in each of us a barbarian, and just as the civilized man masters his internal savage, so must the emperor prove his *philanthropia* by mastering, but not destroying, the Goths. A ruler who utterly destroys the barbarians rules the Romans alone, while one who shows compassion after victory rules all mankind.

<sup>587</sup> Them. Or. 10.201-202/132-133.

<sup>588</sup> Them. Or. 10.210-211/138: ἀλλὰ φόβος ὃν οὐδεὶς πώποτε ὑπερέβη καταδέεστέρον εἶναι πεπιστευκῶς.

Danube antecedents. A core component of the new policy was to be a renewed emphasis on fortifying the southern bank of the Danube, and Themistius takes pains to explain that this effort was not being undertaken out of concern over large-scale Gothic incursions, but rather to protect the citizens of Moesia from the depredations of Gothic bandits and river-pirates:

*[Under the old treaty,] even if open warfare did not then seem favorable, the opportunity for thievery with impunity was theirs. They spread out in all directions along the bank, not only in ones and twos but in paramilitary companies of cavalry and infantry, yet they weren't real soldiers but mere brigands who labeled their theft 'the spoils of war.' But no longer! From the hinterland to the coast you would think that a wall of adamant had been delineated, with such a defensive bulwark of forts, arms, and soldiers has [the south bank of the Danube] been consolidated.<sup>589</sup>*

This argument is exactly the same one made by Commodus on his Middle Danube refortification inscriptions, erected at the end of the Marcomannic Wars,<sup>590</sup> and characterization of the inhabitants of the Hungarian Plain as pitiful bandits prone only to minor acts of thievery had been a cornerstone of *limes* policy in that region ever since. In contrast, prior raids by 'Scythians' from north of the Lower Danube had been, for the most part, characterized as invasions, that is, as acts of war, rather than lawless thievery. Gregory Thaumaturgus' *Canonical Letter* offers a clear example of this earlier mindset. Here, the author directly addresses the topic of theft during the Scythian troubles of the later third century. Gregory begins by noting that theft is a shocking sin worthy of excommunication, but the point of the letter is not to cast the barbarian raiders as thieves. Their

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<sup>589</sup> Them. Or. 10.207/136: κὰν ἄρα δοκῆ τὸν ἐκ τοῦ προφανοῦς πόλεμον τέως δυσωπεῖσθαι, ἀλλὰ τό γε κλωπεύειν αὐτοῖς ἐπ' ἀδείας καθεστηκέναι. διεσπείροντο οὖν ἀπανταχόσε τῆς ὄχθης οὐ καθ' ἓνα καὶ δύο μόνον, ἀλλ' ἤδη καὶ κατὰ λόχους καὶ οὐλαμούς, λησταὶ δῆθεν, οὐ στρατιῶται, φώρια τὰ λάφυρα ὀνομάζοντες. ἀλλ' οὐ νῦν, ἀλλ' ἄνωθεν μέχρι θαλάττης δόξαις ἂν τεῖχος ἀδαμάντινον ἐληλάσθαι· τοιοῦτῳ καταπεπύκνωται χαρακώματι φρουρίων, ὄπλων, στρατιωτῶν.

<sup>590</sup> RIU 1127-1137: *Imp(erator) Caes(ar) M(arcus) Aur(elius) [[Commodus]] Antoninus / Aug(ustus) Pius Sarm(aticus) Germ(anicus) pont(ifex) max(imus) trib(unicia) pot(estate) / VI imp(erator) IIII co(n)sul IIII p(ater) p(atriciae) ripam omnem burgis / a solo extractis item praesidiis per lo- / ca opportuna ad clandestinos latruncu- / lorum transitus oppositis munivit / per [[L(ucium) Cornelium Felicem / Plotianum leg(atum) pr(o) pr(aetore)]]]. See sections 2.4.6 and 3.5.4 in chapters Two and Three for further discussion of Commodus' inscription and the policies that underlay it, as well as additional citations*

depredations are “a crisis that brought ruin to all.”<sup>591</sup> Only those of his own Christian, Roman community who used the chaos as cover for unlawful predation could be considered thieves, and their crime comes in for even harsher condemnation than the violence of the Scythians.<sup>592</sup>

Portraying the Scythians as bandits meant a major conceptual shift from the Constantinian ideologies of the previous decades. Even if the exact status of Constantine’s allied Tervingi remains elusive, the treaty of 332 required a conception of the barbarians capable of reconciliation with his neo-Trajanic policy towards Dacia. Dacia could only be repopulated with people deemed worthy, or potentially worthy, of eventual integration into the larger body of Roman provincial citizens, and while barbarians might qualify, bandits never could. This new conception of the Goths is set forth explicitly by Themistius in the tenth oration. In an authorial aside, the orator explains:

*In my opinion [Valens] recognizes that while he is able to ward off the barbarians from power, he cannot change their basic nature and thereby deprive them of the opportunity for breaking faith. It was for this reason that he built new border forts, restored others that had fallen into ruin, and furnished others with what they lacked.*<sup>593</sup>

This passage most clearly expresses the new policy of Valens. No longer would the Goths be considered the new, Roman-supported population core of a revived transdanubian Dacia. From this point forward, they were intractable barbarians and bandits, incapable of acquiring the *humanitas* required for citizenship, who could only be kept from causing harm through exclusion from *Romania*. The other side of this conceptual shift was a tacit acknowledgment that Trajan’s Dacia

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<sup>591</sup> *Can. ep.* 2: Τὸ δὲ ἐν καιρῷ τῆς καταδρομῆς, ἐν τοσαύτῃ οἰμωγῇ καὶ τοσοῦτοις θρήνοις, τολμησαί τινας τὸν καιρὸν τὸν πᾶσιν ὄλεθρον φέροντα νομίσαι ἑαυτοῖς καιρὸν εἶναι κέρδους, ἀνθρώπων ἐστὶν ἀσεβῶν καὶ θεοστυγῶν, οὐδὲ ὑπερβολὴν ἀτοπίας ἔχόντων.

<sup>592</sup> For more prohibitions, *Can. ep.* 2–5. For the punishments for theft and abetment of the barbarians, *Can. ep.* 7–10.

<sup>593</sup> *Them. Or.* 10.206/135–136: Γινώσκει γάρ, οἶμαι, σφῆξιν τοὺς βαρβάρους δυνάμεως ἔχων, τὴν φύσιν δὲ αὐτῶν ἀμείβειν οὐχ οἷός τε ὦν· ὥστε ἀφήρητο αὐτῶν τὴν ῥαστώνην τῆς ἀπιστίας, διὰ τοῦτο γὰρ καὶ τῶν φρουρίων τὰ μὲν ᾤκοδόμησεν ἐκ καινῆς, τὰ δὲ ἀνέστησε κατατετριμμένα, τοῖς δὲ προσέθηκε τὸ ἐνδέον.

could no longer be considered part of that *Romania*. Although this latter corollary may have been a bitter pill for Valens to swallow, the tenuous nature of his Gothic ‘victory’ probably left him with little choice in the matter, and, indeed, after 369, there is scant evidence of continued Roman efforts to exert direct transdanubian control beyond the bridgeheads immediately over the river.<sup>594</sup>

### 5.2.2. ‘Sarmatian’ Iazyges and ‘Scythian’ Tervingi: real and imagined similarities

The transferal of Sarmatian-derived stereotypes onto Valens’ Gothic adversaries would have been facilitated by some real topographic similarities between the regions beyond the Middle and Lower Danube as well as by the similar subsistence patterns and shared elements of material culture employed by the people who inhabited the adjacent borderlands. While the commonalities reflect a shared, Iron Age Danubian heritage common across the region, Rome’s divergent policies towards the two *ripae* during the first three centuries CE ensured that even more important social and political differences separated the people labeled as Sarmatians and Scythians in the late fourth century. The fact that these differences were partially masked by common lifeways and similar physical settings, however, made it easy for Romans steeped in traditional ethnographic divisions and stereotypes to elide the two regional cultures.

#### ※ *Physical setting*

In Chapter One, exploration of the physical landscape of the Danube drainage basin demonstrated that although the macro-region is split into two coherent sub-regions by the

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<sup>594</sup> While some of the Tetrarchic–Constantinian bridgeheads on the north bank of the Danube continued to be occupied into the fifth century (and a few even later), there is no evidence of new transdanubian fortification efforts after Constantine, and the spotty evidence for continued Roman civic life in Dacia also largely ends with the fourth century (Bondoc 2009, pp. 30–34, 166–167; for a catalog of individual bridgehead sites, Bondoc 2009, pp. 34–90).

Carpathian–Balkan mountain chain (the north/west division upstream from the Iron Gates, and the south/east division on either side of the Lower Danube), similar local topographies and ecosystems are found throughout the entire watershed region. Both divisions are characterized by central lowland zones with hillier terrain on the peripheries. The Hungarian, Wallachian, Bulgarian, and Moldavian plains are all dominated by forest steppe environments, where grassland is interspersed with isolated glades and small forests, and riverine parklands characterized by a mosaic mixture of oak–polar forests and marshy riparian ecosystems.

If the ‘building blocks’ are the same throughout the region, however, the final sub-regional products are not quite as homogenous. The Hungarian Plain is quite flat, as is the Wallachian Plain, but the Bulgarian Plain is both narrower and hillier, sloping gradually up from the Danube to the Stara Planina Balkans to the south. Moldavia and Bessarabia also get hillier in their western Carpathian foothills, but a broad steppe–belt, our ‘Scythian Corridor,’ extends north along the coast of the Black Sea, from the Dobrogea all the way to the great Pontic Steppe of the Ukraine. Throughout the region, navigable river systems foster easy movement, most crucially the Danube cutting through the heart of both sections. The tributary systems in the two divisions, however, do not work in quite the same way. In the north/west division, the Upper Tisza and Mureş rivers of the Hungarian Plain provide convenient east–west avenues into and out of the Transylvanian Plateau. The Wallachian and Bulgarian plains, by contrast, are more cut up by their rivers, meaning that while north–south riverine movement between the mountains and the rivers is convenient, east–west movement overland is hindered somewhat by the numerous river crossings. This phenomenon makes access to the Danube itself more important in the south/east division than in the north/west.



Taken together, the physical features of the two divisions appear similar at the local scale, since the same climatic and topographic zones are found throughout the Danube drainage basin. At a larger scale, however, the different regional geographies and mobility patterns have important implications for Roman control over the two Danubian borderlands. Rome's fairly firm grasp on the Sarmatians, Quadi, and other tribes of the Middle Danube Borderland was facilitated by the region's political and natural geography which neatly hemmed in the client tribes between the *limites* and the barrier of the Carpathians, despite the enclosed region's great potential for human movement. North of the Lower Danube, by contrast, the open Scythian Corridor and the protected north-south valleys of the Carpathian foothills in Moldavia made it easier for Rome's enemies to retreat to safety if faced with an unbeatable legion. As Valens found out, achieving total victory in this landscape was simply too time consuming and costly to be worth the effort.

#### ※ *Cultural landscapes*

The physical evidence for settlement and subsistence patterns among the people of the Hungarian Plain and the Sântana-se-Mureş/Černjachov Culture beyond the Lower Danube make it clear that the bulk of the population across the entire region beyond the Middle and Lower Danube lived materially-similar lives. This is not surprising from an ecological perspective given the macro-region's interconnected regional zones and broadly similar ecologies and topographies. From a human perspective, the spread of La Tène and Dacian/Getic material culture across much of the Danubian world during the pre-Roman Iron Age lies at the core of most of the late antique material similarities between the two borderlands. The most basic of these similarities have to do with subsistence and habitation patterns. In the lands beyond the Middle and Lower Danube, most of the population lived in permanent village communities. While S-M/C Culture settlements show a

greater diversity of domestic architecture than is found in Sarmatian villages and among the scattered Dacian homesteads in Transylvania, the most common form of domestic architecture across the entire region remains the humble *Grubenhaus*, a direct holdover from the Iron Age Danubian world.

Agricultural cultivation was the most important subsistence activity on the Hungarian Plain, although the raising of livestock - particularly cattle and sheep - was also extremely important. The same pattern is reflected in the Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov zone as indicated by faunal assemblages and the ubiquity of grain storage pits. In both areas, livestock and agricultural produce were almost certainly the most common exports into the adjacent Roman provinces. Even under Constantine's free trade policy with the Tervingi, we should probably see the Roman army as the most important market for Gothic goods, as it was in the lands to the west. While the details of self-presentation - as indicated by items of personal adornment found in graves - differed somewhat between the people of the S-M/C Culture and the Sarmatians of the Hungarian Plain, and while we can infer from this that there were likely other basic differences in appearance and behavior not visible through the archaeological record, there were also basic cultural practices common across the macro-region. Most importantly, the ubiquity of Danubian gray pottery and gritty cookware speaks to Iron Age continuities in both borderlands, and also hints at possible similar cultural manifestations in terms of cuisine and dining practice.

Most of these similarities relate to low-status, conservative activities and populations and tell us little about how the elite of Sarmatian and Gothic society would have behaved. It was just such village communities, however, with which Romans had the most frequent interactions. In peace, this meant peasants driving their cattle into Roman markets on the Danube, while in war, the villages suffered the brunt of Roman punitive expeditions. The town that produced the martyred

Saba looks in the sources much like the marshland Sarmatian settlement burned by the troops of Constantius after his failed negotiations in 359. When Valens invaded Gothia a decade later, the Moldavian landscape his legions ravished in their quest to bring Athanaric to bay falls neatly into the same mould.<sup>595</sup>

### 5.2.3. The Scythian/Sarmatian delusion

Given the basic similarities in village life and subsistence just surveyed, we can see how easy it would be for Roman decision makers to assume even more general equivalences between the barbarians of the Hungarian Plain and those living beyond the Lower Danube. This would have been as true for an inexperienced Pannonian like Valens – brought up to think of transdanubians as weaklings – as for an equally inexperienced Constantinopolitan politico like Themistius, who only knew about Scythians from stereotypical literary descriptions. Further, even without the encouragement of engrained ethnographic notions about transdanubian Scythia, it would be easy enough to assume that all the barbarians over the Danube were essentially the same, based on the real commonalities that did link the two regions culturally and topographically. Such an assumption, however, would have failed to recognize several important political and social differences between the Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov Culture and the Sarmatian society of the Hungarian Plain. Whereas the similarities that did exist stemmed largely from the macro-region’s geographic connectivity and pre-Roman history, the legacy of nearly four centuries of Roman imperial domination in the Danubian realm ensured that the older Middle Danube client tribes had developed

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<sup>595</sup> For Saba’s village, *Pas. Sab.* 3.2, 4.5–6, 5.2–3, 6.4. For the Sarmatian village, A.M. 17.13.4 (its location), 17.13.12–15 (is description and destruction). For the landscape of Valens’ transdanubian war, A.M. 27.5.3–4.

a dependence on Roman support that did not exist among the people of the Lower Danubian Borderland.

In 369, the people of the Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov Culture were relative newcomers to the Danubian Borderland, whereas the Sarmatians had been living in the Hungarian Plain for almost four centuries by the time of Valens' treaty. More importantly, the period of initial Sarmatian settlement had corresponded to one of Roman strength and stability during the early Principate and Antonine periods, whereas the people of the S-M/C Culture only moved into/emerged culturally in Wallachia and Moldavia in conjunction with the third century crisis, when Rome's ability to project its power beyond the *limes* was limited at best. These differing circumstances ensured different initial arrangements with the Roman Empire. The Sarmatian Iazyges were first humbled by Domitian's generals in the first century,<sup>596</sup> and then even more fully subdued a hundred years later during the long Marcomannic conflict. The repeated experience of defeat and subjugation during the first and second centuries was largely responsible for the stable client relationships that characterized the region of the Hungarian Plain during much of the third and fourth centuries. Most of the attested Sarmatian campaigns of the later Principate and Tetrarchic periods seem to have been prompted by various emperors' needs to prove their legitimacy through battlefield victory, rather than by serious threats to the surrounding provinces. The Sarmatians, Quadi, and Marcomanni had, more or less, come to accept Roman control over their ruling elites, and to expect imperial support when threatened internally or by other barbarians. Thus, we find most of the

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<sup>596</sup> The sources for Domitian's wars are quite terrible. See Kovács 2014, pp. 70–82 for an analysis of what we do know. In short, Rome first struck a treaty with the Iazyges in 69 CE (Tac. *Hist.* 3.5), but a few years later the Iazyges were raiding into Pannonia with their Quadic friends where they defeated a Roman legion (Suet. *Dom.* 6.1), before being themselves bested by Domitian's legate Velius Rufus (Mart. 8.8, Eutr. 7.23.4).

Sarmatian elite seeking Roman assistance to solve their internal troubles with the Limigantes,<sup>597</sup> and later calling on imperial aid when threatened by the Tervingi.<sup>598</sup>

The emergence of Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov hegemony in Wallachia and Moldavia, by contrast, happened more organically, with no real attested Roman interference prior to Constantine's treaty of 332. Earlier emperors had defeated Gothic raiders inside the empire, and occasionally pursued them back across the Danube, but there were no serious attempts to impose direct control over the elites of the S-M/C Culture beyond the river. The result of this 'hands off' approach during the third and early fourth centuries - which should not be read as an intentional Roman policy, but rather as a reflection of the endemic imperial instability of the period - was the formation of a large regional culture with important centers of power far beyond the reach of Roman arms. Neither united as a single polity, nor arbitrarily divided into small, containable tribes by Roman treaty, the S-M/C world was able to develop into the diverse-yet-cohesive society we know from the archaeology. Although it was fostered in this development by Constantine's transdanubian policies, its origins must be seen in the preceding period when Rome had neither the power nor time to exert its will over the people beyond the Lower Danube. The fact that this emerging 'Gothic' society belonged as much to the worlds of the Germanic forest and Pontic Steppe as it did to the Lower Danubian Borderland helped the eventual fourth century relationship between the Tervingi and Rome assume a form distinct from the Sarmatian model, despite Valens' attempt to shoehorn Athanaric and his followers into the more familiar client system.

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<sup>597</sup> A.M. 17.12.17-20; *Orig. Const.* 6.32.

<sup>598</sup> *Orig. Const.* 6.31.

