BEYOND THE RIVER

UNDER THE EYE OF ROME

TIMOTHY C. HART

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Jacket illustration: Copper-alloy sestertius of Marcus Aurelius, courtesy of Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (inventory no. RÖ 12186, object no. ID64296).

For my family

Contents

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Acknowledgments

At the risk of beginning with something of a banality, it has been a long journey developing *Beyond the River* from a young graduate student's amorphous thoughts to a bound and published monograph. At times, this process has felt like a solo battle, but in reality this has always been far from the truth. I could not have completed this book without the advice and support of many individuals, and to them I must offer my gratitude and thanks. Thanks are due first to the University of Michigan, where I wrote the core of this book as my doctoral dissertation. My twin homes there were the departments of Classical Studies and History. I am the scholar I am today thanks to the instruction of intellectual paragons like Ruth Scodel, Sara Forsdyke, Ian Moyer, Bruce Frier, and the late Kweku Garbrah.

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In the position of honor, at the end, I would like to thank my family. First, my brothers, Gabe, and Matt, who occasionally managed to drag me away from my books as a child and who, as adults, have always been there when I've needed them. Gratitude is also due to my parents, William and Victoria, who have been unswerving in their support for my academic endeavors, even when the future they would bring remained uncertain. Finally, words really cannot express the debt of gratitude I owe to my wife, Ximena Gómez. She has always been there during the last six years, both as a supportive shoulder and—even more crucially—as a colleague with whom I could work out difficult ideas and refine delicate prose. Without her help and support, this book would never have seen the light of day. Looking forward, I'll end by preemptively thanking my son, Julian, who doesn't know it yet, but can look forward to years of half-apposite tangents from his daddy on all manner of Greek and Roman *arcana*.

Tables

Figures

Abbreviations

Primary Sources

A.M.	Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*
AWP	ps. Hippocrates, *Airs, Waters, and Places*
Adv. Marc.	Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*
Arg.	Valerius Flaccus, *Argonautica*
Can. Ep.	Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Canonical Epistle*
Claud.	Claudius Claudianus:
Cos. IV Hon.	*Panegyricus de Quarto Consulatu Honorii Augusti*
Cos. VI Hon.	*Panegyricus de Sexto Consulatu Honorii Augusti*
in Eut.	*in Eutropium*
in Ruf.	*in Rufinum*
Goth.	*de Bello Gothico*
Cod. Vind. Hist. gr.	*Codex Vindobonensis Hist. gr.*
Cons. Const.	*Consularia Constantinopolitana*
Cos. Ind.	Cosmas Indicopleustes, *Topographia Christiana*
CTh	*Codex Theodosianus*
de Admin.	Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *de Administrando Imperio*
de Reg.	Synesius of Cyrene, *de Regno*
Dio	Cassius Dio, *Res Gestae*
Evag.	Evagrius Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History*
Festus	Festus, *Brevarium*
Florus	Florus, *Epitome*
Hydatius	Hydatius, *Chronica*
Joh. Ant.	John of Antioch, fragments
Mal.	John Malalas, *Chronographia*
Marc. Com.	Marcellinus Comes, *Chronicon*
Men. Prot.	Menander Protector, fragments
Olymp.	Olympiodorus of Thebes, fragments

Opt. Por.	Optatianus Porphyrius, *Carmina*
Orig. Const.	*Origo Constantini* (*Anonymous Valesianus* 1)
Pas. Sab.	ps. Cyril of Scythopolis, *Passio Sabae*
Pet. Pat.	Petrus Patricius
Philost.	Philostorgius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*
Princ. Hist.	Fronto, *Principium Historiae*
Priscus	Priscus of Panium, fragments
Prosp.	Prosper of Aquitaine, *Epitoma Chronicon*
Scyth.	Herennius Dexippus, *Scythica*
SHA, Gord.	*Scriptores Historiae Augustae, Gordian*
Soc.	Socrates Scholasticus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*
Soz.	Sozomon, *Historia Ecclesiastica*
Strat.	ps. Maurice, *Strategikon*
Sync.	George Syncellus, *Extract of Chronography*
Theophanes	Theophanes, *Chronographia*
Tox.	Lucian of Samosata, *Toxaris, or On Friendship*
Wars	Procopius of Caesarea, *History of the Wars of Justinian*

Secondary Literature

AE	*L'Année épigraphique*, various eds. Paris: 1888–
AntTan.	*Antik Tanulmányok* [Journal of Ancient Studies], Budapest: 1954–
Bulgaria	*A Handbook of Bulgaria*, Great Britain Admiralty. Oxford: 1920
CIL	*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, Th. Mommsen et al., eds. Berlin: 1863–
ILS	*Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, H. Dessau ed. Berlin: 1892–1962
OLD	*Oxford Latin Dictionary*, P. G. W. Glare, ed. Oxford: 1992
PLRE	*Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, A. H. M. Jones et al., eds. Cambridge: 1971–1992
RIC	*Roman Imperial Coinage*, H. Mattingly et al., eds. London: 1968–1994.
RIU	*Die römischen Inschriften Ungarns*, L. Barkóczi et al., eds. Amsterdam: 1972–
Roumania	A Handbook of Roumania, Great Britain Admiralty. Oxford: 1920
Tit. Aq.	*Tituli Aquincenses*, P. Kovács and Á. Szabó, eds. Budapest: 2009–2010

Notes on the Text

On Maps and Figures: All maps and figures are the author's original creations. For the maps, 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. Images of the friezes from the Column of Marcus Aurelius are in the public domain.