Prior to Constantine's emergence as the sole ruler of the Roman world, Roman emperors and generals had simply been too busy with other, internal matters to project serious transdanubian influence, but as soon as the Roman house was in order, Constantine turned his organizational eye north beyond the river, leading swiftly to the treaty of 332. As we have seen, however, even at this point there was still 'internal' work to be done cleaning up Aurelian's Dacian withdrawal. Once again, provincial affairs came first, leading to Constantine's pseudo-resettlement policy designed to begin the process of returning Trajan's conquests to some sort of productive, provincial status. Instead of attempting to reduce the Tervingi to the status of utterly-dependent translimitine clients through restrictive trade policies and the installation of a puppet regime, Constantine treated them like *laeti*, granting them land in exchange for military service on a case-by-case basis, and unrestricted trade with other parts of the empire south of the Danube. This pseudo-provincial status resulted in broader, more monetized sub-elite trade than in other borderland regions as testified by the large concentration of low-value bronze coinage north of the Danube during the period of the treaty's effect. Together with the ebb and flow of goods across the Danube came ideas. Tervingi leaders started to interact with Roman power in new ways, sending embassies to Constantinople - most notably Ulfilas' mission of c. 340<sup>599</sup> - and using diplomacy to challenge perceived mistreatment rather than simply accepting the tyranny of imperial caprice, or immediately resorting to revolt.<sup>600</sup> In the other direction came imperially-sponsored proselytization and, ultimately, the Gothic Bible.<sup>601</sup>

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<sup>599</sup> Philost. 2.5

<sup>600</sup> When accused by Valens of breaking faith in their support of Procopius, the Goths dispatched an embassy to Constantinople and presented letters from Procopius as proof that they had acted according to their oaths (A.M. 27.1). Eunapius' account of the events (fr. 37) present Athanaric as engaging in a multi-stage diplomatic wrangle with Valens prior to the outbreak of war.

<sup>601</sup> NOTE HERE

While Constantine undertook similar conversion efforts on the Eastern frontier, the mission to the Goths is unparalleled among the fourth century barbarians of the Danube and Rhine frontiers. Only a minority of the Tervingi ascribed to the Christian faith in 369, as indicated by the village scenes in the *Passio Sabae*, written only a year or two later, but the new faith had, apparently gained enough of a toehold to play an important role in the politics of post-369 Gothia.<sup>602</sup> To our knowledge, neither Constantine, nor Valens, nor any other emperor ever took an interest in the faith of the Sarmatians, Quadi, or other barbarian clients of the older generation.

### ***III. The Lower Danubian Borderland Destabilized***

#### **5.3.1. The road to the Danube, 369 to 376**

At some point in 376 CE, about seven years after Valens and Athanaric ended the first Gothic war with their riverboat treaty, large numbers of Tervingi arrived at the north bank of the Lower Danube. According to Ammianus, who recorded the event in book 31 of his histories, the Goths were refugees from the relentless advance of Hunnic and Alanic raiders. No longer led by Athanaric, but by two chiefs, Alavivus and Fritigern, the Tervingi who encamped on the Danube's bank sought only to escape a land "already suffering the thunderbolts of a foreign war-god." With such terrors behind them, the Tervingi sent envoys to Valens - then residing in Antioch - with a proposition: in exchange for lands in Thrace, the Tervingi would become model provincials, living

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<sup>602</sup> In addition to Ulfilas, it seems Valens made ecclesiastical matters part of his negotiations with Fritigern in the years immediately after his transdanubian war (Soc. 4.3). We will discuss this episode below.

quietly during peacetime and offering their services to the army in times of war.<sup>603</sup> Every student of Roman history knows, however, that things did not quite work out that way in the end.

Ammianus provides a lengthy narrative of the roughly three-year period between the arrival of the Tervingi at the Danube in 376, and Valens' death at Adrianople in August of 378, and while it is not without lacunae and is flavored with a strong dose of bitter hindsight,<sup>604</sup> this account has allowed scholars to reconstruct the events leading up to the Battle of Adrianople in much greater detail than is possible for virtually any previous period of Danubian history.<sup>605</sup> We are not so fortunate, however, for the seven years between Valens' mid-river treaty and the events of 376, and yet this period is of crucial importance for any understanding of subsequent events and for the development of Roman thought about the Goths who crossed into the empire and the other barbarians who remained behind in Scythia. The narrative that Ammianus does provide is pleasingly linear and continues to be accepted more-or-less at face value by many scholars to this day.<sup>606</sup> The broad outline requires only a few comments. The Huns, a previously unknown tribe of *bipedes bestiae* dwelling east of the Maeotic Lake are described living a stereotypical nomadic life using exaggerated Herodotean tropes.<sup>607</sup> For no apparent reason,<sup>608</sup> "this highly-mobile, untamed tribe of

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<sup>603</sup> A.M. 31.3.8-4.1. In his initial description of the arrival of the Goths on the Danube shore (31.4.1), Ammianus only mentions Alavivus as leader. The lack of Fritigern in this scene appears to be a simple oversight as the other Tervingi leader is introduced with no special explanation as Ammianus describes the initial crossing at 31.4.8.

<sup>604</sup> eg: A.M. 31.4.6: *Ita turbido instantium studio orbis Romani pernicies ducebatur!*

<sup>605</sup> Dexippus' *Scythica* probably did much the same for the period of the third century invasions, but its poor state of preservation means we currently have only a series of vignettes rather than a detailed, connected narrative.

<sup>606</sup> eg: Thompson 1966, pp. 21-22; Heather 1991, p. 122; Zahariade 2006, p. 27; contra Kulikowski 2009, pp. 111-112, 124-126; Kim 2013, pp. 43-45.

<sup>607</sup> A.M. 31.2.1-11.

<sup>608</sup> The fifth century historian Priscus (cited in Jordanes), however, does give a reason for the Hunnic move west. In his account, the Huns previously knew nothing of the lands beyond Maeotis, but were shown the way across by a capricious deity while hunting. Upon seeing the better land of Scythia beyond - and this is probably meant to be a further sleight against the Huns, since only they would consider Scythia to be a bountiful land - the Huns conceive of an insatiable desire to possess it, and so begin their push west (Priscus, fr. 1/ Jord. *Get.* 24.123-126). At least they weren't driven out by griffons, a line of reasoning Priscus later gives as the initial impetus for the westward movement of the even more remote



men, burning with a demonic desire for foreign plunder, advanced as far [west] as the Alani – formerly known as the Massagetae – their passage marked by the rape and pillage of all the neighboring peoples.”<sup>609</sup> After defeating and absorbing the only-slightly-less-horrible Alani, the growing confederation smashed into the Greuthungi Goths somewhere north of the Dniester, prompting Athanaric to lead a Tervingi relief force in an attempt to staunch the barbarian tide. When this inevitably failed due to Hunnic trickery, Athanaric withdrew to the hills of western Moldavia while most of his people opted to follow Fritigern and Alavivus south to the Danube and *Romania* beyond.<sup>610</sup>

The main problem with Ammianus’ narrative of the period between 369 and 376 is the heavily telescoped nature of its initial episodes. Reading the account, one gets the impression of a sequence of events occurring over a course of months or perhaps a few years. This makes little sense, and is reflected by the lack of any external chronological markers within the narrative of Hunnic expansion and Gothic collapse.<sup>611</sup> Ammianus’ narrative captures a genuine period of social and political upheaval in the lands of the Pontic Steppe, but in order to understand what was actually going on, we need to look to the social structures of the Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov Culture and the impact of the Gothic treaties of Constantine and Valens, rather than placing the blame for Adrianople on the misshapen shoulders of some Hunnic ethnographic bogeyman.

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Avars (fr. 40.2 / Suda A 18). The griffon episode, as well as the general portrayal of the Huns by Priscus, Ammianus, and others, fits the Herodotean model of portraying more and more outlandish peoples and creatures the further out towards the knowledge horizon one gets.

<sup>609</sup> A.M. 31.2.12: *Hoc expeditum indomitumque hominum genus, externa praedandi aviditate flagrans immani, per rapinas finitimorum grassatum et caedes, ad usque Halanos pervenit, veteres Massagetas.*

<sup>610</sup> For the equally Herodotean ethnography of the Alani, see A.M. 31.2.13–25. For the historical narrative, A.M. 31.3.1–8.

<sup>611</sup> Kulikowski 2007, pp. 124–126.

A good place to begin would be with one more look back at Valens' treaty. In a very real sense, the agreement reached between the Emperor and the *iudex* of the Tervingi in 369 left no winners. On the Roman side, Valens' rather halfhearted victory failed to prove the empire's overwhelming dominance north of the Danube. Not only did Valens lack the power to replace Athanaric with a more pliable client ruler – the usual practice when settling affairs beyond the *limites* – but he apparently lacked even the ability to compel Athanaric to negotiate on Roman terms. For all Themistius' attempts to wrap it in a cloak of *clementia*, Valens' mid-river peace conference was a far cry from Constantius' lofty Sarmatian tribunal of only a decade prior.<sup>612</sup> Meeting Athanaric on neutral ground was a concession and sign of weakness, and would have been read as such by the emperor's opponents on both sides of the river.<sup>613</sup>

If Valens came out of the 369 negotiations looking weak, so did Athanaric. During the course of two campaigning seasons, the *iudex* of the Tervingi did little more than retreat in the face of the Roman advance before losing the only battle of the war in 369.<sup>614</sup> While these delaying tactics had allowed Athanaric to wear down Roman resolve enough to bring Valens to the negotiating table, the village population suffered extensively from Roman looting and slave-taking during the protracted conflict.<sup>615</sup> As we have seen, at the conference, Athanaric managed to keep Valens from removing him as *iudex*, but he could do nothing to prevent the end of the Roman subsidies that had supported his regime since the 340s, nor could he stop the emperor's general economic sanctions on

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<sup>612</sup> A.M. 19.11.7–14. Of course, we know how those negotiations fared...

<sup>613</sup> Lenski rightly suggests that the origin of Athanaric's oath probably has to do with a promise not to raid against the provinces south of the Danube as part of the Constantinian settlement (2002, pp. 126–127). Even provided this rationale, Valens' inability to force the Gothic leader to abandon his stance and pay proper homage would have appeared weak.

<sup>614</sup> A.M. 25.5.2–7.

<sup>615</sup> A.M. 25.5.4: *Ne igitur aestate omni consumpta, sine ullo remearet effectu, Arintheo magistro peditum misso cum praedatoriis globis, familiarum rapuit partem, quae antequam ad dirupta venirent et flexuosa, capi potuerunt, per plana camporum errantes.*

trade across the Danube. The Tervingi leader's precarious position in the early 370s is demonstrated by his persecution of Gothic Christians in the years immediately after the treaty. Scholars have pointed out that this persecution – the same one which led to the martyrdom of Saba – targeted followers of the 'Roman religion' because their Christian faith could be construed as loyalty to a hostile power.<sup>616</sup> This is surely correct, yet there is some evidence to suggest that the persecution may also have been prompted by challenges to Athanaric's authority from other leaders within the Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov cultural sphere.

Socrates Scholasticus, a writer of church history around the beginning of the fifth century, records an otherwise unknown civil war between Athanaric and Fritigern sometime in the period between 369 and 376.<sup>617</sup> The likelihood that Valens' Gothic nemesis would have faced homegrown challengers following the unsatisfying treaty is high, but the details of Socrates' account lend it even more credence. According to the chronicler, Fritigern sought support from Valens who, sensing a way to reassert his influence beyond the Danube, sent Roman troops to aid the challenger in defeating Athanaric. Socrates' claim that Athanaric was totally defeated smacks more of Roman propaganda than reality considering the role the old *iudex* was to play in resisting Hunnic/Alanic raiders just prior to 376, but it does seem clear that some sort of major power struggle took place among the Tervingi following Valens' treaty, which ended up dealing a major blow to Athanaric's regional authority. For us, this mysterious 'civil war' should serve as a reminder that there was no tradition of strong centralized authority among the Goths of the Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov Culture. Fritigern's victory, Socrates concludes, led directly to his conversion to Christianity,

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<sup>616</sup> Heather and Matthews 1991, p. 96; Kulikowski 2007, p. 109.

<sup>617</sup> Soc. 4.33.

together with many of his followers, an act which the church historian rightly connects to Fritigern's post-revolt client obligations to the Christian emperor who had supported him. If we ascribe any non-political Christian leanings to Fritigern, a possibility supported by his later negotiations by means of a Christian priest whom Ammianus describes as both a trusted advisor and close confidant of the Tervingi leader (*[vir] conscius arcanorum et fidus*),<sup>618</sup> then we should entertain the possibility that Athanaric's persecutions were aimed as much at internal threats from Fritigern or those of similar persuasions, as at perceived imperial sympathies.

Looking further north, we must also attempt to make some sense out of Ammianus' narrative of the Hunnic advance. Here it is worth remembering that while most of our textual information about the fourth century Goths relates to the Tervingi and other unnamed groups living in Wallachia and southern Moldavia, the area of Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov material culture extended far to the north into the western portion of the Pontic Steppe. Rather than seeing the Huns and Alans of Ammianus as culturally-alien bolts from the blue, we should, instead, imagine a continuum of contact and exchange between the northern S-M/C Culture and the steppe peoples dwelling further east. The fact that the Huns were new to Roman ethnography in the fourth century does not mean that they would have been such an unknown quantity to the Greuthungi, the Gothic group described by Ammianus as living beyond the Dniester River during that period.<sup>619</sup> Rather, we should see longstanding east-west interactions in the northern half of the S-M/C Culture zone between agriculturalists like the Greuthungi and pastoral Sarmatians, Alans, and Huns from the Pontic Steppe. Indeed, if we can extract any truth from Ammianus' account of hostility between

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<sup>618</sup> A.M. 31.12.8-9.

<sup>619</sup> A.M. 31.3.1.

Huns and Alans in the lands abutting the Greuthungi, then we can imagine the regional hegemony of Greuthungi leaders like Ermanaric solidifying partially in order to ensure stability in a world where nomadic power struggles were a neighboring fact of life. That such efforts were evidently successful from the late third century onwards is attested by the fluorescence and spread of S-M/C material culture from its origins in Volhynia south and east into both the Roman borderland and out onto the steppe.

Although groups like the Greuthungi existed far beyond the sphere of Roman political control, they also benefitted from trade with the empire, and so we must see Valens' embargo as hurting everyone in the lands north of the Lower Danube. Across the Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov zone, Roman imports were used as symbols of elite status and we can imagine that the abrupt disruption of access to wine, oil, jewelry, and coin not only hurt individuals' ability to project their own status, but more crucially made it difficult for leaders who had risen to power under the conditions of the Constantinian settlement to maintain the networks of patronage at the foundations of their various sub-regional hegemonies.<sup>620</sup> The mysterious suicide of Ermanaric, recorded by Ammianus, may be our only vague reference to the collapse of the pre-Valens order in the north. Ammianus attributes the Greuthungi leader's suicide to his inability to "maintain a firm and continued stand," in the face of a growing Hunnic/Alanic threat,<sup>621</sup> but he never describes an actual battle between the Greuthungi and the Goths during this period. Rather, with its language of

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<sup>620</sup> For the use of Roman goods to support barbarian networks of patronage and power, see Whittaker 1994, pp. 121-131 and Drinkwater 2007, pp. 92, 104-106.

<sup>621</sup> A.M. 31.3.1-2: *Igitur Huni pervasis Halanorum regionibus, quos Greuthungis confines Tanāitas consuetudo cognominavit, interfectisque multis et spoliatis, reliquos sibi concordandi fide pacta iunxerunt, eisque adhibitis confidentius Ermenrichi late patentes et uberes pagos repentino impetu perrupereunt, bellicosissimi regis, et per multa variaque fortiter facta, vicinis nationibus formidati. (2) Qui vi subitae procellae percussus, quamvis manere fundatus et stabilis diu conatus est, impendentium tamen diritatem augente vulgatius fama, magnorum discriminum metum voluntaria morte sedavit.*

swirling rumor and threatening storm-clouds, we see in Ammianus' narrative, a confused, 'third-hand' account of the collapse of a regional hegemony that had developed in the preceding period of stability and trade. Raids from the steppe surely contributed, yet we also find Huns fighting as allies of the Greuthungi, against other Huns, perhaps in competition with other claimants for regional hegemony following the death of Ermanaric.<sup>622</sup> In all likelihood, the root cause of Greuthungi collapse had more to do with the economic and social disruptions caused by Valens' embargo, than the depredations of an unstoppable Hunnic horde, although this must remain somewhat speculative. In Ammianus, when Greuthungi politics stabilize an unspecified time later, we find two powerful warlords (Alatheus and Saphrax) in charge as regents for the young son of the previous, short-lived ruler.<sup>623</sup> This power sharing further reflects a society in the process of reestablishing its systems of authority after a major disruption.

Into this picture of northern chaos rode Athanaric who, Ammianus tells us, led an army to the banks of the Dniester in an attempt to stop the supposedly inexorable tide of Hunnic expansion.<sup>624</sup> A more likely interpretation, however, sees the Tervingi *iudex* acting to contain the unstable Greuthungi as much as any invaders from the steppe. We can understand Athanaric's position at this point. His own hegemony in the south was shaky following a chain of military and political setbacks at the hands of Valens and then Fritigern; his power clearly could not withstand further instability from the north. When the perpetually-unlucky leader was defeated, yet again, by a sudden Hunnic attack, he was finally abandoned by the bulk of his people while attempting to

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<sup>622</sup> A.M. 31.3.3.

<sup>623</sup> A.M. 31.3.3.

<sup>624</sup> A.M. 31.3.4.

construct defensive earthworks somewhere in Moldavia.<sup>625</sup> Fritigern now emerges as a major Tervingi leader, and the main proponent of settlement inside the empire. Given his probable Christian faith and personal connection with Valens, we can understand why he might have expected a warm welcome. His petition to Valens for lands in Thrace essentially requested the terms established by Constantine in 332: land to farm in peace, troops as needed in times of war, and (implicitly) free exchange with the rest of the empire's varied provincial citizenry.<sup>626</sup>

Taken all together, we can see that the two Gothic treaties of the fourth century created the conditions necessary for the crossing of 376. In particular, the inappropriateness of Valens' 'Sarmatian' embargo exerted a profoundly negative effect. While the closing of the borders did serve to disrupt Athanaric's power base, as must surely have been its original intent, this policy of economic warfare did not turn the Lower Danube borderland into a region of placid client tribes as similar tactics had repeatedly done in and around the Hungarian Plain. Because the Tervingi were only the southern part of a larger socio-cultural system extending far beyond the scope of Roman political authority, the effects of the Roman embargo were passed further and further north, disrupting the Greuthungi and the rest of the northern half of the Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov cultural zone without simultaneously bringing those regions under Roman hegemony. At the same time, instability caused by the breakdown of patronage networks reliant on Roman imports must have encouraged Hunnic/Alanic raiders who were, themselves, probably also feeling the material effects of the trade ban. Increased raiding further exacerbated the problem, and so, in the course of a few years, the Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov region, previously characterized by a patchwork of

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<sup>625</sup> A.M. 31.3.5-8.

<sup>626</sup> A.M. 31.4.1.

several stable sub-regional hegemonies, devolved into a chaos of competing warbands and opportunistic nomadic raiders. For Romans trying to explain the disturbing rumors trickling back over the Danube, the Huns were the obvious culprits. After all, the ‘domino’ model of barbarian migration so clearly set out by Ammianus had been a part of the Scythian Logos since Herodotus first described how Scythians moving in from the east had pushed out the indigenous Cimmerians from their homeland in the Crimea.<sup>627</sup> Even if Attila would eventually emerge in the fifth century as a genuine threat from that quarter, the Huns of the fourth century were more of an ethnographic bogeyman than an existential danger to the Goths or the empire. Instead, blame for upsetting the transdanubian apple cart should be placed squarely at the feet of Valens and his clique of advisors, and their thoughtless transfer of Sarmatian tactics onto the world of the Lower Danubian Borderland.

### **5.3.2. The road to Adrianople**

The litany of incompetence and outright villainy that characterized the treatment of the Tervingi refugees following their admittance into the empire in 376 has been discussed in great detail and does not require yet another critical scrutiny, where broad strokes will suffice. Ammianus tells the story, as usual, with additional contributions from Zosimus and the fragments of Eunapius. Valens agreed to admit the Tervingi and we have no real reason to doubt the claim that he saw Fritigern’s petition as a godsend of fresh manpower as he prepared for a new Persian offensive.<sup>628</sup> Whether the cruel mistreatment of the Tervingi by Lupicinus and Maximus as they awaited resettlement was another misguided attempt to render the Goths submissive through economic

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<sup>627</sup> Hdt. 4.11–12. The narrative is almost exactly parallel to Ammianus’ Hunnic account: Massagetae (a term we will see applied to the Huns in the following chapter) living in Asia pushed Scythians westwards into the Crimea where they, in turn, expelled the Cimmerians who were already living there.

<sup>628</sup> Eunap. fr. 42.11–19; A.M. 31.4.4–5.



warfare, or merely stemmed from the greed of the unscrupulous commanders cannot be determined, but as usual it reflected a poor understanding of Tervingi politics.<sup>629</sup> Ignoring obvious post-Adrianople retrojections, like Eunapius' improbable story of a mass conspiracy among the Gothic elite to disregard their oaths in order to seize control of the Roman Empire,<sup>630</sup> there is actually little to suggest duplicity on the part of Fritigern and his Tervingi. Their desire to settle in Thrace and incorporate themselves (or as some must have seen it, re-incorporate themselves) into the Roman world appears to have been genuine, and given the chaos then wracking the lands beyond the Lower Danube, this intention is easy to understand. Indeed, Ammianus has the Tervingi grumble as they languish, starving, on banks of the Danube, that they were being driven towards rebellion not because of any disloyalty, but by cruel necessity.<sup>631</sup>

Eventually Lupicinus and Maximus recognized the growing unrest among the hungry Tervingi, and began the process of moving them to a staging ground at Marcianople, and it was there that the actual rebellion broke out following more Roman ineptitude based, again, on poor interpretation of Sarmatian precedents. Eunapius records some important details of the Roman plan for resettling the Tervingi, and they reveal once again, that the Roman decision-makers were turning to a traditional playbook. A generation earlier, Constantine had overseen two distinct

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<sup>629</sup> A.M. 31.4.11-5.2.

<sup>630</sup> Eunap. fr. 59 (*Exc. de Leg. Gent.* 7): οἱ μὲν ἀγαπᾶν καὶ δέχεσθαι τὴν παροῦσαν εὐδαιμονίαν κελεύοντες, οἱ δὲ τὸν οἶκοι γεγονότα φυλάττειν ὄρκον αὐτοῖς καὶ μὴ παραβαίνειν ἐκείνας τὰς συνθήκας. αὐταὶ δὲ ἦσαν ἀσεβέσταται καὶ βαρβαρικὸν ἦθος εἰς ὠμότητα παρατρέχουσαι, παντὶ τρόπῳ Ῥωμαίοις ἐπιβουλεύειν καὶ πάσῃ μηχανῇ καὶ δόλῳ τοὺς ὑποδεξαμένους ἀδικεῖν, κἂν τὰ μέγιστα ὑπ' αὐτῶν εὖ πάσχωσιν, ὡς ἂν τῆς ἐκείνων ἀπάσης χώρας ἐγκρατεῖς γένωνται. [*After passing into Thrace, there was a debate among the Gothic leaders.*] *One side said that they should rejoice in and accept their present good fortune, the other that they should keep the oaths that they had sworn at home and not break their pledge. This pledge, a most unholy one that went beyond the normal savagery of the barbarians, was that, even if they were to receive the greatest kindness from the Romans, they would plot against them in every way and use every treacherous device to harm those who had taken them in, in order that they might gain possession of all their territory.* trans. Blockley.

<sup>631</sup> A.M. 31.5.2: *Quo intellecto, ad perfidiam instantium malorum subsidium verti mussabant.*

resettlement efforts. First, as discussed in Chapter Four, he ‘resettled’ the Tervingi within the theoretical boundaries of his revived transdanubian Dacia. This pseudo-laetic settlement finds its best parallels in Gaul, where Julian used the same technique when dealing with the Alamanni, and perhaps also the Franks.<sup>632</sup> In these cases, the barbarian *laeti* were allowed to live together in their existing tribal units, and existing barbarian leadership was largely left intact. By contrast, when Constantine settled large numbers of Sarmatians following the Limigantes revolt, he spread them across several provinces, implying the removal of pre-settlement leaders and the breakup of their powerbases.<sup>633</sup> This latter method of resettlement resulted in some sort of different status for the new Sarmatian *coloni* whom we find listed in the *Notitia Dignitatum* in tribal units distinct from the laetic forces serving in Gaul.<sup>634</sup> Constantine’s differing treatment of his resettled Tervingi and Sarmatians demonstrated an awareness of the social and political differences between the two barbarian groups and at least some effort to tailor his settlement methods to fit the requirements of each. Valens’ policy, as usual, fell short of the mark set by Constantine.

From Eunapius, we learn that the first phase of the Tervingi resettlement involved the dispersal of women and children throughout the region as hostages, while the fighting men were further detained at the river crossing.<sup>635</sup> This tactic strongly suggests that those men not intended for

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<sup>632</sup> Mathisen 2006, pp. 1023–1027; Nixon and Rogers 1994, pp. 141–143, n. 75.

<sup>633</sup> *Orig. Const.* 6.32.

<sup>634</sup> *Not. Dign. [occ.]* ch. 42. Immediately following the Gallic *laeti*, the *Notitia* lists 24 *praefecti Sarmatarum gentilium* dispersed through 17 Italian and 6 Gallic regions. The proximity of the Sarmatian *gentiles* to the *laeti* in the document is suggestive of similar status, but the fact that different terminology is used argues against exact equivalence.

<sup>635</sup> Eunap. fr. 42 (*Exc. de Leg. Gent.* 6). Eunapius does not specify a regional limit for this dispersal, but we should probably imagine it as confined to the Danubian and Balkan provinces, and perhaps Asia Minor. For further evidence of Valens’ intent to break up the Tervingi population, see A.M. 31.4.5 (*partes Thraciae*) and Soc. 4.34.3 (τὰ μέρα τῆς Θράκης) (Lenski 2002, p. 343, n. 136). The defeat of Farnobius, a Gothic warleader operating independently of Fritigern, and the resettlement of his troops throughout Italy’s Po Valley sometime during Fritigern’s revolt, may also offer a glimpse of the fate intended for the main body of Tervingi (A.M. 31.9.3–4).

immediate conscription for Valens' looming Persian war could expect similar treatment. They, like the Sarmatians and many other groups of barbarians before them, would be divided into small groups and settled over a wide area where they would remain disorganized and unable to form any sort of power block. For this resettlement plan to succeed, it required either the support or the removal of the Tervingi leadership, and it is in light of this reality that we must read the next major scene in the unfolding Gothic tragedy: Lupicinus' disastrous dinner party at Marcianople.

Determining the original goal of the symposium thrown for the two Tervingi leaders is impossible because the proceedings were disrupted before they could be completed as planned. Ammianus tells us that Roman troops kept the bulk of the Tervingi men away from the city as Fritigern, Alavivus, and their retinues were invited inside for Falernian and fish-sauce.<sup>636</sup> When the Roman soldiers refused to provide any sort of food for the common Goths, fighting broke out, and when a half-drunk Lupicinus got word of the growing crisis, he panicked, ordered the Gothic chiefs' retainers killed, and attempted to detain both Fritigern and Alavivus. Only the former managed to bluff his way out of the trap, the fate of Alavivus remaining unknown. It is unclear whether Lupicinus intended to kill the Tervingi leaders - perhaps remembering how the Medes had once done the same when dealing with their own Scythian problem<sup>637</sup> - or instead had planned to wine and dine them into supporting Constantinople's plan for divvying up the Tervingi settlers. Either way, the Roman governor clearly did not expect the mass of Goths to show as much spirit as they ultimately did. Where that faulty assumption came from can only be guessed, but memory of the

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<sup>636</sup> A.M. 31.5.4-8.

<sup>637</sup> Hdt. 1.106. Herodotus relates that after suffering 28 years of Scythian depredations, Median king Cyaxares finally got rid of the barbarians by inviting them to a feast, getting them all drunk, and then killing most of them over their cups. If the story has any truth in it, the massacre must have been limited to the Scythian leaders.

submissive Sarmatians – the most recent large-scale resettlement effort in the Danubian region – seems the most likely candidate.

From its beginnings at walls of Marcianople, Fritigern's revolt spread across the Danubian and Balkan provinces. Of the subsequent events, two are of particular interest. First, Ammianus reports that Fritigern found eager supporters among the general provincial population. These not only included Goths settled in the region previously, but also individuals without any given ethnic designation. While the sources speak of terrible acts of rape and pillage, we should probably see Fritigern's force as behaving in basically the same way as any Roman army of the period.<sup>638</sup> The provincials who joined his cause may not have seen much of a difference between Fritigern and the frequently-barbarian-led Roman armies that periodically made their potentially-destructive way through their homelands. In contrast to this enthusiastic rural support, Fritigern was only reluctantly aided by Sueridas and Colias, two Goths serving as the leaders of ethnic units in Valens' army. These Goths only joined the rebellion when nervous citizens physically drove them and their soldiers out of their garrison at Adrianople.<sup>639</sup> The episode is of particular interest because it shows again that Fritigern's rebellion cannot be read as a simple matter of Goths vs. Romans. In most respects, the course of the actual rebellion looks much more like a typical late Roman civil war than the Scythian raids of the third century, or those periodically launched by Sarmatians from the Hungarian Plain.

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<sup>638</sup> For Fritigern's motley supporters and acts of violence against the populace of Thrace, A.M. 31.6.4-7. For his resemblance to a Roman army, in particular, he acquired a large baggage train of wagons to carry supplies and equipment (A.M. 31.7.5), and routinely sent out foraging parties to gather the food Rome refused to provide him (A.M. 31.7.7). Fritigern's force apparently lacked the know-how to besiege and capture cities (A.M. 31.6.4), but in this way only does he appear deficient in comparison to his Roman enemies. This 'fault,' may, in fact be mere illusion. If we read his conflict as mainly a political one, designed to force Valens to make good on his promise of lands in Thrace, while also avoiding the destruction of his own powerbase, then there really wouldn't have been any reason for Fritigern to attempt the capture of walled cities. His goal was better accomplished by either a battlefield victory, or by wearing down Roman resolve through provincial looting, incidentally, the same tactic Valens had used in 367-369 to force Athanaric to the bargaining table.

<sup>639</sup> A.M. 31.6.1-3.

### 5.3.3. Conclusions: Fritigern and Valens, and the end of the ‘Sarmatian playbook’

Fritigern and Valens finally faced each other on the plains outside Adrianople on August 9th, 378. From the day the Tervingi leader had first requested resettlement south of the Danube for himself and his followers, he had been unswerving in his pursuit of that goal. Fritigern, like all the Tervingi past adolescence, had grown up before 369 in a Gothia at least loosely considered part of the Roman Empire, thanks to the treaty of 332. Valens’ ham-fisted attempts to change the terms of the Roman-Tervingi relationship in the years since 369 may have initially made sense from his perspective as an outsider trying to prove his legitimacy to his Constantinopolitan advisors and the allies of the old regime. The new order, however, was built on fundamental misreadings of the political and social structures present among the Lower Danubian people Valens and his advisors considered Scythians; the treaty of 369 had always been doomed to failure because it was based on entrenched ideas about how to handle barbarians derived from the different socio-historical realities of the Hungarian Plain.

That day, before the walls of Adrianople, Fritigern made two final attempts to achieve access to the Roman system through peaceful means. Valens apparently responded favorably to the second Gothic embassy, but whether this reflected a genuine policy change cannot be known because over-eager Roman troops attacked on their own initiative before negotiations could begin, dragging both armies into what would go on to become one of the more politically significant defeats in Roman imperial history.<sup>640</sup> Although old claims that Adrianople marked the beginning of the fall of the

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<sup>640</sup> A.M. 31.12-13. Fritigern first attempted to negotiate by sending the Christian priest mentioned above (A.M. 31.12.8). Although pure speculation, it is not unreasonable to imagine this figure as one of the agents involved in his imperially-sponsored conversion during the war/power-struggle with Athanaric in the early 370s (Soc. 4.33). When this embassy was

Roman empire are overblown, the destruction of two-thirds of the eastern field army caused real problems. When Theodosius eventually came to terms with Fritigern in 383, the brokered peace essentially granted the Goths everything they had originally sought: land in Thrace and access to the Roman political world through service in the Roman army.<sup>641</sup> The outdated Sarmatian playbook for handling barbarians died along with Valens, but it would take some time yet for the empire to wrap its collective mind around the idea that the Goths were inside the *limites* to stay and therefore could be Scythians no longer.

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rejected by Valens for not being of high enough status, Fritigern opted to try again, this time proposing an exchange of elite hostages as a prelude to formal, high-level peace negotiations. Ammianus hints that this was all a ploy to allow Fritigern's Greuthungi allies to arrive on the battlefield, and while such tactical considerations surely did factor, the Tervingi leader's actions up to this point strongly suggest that he genuinely hoped to find a way to resolve the conflict without a pitched battle. Regardless of the motive, Valens appeared ready to pursue this final overture, but Fortuna had other ideas.

<sup>641</sup> Them. *Or.* 16. We will discuss Theodosius' Gothic settlement in depth in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER SIX

### GOTHS, HUNS, AND THE IMMORTAL SCYTHIAN LOGOS

#### *I. The Post-Adrianople Spin Room*

##### 6.1.1. Introduction: explaining the unthinkable (again)

The debacle at Adrianople in 378 was entirely unexpected to both the Romans and Goths. Fritigern's repeated eleventh-hour attempts to broker a peace before the outbreak of battle suggest that the Goths did not expect their conflict with Valens and the Roman field army to turn out to their advantage.<sup>642</sup> On the Roman side, the death of an emperor together with the destruction of so large an army had not been experienced since Decius' death at Abritus over a century earlier,<sup>643</sup> and it threw the entire Eastern Empire into chaos. Beginning at this moment of crisis, this final chapter will consider how Romans talked about and acted towards transdanubian peoples in the 'long fifth century' beginning after the Battle of Adrianople. Although the process took time, the events of 378 initiated major changes not only in how Roman decision makers *interacted* with people from beyond the Danube and their descendants inside the empire, but also how they *conceived* of the peoples they identified as Goths. During the fifth century, we see a major change in who gets labeled as a Scythian, but ultimately the Herodotean worldview that pictured the Danube as the boundary between worlds proved more durable than the Roman *limes* it had been coopted to support.

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<sup>642</sup> A.M. 31.12.14-15.

<sup>643</sup> *Scyth. fr.* 17; Jord. *Get.* 101-103.

## 6.1.2: Theodosius' Gothic War

In the immediate aftermath of Valens' battlefield death, when the eastern field army had “vanished away more quickly than a shadow,”<sup>644</sup> and with no emperor to issue commands, the governors and generals attempted to handle the situation as best they could. In Asia Minor, Gothic soldiers and hostages were rounded up and executed in a series of poorly-understood pogroms,<sup>645</sup> while a Gothic general in Roman service named Modares appears to have scored some sort of independent victory over a group of Fritigern's confederates as they were engaged in looting sometime after the main battle.<sup>646</sup> Someone needed to take over the reins of the Eastern Empire, and Zosimus tells us that Gratian, the Western Augustus, personally selected Theodosius to fill this role as his new eastern colleague, although we should probably read Theodosius' elevation as a bloodless coup to which Gratian grudgingly acceded.<sup>647</sup> Regardless, the new emperor's chief concern was to restore order in the Balkans where Fritigern's followers continued to support themselves by living off

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<sup>644</sup> Them. *Or.* 14.181a. cf. *Or.* 16.206d where Themistius describes the situation as “an indescribable Iliad of evils on the Ister.”