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.

Herennius Dexippus	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
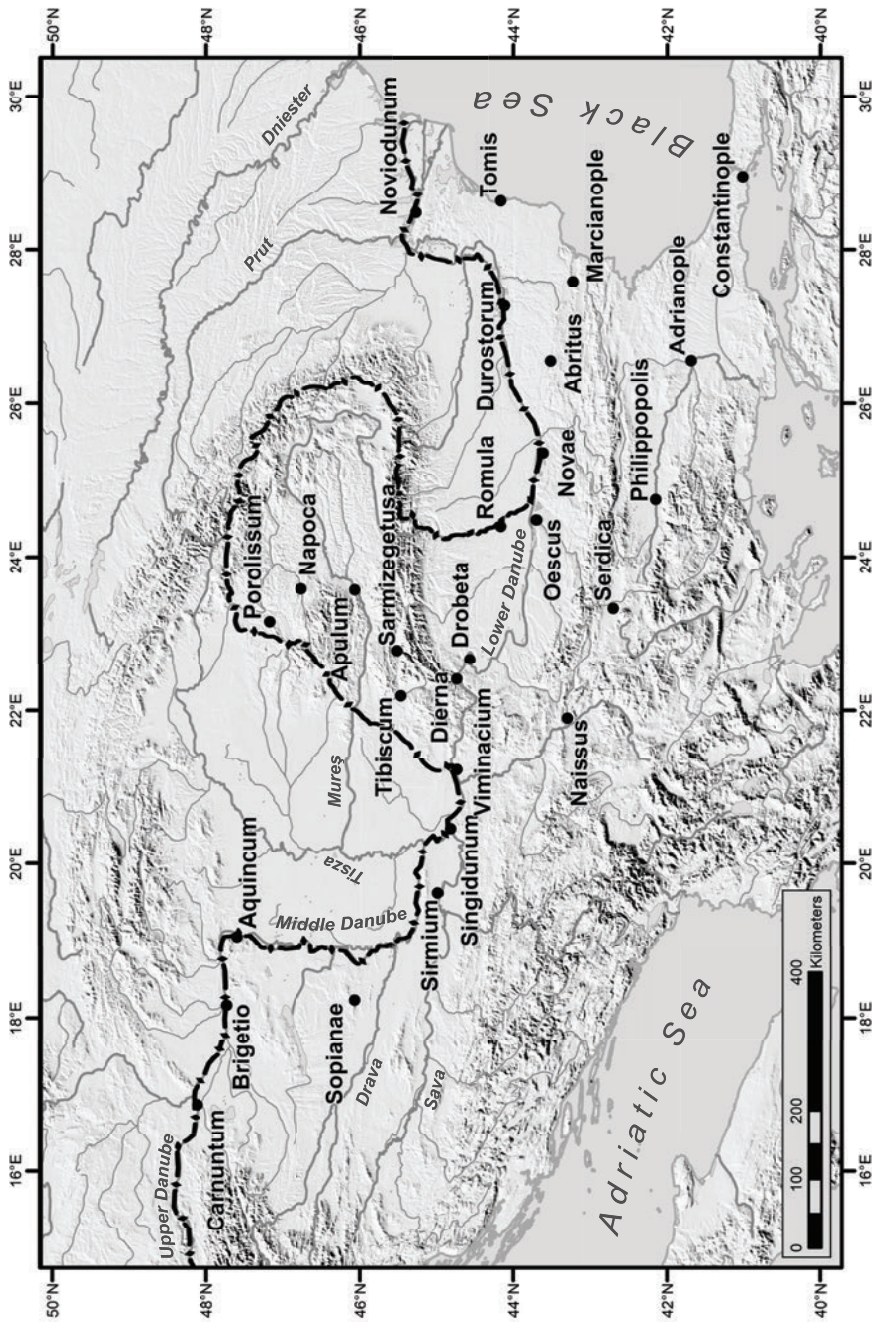
Rome's Danubian Borderland

PART I

Introduction

I. A River and an Ideology

When Olympiodorus of Thebes sat down, around 430 CE,[1] to write his history of the reign of western Roman emperor 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 in 410 was still in living memory, and disturbing rumors of a *nova feritas* from beyond the central frontiers were swirling at the imperial court in Ravenna.[2] Nowhere was the uncertainty of the times manifested so clearly as in the empire's provinces south and west of the Danube River. Since the early first century CE, the Danube and its *limes*—a line of road-connected forts and watchtowers decorating nearly the full length of the river's right bank—had stood as a visible symbol for the citizens of the empire, marking the boundary between civilization and barbarism. In 430, however, the events of the previous half century had called into question the stability of that artificially created, and laboriously maintained symbol of Rome's imperial might.