<sup>645</sup> A.M. 31.16.8; Zos. 4.26. The two surviving accounts are quite different in their narratives. Ammianus speaks of the execution of Gothic soldiers in the garrisons of Asia Minor, while Zosimus claims the main victims were adolescent Gothic hostages, presumably the same ones spoken of by Eunapius in his description of the initial settlement agreement of 376 (fr. 42). Kulikowski's analysis of these contradictory narratives is persuasive, namely that they reflect two aspects of a more general, widespread, but poorly-organized effort to purge the region of potential Gothic enemy combatants. He suggests, hypothetically, that Zosimus' urban pogroms could have stemmed from riots among the Gothic hostage population over the execution of Gothic soldiers following news of Adrianople (2007, pp. 145-147).

<sup>646</sup> Zos. 4.25. Zosimus makes this victory sound more important than it probably was, although such over-inflation is understandable as Romans grasped at any shred of good news following the main defeat.

<sup>647</sup> Zos. 4.24.4. For scholarly interpretation, cf. Kulikowski 2007, pp. 147-150 and Heather and Moncur 2001, pp. 205-206. The crux seems to revolve around Theodosius' retirement to Spain in the years between his father's fall from grace and execution in 376, and his elevation in 379. Theodosius' C.V. included a well-known victory over the Sarmatians when he was serving as *Dux Moesiae* in 374, and this earlier 'Scythian' victory would have made him an obvious candidate for handling the post-Adrianople crisis. His retirement in Spain, however, put him far away from the action, and therefore perhaps not the most obvious candidate for elevation unless he (or his political allies) had not already seen the ongoing Gothic troubles as a potential avenue for Theodosius' political rehabilitation. The somewhat frosty relations between Theodosius and Gratian throughout their joint-reign may lend credence to the theory that the former may have asserted his claim to the Purple without prior permission from the latter, although since the texts are silent on this possibility, it will have to remain within the realm of speculation.



the land with little regard for the lives or property of the inhabitants. The events of Theodosius' Gothic war are not fully preserved in the sources, but from what we can tell, it – like Valens' transdanubian Gothic war before it – was not a complete success. Theodosius' green recruits were trounced in their first encounter in 380,<sup>648</sup> and in the following campaigning season, the Goths appear to have employed Athanaric's old playbook, leading their Roman pursuers on a protracted chase through the Balkan provinces. Although attempts by Fritigern to move into less-devastated Pannonia were foiled by Gratian's generals,<sup>649</sup> Theodosius was unable to force a decisive battle within his own ambit, and so opted to follow Valens' example in 382 by offering Fritigern a brokered peace. The Gothic chief, in a position of strength, jumped at the chance to put an end to the marching and inconclusive fighting.

The terms of Theodosius' treaty are not directly preserved, but Themistius – ever the reliable pundit for imperial policy – reveals much in a speech delivered in 383 to celebrate the return of peace. We will look at the orator's language more closely below, but for the moment it is enough to note what we learn from this sixteenth oration, namely that the treaty included the symbolic surrender of Fritigern and his army,<sup>650</sup> and the subsequent assignment to the Goths of farmland in Thrace.<sup>651</sup> Synesius of Cyrene later claimed that these newly-settled Goths continued to live under their own laws,<sup>652</sup> but as Heather and Moncur note, the source of this information is a hostile diatribe highlighting the folly of Theodosius' treaty,<sup>653</sup> so we should use this information with caution.

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<sup>648</sup> Zos. 4.31.3–5.

<sup>649</sup> Zos. 4.33.1–2.

<sup>650</sup> Them. Or. 16.199c. See also, *Pan. Lat.* 2.22.3; Libanius, *Or.* 9.16; Synesius, *de Reg.* 21.50.12; Oros. 7.34.7; *Cons. Const.* s.a. 382; Hydatius s.a. 382, *Marc. Com.*, s.a. 382.

<sup>651</sup> Them. Or. 16.211a–b.

<sup>652</sup> Synesius, *de Reg.* 19.

<sup>653</sup> Heather and Moncur 2001, pp. 261–262.

Themistius himself chose to emphasize the potential the Goths held for becoming model provincials, citing the example of the Galatians as proof of Rome's civilizing power.<sup>654</sup> This rhetoric would seem to imply that the new settlers were subject to Roman administration, and given Themistius' position as a mouthpiece for Theodosius, we should perhaps put more stock in his evidence than Synesius' speech delivered a decade or so later.<sup>655</sup> The two sources, however, need not necessarily contradict each other. Even if imperial policy was to settle Fritigern's Goths as *laeti* in Thrace and thereby turn them into good, model Roman *coloni*, the reality need not have matched the intention. At any rate, we find Goths serving en-masse in Theodosius' campaigns against Magnus Maximus, as well as in regular units, indicating that individual and short-service mass recruitment must both have been part of the settlement of 382.<sup>656</sup> Subsequent events also reveal that in the post-Adrianople world, members of the Gothic elite found high military office open to them to a degree unknown in the previous period. This important development, which we will consider next, appears to be the only fundamental innovation of Theodosius' treaty and its subsequent settlement. In other respects, his policy towards Fritigern and his coalition appears very similar to Constantine's as expressed in the treaty of 332 when the Tervingi were originally bound to Rome as pseudo-laetic settlers in a revived transdanubian province of Dacia/Gothia.<sup>657</sup>

### 6.1.3. Goths on the Eastern Roman political stage

Whether Fritigern himself was granted an imperial office as part of his treaty with Theodosius is unknown. The Gothic leader does not appear again in the historical record after the

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<sup>654</sup> Them. Or. 16.211b-212a.

<sup>655</sup> We will look at the *de Regno* in some depth below.

<sup>656</sup> Heather and Montur 2001, pp. 262-263. For Gothic service vs. Magnus Maximus, see Pacatus 2.32.3-4.

<sup>657</sup> See sections 4.5.1 in Chapter Four.

end of the war, and we can reasonably assume that he died relatively soon after 383. The history of the twenty-seven years between the end of Theodosius' Gothic war and the sack of Rome in 410 are a veritable rat's nest of political intrigue, revolt, and assassination across both halves of the Roman Empire, and while we do not need to unravel all the tangled threads,<sup>658</sup> it is crucial to emphasize the new roles we see Goths filling in the final two decades of the fourth century. We have already met Sueridus and Colias in the previous chapter, Gothic *optimates* who crossed into the empire with their followers sometime around Fritigern's more famous immigration, and subsequently received modest Roman military commissions to lead their followers as ethnic auxiliaries.<sup>659</sup> A certain Tribigild recorded by Zosimus and Claudian as a Gothic noble in charge of Gothic troops in Asia Minor in the late 390s,<sup>660</sup> probably began his imperial career with a status similar to that of Sueridus and Colias, and indeed, we can imagine that this sort of middle-rank leader of auxiliary troops may have had its origin with the occasional Gothic levies employed earlier in the century. Tribigild, however, was not content to remain a political nobody, and if we are to believe Claudian, raised a rebellion in Phrygia after his petition to Arcadius for higher promotion was rejected.<sup>661</sup>

Both his expectation of achieving high office, and his recourse to arms when denied promotion place Tribigild in a category apart from the likes of Sueridus and Colias. Neither his actions, nor his expectations, however, were unprecedented. In the years after Theodosius' peace,

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<sup>658</sup> Kulikowski offers as succinct and cogent an overview of the period as possible given the evidentiary problems (2007, pp. 154-177). The main ancient sources are Eunapius and Olympiodorus, and the poetry of Claudian. While the former two survive only in fragments, the latter presents a view consistently slanted in favor of the poet's patron, Stilicho. Zosimus remains a useful source, but as usual mainly for his preservation of otherwise unknown material, rather than for his own analysis.

<sup>659</sup> A.M. 31.6.1-3. These were the Gothic leaders garrisoning Adrianople in c. 376 as Roman soldiers. When the populace turned on them over perceived slights and out of fear of Fritigern (with whom they, as yet, had no connection), they reluctantly fought their way out of the city and only then opted to join the growing rebellion.

<sup>660</sup> Zos. 5.13ff.; Claudian, in *Eut.* 2.174ff.

<sup>661</sup> Claudian, in *Eut.* 2.174ff.

individuals identified as Goths began to appear as the holders of high civilian and military positions in the Eastern Empire. There are three notable figures: Gainas, Fravitta, and Alaric. Gainas, a Goth born north of the Danube, according to Zosimus,<sup>662</sup> rose through the military ranks on merit, particularly for his efforts in putting down the usurpation of Eugenius.<sup>663</sup> He was rewarded with the rank of *comes rei militaris*, a promotion unheard of for a Scythian/Goth.<sup>664</sup> Perhaps it was this promotion that prompted Tribigild to seek his own advancement, but regardless, in 399, Gainas was tasked with dealing with his fellow Goth's rebellion. The intricacies of the plotting and politicking that surrounded this event need not concern us,<sup>665</sup> except in so far as they led to Gainas' further promotion to *magister militum praesentalis* in 399,<sup>666</sup> followed swiftly by his fall from grace, defeat, and death while attempting to regroup beyond the Danube.<sup>667</sup> One of the generals responsible for doing away with Gainas was another Goth named Fravitta, who, having served as a Roman officer since the days of Theodosius, was rewarded first with Gainas' recently-vacated post of *magister militum*, and then with a consulship in 401, the first Goth to hold that exalted position.<sup>668</sup>

The third major Gothic politico of the age was Alaric, whose career more-or-less ran parallel to those of Gainas and Fravitta up to the end of the fourth century. Like Gainas, he appears to have

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<sup>662</sup> Zos. 5.21.9.

<sup>663</sup> On his origins as a common soldier, Soz. 8.4; Soc. 6.6.1; Joh. Ant. fr. 190. For his exploits in the war against Eugenius, Zos. 4.57.2-58.2; Joh. Ant. fr. 187.

<sup>664</sup> Marc. Com. s.a. 395; *Rom.* 319-320; *Get.* 176; Joh. Ant. fr. 190.

<sup>665</sup> Again, see Kulikowski 2007, pp. 168-171 for an overview. The main ancient authority is Zosimus with contributions from others.

<sup>666</sup> Soz. 8.4.5; Soc. 6.6.1.

<sup>667</sup> Zosimus (5.18) claims that Gainas was attempting an actual usurpation of the Purple, but this seems unlikely. More probably, Gainas simply sought to establish himself as the latest puppet master over the biddable Arcadius, since he had been closely involved in the removal of the two previous imperial advisors (Eutropius and Aurelianus). In aiming for such a position, Gainas was, essentially, attempting to set himself up as the eastern equivalent of Stilicho, who stood as the undisputed power behind Honorius' rather shaky throne.

<sup>668</sup> Fravitta has already held the post of *magister militum per orientem* since 395 (Eun. fr. 80; Zos. 5.20.1), and he was granted the more prestigious *magister militum praesentalis* when tasked with handling Gainas (Eunap. fr. 82; Zos. 5.20-21). On the evidence for his consulship, see *PLRE I*, p. 373.

gotten his start as a middle-rank officer during Theodosius' war against Eugenius.<sup>669</sup> Alaric's own unrivaled ambition, however, revealed itself when he resorted to open revolt in 395 when passed over for promotion after the war.<sup>670</sup> The next fifteen years saw the Gothic general on an obsessive quest to break into the upper echelons of Roman military society, frequently relying on force when faced with political setbacks.<sup>671</sup> Alaric managed to extort some sort of high commission (probably *magister militum per Illyricum*) in 397,<sup>672</sup> but our poor sources mean we have little idea of what he got up to between then and his first departure for Italy in 401. Kulikowski's suggestion that he found the Constantinopolitan political scene too hot after the brouhaha over Tribigild and Gainas is persuasive.<sup>673</sup> Alaric had spent over half a decade attempting to advance his career in the east by means of the sword, and all of his endeavors in the west need to be seen as more of the same. The sack of Rome, when it came, represented Alaric's final failure to break into the very highest levels of Roman politics rather than the culmination of some supposed desire to destroy the Eternal City.<sup>674</sup>

The Gothic meddling in imperial politics of Gainas, Alaric, and Tribigild, and the less revolutionary military career of Fravitta all have numerous precedents in the Western Empire, where Alamannic elites had routinely made careers for themselves as military officers since at least the reign of Constantius II.<sup>675</sup> This access to high office is probably related to periodic settlement of Alamanni

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<sup>669</sup> Soc. 7.10.

<sup>670</sup> Zos. 5.5.4.

<sup>671</sup> See Kulikowski 2007, pp. 164–168, 170–177 for a cogent overview of Alaric's career.

<sup>672</sup> Kulikowski 2007, p. 167; Claud. in *Eut.* 2.211–218, *Goth.* 533–540.

<sup>673</sup> Kulikowski 2007, p. 170.

<sup>674</sup> Claudian died sometime before the sack of Rome in 410, but in his panegyrics to Stilicho and Honorius following their victory over Alaric at Pollentia in 401, he appears to have invented the trope of Alaric's insatiable desire to “feed his horses on the Tiber's grassy bank” (*Cos. VI Hon.* 182–3, cf. *Goth.* 544).

<sup>675</sup> For a prosopography of these figures and a cogent discussion, see Drinkwater 2007, ch. 5. The earliest high-ranking barbarian general appears to be Crocus, an Alamannic king and ally of Constantius Chlorus, but the practice of bestowing high rank on western barbarians really takes off under Constantius II.

(and also Franks) in Gaul as *laeti* beginning under the Tetrarchy.<sup>676</sup> Since Theodosius' Gothic settlement was hardly the first time transdanubian populations had been granted land inside the empire, the fact that we know of virtually no Gothic, Sarmatian, Carpic, or Vandal holders of high office from the period when Franks and Alamanni were first joining the echelons of the Western military elite probably reflects the enduring legacy of Greco-Roman stereotypes about people considered to be Scythians.<sup>677</sup> We must consider, therefore, how popular ideas about Goths and other transdanubians changed in the wake of Adrianople.

#### 6.1.4. Writing about Goths after the Battle of Adrianople

For the Greek authors Themistius, and Eunapius, born in the first half of the fourth century, the shock of Adrianople and the subsequent turmoil in Thrace occurred during their mature adulthood. While the chaotic political situation forced their contemporaries in the administrative and military spheres to contemplate and advance radical steps, such as appointing barbarians they viewed as Scythians to high office, these writers largely continued to write about the Goths in the same ways they always had. In those of Themistius' post-Adrianople orations touching on the Gothic war and subsequent treaty (nos. 14–16), he generally continues to refer to Goths as Scythians, suggesting that his overall worldview was not shaken by the changed circumstances in Thrace.<sup>678</sup>

We do, however, find one important innovation. When Athanaric, the venerable *iudex* of the Tervingi sought sanctuary at Constantinople in 381,<sup>679</sup> he was received with great honor by

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<sup>676</sup> Drinkwater 2007, pp. 166–169; Mathisen 2006.

<sup>677</sup> There are two exceptions to this pattern. The first is a certain Victor, a long-time general of Constantius, Julian, and Valens who is described as a Sarmatian (A.M. 31.12.6). The second is Stilicho whose father was a Vandal (Oros. 3.38; Joh. Ant. fr. 187).

<sup>678</sup> Or. 14.181b; 15.185b; 16.207c, 210d, 211d, 212a.

<sup>679</sup> It is worth repeating that Athanaric had opposed Fritigern's initial desire to cross into the empire and had taken no part in the subsequent rebellion and war. As we saw in the previous chapter, his power base had been eroded significantly in

Theodosius and buried in state when he died shortly after arriving.<sup>680</sup> Themistius discusses the event in his fifteenth oration, but describes the Gothic leader not as a Scythian, but rather as one of the Getae. As a member of the Constantinopolitan elite who may well have witnessed Athanaric's arrival, or at least learned of it from eyewitnesses, Themistius' curious alteration of his usual labeling practice may reflect the actual words used to welcome the *iudex* of the Tervingi on his arrival at the imperial court. At any event, the difference between Athanaric and the other Goths discussed in the orations is clear. The elderly chief was now a friend of Rome being offered high, if honorific, status, while Fritigern and his followers remained hostile, uncontrolled or only freshly brought to terms, and therefore still more part of the transdanubian Scythian world of hostile barbarism than the ostensibly law-governed Roman Empire.<sup>681</sup> Themistius may have hoped that Rome's civilizing influence would, in time, turn these newly settled Goths into good Roman citizens,<sup>682</sup> but that was a goal for the future, not something already achieved. In his decision to label Athanaric a Getan we see the first recognition that in the post-Adrianople world, Romans would need to devise new ways

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the decades after his war with Valens, first by the emperor's restriction of transdanubian trade, then by his power struggles with Fritigern, and finally by his failure to contain the chaos north of the Dniester caused by the implosion of Greuthungi regional hegemony and the opportunistic depredations of Alans and Huns from further afield. By the time Athanaric opted to swallow his pride and seek the shelter of Rome's protection, he was an old man without any serious political clout, but apparently with significant residual prestige attached to his person. Theodosius' decision to receive the *iudex* was a shrewd political move as it demonstrated to the rest of the Goths inside the empire that even Rome's bitterest foes could expect mercy and reward if they took the step of seeking it humbly.

<sup>680</sup> The specific date is given as January 11 (*Cons. Const. s.a.* 381). For Athanaric's reception and burial, see *Them. Or.* 15.190c-191a.

<sup>681</sup> Pacatus, a Gallic orator who penned a Latin panegyric to Theodosius shortly after the conclusion of his Gothic peace, stands as a rough western analog to Themistius, and we find a similarly conservative worldview in his discussion of the Goths. While he refers to the barbarians as Goths, rather than Scythians, this has more to do with Latin prose conventions which always favored more precise ethnographic language (see the discussion of Ammianus below). His overall worldview regarding Danubian peoples can be seen in section 32 (*Pan. Lat.* 2/12.32) where he discusses all the Scythian peoples (*Scythicae nationes*) now in service to Rome. These, he explains, include the Goths, the Huns, and the Alans. This hyperbolic statement is a comment on Theodosius' recent treaty, indicating that in Pacatus' mind, at least, Fritigern's Goths - who had been living south of the Danube for several years - were still considered part of the transdanubian world of Scythia.