The Danube, together with its Roman[3] guardians, was *supposed* to

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1. All dates in this book are in the Common Era, unless otherwise indicated.

2. 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).

3. My use of the term "Roman" in this book 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 (e.g., inhab-

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 chief inhabitants were wretched nomads cursed by their inhospitable homeland to squalid lives of perpetual wandering. Since 376, however, barbarian[4] groups with roots in the transdanubian[5] lands had been living south of the 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 been content to eventually 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 ethnographic and climatic prejudices, they could recognize what many Roman decision-makers could not: 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 living outside the Danubian provinces, on the other hand, such observations were unthinkable. Indeed, it was easier for Olympiodorus to attribute Rome's ongoing problems with people from beyond the river to some terrible barbarian curse,[6] than to admit that Rome's entire Danubian *limes* was built on an ideological foundation fundamentally at odds with the ecology, topography, and pre-Roman cultural traditions of the greater Danube drainage basin. According to the sometimes-eccentric historian, in the early 420s,

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itants of *Roma urbs*, holders of Roman citizenship, or in contrast to Greeks/other *ethne* **within** the empire) should be clear from context.

4. "Barbarian" is certainly a loaded term in popular English usage, but I will use it periodically throughout this book and therefore it demands a short justification. I employ 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 favor 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).

5. 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, which is fundamentally concerned with Roman perceptions of space, Transdanubia is the region **east** and **north** of the river, that is, outside Herodotus' *oikoumene*, and later beyond the Roman *limites*.

6. Olymp. fr. 27.

three silver statues depicting bound barbarian captives were accidentally unearthed somewhere along the Middle Danube, facing north toward the savage lands beyond the river. Like the opening act of a B-rated horror film, the Roman governor decided to remove the statues, with predictably dire results:

> Only a few days after the statues were removed, the entire Gothic people overran Thrace, and only a little later Hunnic and Sarmatian peoples 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*.[7]

This book is about the borderland that developed together with Rome's military *limes* along the Middle and Lower Danube. We will witness 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. On one level, this is a story of the concrete actions of people and communities in the physical world: the history of the edges of empire where communities from beyond Rome's political sphere encountered and engaged with imperial power. Just as important, however, is a second story: one of ideas, where Romans constructed mental frontiers to explain and justify the shape of their Danubian hegemony and the stances

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7. Ἐν γὰρ ταῖς ἡμέραις, φησί, Κωνσταντίου τοῦ βασιλέως, ἐν τῇ Θρᾴκῃ Οὐαλερίου ἄρχοντος, μήνυσις γέγονεν ὡς θησαυρὸς εὑρεθείη. 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 μηνυθέντα. Ἀνορυχθέντος τοίνυν τοῦ τόπου εὑρίσκονται τρεῖς ἀνδριάντες δι᾽ ὅλου ἐξ ἀργύρου πεποιημένοι, ἐν σχήματι βαρβαρικῷ κατακείμενοι καὶ ἐξηγκωνισμένοι κατ᾽ ἀμφοῖν ταῖν χεροῖν, ἐνδεδυμένοι δὲ βάρβαρον πεποικιλμένην ἐσθῆτα, καὶ κομῶντες τὰς κεφαλάς, νεύοντες ἐπὶ τὸ ἀρκτῷον μέρος, τουτέστι κατὰ τοῦ βαρβαρικοῦ χώρου. **Ὧν ἀνδριάντων ἀναληφθέντων πάραυτα καὶ μετ᾽ ὀλίγας ἡμέρας πρῶτον μὲν τὸ Γότθων ἔθνος πᾶσαν ἐπιτρέχει τὴν Θρᾴκην, ἔμελλε δὲ μικρὸν ὕστερον καὶ τὸ τῶν Οὔννων καὶ τὸ τῶν Σαρματῶν καταδραμεῖσθαι τό τε Ἰλλυρικὸν καὶ αὐτὴν τὴν Θρᾴκην· ἐν μέσῳ γὰρ αὐτῆς τε Θρᾴκης καὶ τοῦ Ἰλλυρικοῦ κατέκειτο τὰ τῆς τελετῆς, καὶ ἐῴκει 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, 76–77).

they took toward various borderland peoples. Geographically, the Danubian Borderland is largely coterminous with the middle and lower portions of the Danube drainage basin, an area of over 800,000 square kilometers, roughly equal to the size of Texas and Virginia combined,[8] yet basin and borderland 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 River from a natural source of movement and connection to a symbol of political and cultural separation. This basic 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 enduring hegemonic power at the grand scale had allowed for the development of human societies that straddled the river and generally divided themselves in line with the region's natural topographic boundaries. Through this landscape, Rome drove its imperial *limes*, creating a line of political control that failed to map onto the region's existing natural boundaries. This book explores 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 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 Rome's experience interacting with the peoples living specifically in the Hungarian Plain east of the Middle Danube, and the particular constellation of economic, political, and topographical factors that shaped this geographically limited borderland society. The totalizing nature of Rome's Danubian world view, however, ensured that ideas originating from Rome's interactions with this 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 frequently to exacerbate the other, more fundamental disjunction between the region's natural and political divisions. Together, these two disjunctions exerted influence—usually malign—on all the pivotal political and military events of Rome's history along the Danube River.