<sup>682</sup> *Or.* 16.211b-212a.

of conceptualizing and describing those Goths who were now living outside their traditional transdanubian, Scythian homeland. The problem would only compound itself as new generations were born and came of age inside the Roman Empire.

If Themistius seems to have included a small nod to the changing times, the historian Eunapius' language appears entirely traditional. In his surviving fragments, which include material up to 404, Goths are always identified as Scythians, even those in Roman service, like Gainas.<sup>683</sup> The conservativeness of his language regarding the Goths probably has to do with the scope of his historical project. Photius records the title of Eunapius' work as *Chronicle of History after Dexippus*, and explains that the historian intentionally began his narrative at the death of Claudius II, where Dexippus' *Chronicle* ended.<sup>684</sup> As we have seen, Dexippus always identified his transdanubian terrors as Scythians in the *Scythica* – a practice he continued in his *Chronicle* – and we may simply have to conclude that Eunapius was following suit out of concern to produce a work of compatible style.

The language of Ammianus requires brief discussion here, although our frequent references to his history throughout this dissertation has already acquainted us with his general habits when discussing people from beyond the Danube. While it is difficult to nail down exactly when the historian wrote most of his massive chronicle, the latest datable reference is to the year 391, and it is generally supposed that he composed the bulk of the work during the preceding decade.<sup>685</sup> Such a timeline places his period of composition well after the Battle of Adrianople, and largely after the Gothic settlement of Theodosius. Writing in the Latin tradition, we find Ammianus labeling

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<sup>683</sup> Eunap. frs. 27.1; 37; 39; 41.1; 42; 44; 59. For the identification of Gainas as a Scythian, see fr. 60.

<sup>684</sup> Phot. *Bibl. Cod.* 77, I pp. 158-160 [Eunap. test. 1]. The *Chronicle* is not to be confused with Dexippus' *Scythica*, a separate, shorter, more focused work.

<sup>685</sup> Matthews 1989, pp. 17-27.



barbarian groups and individuals with the most specific applicable ethnographic terms throughout his work, while still relying on the established set of ethnographic tropes to fill out the picture, particularly when dealing with distant peoples. Thus, we hear of Amicenses and Picenses (otherwise unknown) as subsets of the Limigantes, who, together with the Liberi, are, in turn, identified as subsets of the Sarmatians.<sup>686</sup> To the east, in the Lower Danube Borderland we see both Tervingi and Greuthungi described as types of Goth.<sup>687</sup> Nowhere does Ammianus employ the Scythian label to describe peoples living in the immediate transdanubian region, and even his ethnographic digressions on the more distant Alans and Huns rely mainly on those terms rather than the traditional ethnonym.<sup>688</sup>

Ammianus' preference for precise ethnographic language sets him apart from most of his historiographical contemporaries, particularly in the Greek half of the empire. Nevertheless, there are many indications throughout his history that despite the gloss of specificity, Ammianus' underlying worldview relied on essentially the same Scythian tropes as everyone else's. This is most obvious in his geographic digressions,<sup>689</sup> and the twin-ethnographies of the Alans and Huns, who are described using almost identical language drawn directly from the corpus of Herodotean Scythian tropes.<sup>690</sup> His aside regarding the thieving nature of the Sarmatians,<sup>691</sup> on the other hand, suggests that he was also steeped in the contemporary 'weak Sarmatian' military tropes. Interestingly,

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<sup>686</sup> For the *Liberi* and *Limigantes* as divisions of the Sarmatians, see 17.13.1. For the *Amicenses* and *Picenses* as further subsets, see 17.13.17-19.

<sup>687</sup> For the Tervingi, see 31.3.4. For the Greuthungi, see 27.5.6, 31.3.1.

<sup>688</sup> For the general language on the Huns and Alans, see 31.2.

<sup>689</sup> For the Scythian geographic setting north of the Black Sea, see 31.2.13-16.

<sup>690</sup> For the ethnographies, see 31.2.1-11 (Huns) and 31.2.16-25 (Alans). Ammianus clearly sees the Alans as a type of Scythian, although he doesn't play up this label. He explains that they were once called the Massagetae, one of Herodotus' tribes (31.2.12) and later tacitly acknowledges their Scythian status when describing the Scythian origins of the Persians (31.2.20).

<sup>691</sup> 17.12.2-3.

however, Ammianus does not indulge in any such stereotyping when talking about the Goths. They receive very little ethnographic slander, although the historian is quick to disparage them as bringers of ruin to the Roman Empire.<sup>692</sup> In general, Ammianus' Goths lack Scythian characteristics, beyond generic barbarian savagery, despite dwelling beyond the Danube for the first part of book 31. This surprisingly neutral treatment for what can be read as his history's final, greatest villains, may reflect Ammianus' specific period of writing. In the late 380s, memory of Fritigern's war would have been fresh, but at the same time, his former soldiers would have been quiescent for a number of years, while figures like Gainas, Fravitta, and Alaric were already working on building careers for themselves inside the Roman system. Under these circumstances it may have seemed natural to reserve the Scythian characteristics for barbarians still living outside the *limites*, most notably the Huns and Alans. The Goths could still be decried as bringers of destruction, but they were becoming something of a homegrown plague, rather than a lurking foreign threat.

### 6.1.5. The 'Adrianople generation'

The authors of the next generation, most notably for our purposes Claudian and Synesius, were children in 378 and developed their literary voices largely during and after the Gothic troubles. In their presentation of Alaric and other Danubian figures we see greater evidence of changing conceptions of the Goths living inside the empire, as their transdanubian origins receded ever further into the past. Claudian, writing in Latin and mainly in the western court, clearly viewed Alaric and his Goths as a barbarian menace, yet when describing them he never refers to them as Scythians. In his characterization, we see a developing set of new ethnographic stereotypes, modified to fit the

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<sup>692</sup> 31.4.6: *Ita turbido instantium studio orbis Romani pernicies ducebatur.*

Thracian Goths' specific status as Danubian barbarians living inside the empire. A revealing passage comes from Claudian's second diatribe against Rufinus:<sup>693</sup>

*Whenever [Rufinus] went out to strike some 'excellent' treaty, he was mobbed by hangers-on and an armed band of clients, acting as slaves to his private standards. He himself, lest he relinquish any bit of barbarity, drapes his chest in tawny animal skins and leather harness, sham-wields great quivers and twanging bows, and openly reveals the nature of his mind in his choice of fashion. Nor does this man - who enjoys the Ausonian chariot and powers [of the consulship] - blush to take on the shameful manners and dress of the Getae! Roman Law, compelled to change her noble garment, mourns her captivity to a skin-clad iudex.*<sup>694</sup>

The terms and details used here are extremely revealing. First, the Goths are cast as Getae, a habit used throughout Claudian's corpus.<sup>695</sup> This Getic label was first used to refer to the Goths by Themistius, as we saw above, but from Claudian's day onward it becomes the preferred term for the Goths in poetic work in place of the earlier Scythian label.<sup>696</sup> Jordanes' decision to title his sixth century history of the Goths the *Getica* rather than the *Scythica* - as Dexippus had done in the third century - reflects this change in labeling.

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<sup>693</sup> Rufinus was a powerful noble of the eastern court who gained great influence under Theodosius, and held Arcadius' reins upon his ascension in 395. He was murdered by Gainas later in the same year (see Kulikowski 2007, pp. 165-166).

<sup>694</sup> in *Ruf.* 2.75-85: *egregii quotiens exisset foederis auctor, / stipatur sociis, circumque armata clientum / agmina privatis ibant famulantia signis; / ipse inter medios, ne qua de parte relinquat / barbariem, revocat fulvas in pectora pelles / frenaque et inmanes pharetras arcusque sonoros / adsimulat mentemque palam proclamat amictu, / nec pudet Ausonios currus et iura regentem / sumere deformes ritus vestemque Getarum; / insignemque habitum Latii mutare coactae / maerent captivae pellito iudice leges.*

<sup>695</sup> Claudian also occasionally refers to the Goths as Geloni, a non-Scythian, Pontic tribe with a pedigree stretching back to Herodotus (Hdt. 4.108-109). While this may mainly relate to metrical considerations, it's worth remembering that in Herodotus' ethnography, the Geloni were identified as Greeks who had partially 'gone native' north of the Black Sea. They were the only tribe beyond the Crimea to dwell in cities and grow crops. This would be a fitting reworking of the Goths' traditional transdanubian origin story.

The turn away from directly referring to the Thracian Goths as Scythians is also seen in Claudian's rough contemporary, Olympiodorus of Thebes. O. wrote a traditional, classicizing Greek history covering the years 407 to 423 (test. 1 [Phot., *Bibl. Cod.* 80, pp. 166f.]), and considering the language choices of his immediate predecessors in the genre, we might expect him to continue referring to the Goths as Scythians. This expectation is never realized, however. Within the surviving fragments, we only find one instance of Scythian language, where the author describes the Euxine as the 'Scythian Sea' (fr. 4 [Soz. 1.6.5]). Throughout his work, the Goths have passed firmly out from under the Scythian yoke, being described either generically as barbarians, or else as Goths (frs. 1.2; 6; 24; 25; 26; 27; 29).

<sup>696</sup> Sidonius Apollinaris, for example, employs the Getic label relentlessly whenever discussing Goths in his poetry of the mid-late fifth century.

Returning to Rufinus, we see further evidence of Claudian's alterations to the usual Scythian Logos. The wearing of leather and furs among the Getae has its roots in Ovid's descriptions of the natives of Dobrogea,<sup>697</sup> but that detail was not an important element of the standard Scythian Logos thereafter. Claudian's emphasis on this feature, here and elsewhere in his corpus, is new.<sup>698</sup> Finally, Claudian identifies Rufinus – who was not actually of barbarian descent, as far as we know, despite his fashion choices when negotiating with the Goths – as a *iudex*. This is not the official term for any normal Roman office, and while its use here is partially an acknowledgement of Rufinus' consular rank, it surely also represents a nod to the Gothic rank held by Athanaric, and described by Ammianus using the same term.<sup>699</sup>

We can also see in Claudian's writing rhetorical attempts to separate the Goths from the transdanubian world. In the first diatribe against Rufinus, the poet gives a description of the consul's attempts to recruit a barbarian army to support his position behind the throne (and in opposition to Claudian's own patron, Stilicho). Claudian first describes the recruitment process thus: "*iamque Getas Histrumque [Rufinus] movet Scythiamque recepat / auxilio.*"<sup>700</sup> The language clearly suggests two conceptual separations. The most obvious is that the Getae and Scythians are two distinct groups, governed grammatically by different verbs and probably reflecting some murky difference in terms of their relationship with Rufinus. There appears, however, to be a further, tripartite division which broadly mirrors the geography of the Danubian Borderland. The Getae come first. These are Alaric and his Goths living inside the *limes*. Next comes the Danube itself, standing in for the tribes

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<sup>697</sup> eg: *Tr.* 5.7.49-50: *Pellibus et laxis arcent mala frigora braxis, / oraque sunt longis horrida tecta comis.*

<sup>698</sup> *Cos. IV Hon.* 486; *Goth.* 485.

<sup>699</sup> *A.M.* 31.3.4.

<sup>700</sup> *in Ruf.* 1.308-309.

residing in the plains and hills of the proximate borderland. These would include Sarmatians, and other Gothic groups. Finally, we have the Scythians who, in light of the rest of Claudian's corpus probably consist of Huns and Alans.<sup>701</sup> What is important here, is that the Goths/Getae have become endemic to Rome's Danubian provinces rather than the transdanubian world. We see this reflected again in a passage from Claudian's panegyric to Honorius' fourth consulship:

*For, when barbarism - roused from deep within - rushed over groaning Rhodope, and the Arctic - left deserted by the act - decanted its peoples into our lands in a mixed horde; when all the banks of the Danube were puking out battles; when wide Moesia was run down by Getic war-cars, and blond battalions covered the Bistonian plains [of Thrace;] and when, with everything in ruins and either laid low by the blow or close to collapse, one man [named Theodosius] stood fast against all the funeral pyres, extinguished the blaze, returned the coloni to their fields, and snatched the cities from the very jaws of death!<sup>702</sup>*

This rather hyperbolic description of Theodosius' Gothic war emphasizes that the barbarians came from two sources: one inside the *limes*, and the other without. The *barbaries penitus commota* represents Fritigern and his Goths as an internal foe, while at the same time, the north personified launches its own peoples into Roman territory from beyond the Danube. This double invasion leads to chaos in Moesia, but the division is maintained in Claudian's description. Thus, from the north, the Danube spews forth battles, while from the south, Moesia suffers under the wheels of Getic chariots. This two-part description of warfare in a single location preserves the earlier distinction between the barbarians of Thrace (the Getae) and those from the transdanubian lands (Arctos' human vomit). Claudian was not so blind to history as to deny the transdanubian origins of the Goths of his day, concluding in a different work that they were a people "forgetful of their native, northern

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<sup>701</sup> eg: in *Eut.* 2.341; in *Ruf.* 1.323-331; 2.272-273.

<sup>702</sup> *nam cum barbaries penitus commota gementem / intrueret Rhodopen et mixto turbine gentes / iam deserta suas in nos transfunderet Arctos, / Danuvii totae vomerent cum proelia ripae, / cum Geticis ingens premeretur Mysia plaustris / flavaque Bistonios operirent agmina campos, / omnibus adfluctis et vel labentibus ictu. vel prope casuris: unus tot funera contra / restitit extinxitque faces agrisque colonos / reddidit et leti rapuit de faucibus urbes.*

stars,<sup>703</sup> but we see in the two passages surveyed here an emerging worldview at pains to separate the Thracian Goths from the greater Scythian horde still lurking beyond the Danube.<sup>704</sup>

Flourishing at the same time as Claudian, Synesius of Cyrene presents what, at first, appears to be a completely different picture of the Thracian Goths than does his Latin counterpart. The middle sections of his *de Regno* (14–15), an oration on good kingship ostensibly delivered personally to Arcadius, contains a protracted diatribe against the Thracian Goths, whom Synesius blames for all the empire’s current woes, particularly thanks to their large-scale recruitment into the Roman armies following Theodosius’ treaty of 383. Synesius advocates purging the army of Gothic recruits and either forcing them to till the soil as *coloni*, or better yet, driving them back over the Danube from whence they came.<sup>705</sup> From this stance, and his frequent use of the Scythian label to describe the barbarians in question, it would be easy to read Synesius’ worldview as directly from the old school of ethnographic thought. He even cites Herodotus in order to question the manliness and assert the slavishness of the Goths.<sup>706</sup> There are hints, however, that all is not quite as it seems. When first discussing the barbarians, Synesius, too, labels them as Getae rather than Scythians.<sup>707</sup> Later, when

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<sup>703</sup> *Goth.* 169: *patrios gens [...] oblita Triones.*

<sup>704</sup> Orosius, a contemporary of Claudian, seems to have held a similar distinction between internal and external barbarians, although he phrases this difference largely in terms of religion. Throughout his *Historia contra Paganos*, Orosius generally refers to the Goths by that name. Early in the work, however, he explicitly notes that “the people once called the Getae [...] are now called the Goths” (1.16.2), and later admits that these Getae/Goths are one of three contemporary manifestations of the Scythians, together with the Alans and Huns (7.34.5). When discussing the Gothic troubles around the year 400, however, Orosius clarifies his position somewhat, noting that “at that time, two Gothic tribes, led by their two most powerful kings, raged through Rome’s provinces. One of these [Alaric] was Christian, more like a Roman, and as events have proven [during his eventual sack of Rome], less savage in his slaughter through his fear of God. The other [Radagaisus] was a pagan and barbarian, a true Scythian, whose insatiable cruelty loved slaughter for slaughter’s sake as much as glory and plunder” (Oros. 7.37.7–8). Underlying this remarkable characterization is the fact that Radagaisus was an invader from beyond the *limes*, while Alaric was a more home-grown sort of warlord, and as such more Roman than Scythian, despite his Gothic heritage.

<sup>705</sup> *de Reg.* 14.

<sup>706</sup> *de Reg.* 15.7–8. He references the Scythian campaigns in Media and the Levant (cf. Hdt. 1.103–106), and puts special emphasis on the ‘feminine affliction’ (this is never explained in either source) endemic among them (cf. Hdt. 1.105).

<sup>707</sup> *de Reg.* 11.6.

decrying the high office enjoyed by certain Goths (probably Gainas and Fravitta), our author describes them wearing skins and leather in essentially the same way Claudian used Getic tropes to slander Rufinus.<sup>708</sup> These two passages together suggest that Synesius was fully aware and conversant with current Gothic stereotypes and tropes. We must read his insistence on employing the archaic Scythian label as a rhetorical tool designed to support his old-fashioned opinion that Goths belonged only on the other side of the *limes*. Synesius nearly admits that his position and rhetoric are out of step with the contemporary consensus in an address to the personification of Rome, noting that

*now [the Goths and other transdanubian terrors] spread fear through your lands, crossing over [the Danube] in their turn, taking on new names, and some of them even falsifying their appearances by craft, so that some strange, new people might appear to have spring from the earth.*<sup>709</sup>

Synesius is insisting here that the Goths who people have begun to conceptualize as something new are actually just the same, old Scythians from the pages of history. Such a rhetorical tactic would only have been necessary within a setting where general opinion about the Goths had shifted significantly from the pre-Adrianople, worldview.

## ***II. Attila and the Hunnic Alternative***

### **6.2.1. Attila and the end of Roman military dominance**

If, by the early fifth century, the Thracian Goths had largely assumed a Getic mantle in place of a Scythian one in the Roman imagination, nothing in the literature surveyed above suggests a breakdown of the underlying, pseudo-Herodotean worldview which pictured the Danube -

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<sup>708</sup> *de Reg.* 15.1.