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8. *The Danube River Basin District Management Plan—Update 2015*, v.

II. Borderlands and Frontiers

A crucial concept for this book is the idea 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- and 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 a polity's line of political control, 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.[9]

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

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 Greco-Roman world, where conceptions of hegemony usually emphasized rule over cities and peoples rather than specific tracts of land.[10] What we can

9. Cusick 2000, 47.
10. Mattern 1999, chs. 2 and 5.

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, syncretic cultures at the local level, but also existed in intense dialogue with cultural centers farther afield on either side. Beyond mundane cultural exchange, borderlands are crucially where different world views meet and interact, frequently driven by the need of one or more political entity to justify its decision to place a boundary at some specific point in space. In other words, when thinking about borderlands as an epistemological category, we must broaden our definition to encompass both political and mental borders and zones of interaction. In this setting of physical and intellectual exchange, we need to recognize that borderland societies could exert cultural, economic, and political influence on the imperial heartland in addition to absorbing trends and trinkets from it, as theorized in the common Romanization model.

Of the Roman borderlands, none, I would argue, exerted a stronger influence over the cultural imagination 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. Within this physical setting, our study focuses most closely on the encounter between transdanubian peoples and Roman power in the zone immediately beyond the middle and lower Danube. Other scholars have already done much to tell the story of the "other half" of the borderland, that is, of the provincial societies of the Roman provinces of Pannonia, Moesia, and Dacia,[11] but less attention has been given to the ways adjacent barbarian societies developed in dialog with Roman power. Correcting this oversight is a crucial aim of this book, since, I argue, it was Rome's long relationship with the societies of the transdanubian plains which ensured a more general perpetuation of specific ethnographic ideas which would go on to bear bitter fruit for the Roman state during the troubled third, fourth, and fifth centuries CE.

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11. For Pannonia, P. Kovács *History of Pannonia in the Principate* (2014); and *History of Pannonia in the Late Roman Period I (284–363 AD)* (2016); as well as T. S. Burns, *Rome and the Barbarians* (2003), ch. 5. A. Mócsy's *Pannonia and Upper Moesia: A History of the Middle Danube Provinces of the Roman Empire* (1974) is also still valuable. For lower Moesia, the archaeological work of G. Poulter, e.g., *Nicopolis ad Istrum: A Late Roman and Early Byzantine City* (2007a); for the Dobrogea in particular, M. Zahariade, *Scythia Minor: A History of a Later Roman Province (284–681)* (2006). For Dacia, there is a plethora of studies, e.g., D. Bondoc's *The Roman Rule to the North of the Lower Danube* (2009); and Hanson and Haynes, eds. *Roman Dacia: The Making of a Provincial Society* (2004).

III. The Story of Rome's Danubian Borderland

The plains and hills of the Danube's great watershed, sometimes called the Carpathian Basin after the mountain chain that bisects it more or less perpendicularly to the course of the river, have been inhabited since the Paleolithic. Vibrant Neolithic and Bronze Age societies grew there and passed away millennia before the coming of Rome. During the pre-Roman Iron Age (roughly ninth–first centuries BCE), peoples speaking related Indo-European languages spread across the region, giving rise to the various groups of Pannonians, Thracians, Getae, and Dacians later imperfectly described by classical geographers and historians. Beginning around the fourth century BCE, Celtic language speakers—bearers of the La Tène material culture complex—began to migrate into the Danubian region from their own cultural heartlands in western and central Europe. Occasionally, these immigrants appear to have pushed out indigenous communities, but from what we can tell archaeologically—and from the later writings of ethnographers like Strabo and Pliny—in most places the Celtic newcomers integrated into existing Pannonian and Thraco-Dacian societies, placing a distinctive mark on the material culture of the region, while leaving its fundamentally Danubian character intact.

For these peoples, the Danube and its great watershed represented the core of their world, but when outsiders from the Aegean—most famously Herodotus—tried to make sense of the Danubian lands, they tended to mistake the river for a divider of societies, rather than a uniter, following their own ways of thinking about peoples, spaces, and boundaries. Nonetheless, Greek misunderstandings of the Danube's cultural importance had little practical impact on the inhabitants of the Carpathian Basin during the Classical and Hellenistic ages, since Greek colonial ventures were mostly limited to isolated emporia along the coast of the Black Sea, and Hellenistic conquerors rarely sought to extend their domains north beyond the Rhodope Mountains of southern Thrace.

When Rome arrived on the Danubian scene, it engaged with the people of the region in a much more belligerent and expansionistic manner than had the Greeks and Macedonians. Beginning in the later third century BCE, the Roman republic waged a series of wars against the peoples living along and beyond the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea, whom they labeled as Illyrians and Dalmatians. Initially couched as anti-piracy measures, these Illyrian wars ended—perhaps predictably—with the establishment of Roman ruling hegemony over a handful of pliable local kings. At some

point in the second or first century BCE, Rome established the province of Illyricum, bringing direct provincial administration over the Adriatic littoral, perhaps initially only as far inland as the Dinaric Alps.[12]

Until the time of Augustus, Rome largely ignored the lands east of the Dinarics—which is to say, the Danubian Basin, proper—since its main concern in the region was to secure Adriatic commerce from pirate attacks. In 35 BCE this policy changed, when Octavian, the future Augustus, conquered the important center of Segesta, located inland on the banks of the Sava River, a major tributary of the Danube. The motivations for this attack remain a subject of debate, but Octavian was potentially seeking to secure a route into the eastern territories, which were then held by his rival, Marc Antony. Beginning a decade later, in response to raids from the Pannonian peoples east of the Dinarics, Augustus' generals Agrippa and Tiberius waged a war of subjugation and conquest against the Pannonians, pacifying much of the region west of the Middle Danube by 9 BCE. While various punitive campaigns were launched across the Danube, mostly aimed at suppressing raids by the Dacians of the Transylvanian highlands, Roman generals did not attempt to annex any of the transdanubian peoples at this point. In 6 CE, the subjugated Pannonian peoples attempted to throw off the Roman yoke; it took Tiberius, Augustus' general of choice, until 9 CE to fully quell the ensuing rebellion. Sometime later, during Tiberius' time as princeps, the regions west of the Middle Danube were reorganized into the provinces of Pannonia (the western Hungarian Plain), and Dalmatia (the Adriatic littoral and Dinaric hill country south of the river Sava).

Meanwhile, to the east, Rome pursued similar policies toward the peoples living south of the Lower Danube. After annexing Macedonia in 146 BCE, Roman generals campaigned sporadically against the Thraco-Getic peoples living to the north of the Rhodope Mountains. While the Thracians living south of the Stara Planina Balkans remained quasi-independent as a client state until 46 CE, the peoples of the Bulgarian Plain, between the Balkans and the Danube, were subdued early in Augustus' reign. By the time of the Pannonian revolt, in 6 CE, the region had already been organized as the province of Moesia.

From the outset, Rome had shown little interest in pushing its zone of provincial control beyond the Danube. To Roman eyes, the river was a logical place to establish a boundary, both for the practical logistical benefits

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12. For a summary of scholarship on the question of the date of the province's formation, see Kovács 2014, 1n5. For the original geographic extent of Illyricum, see Kovács 2014, 1–3.

afforded by control of its watercourse, and because it offered a convenient, visible symbol of the edge of empire. The roads, forts, and watch posts of the military *limes* took longer to fully establish, but already during the early first century CE, we find evidence of ideological structures developing to present the river as a meaningful boundary marker between the (comparative) civilization of the Roman provinces and the barbarian lands beyond. Generals like Plautius Silvanus used the river as a stage for diplomatic negotiations, while the exilic poetry of Ovid illustrates a world view that pictured the Danube as the frontier between transdanubian Scythia and the Greco-Roman *oikoumene*.

The importance of the Danubian *limes* grew progressively throughout the remainder of the first century CE, both as a logistical support for periodic campaigns against Dacians and Sarmatians living beyond the river, and as the visible manifestation of the world view justifying its own maintenance. Because Rome was a state that wielded its hegemony over cities and peoples (*civitates* and *gentes*), an explanation was needed to justify the fact that the northern half of the culturally Thraco-Dacian world remained outside direct administrative control. The old Greek ethnographic world view, which pictured the Danube as the cultural border between Scythia and the Thracian regions, served Rome's purposes admirably. Unsurprisingly, we see aspects of this Scythian Logos repeated in every genre of Latin and Greek literature of the age, from epitaphs like the memorial to Plautius Silvanus, to the prose geographies of Strabo and Pliny, and the poetic works of Ovid, Martial, and Valerius Flaccus—to name only a few.