<sup>709</sup> *de Reg.* 11.6: οἱ δ' οὖν ἕτερα ἀντὶ τούτων ὀνόματα θέμενοι, ἕτεροι δὲ αὐτῶν καὶ τὰ πρόσωπα τέχνη παραποιήσαντες, ἵνα δὴ δοκοίη γένος ἄλλο νέον τε καὶ ἀλλόκοτον ἐκφῦναι τῆς γῆς, δεδίπτονται ὑμᾶς ἀντιδιαβαίνοντες.

together with its necklace of Roman fortifications – as a clear boundary between Scythia and the civilized *oikoumene*. There were still Scythians out there, but more and more they were coming to be associated with new peoples, most notably the Huns. Ammianus – writing, most likely in the 380s – presents us with one of the earliest ethnographic pictures of the Huns, and his tropes are nearly all lifted straight from the pages of Herodotus:

*No one among [the Huns] tills the soil or ever touches a plow-handle. They all exist without settled dwellings, or hearths, or laws, or sedentary mode of life, and wander aimlessly like fugitives, together with the wagons wherein they live: where their women stitch together their nasty garments [of mouse, or perhaps hamster skins, apparently – see 31.2.5], where they lie with their mates, where they give birth, and up to adolescence raise their children. And not one of them, when asked, is able to tell you where he was born, since they are born far from where they were conceived, and raised even further afield.<sup>710</sup>*

For the moment, these nomadic terrors, whom Jerome called Transdanubia's *nova feritas* at about the same time,<sup>711</sup> lived far enough off to require no more than pat repetition of long-established Scythian tropes, but this situation was not to endure long into the fifth century.

Assessments of Hunnic impact on the politics of the fifth century Mediterranean vary greatly. Old models, reliant on the picture painted by Ammianus, frequently construed the Huns as an unstoppable tide of primitive terrors forcing terrified Goths and Germans into the less-than-welcoming arms of the empire like so many billiard balls scattered by the cue.<sup>712</sup> More recent reassessments of the fifth century Roman collapse tended to downplay the significance of the Huns

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<sup>710</sup> A.M. 31.2.10: *Nemo apud eos arat nec stivam aliquando contingit. Omnes enim sine sedibus fixis, absque lare vel lege aut victu stabili dispalantur, semper fugientium similes, cum carpentis in quibus habitant: ubi coniunges taetra illis vestimenta contextunt, et coeunt cum maritis, et pariunt, et ad usque pubertatem nutriunt pueros. Nullusque apud eos interrogatus respondere unde oritur potest, alibi conceptus natusque procul, et longius educatus.* It is also worth noting that Ammianus' ethnography of the Alans is practically identical to his characterization of the Huns. Both were clearly Scythian tribes in his mind, and both remote enough to require no more than a rehashing of the traditional tropes, even as he uses more modern labels to name these groups.

<sup>711</sup> *Adv. Iovinian. 2.7: Nomades, et Troglodytae, et Scythae, et Hunnorum nova feritas, semicrudis vescuntur carnibus.*

<sup>712</sup> eg: Rostovtsev 1922, p. 119; 1931, pp. 103ff.; Thompson 1948, pp. 41–43; Gordon 1960 (2013), ch. 3, especially pp. 106–111.



either in favor of the emerging Gothic, Vandalic, and Frankish proto-states,<sup>713</sup> or internal Roman divisions and weaknesses,<sup>714</sup> although recent interventions by Luttwak and Kim have once again reasserted a ‘strong Hun’ model.<sup>715</sup> Neither work is unproblematic,<sup>716</sup> but both rightly reestablish the Huns as the prime culprits responsible for the end of Rome’s ability to project its power militarily in the Danubian region.<sup>717</sup> All the details of Attila’s rise and fall need not trouble us here, but a few words about his military victories are in order. As Rome was gathering its forces to deal with Vandal-occupied Carthage in 441, a new war with Persia not only saw the abandonment of the African reconquest, but also the first conflicts with the Huns, who took the Persian distraction as their signal to raid across the Danube.<sup>718</sup> These first raids apparently led to Rome’s buying off the Huns, and the real hammer-blow was not felt until 447, when Hunnic forces destroyed two major east-Roman field armies and sacked the city of Marcianople.<sup>719</sup> While we might be wary of ancient claims that a hundred Danubian and Balkan cities were razed in this period,<sup>720</sup> there is every reason to believe that the devastation in Thrace and Moesia was extensive. In the words of Marcellinus Comes, “a huge war – greater than the previous one [ie: Theodosius’ Gothic War] – was brought

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<sup>713</sup> Wolfram 1988; Heather 2006, 2009.

<sup>714</sup> Halsall 2007; Goffart 2006. See also Lindner 1981.

<sup>715</sup> Luttwak 2009, ch. 1; Kim 2013. Maenchen-Helfen (1973) should also be given credit for beginning the process of Hunnic rehabilitation.

<sup>716</sup> Luttwak, for example, relies too heavily on the argument that the Huns possessed technological ‘super weapons’ (the composite bow and steppe cavalry tactics) with which Rome was unfamiliar (Rome had long experience with both of these technologies), and the assumption that Hunnic steppe-style cavalry warfare could be maintained successfully outside the steppe-belt (Luttwak 2009, pp. 22–40, cf. Lindner 1981). Kim’s critique is much more detailed and convincing, although he is perhaps overeager in assessing the institutional stability of Attila’s empire (Kim 2013, *passim*, cf. Payne 2014).

<sup>717</sup> Luttwak 2009, pp. 22–40; Kim 2013, pp. 69–88.

<sup>718</sup> This, and the following historical synopsis is based on Kim’s excellent synthesis of the primary and secondary literature (2013, pp. 70–72, 79–85), with additional details from Blockley’s older, but still essentially correct assessment (1992, pp. 59–67).

<sup>719</sup> Marc. Com. 19; Priscus fr. 9.3.

<sup>720</sup> eg: Theophanes, *Chron.* a.m. 5942.

down on us by King Attila: a war that afflicted nearly all of Europe and saw the devastation and sack of cities and fortresses.”<sup>721</sup>

To forestall further devastation, Constantinople paid Attila a hefty tribute,<sup>722</sup> but the pay-out appears not to have required the Huns to relinquish control over the Cisdanubian lands they had occupied during their campaigns, a crucial – if largely temporary – territorial reconfiguration.<sup>723</sup> As for Attila, he next campaigned west in 451 in what was probably a bid to consolidate his control over the Germanic tribes between the Rhine and Upper Danube. His interest in the Western Roman Empire was probably more extortionary than expansionist. The outcome of this turn to the west was the Battle of Chalons – which was only decisive at destroying Roman hopes of future military power in the region – and the invasion of Italy in 452, which netted a huge haul of protection money.<sup>724</sup>

Attila died the following year, in 453, at the height of his power, with both halves of the Roman Empire paying annual tribute, and their ability to protect imperial territory through arms severely diminished. The Hunnic imperial edifice quickly collapsed as the Gepids and other subjugated tribes rose in revolt, and the sons of Attila battled each other for supremacy. There is no consensus on whether it was the rapid rise of Attila’s steppe empire or its even more abrupt collapse that should be considered most exceptional,<sup>725</sup> but regardless, the death of the Hunnic king must have appeared the work of some *deus ex machina* to the Romans of the day.

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<sup>721</sup> Marc. Com. 447.2: *ingens bellum et priore maius per Attilam regem nostris inflictum paene totam Europam excisis inuasique civitatibus atque castellis conrasit.*

<sup>722</sup> The exact economic impact of this 6,000 pounds of gold (Priscus, fr. 9.3) is much debated. Kim offers a reasonable breakdown of the various opinions (2013, pp. 71–73), but see also Luttwak 2009, pp. 53–55.

<sup>723</sup> We will discuss Attila’s annexations south of the Danube further below.

<sup>724</sup> Kim 2013, pp. 78–84.

<sup>725</sup> The traditional view states that the entire edifice was held together by the force of Attila’s personality alone, and that Hunnic collapse after his death was almost inevitable (eg: Gordon 1960/2013, p. 111). Kim, ever the iconoclast, suggests

## 6.2.2. Attila bursts Rome's Danubian bubble

Whether we fully accept Luttwak and Kim's revived models of Attila as the catalyst that began the political collapse of the Roman West and forced a radical 'diplomatic turn' on the eastern court, there can be no denying that the Hunnic wars wreaked great havoc on both the Roman armies and the civilian population of the Danubian provinces. For our purposes, however, the most important outcome of the 'age of Attila' was the demolition of Rome's Danube *limes*, albeit largely temporarily, and the substitution of a political system which viewed the Danubian Basin as a heartland rather than a divided borderland. Our best source for the period is Priscus of Panium, a Roman diplomat who wrote a traditional Greek history, surviving in substantial fragments. The most famous of Priscus' fragments (nos. 11, 13, and 14) describe his experiences on an official East Roman embassy to the court of Attila - located somewhere on the Tisza River in the central Hungarian Plain - and there is much we can extract from his narrative regarding the extent and organization of the Hunnic realm in the mid fifth century.

Most interestingly, from our perspective, Priscus describes Hunnic hegemony extending far beyond the Danube into the Roman provinces of Pannonia, Moesia and Dacia Ripensis. The historian first explains that prior to his embassy in 448 or 449, Western Roman officials had officially ceded Pannonia to Attila by treaty. One of the Hunnic king's demands which Priscus' own mission

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inverting the paradigm. He argues that Attila was exceptional, but not for the normal reasons. The unprecedented step was his murder of Bleda, his brother and ostensible overlord in Kim's model of Hunnic diarchy. This move allowed Attila greater personal authority over the Hunnic realm, but set a destabilizing precedent that played out predictably after his death. Thus, it was not the failure of Hunnic organization or institutions (or their non-existence) that caused the nascent empire to break up, but rather Attila's undermining of the diarchic system that had given earlier steppe empires their stability and strength (Kim 2013, pp. 55-57, ch. 5). This is a persuasive argument, but must remain somewhat hypothetical as it relies heavily on a reconstruction of Hunnic institutions based mainly on comparisons with other, better-documented steppe states.

aimed to settle, meanwhile, was the full surrender and evacuation of lands Attila had conquered south of the Lower Danube, specifically a belt running from the Pannonian border east to Novae, and extending south of the river for the distance of a five-day journey by an un-laden man.<sup>726</sup>



*Fig. 6.1 Approximate extent of Attila's Danubian domains.*

Depending on the pace (somewhere between 20 and 40 km. per day), the width of territory to be ceded must have fallen between 100 and 200 kilometers, an estimation borne out by Attila's insistence that the main market for trade with Rome be relocated from the Danube to the recently-conquered city of Naissus, lying about 175 kilometers south of the Danube along the road from Viminacium.<sup>727</sup> These territorial demands, which amounted to no more than acknowledgement of a

<sup>726</sup> Priscus, fr. 11.1 [*Exc. de Leg. Gent.* 5].

<sup>727</sup> Priscus, fr. 11.1. For the possible rates of travel, road network, and distances between cities, see Stanford's Orbis Project (<<http://orbis.stanford.edu/>> Accessed, 7/18/2017). The only way this demand makes any sort of geographical sense is for the man in question to be traveling on foot.

Hunnic *fait accompli*, would have included the entire western half of the Bulgarian Plain, not to mention the Western Roman provinces in Pannonia. Attila's insistence that Naissus serve as the new emporium for trade between Romans and Huns strongly indicates that he viewed the land he had occupied in the course of the 447 campaign as part of his nascent Hunnic state. Further, Attila's efforts to establish and control markets in places of his choosing shows a complete understanding of Roman client treaty procedures, an irony surely not lost on Priscus and his fellow diplomats.<sup>728</sup>

During the course of his journey north to the court of Attila, Priscus describes crossing the Danube and a number of other rivers, including the Timiș and Tisza before arriving at the Hunnic capital after a journey of seven days beyond the Danube.<sup>729</sup> Although it is impossible to pinpoint the exact location of Attila's capital, the narrative suggests a location somewhere in the heart of the Hungarian Plain between the Tisza and the Middle Danube.<sup>730</sup> Here, the Roman embassy encountered a substantial, permanent settlement built largely of wood, but with Roman touches, most notably a newly-built stone bathhouse. Priscus points out that both the stone for the bath, and the wood for Attila's palace had been imported, further strengthening the impression that the town was designed as a permanent capital, rather than some temporary nomadic headquarters.<sup>731</sup> Thus, we find Romans negotiating with a barbarian king from an inferior position, in essentially the same location described as the home of mere bandits by authors as recent as Ammianus.<sup>732</sup>

While the narrative of Priscus' embassy reveals the sorry state of Roman prestige in the aftermath of the Hunnic victories of 447, it also gives us our first glimpse of what the Danubian

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<sup>728</sup> eg: Marcus and Commodus' Danubian treaties (Dio 72.15-16, 73.2) and Valens' Gothic treaty (Them. Or. 10).

<sup>729</sup> Priscus fr. 11.2.

<sup>730</sup> Blockley 1983, p. 384, n. 44.

<sup>731</sup> Priscus, fr. 11.2.356-372.

<sup>732</sup> A.M. 17.12.2-3.

Borderland could look like if it were no longer a borderland at all. Attila's conquests destroyed the Danube *limes*, and his own political arrangement showed a complete disregard for Rome's boundary marker. Instead of relying on the Danube as a laboriously-maintained artificial boundary, the new Hunnic alternative extended to more geographically natural boundaries: the Stara Planina Balkans in the south, and the Dinaric Alps in the west. From this perspective, Attila's choice to locate his capital in the central Hungarian Plain on, or near the banks of one of the Danube's largest tributaries, is entirely logical. This great plain lay at the heart of the Middle and Lower Danube drainage basin which was largely contiguous with Attila's emerging state at the time of Priscus' embassy.<sup>733</sup> Movement and communication within his realm was facilitated by the natural features of the land: rivers could once again connect, and plains allow for free movement and the maintenance of Hunnic traditional pastoralism, at least for a select elite.<sup>734</sup>

### 6.2.3. Priscus, Attila, and the Scythian Logos

If the power of Attila forced Rome to change its foreign policy from military resistance to diplomatic suasion and clandestine conspiracy,<sup>735</sup> it did nothing to alter the way people like Priscus

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<sup>733</sup> This is, of course, only taking into account the western half of the greater Hunnic realm, which extended far into the Pontic Steppe. Kim has argued persuasively, however, that we should view the Hunnic realm as divided into two fairly distinct halves, on the precedent of a number of earlier and later steppe empires (Kim 2013, chs. 2-3). This division corresponds with the original allotments of Attila (west) and Bleda (east). Attila's murder of his brother and ostensible overlord shifted the dominant half from east to west, but only temporarily united the twin realms under a single head. Priscus mentions that at about the same time as his embassy, Attila dispatched his eldest son to the steppe in order to assume the eastern kingship as his chief deputy (fr. 11.2.241-263.). Thus, while the Danubian basin cannot be considered coterminous with the entire Hunnic realm, it does appear to match the western division under Attila's personal rule at the time of Priscus' embassy.

<sup>734</sup> The problems with limited grazing land raised by Lindner (1981) and discussed here in Chapter Three are not directly addressed by Kim, but I don't see any fundamental obstacle preventing a merging of the two models. Kim argues for Hunnic strength not so much on the basis of some unstoppable military advantage (ie: irresistible steppe cavalry) but rather based on a reassessment and revalorization of the Hunnic political system. The realities of operating in the Carpathian Basin and Europe more generally may have required a reduction of the Hunnic steppe cavalry, but this would not have necessarily rendered Attila's forces less potent on the battlefield.

<sup>735</sup> Beyond his own embassy, the entire Hunnic portion of Priscus' narrative is dominated by accounts of Roman attempts to ensure peace through diplomatic means. This is a partially-biased picture because most of the surviving fragments come

thought about the Huns or the Danubian world in general. We have already seen Roman writers beginning to cast the Huns as the new Scythians in the decades after Adrianople, and given the workings of Greco-Roman ethnographic thought, it should hardly surprise us that Attila and his followers fully assume the Scythian mantle in the writings of Priscus.<sup>736</sup> Our historian appears to have conceived of the Hunnic war as something of a nightmare sequel to the third century Scythian invasions, and as such models elements of his history on Dexippus. Thus, for example, his narrative of the Hunnic siege of Naissus includes a description of Hunnic/Scythian war machines, and the defenders' attempts to dislodge the besiegers by hurling huge rocks from the ramparts.<sup>737</sup> This last detail directly imitates Dexippus' narrative of the siege of Philippopolis, which in turn references Thucydides' Plataean narrative.<sup>738</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Priscus refers to the Huns as Scythians throughout his work, a position he refines when first describing the ascension of Attila and his brother Bleda. With the death of Rua, we are told, the brothers assumed the “kingship of the Huns” (βασιλεία Ούννων), a phrasing that tells us the identity of the people whom they ruled but nothing about how Priscus viewed the identity of the new kings. This is shortly clarified when Priscus described Attila and Bleda as “Royal Scythians,” or “Scythian kings” (βασιλῆες Σκύθαι). Here, we have a statement about identity, and unsurprisingly, Attila turns out to be a Scythian, who happens to rule over the Huns, a subset of the larger Scythian identity.<sup>739</sup>

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from Byzantine *excerpta* explicitly devoted to historical embassies and diplomatic missions, but the fact that Roman military deterrence was severely undermined by Attila does much to mitigate this bias. As for the cloak-and-dagger aspect, Priscus describes an elaborate – if ultimately unsuccessful – attempt to assassinate Attila (frs. 11.1, 15).

<sup>736</sup> Sidonius Apollinaris, a contemporary of Priscus from the Latin west, also consistently labels the Huns as Scythians and describes them using traditional tropes; we will focus on Priscus in this discussion, however.

<sup>737</sup> Priscus, fr. 6.2.

<sup>738</sup> Blockley 1972.

<sup>739</sup> Priscus, fr. 2. This is probably also a nod to Herodotus' Royal Scythians (Hdt. 4.20).

Priscus' conceptions of space are equally traditional. While he might concede that Naissus now served as the de facto political border between Roman territory and Attila's domain,<sup>740</sup> he still saw the world through the lens of Herodotus' geographical divisions in their Roman-modified form. Thus, Priscus repeatedly speaks of crossing over the Danube into Scythia,<sup>741</sup> and describes the cisdanubian land held by Attila as Roman territory.<sup>742</sup> Attila's political expansion did not imply a corresponding expansion of the geographic Scythia for Priscus, or, we can safely assume, for Roman minds more generally. This should hardly surprise us, not only because Attila only controlled cisdanubian territory for a few years, but at a more basic level because Roman ethnographic and climatic divisions were so deeply engrained. The Scythian Logos had survived Cniva, Fritigern, and Alaric, and it would long outlive Attila.