In 101 CE, emperor Trajan went to war with the Dacians, the most powerful transdanubian polity of the time. The emperor's decision, in itself, was nothing terribly unusual. After all, Dacians had been in the habit of raiding across the Danube since before Rome even arrived on the scene, and since the establishment of the Danube *limes*, Rome had waged a number of punitive wars against them, most recently a pair of partially successful campaigns during the reign of Domitian. Trajan achieved victory over the Dacian king Decebalus in 102, but then broke Rome's usual Danubian policy by appointing a governor for the parts of Dacia he had occupied. Decebalus, meanwhile, was confirmed as Rome's ally and bulwark against future raids from beyond the northern Carpathian Mountains. The Dacian king, however, was not content to play the role of the biddable client ruler. After licking his wounds for a year or so, Decebalus renewed the offensive by sacking Trajan's nascent transdanubian colonies. In 105 the empire struck back, and by the end of the following campaigning season, Dacia's capital

had been sacked and its armies destroyed. With all hope of victory lost, Decebalus took his own life—a scene graphically depicted by Trajan on his monumental victory column in Rome. Following this total victory, Trajan annexed the entirety of the Dacian lands inside the arc of the Carpathians and at least as far west as the western foothills of the Apuseni Mountains.

Trajan's decision to bring the Dacian lands beyond the Danube into the Roman fold ran against the prevailing ethnographic world view which pictured the Danube as a hard boundary between Roman civilization and Scythian barbarism. In the aftermath of the war, two modifications to the Scythian Logos developed in order to reconcile political reality to ethnographic theory. First, as clearly illustrated on Trajan's column, the Dacians themselves were presented as worthy, non-Scythian foes. These were people whom Rome could feel proud to have defeated and brought into the community of provinces. At the same time, the Sarmatian peoples of the remaining free transdanubian lands—Iazyges on the Hungarian Plain to the west, and Roxolani in the eastern part of Wallachia—continued to be characterized as dangerous Scythian nomads, with a special emphasis placed on the traditional topos of nomadic poverty. The result of these ideological contortions was the rhetorical relocation of Dacia out of Scythia and into the *oikoumene*, and a strengthened argument for why the remaining free transdanubian lands were unworthy of annexation by Rome.

In 166, a new war broke out along the Middle Danube. In this case, it was the failure of Rome's clients beyond the river to interdict raiders from farther afield—one of their primary responsibilities—that touched off the conflict. After pushing out the raiders, emperor Marcus Aurelius waged a long series of punitive campaigns against Rome's former client allies, the Marcomanni, Quadi, and Sarmatian Iazyges. These so-called Marcomannic Wars lasted—with one short hiatus—until Marcus' death in early 180 CE, at which point his son and successor Commodus brought the conflict to a swift conclusion. While some historians, both ancient and modern, have claimed that Marcus intended to annex the territories of the Marcomanni, Quadi, and Iazyges as new transdanubian provinces, there is little convincing evidence to support this idea and much that suggests it was simply a useful wartime talking point given a long afterlife by historians intent on disparaging Commodus' decision to end the war with a brokered peace. Indeed, we find during and immediately after the Marcomannic Wars, an intensification of the ethnographic stereotypes that characterized Rome's transdanubian enemies as utterly irredeemable thieves and bandits: supremely dangerous raiders to the citizens of Rome's Danubian provinces,

but no true enemy like Trajan's former Dacian foe. This new picture of the "weak" transdanubian barbarian was most thoroughly projected onto the Sarmatian Iazyges who dwelt in the Hungarian Plain beyond the Middle Danube, where the new topoi of the impotent, defeated, client state merged seamlessly with existing stereotypes of Scythian savagery, fecklessness, and nomadic poverty. Indeed, Commodus actively promoted such a picture of Rome's neighbors beyond the Middle Danube in order to justify his decision not to annex any territory after more than a decade of hard fighting in the region.

The one-two punch of Marcus' ruthless Marcomannic Wars and Commodus' postwar propaganda effort ensured that the topoi of the weak Sarmatian became deeply ingrained in Roman perceptions of transdanubian peoples by the end of the second century CE. While these stereotypes arose from, and were most suitable for explaining, the condition of the peoples living beyond the Middle Danube, they gradually came to be applied to all the peoples beyond the river, since to Greco-Roman eyes all the transdanubian peoples were different types of Scythians and therefore, ultimately more culturally similar than different. This assumption, however, was fundamentally flawed, and Rome would begin to feel the negative effects of its totalizing ethnographic world view during the second half of the third century. Beginning in the mid-third century, barbarian warbands from beyond the Lower Danube and the shores of the Black Sea began to raid into the Roman empire with ever greater intensity. These raids—a major component of the so-called crisis of the third century—saw barbarians identified as Scythians behaving in very non-Scythian ways. They were neither the well-known, impotent Middle Danube Sarmatians, nor the traditional mobile steppe raiders of popular imagination. Instead, these new Scythians—whom some chose to identify by more precise names like Borani, Heruli, and Goths—managed to defeat Roman armies in battle and even sacked major cities, most infamously Philippopolis in 250 and Athens in 267. It would take until 276 for Rome to fully expel these Scythian raiders from the empire.

The difficulty Roman emperors and generals had in dealing with these third-century Scythians stemmed, in large part, from the near-complete political breakdown that was occurring at the same time, but the prevailing ethnographic picture of these transdanubian raiders also played an important role. Romans conditioned by either the traditional topoi of the Herodotean Scythian, or the more recent example of Rome's defeated Middle Danube clients—who remained largely quiescent during this time

of troubles—would have found themselves ill-prepared, mentally, to handle the barbarians who actually crossed into the empire during the third century. These people were members of the so-called Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov culture, an emerging, multiethnic society with roots in Central Europe and the Pontic Steppe, as well as in the more proximate transdanubian lands. These Goths and others who raided into the empire during the third century did not play by Rome's expected rules for Scythians. Neither were they stereotypical steppe nomads, nor had they any experience of Roman domination, since they had coalesced largely during the period when Rome was either distracted with its wars along the Middle Danube or else busy eating itself alive in the endless civil conflicts of the third century.

Eventually, by the final decades of the third century, the efforts of soldier emperors like Aurelian and Tacitus managed to stabilize the worst of Rome's internal and external military problems, but not before Aurelian opted to reduce the empire's military commitment in the Danubian realm by abandoning the transdanubian provinces of Dacia. Diocletian and his tetrarchy followed, finally returning some semblance of true stability to the Roman world. While the Romans licked their wounds as the third century turned over to the fourth, the peoples living north of the Danube were also undergoing a significant period of upheaval. In the wake of the great third-century raids, there were winners and losers in the transdanubian lands. While some subsets of the Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov culture, most notably the Tervingi Goths, grew powerful thanks to their third-century plunder and Rome's regional weakness, other groups—most importantly the Dacian-speaking Carpi—found themselves pushed toward the Roman *limes*, where they were greeted first with imperial steel, and then with offers of resettlement inside the empire.

By the time Constantine emerged in 325 as the uncontested master of the Roman world, the Tervingi had also come out on top in the lands north of the Lower Danube, controlling the plains of Wallachia and southern Moldavia, as well as large parts of Transylvania. It was not until these Goths turned their hegemonic eye toward the lands of the Hungarian Plain, however, that they warranted serious attention from Rome. There, in the lands east of the Middle Danube, the Tervingi came into conflict with the Sarmatian Iazyges. These people, as we have seen, had been subjugated clients since before the Marcomannic Wars, and most recently Constantine had reaffirmed their status as imperial dependents in 322 after a short punitive campaign through the Hungarian Plain. Under pressure from the Tervingi, the Iazyges requested Roman aid in 332, prompting Constantine to dispatch

an army with his son in command. After a short, bloody war, the Tervingi sued for peace, which Constantine granted with a formal treaty that established his erstwhile Gothic enemies as imperially sanctioned settlers in a nominally reconquered transdanubian province.

Part of Constantine's Gothic settlement was the establishment of free trade across the Danube between the Tervingi and Rome's Danubian provinces. To an emperor who appears to have viewed these people as the resettled population of a revived Dacia, such a policy would have seemed natural. In truth, however, the Tervingi never came under any meaningful imperial control—although they served loyally in Rome's armies on campaign—and at the same time, their unfettered commerce with the empire during the three decades after Constantine's treaty, greatly aided in the fluorescence of the Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov culture, both in the Tervingi lands and farther to the north. During the reign of Constantine and his dynastic successors, the Tervingi remained loyal to Rome as quasi-provincial *laeti*, but this relationship would not long outlive the reign of Julian, the last emperor of the Constantinian house. In emulating Trajan, Constantine had—perhaps unintentionally—pushed back against the dominant world view which pictured all the transdanubian peoples as irredeemable Scythian barbarians. Valens, who assumed the eastern emperorship after the chaos surrounding Julian's battlefield death in 363, viewed the Tervingi in a more traditional way: as dangerous Scythians allowed to grow too powerful under the lax frontier policies of the previous dynasty. When, a few years later, Tervingi soldiers opted to aid the dubious Constantinian usurper Procopius in an ill-starred rebellion, Valens had had enough. With Procopius safely in his grave, Valens turned a punitive eye toward the Tervingi in 367. Instead of a quick, prestige-winning victory, however, Valens' Gothic War quickly bogged down into a prolonged game of cat-and-mouse, repeatedly plagued by bad weather and other delays. In 369, with no decisive victory to his name, the emperor came to terms with Athanaric, the leader of the Tervingi. The new treaty, we are told, was signed on boats in the middle of the Danube, since the Gothic king had sworn an oath never to touch Roman soil south of the river, and Valens lacked the military power to compel a signing on his terms.

With a military victory impossible, Valens attempted in his treaty of 369 to employ Rome's other traditional method for managing troublesome client states: economic sanctions. Valens ended Constantine's open trade policy across the Danube and strengthened the lower Danubian *limes* forts to create an "adamantine wall"—to use the orator Themistius' words—

between Gothia and Romania.[13] Similar policies had been used effectively against the Iazyges and the other Middle Danube client states, but rather than starve the Tervingi into meek acknowledgment of Rome's supremacy, Valens' trade embargo set off a destabilizing chain reaction beyond the Lower Danube. Leaders across the Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov lands lost access to the prestige goods that had supported their gift-based claims to power, sparking internal conflicts—often couched in religious terms—as the previous generation of Roman-supported strong men vied with new claimants.