### *III. Shifting Frontiers and the Indestructible Scythian Logos*

#### **6.3.1. New heartlands in the Danube Basin**

After the death of Attila, Rome managed to restore order along the Lower Danube *limes*, although the Middle Danube line was never again securely maintained.<sup>743</sup> While Hunnic hegemony beyond the river had proven ephemeral, it was, in a very real sense the way of the future; even a cursory look forward in time reveals a long catalog of migrations/invasions across the Danube, and in a number of instances, the establishment of durable polities which viewed the river in ways more similar to Attila than to Priscus. First, the Avars whose sixth-century state straddled the Danube as

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<sup>740</sup> Priscus, fr. 11.1.12-14.

<sup>741</sup> Priscus, frs. 11.1.43-44, 15.4.1-2.

<sup>742</sup> Priscus, fr. 15.4.5-10.

<sup>743</sup> Blockley 1992, p. 71; Wolfram 1988, pp. 258-268.



Attila's had done a century before.<sup>744</sup> Next, in the late seventh century, Bulgars, migrating down the Scythian Corridor and across the Lower Danube, defeated Roman forces and established a state that was initially centered on the Wallachian and Bulgarian Plains in the south/east division of the Danubian drainage basin, but later expanded south and west to encompass much of the Balkan peninsula.<sup>745</sup> These two groups established the paradigms going forward. Thus, the Magyars, following the Hunnic-Avar model set themselves up in the early tenth century as rulers of a state centered on the Middle Danube which would go on to become the medieval Kingdom of Hungary,<sup>746</sup> while Pechenegs (tenth-twelfth centuries) and Cumans/ Qipčaq (eleventh-thirteenth centuries) established their Lower Danube hegemonies mainly in Wallachia, Bulgaria, and Thrace - but with continuing ties to the Pontic Steppe - where they are recorded in frequent conflict with the Bulgarians and Byzantines already living there.<sup>747</sup>

### 6.3.2. An unshakable Roman mindset

Throughout these centuries, Roman writers continued to cast the empire's various Danubian foes as Scythians.<sup>748</sup> A brief, in no way comprehensive, look forward demonstrates clearly that the

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<sup>744</sup> Kim 2013, pp. 142-143; Batty 2007, p. 111; Curta 2001, pp. 204-208. See also Pohl 1988.

<sup>745</sup> Kim 2013, pp. 142-143; Batty 2007, p. 110; Shepard 2008. See also Gyuzelev 1979.

<sup>746</sup> Bakay 2008.

<sup>747</sup> Batty 2007, pp. 111-112; Golden 2005.

<sup>748</sup> A note is required here regarding both the *Historia Augusta* and Zosimus. While we have used both sources throughout this project to help reconstruct historical events, neither is particularly useful for the present discussion of ethnographic mindsets. The *Historia Augusta* is problematic mainly because of its disingenuous authorship. The author intentionally sets out to mislead his audience by using false names for the authors of the various biographies, but also attempts to cast the whole project as a product of the age of Constantine, when in reality it dates to the early fifth century (Rohrbacher 2016, p. 7). For this reason, we cannot reasonably expect his Scythian terminology to match his fifth century dates. The author does slip up once and label the Goths as Getae (*SHA Prob.* 16.3), but for the most part he skillfully mimics the style of the previous century, causing no end of headaches and erroneous readings for scholars brave enough to try unraveling the mess. Zosimus, on the other hand, is simply a copycat. As noted before, his *Historia Nova* is valuable mainly for the fragments of earlier authors it preserves. Zosimus, writing around the year 500, blatantly copies passages from Dexippus, Eunapius, and others, and this practice makes it unwise for us to attempt any analysis of his own use of ethnic terminology.

basic Scythian Logos and its underlying geographic/climatic supports remained vibrant long after the age of Attila. For Procopius, writing in the mid sixth century, Attila's Huns were still Massagetae, an explicit subset of Scythians,<sup>749</sup> but the Vandals of his own day, now a few generations removed from their transdanubian origins, could no longer be spoken of in the same breath as Rome's remaining Scythian enemies.<sup>750</sup> When discussing their past, Procopius describes the Vandals as one of the most powerful branches of the Gothic family, and even admits that in antiquity Goths had been known as Sarmatians, Melanchlaeni, or Getae, but pointedly avoids invoking the Scythian elephant in the room.<sup>751</sup> That term was reserved for peoples more closely linked with the transdanubian world.

Menander Protector, an historian of the later sixth century, is worth considering next because although he uses contemporary terminology throughout his work, he nonetheless maintains the underlying ethnographic divisions.<sup>752</sup> We see this when occasionally he slips up, and Avars and Turks get labeled as Scythians.<sup>753</sup> The same principal is found in the *Strategikon*, composed by, or at least associated with, the emperor Maurice in the early seventh century. This technical treatise includes an entire book on the fighting styles of Rome's various neighbors who are described according to their contemporary tribal names (Persians, Avars, Turks, Antes, Slavs, Franks, and Lombards), but grouped according to prevailing ethnographic divisions. These are worth considering because they reflect an 'official' imperial worldview which appears largely unchanged from earlier centuries. Thus, the major barbarian divisions are Persians (11.1), Scythians (11.2), the

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<sup>749</sup> *Wars* 3.4.24.

<sup>750</sup> *Wars* 3.19.7.

<sup>751</sup> *Wars* 3.2.2. Procopius uses the archaic 'Sauromatai' rather than the more common 'Sarmatae.' This puts all three of his ancient names into a firmly Herodotean category.

<sup>752</sup> Blockley 1985, p. 9.

<sup>753</sup> *Men. Prot. frs.* 10.1, 10.3, 12.5, 15, 19.

‘blonde peoples’ of Northern Europe (11.3), and finally the Slavic tribes (11.4). Of these ethnographic groups, only the final one represents an innovation from the days of Strabo and Pliny. In introducing his second division, Maurice explains that Scythians consist of Turks and Avars, and “all the rest who resemble the Hunnic peoples in their way of life.”<sup>754</sup> The author feels comfortable generalizing about Scythians, he explains, because “the Scythian peoples are one, you might say, in terms of their way of life and organization, which consists of a hands-off sort of dominion over many tribes.”<sup>755</sup> The description of Scythian arms, tactics, and Roman countermeasures that follows reflects a mixture of contemporary knowledge on specific topics such as arms and armor,<sup>756</sup> and traditional tropes about general cultural practices, such as the old chestnut about the inability of nomads born in the saddle to fight – or even walk – on their own two feet.<sup>757</sup>

Three and a half centuries later, in the mid tenth century, another imperially-penned treatise bears witness to Rome’s enduring Scythian mindset. Chapter forty-two of Constantine Porphyrogenitus’ *de Administrando Imperio* discusses the territories and habits of Rome’s northern neighbors. As usual, these peoples (Pechenegs, Turks, Khazars, Russians, etc.) are described based on contemporary knowledge, yet when transitioning to the next topic at the beginning of chapter forty-three, Constantine groups all the preceding Pontic peoples together and identifies them as “northern Scythians,”<sup>758</sup> following a precedent set earlier in the work when suggesting ways to

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<sup>754</sup> *Strat.* 11.2.1–2 πῶς δεῖ Σκύθαις ἀρμόζεσθαι, τοιτέστιν Ἀβάροις καὶ Τούρκοις καὶ λοιποῖς ὁμοδιαίτοις αὐτῶν Οὐννικοῖς ἔθνεσιν

<sup>755</sup> *Strat.* 11.2.4–5: τὰ Σκυθικὰ ἔθνη μιᾶς εἰσιν, ὡς εἰπεῖν, ἀναστροφῆς τε καὶ τάξεως πολύαρχα τε καὶ ἀπράγμονα.

<sup>756</sup> *Strat.* 11.2.24–30.

<sup>757</sup> *Strat.* 11.2.67–70. cf. A.M. 31.2.6; cf. ps. Hip. *AWP* 20.

<sup>758</sup> *de Admin.* 43.1–3.

handle embassies from the “Khazars or Turks, or again Russians, or any other nation of the northerners and Scythians.”<sup>759</sup>

The ethnographic divisions of the durable neo-Herodotean worldview relied on clear geographical markers, and the boundary between Romania and Scythia continued to follow the course of the Danube in the centuries after Attila first demonstrated the artificiality of the military *limes*. In the sixth century, Menander still cast the river as the dividing line between barbarous lands and the civilized world,<sup>760</sup> while the fact that Cosmas Indicopleustes – a roughly-contemporary monk with a very different background and audience – preserved the same definition of Scythia in a work explicitly designed to demolish older geographic models, is a strong testament to the enduring strength and ubiquity of the Scythian Logos.<sup>761</sup> Centuries later, Constantine Porphyrogenitus began his survey of the Scythian lands with the territory of the Pechenegs, whose border with the Roman Empire he placed along the Danube.<sup>762</sup>

### 6.3.3. Anna Komnene’s Danubian world

One final twelfth century author deserves mention in this our brief survey. Anna Komnene’s *Alexiad* was written by a Byzantine princess, ‘born in the purple,’ according to her own account,<sup>763</sup> based on notes produced by her husband, a general active in many of the campaigns described in the work.<sup>764</sup> This perspective allows the *Alexiad*, which chronicles the life and reign of Anna’s father, Emperor Alexios I, to present a worldview closely linked to the throne of the Caesars. The work is

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<sup>759</sup> *de Admin.* 13.24–26: Χάζαροι, εἴτε Τοῦρκοι, εἴτε καὶ Ρῶς, ἢ ἕτερόν τι ἔθνος τῶν βορείων καὶ Σκυθικῶν

<sup>760</sup> Men. Prot. fr. 5.4.

<sup>761</sup> Cos. Ind. 2.131.

<sup>762</sup> *de Admin.* 42.55ff.

<sup>763</sup> *Alexiad* prologue.1.

<sup>764</sup> *Alexiad* prologue.3.

not, however, a technical treatise like the *de Administrando Imperio*, but rather an openly literary work designed to highlight the author's erudition as well as sing the praises of her imperial father.<sup>765</sup> The picture of the transdanubian world that emerges from the *Alexiad*, therefore, is somewhat more complex than what we have observed in the authors surveyed above. Anna Komnene employs a wide array of modern and traditional terms when describing the Pechenegs and Cumans living in the Danubian Basin, in which the Scythian label is applied liberally.

Some sections have to be read as intentional archaizing. Thus, when describing the movement of barbarians (probably Pechenegs) across the Danube, we hear that “the reason for the migration was the deadly hostility of the Getae, who were neighbors of the Dacians and plundered Sarmatian settlements.”<sup>766</sup> This remarkable statement neither reflects contemporary reality nor any normal Scythian tropes of this period and instead reflect a – somewhat muddled – attempt by the author to demonstrate that she had read her early imperial history. Commentators have latched onto this and similar passages as evidence that Anna Komnene described and named all her history's barbarians according to an archaizing code.<sup>767</sup> This is surely correct in this instance, but I would argue that it is not a universal phenomenon within the *Alexiad*. A second look at the passage reveals that there are no Scythians, and that is important. Although missing here, the Scythian label is used very frequently throughout the *Alexiad* as a synonym for the Pechenegs. Whereas the author's isolated references to Dacians and Getae are literary conceits more than reflections of an actual

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<sup>765</sup> *Alexiad* prologue.1.

<sup>766</sup> *Alexiad* 3.8.6: ἐπεὶ γὰρ ἄς πάλαι εἶχον οἱ τῶν Δακῶν ἀρχηγέται μετὰ τῶν Ρωμαίων σπονδὰς τηρεῖν εἰσέτι οὐκ ἤθελον, ἀλλὰ παρασπονδήσαντες διέλυσαν, τούτου δὲ δήλου τοῖς Σαυρομάταις γεγονότος, οἱ πρὸς τῶν πάλαι Μυσοῖ προσηγορεύοντο, οὐδὲ αὐτοὶ τοῖς ἰδίοις ὀρίοις ἐμμένοντες ἤθελον ἡσυχάζειν, νεμόμενοι πρότερον ὅποσα ὁ Ἰστρος πρὸς τὴν τῶν Ρωμαίων διορίζει ἡγεμονίαν, ἀλλὰ ἀθρόον ἀπαναστάντες πρὸς τὴν ἡμεδαπὴν γῆν μετωκίσθησαν. αἰτία δὲ τῆς τούτων μετοικήσεως ἢ τῶν Γετῶν κατ' αὐτῶν ἄσπονδος ἔχθρα ὁμορούντων μὲν ἐκείνοις, τούτους δὲ ληστευόντων. trans. Sewter.

<sup>767</sup> Frankopan 2009, pp.493–494, n.31.

authorial worldview, the ubiquity of the Scythian label – and to a lesser extent, related Sarmatian language – indicate the survival of the old ethnographic worldview, particularly when the *Alexiad* is viewed in the context of the continuous literary tradition.<sup>768</sup>

There are further hints at the enduring Scythian mindset throughout the *Alexiad*. First, when attempting to explain the origins of Rome’s Pecheneg troubles, Anna Komnene resorts to the tried-and-true ‘billiard ball’ model:

*As I now wish to describe a more terrible and greater invasion of the Roman Empire, it will be advisable to tell the story from its beginning, for these invaders followed one another in succession like waves of the sea. A Scythian tribe, having suffered incessant pillaging at the hands of Sarmatians, left home and came down to the Danube. [After meeting with the people already living just north of the River], a treaty was concluded and the Scythians from then on crossed the Danube with impunity and plundered the country near it.<sup>769</sup>*

Just before, Anna Komnene describes the diminished extent of her father’s realm on his ascension as bounded on the west by Adrianople and the east by the Bosphorus, with Alexios standing in the middle at Constantinople “fighting two-fisted against barbarians who attacked him on either flank.”<sup>770</sup> This evocative description served to amplify the scope of Alexios’ eventual territorial gains, and cannot be read literally, yet it suggests, together with the description of Scythians crossing the Danube at will, that Roman control over the old *limes* had lapsed once again. This is borne out by the narrative of book seven which recounts Alexios’ successful campaign to drive the Pechenegs

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<sup>768</sup> Dacians are discussed in 5 chapters (3.8, 7.1, 10.5, 13.2, 14.4), Getae only once (3.8), and Sarmatians in 6 chapters (3.8m 5.7, 6.14, 7.1, 7.3, 10.4). Scythians appear, by contrast, in 40 different chapters throughout the history (too many to productively list) for a total of 268 individual mentions.

<sup>769</sup> *Alexiad* 6.14: βουλομένη δὲ δεινότεραν καὶ μείζονα τῆς προλαβούσης κατὰ τῆς τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς ἔφοδον διηγῆσασθαι εἰς ἀρχὴν αὐτῆς καθιστῶ τὸν λόγον· ἄλλα γὰρ ἐπ’ ἄλλοις διεκυμάνθησαν. γένος τί σκυθικὸν παρὰ τῶν Σαυροματῶν καθεκάστην σκυλευόμενοι ἀπάραντες τῶν οἴκοι κατήλθον πρὸς τὸν Δάνουβιν. [...] σπεισάμενοι γοῦν μετ’ αὐτῶν ἀδεῶς τοῦ λοιποῦ διαπερῶντες τὸν Δάνουβιν ἐληίζοντο τὴν παρακειμένην χώραν, ὡς καὶ πολίχνια τινα κατασχεῖν. trans. Sewter

<sup>770</sup> *Alexiad* 6.11: ἀλλ’ ὅ γε βασιλεὺς Ἀλέξιος ἀμφοτέρας ὥσπερ παίων χερσὶ τοὺς ἐκατέρωθεν ἐπιτιθεμένους βαρβάρους. trans. Sewter

north beyond the Danube. The goal is clearly stated near the beginning of the episode and reflects an extremely traditional view of the division between Scythia and the Roman *oikoumene*:

*Although the enemy had been driven from Macedonia and the area around Philippopolis, they returned to the Danube and made their camp there. Living alongside [the south bank of the river] they treated our territories as their own and plundered with complete license. The news that the Scythians were living inside the Roman borders was reported to the Emperor. He thought the position was intolerable but he was also afraid they might make their way over the mountain passes again and turn bad to worse.<sup>771</sup>*

The picture is clear enough. As Attila had done over five centuries earlier, these Pecheneg ‘Scythians’ had no reason to follow Roman conceptions of space except under duress. At the same time, Alexios, in the tradition of his ancient forbearers, appears just as unwilling to entertain new ideas about what counts as Roman territory. In many respects, the Roman Empire of Alexios and Anna Komnene bore little resemblance to the empire of Themistius and Valens, never mind Marcus and Dio. Amidst all the religious, political, cultural, and territorial transformation, however, the basic Greco-Roman image of the world remained strong and unchanging. The Scythian Logos had always been a crucial support for Rome’s presence in the Danubian Basin because it cast the river as a thin, blue line separating civilization and barbarism. As ever more imperial territory was shorn away over time, the Danube always remained, if not in reach, at least in sight as a visible symbol of the empire’s mission and rightful place in the world. Such a symbol, however, only had meaning when a suitable bogeyman lurked just beyond the river, and so the Scythian mantle was passed on, from one northern enemy to the next. After all, “they were, those people, a kind of solution.”<sup>772</sup>

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<sup>771</sup> *Alexiad* 7.2: οὕτως δὲ τῶν κατὰ τὴν Μακεδονίαν καὶ Φιλιππούπολιν μερῶν ἀπελαθέντες περὶ τὸν Ἰστρον αὐθις ἐπαναστρέψαντες ἠύλιζοντο καὶ ὥσπερ ἰδίαν τὴν ἡμεδαπὴν ἀνέτως πάντῃ παροικοῦντες ἐλίγιζοντο. ταῦτα ὁ βασιλεὺς ἀκούων οὐκ ἠνείχετο τῶν ῥωμαϊκῶν ὀρίων εἰσῶ τοὺς Σκύθας παροικεῖν, ἅμα δὲ καὶ δεδιώς, μὴ διὰ τῶν στενωπῶν διελθόντες αὐθις χεῖρονα τῶν προτέρων ἀπεργάσωνται. modified from Sewter

<sup>772</sup> C. P. Cavafy, “Waiting for the Barbarians.,” 35.

## GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

From its inception, Rome's Danube *limes* always rested uneasily on the landscape of the river's great drainage basin. What could have been a major artery of movement and communication through an ecologically and topographically coherent region - and indeed had been for centuries prior - was turned into a line of division by the twin forces of imperial iron and ethnographic ideology. Perhaps unintentionally, at first, the myth of Scythia was called down from its Pontic homeland and wedged firmly against the Danube's great Balkan arc, where it remained entrenched for over a thousand years. Around the beginning of the Common Era, Roman writers started to characterize all the various transdanubian peoples as Scythians, gradually erasing the earlier, Hellenistic worldview which had pictured the Danubian Basin - perhaps more accurately - as populated by a chaotic mixture of Thracians, Celts, and Scytho-Sarmatian nomads. The new perspective homogenized all the transdanubian peoples under a single set of ethnographic tropes ideally suited to support the perpetual maintenance of a fortified line of military control.

Ovid captured Rome's emerging Scythian Logos in its early years within the lines of his exilic poetry, but the poet hardly invented the tropes that he morosely recorded in the missives he sent back to Rome from his relegated home at Tomis. Describing people living north of the Danube as archetypal nomadic pastoralists and labeling them Scythians had been a Greek habit at least as far back as Herodotus, Aeschylus, and pseudo-Hippocrates in the fifth century BCE, but whereas these earlier ethnographers had described the Scythian heartland as lying north of the Black Sea, with the



Danube representing only the furthest southern limit of Scythia, Roman authors rhetorically relocated the Scythian heartland south to the plains and hills of the proximate Transdanubia.<sup>773</sup> This transposition had some important practical implications for how later Greeks and Romans viewed the people living just beyond the river. Under the earlier, Hellenic worldview – as captured by Strabo – the northern half of the Danube Basin existed as something of a transitional zone. It was technically part of Scythia according to basic geographic divisions, but it was also the upper half of a greater Thracian heartland. This worldview worked fine within the context of a Hellenistic society generally unconcerned with exerting political control north of the Balkan Mountains, but such ambiguity could only serve to undermine Rome’s political position once the empire came to the Danubian region to stay. As a state that ruled over cities and peoples, it was unacceptable to have half of the Thracians under provincial administration (ie: Moesians, Bistonians, Odrysians, etc.) and half of them beyond Rome’s political reach (Getae and Dacians). This problem was neatly solved – again, probably not intentionally – when Ovid’s Scythian tundra was imagined to begin not far north on the Pontic steppe, but rather just over the horizon north of the Danube. Such a picture of the lands beyond the river – however inaccurate – made it easier to think of all the transdanubian peoples as ferocious Scythians best left to their own devices.

Trajan’s decision to annex the minerally rich and chronically hostile Dacian kingdom complicated Rome’s emerging image of transdanubian Scythia, but the presence of Sarmatian *lazyges* immigrants in the Hungarian Plain to the west ensured that the tropes couldn’t be abandoned outright. Instead, as illustrated on Trajan’s column, the official spin was to cast the

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<sup>773</sup> Another way to look at it might be to see the Roman version as simply more totalizing. This may, in fact, be more accurate since Roman writers continued to describe people from the actual Pontic Steppe as Scythians even as they began to extend the label to the ‘ex-Thracians’ just north of the River.

Dacians as an exceptional case. They were organized and wealthy enough to merit inclusion within the community of provinces, but in order for this justification to ring true, the remaining ‘free’ transdanubians had to be shown unworthy of similar treatment. Thus, we begin to see an evolution of Rome’s Scythian Logos in the period after Trajan’s Dacian wars. The Sarmatians of the Hungarian Plain become no longer just fearsome nomadic lancers, but now somehow also impoverished raiders, too primitive even to know the meaning of peace.<sup>774</sup> This rebranding of the Middle Danube Scythians continued during the Marcomannic Wars of the later second century, when more than a decade of brutal conflict designed to distract and mollify an empire terrified by plague, demonized the Iazyges and their Germanic allies as wretched barbarians unworthy of the respect ostensibly shown to the previously-defeated Dacians.

Even as the Romans characterized the whole population east of Pannonia as nothing but feckless, Sarmatian nomads, the reality was that most of the people of the Hungarian Plain were farmers, much like their peasant neighbors in the surrounding Roman provinces. As a small minority attempting to cling to an elite position, and with limited land available for their traditional semi-nomadic patterns of subsistence, the Sarmatian Iazyges found themselves in a difficult position after their migration into the Hungarian Plain around the beginning of the Common Era. Following the annexation of Dacia, the situation worsened, as the Iazyges came to be surrounded on three sides by fortified Roman *limites*, and on the fourth by the northern arc of the Carpathians. The geographic, political, and social realities of this setting conspired to dampen the potential military power of the Iazyges and encourage close relations with the agricultural majority, dynamics subtly

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<sup>774</sup> Florus 2.29: *tanta barbaria est ut nec intellegant [Sarmatae] pacem.*

indicated by steppe-influenced animal husbandry practices in the villages of the Roman-era Hungarian Plain.

When they came, the Marcomannic Wars led to the thorough subjugation of the people of the Hungarian Plain. Not only was Iazyges military power firmly broken, but the client treaties that ended the war imposed strict controls over commerce between the Iazyges and the Roman army, most importantly over the livestock trade, which had developed in the previous century as the main economic pillar supporting the Iazyges at the top of the Hungarian Plain's social pyramid. In the following centuries, the 'Sarmatian' inhabitants of the Hungarian Plain proved easy for Roman authorities to control through a combination of economic leverage, financial support for biddable client leaders, and the ever-present threat of violent incursion, should anyone step out of line. In such a setting, the Roman provinces came to represent the prime sources of both wealth and political legitimacy for the people of the Hungarian Plain, a dynamic revealed clearly by the progressive dominance of Roman jewelry and other trade goods in elite Sarmatian burials during the two centuries following the Marcomannic Wars.

Out of this situation of abject dependency emerged the all-too-accurate ethnographic trope of the weak Sarmatian, a stereotype helped along initially by Commodus' calculated decision to cast the Iazyges as bandits instead of proper enemies in his post-war propaganda, and later reinforced by a number of easily-won 'prestige victories' undertaken by emperors and generals looking to solidify their military reputations. The adeptness with which Roman authorities learned to handle the Sarmatians of the Hungarian Plain in the centuries after the Marcomannic Wars is demonstrated by the comparatively minor role the Middle Danube theater played in the drama of the third century crisis. While 'Scythian' tribes were wreaking havoc south of the Lower Danube, the Iazyges, Quadi,

and other tribes of the Hungarian Plain mainly stayed home, for the most part too cowed – or savvy – to take advantage of the chaotic political situation.

While the weak Sarmatian trope fit the Middle Danube setting where it originated, the totalizing nature of Roman ethnographic thought encouraged its application to all the peoples living beyond the river. The ‘Scythian’ raiders who ravaged large parts of the Roman world in the second half of the third century, however, came from totally different circumstances north of the Black Sea. Both strands of the Greco-Roman Scythian Logos – the older, ‘Herodotean’ type, and the new, ‘weak Scythian’ type – failed to accurately describe these new ‘Gothic’ Scythians who, as members of the emerging Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov Culture, had little in common with either the archaic Scythians of popular imagination, or the contemporary client tribes of the Hungarian Plain. The results of this failure of ethnography were a bitter pill for Rome: the battlefield death of Decius, and the sack of Philippopolis, Athens, and many other cities.

Rome’s third century Scythian troubles, however, failed to reveal the lie behind popular perceptions of transdanubians which continued along the same two-pronged path during the following century. While the north/west division of the Danube Basin remained fairly stable thanks to the continued subjugation of the Iazyges, the south/east division witnessed the florescence of the Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov Culture, a vibrant, poly-ethnic society that drew on traditions and peoples from the Pontic Steppe, Danubian Basin, and Central European forests. These people, known to us through their material remains, are clearly, if only loosely, connected with the various tribes of Goths described in third and fourth century sources. In 332, Constantine struck a treaty with the southern-most elements of the S-M/C Culture, known to our sources as the Tervingi. In an attempt to repopulate and secure portions of Trajan’s transdanubian Dacia, which had been

abandoned out of military expediency in the late third century, Constantine legitimized the settlement of the Tervingi in the Wallachian Plain and parts of Transylvania, and granted them some sort of semi-provincial status, similar to that enjoyed by barbarian settlers in Gaul known as *laeti*. A crucial part of this treaty was a free trade agreement: an arrangement that surely seemed natural to an emperor who clung to the notion that Trajan's Dacia was still part of the Roman state.

Constantine's more inclusive policy could have been a turning point in Roman thinking about the people beyond the Danube, but it ended up as nothing more than an unintentionally destabilizing interlude. The treaty of 332 secured a strong relationship between the leaders of the Tervingi and the Constantinian house, but it also had the effect of extending and expanding Roman economic networks throughout the region of the Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov Culture, as had happened earlier with the Iazyges of the Hungarian Plain. Access to Roman goods came to be associated with high status, a social dynamic revealed clearly in the burial evidence from the region, and, once again echoing the example of the Hungarian Plain, this connection made the holders of those elite positions in S-M/C society vulnerable to Roman manipulation. When relations with the Tervingi soured under the rule of the non-Constantinian Valens, the emperor attempted to salvage an inconclusive Gothic war with a round of economic sanctions in 369. Constantine's free trade policy was reversed, but subsequent events failed to follow the expected Sarmatian example.

Whereas controls on trade had been an effective method of keeping the Iazyges in line because of their particular position, hemmed in on three sides by fortified provinces with nowhere else to turn, the geographic and cultural parameters were different in the S-M/C Culture's sphere of influence, and so Valens' trade ban did not work quite as expected. Although the sanctions succeeded in disrupting many existing power structures among the Goths, giving rise to events like the

martyrdom of Saba and the shadowy civil conflict between Athanaric and Fritigern in the early 370s, the sanctions failed to bring the barbarians under Roman control. Instead, Valens' meddling created a power vacuum along the Scythian Corridor which encouraged exploitative raiding by Alans and Huns dwelling further afield on the Pontic Steppe.

Eventually the snowballing chaos north of the Danube encouraged the bulk of the Tervingi to seek resettlement south of the river. In making this request, they were probably still treading on memories of their earlier semi-provincial status under Constantine, and perhaps also recalling the example of Aurelian's Dacian evacuation, when a new Dacia had been carved out south of the Danube in order to facilitate those of the provincial population eager to follow the army out of Transylvania. These optimistic expectations were misplaced, however, because the Scythian Logos remained dominant in Roman conceptions of the Tervingi and their various Gothic brethren. Valens agreed to let Fritigern and his followers in, but then attempted to treat them like earlier Sarmatian refugees, to be dispersed across the Danubian provinces and afforded none of the benefits of their prior, pseudo-laetic status. When callous cruelty and inept skullduggery were thrown into this volatile mixture, rebellion broke out, leading ultimately to Valens' death in 378 at Adrianople.

The events of the long fifth century that followed Valens' demise, and the ways those events were described by contemporary authors, reveal an important truth about Roman ethnographic thought: while it might be possible for a group to shrug off the burden of outdated tropes and stereotypes, the worldview behind the tropes was based on two indestructible pillars: ideas about the power of climate and environment to shape human nature, and the continued perception that, in the Danubian Borderland a clearly defined *limes* was required to separate civilization from barbarism. With Rome forced by circumstance to engage in new ways with the Goths now ensconced south of

the Danube, Scythian tropes slowly began to appear less appropriate for the Tervingi and their various allies as they became more and more of an endemic, homegrown demographic. The Scythian Logos, however, did not disappear. The underlying worldview remained as strong as ever, and so the Huns smoothly stepped into their role as the next Scythians, to be followed by Avars, Bulgars, Pechenegs, and so on, as various steppe peoples assumed hegemony over parts of the Danubian world in their turn. Long after Attila, when multiple ‘Scythian’ peoples had had their chance to demonstrate to Constantinople the artificial nature of the Danube as a boundary between cultures, Roman writers like Anna Komnene still felt confident pointing to the river and saying ‘there our world ends, and theirs begins.’

And what about the Sarmatian Iazyges on the Hungarian Plain? We hear about one last great raid in 374, together with their allies of nearly four centuries, the Quadi, but we can already guess the outcome: Rome triumphs, the Sarmatians are humbled and then reinstated as allies. They play their scripted role one last time and then vanish from the pages of history. In the following centuries, they reappear textually from time to time, but never as more than one of the meaningless ethnographic flourishes thrown in to ornament some author’s tale of Hunnic or Pecheneg depravity: a mere synonym for Scythian, and equally devoid of any real connection to the present day.<sup>775</sup> For the most part, the real people Romans knew as Sarmatians vanished together with the Middle Danube *limes*. The Goths managed to transition into something new, assuming a Getic mantle in place of their earlier Scythian garb, but by the fifth century Sarmatian identity was more the product of four centuries of Roman-imposed clientage than anything else, and so when that system faltered

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<sup>775</sup> eg: *Alexiad* 3.8.

and collapsed under pressure from Attila, the final nail was in the coffin. Being a Sarmatian on the Hungarian Plain had never offered very many benefits, even to the elite, and so - like many other of the older generation of barbarian tribes - the Sarmatian Iazyges splintered and disappeared, their group identity, in as much as they ever had one, overpowered by newer, more attractive options.



## APPENDIX

### ETHNIC TERMS IN OVID'S *TRISTIA* AND *EX PONTO*

#### *I. Concordance of Ethnic Terminology*

##### 1). Scythian terms

- A) Noun: *Scythes*  
 -*Tristia*: NONE  
 -*Ex Ponto*: NONE  
 -**Total: 0**
- B) Adj: *Scythicus*  
 -*Tristia*: 3.4.46; 3.12.51;  
 3.14.47; 4.1.45; 4.6.47;  
 4.9.17; 5.1.21; 5.2.62;  
 5.6.19; 5.10.14; 5.10.48  
 -*Ex Ponto*: 1.1.79;  
 1.2.108; 1.3.37; 1.7.9;  
 2.1.3; 2.1.65; 2.2.110;  
 2.8.36; 3.2.56; 3.7.29;  
 3.8.19; 4.9.81  
 -**Total: 23**
- C) Locational: *Scythia*  
 -*Tristia*: 1.3.61; 1.8.40;  
 3.2.1; 3.4.49  
 -*Ex Ponto*: 3.2.45; 3.2.96;  
 4.6.5  
 -**Total: 7**

##### 2). Sarmatian terms

- A) Noun: *Sarmata/Sauromata*  
 -*Tristia*: 1.2.82; **2.1.198;**  
**3.3.6; 3.10.5; 3.12.30;**  
**4.1.94; 4.10.110; 5.1.74;**  
 5.3.8  
 -*Ex Ponto*: **1.2.77;**  
**1.2.112; 2.2.93; 2.7.72;**  
**3.2.37**  
 -**Total: 14**
- B) Adj: *Sarmaticus*  
 -*Tristia*: 1.8.40; 3.3.63;  
 3.10.34; 4.8.16; 5.1.13;  
 5.7.13; 5.7.56; 5.12.58  
 -*Ex Ponto*: 1.2.45; 1.2.58;  
 1.3.60; 1.5.50; 3.2.40;  
 3.8.8; 4.10.38  
 -**Total: 15**
- C) Locational: *Sarmatia*  
 -*Tristia*: NONE  
 -*Ex Ponto*: NONE  
 -**Total: 0**

##### 3). Getic terms

- A) Noun: *Geta*  
 -*Tristia*: 2.1.191; 3.3.6;  
 3.9.4; 3.10.5; 3.11.55; 3.14.42;  
 4.1.67; 4.1.94; 4.6.47;  
 4.10.110; 5.1.46; 5.3.8; 5.5.28;  
 5.7.11; 5.7.12; 5.10.38;  
 5.12.10  
 -*Ex Ponto*: 1.2.76; 1.2.92;  
 1.5.12; 1.5.66; 1.5.74; 1.7.2;  
 1.8.6; 2.1.20; 2.2.4; 2.2.65;  
 2.7.2; 2.7.31; 2.10.30; 2.10.50;  
 3.2.37; 3.2.102; 3.4.92; 3.5.6;  
 3.5.28; 3.9.32; 4.2.2; 4.3.52;  
 4.7.28; 4.8.84; 4.9.78; 4.10.2;  
 4.10.70; 4.13.22; 4.14.14;  
 4.15.40  
 -**Total: 57**
- B). Adj: *Geticus*  
 -*Tristia*: 1.5.62; 1.10.14;  
 3.12.14; 3.12.16; 3.14.48;  
 4.8.26; 5.1.1; 5.2.68; 5.7.13;  
 5.7.52; 5.12.58; 5.13.1  
 -*Ex Ponto*: 1.1.2; 1.8.55;  
 1.9.45; 1.10.32; 2.8.69; 3.2.40;  
 3.2.46; 3.5.45; 3.7.19; 4.4.8;  
 4.7.20; 4.13.19; 4.13.36  
 -**Total: 26**
- C). Locational: *Getia*  
 -*Tristia*: NONE  
 -*Ex Ponto*: NONE  
 -**Total: 0**

##### 4). Thracian terms

- A) Noun: *Thrax, Bistonis*  
 -*Tristia*: NONE  
 -*Ex Ponto*: **2.9.54;** 4.5.5;  
**4.5.35**  
 -**Total: 3**
- B) Adj: *Threicius, Bistonius*  
 -*Tristia*: 1.10.20; **1.10.23;**  
**1.10.48;** 3.14.47  
 -*Ex Ponto*: **1.2.110;**  
**1.3.59;** 2.9.52  
 -**Total: 7**
- C) Locational: *Thracia*  
 -*Tristia*: NONE  
 -*Ex Ponto*: 2.1.226  
 -**Total: 1**

#### *II. Comparative Table of Ethnic Terminology*

	Nominal	Adjectival	Locational	Total
Scytho-Sarmatian	14 (19%)	38 (53%)	7	52
Getic	57 (77%)	26 (37%)	0	83
Thracian	3 (4%)	7 (10%)	1	11

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