The effects of Valens' policy were felt far beyond the lands of the Tervingi. To the north, in what is now Moldova and western Ukraine, the coalition of the Greuthungi Goths collapsed entirely, faced with economic and political instability spilling up from the south, and opportunistic raids by nomadic Huns and Alani from the east. In the end, the entire Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov region descended into chaos in the decade after Valens' disastrous treaty until resettlement south of the Danube became the last, best hope for many among the Tervingi and Greuthungi. In 376, a large band of Gothic refugees encamped north of the Lower Danube, seeking land inside the empire, in exchange for service in the Roman army. Valens jumped at the opportunity to fill out his ranks in preparation for a looming war with Persia, but once again the policies of his generals toward the Gothic refugees proved disastrous. What should have been a fairly routine resettlement program—Rome had been conducting similar procedures for centuries—turned into an armed Gothic rebellion. While personal greed on the part of the Roman commanders played its part, the resettlement effort was ill-fated from the beginning as Romans steeped in the oppressive tactics and ideologies of Rome's Middle Danube theater, attempted to deal with an unpacified people whose leaders still remembered the more equitable relationship that had prevailed between Goths and Romans under the terms of Constantine's treaty.

In 378, Valens personally led the cream of the eastern Roman army to deal with the rebellious Goths, once and for all. The decisive Gothic victory that followed, near the city of Adrianople, was a surprise to both sides. Valens was killed in the action and a large percentage of the eastern field army perished with him. In the aftermath of the great battle, Roman control over the Danubian provinces virtually collapsed, although the regional chaos did not spin out into surrounding regions as had happened during

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13. *Or.* 10.136.C–D.

the dark years a century before. It took until 382 for the empire to restore order to the region, but even then the Gothic insurgents were never decisively defeated. When Theodosius struck a new treaty, ending the war, he granted the Goths everything they had originally sought: land south of the Danube, the protection of the empire's frontiers, and access to high military and political office for the Gothic elite.

The Goths would continue to play a crucial role in Roman history throughout the fifth century, and beyond, but as their transdanubian origins receded into the past, and as Rome was forced to engage with them politically, more and more, their connection with Scythia began to fade. New ethnographic topoi developed to characterize the Goths, while the Scythian mantle was passed on to new bogeymen beyond the Danube. During most of the fifth century, these were the Huns. Under Attila, the Hunnic coalition—which included many of the older generation of Gothic and Sarmatian peoples—terrorized both halves of the Roman empire, before fracturing into its component parts following the premature death of the Scourge of God in 453. During their moment in the sun, the Huns not only broke Rome's illusion of military supremacy, but also modeled an alternative social order where the Carpathian Basin functioned once more as a heartland rather than as a divided borderland.

Other steppe-based conquerors followed Attila's example in the succeeding centuries, while the slow immigration of Slavic peoples throughout the greater Balkan realm further changed the cultural landscape. Throughout the Middle Ages, however, Roman eyes remained fixed on the Danube as the rightful border between their *oikoumene* and barbarian Scythia beyond. As a functioning military frontier, the Danube *limes* broke down during the seventh century, but even as late as the twelfth century, writers like Anna Komnene were looking to the Danube as the true edge of empire, despite what the more recent histories of Avar, Bulgar, Magyar, and Pecheneg occupation might reveal. In the end, the ideas of the Danube *limes* and the Scythians beyond proved far more durable than the military border to which they had once given their ideological support.

IV. Theorizing Roman Frontiers and Borderlands

In writing a new history of Rome's Danubian Borderland, this book builds on the models and theories of a range of ancient historians and archaeologists. Of great importance is the work of C. R. Whittaker. In a 1994 mono-

graph entitled *The Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A Social and Economic Study*, he proposed a sophisticated model which has proven highly influential in subsequent Anglophone research on the edges of the Roman world. Although Whittaker's language remains fixed in the older scholarly world of frontiers and zones of interaction, his thinking shows strong parallels with the ideas developing concurrently in borderland studies circles, and remains highly influential in Roman *limes* studies today. At a basic level, Whittaker wrote to critique existing models of Roman frontier "policy," most notably E. Luttwak's "grand strategy" model,[14] 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 in need of protection by Roman arms. Whittaker argued, in contrast, that frontier 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. Although he appears to have operated independently from the broader borderland studies community, Whittaker's perspective is generally in line with the ideas coming out of that group in the late twentieth century.

One of Whittaker's most important contributions was the recognition that the Romans established their *limites* where they did not because they were necessarily in the most "scientific" locations for control over existing subject peoples, but rather out of pragmatic considerations for military communication and economic transportation.[15] While natural features such as rivers, or manmade structures like roads or walls could serve as

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14. 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* (1990), 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.

15. Whittaker 1994, 59.

"potent symbols of rule,"[16] their main function was to facilitate "horizontal" movement along the edges of Roman-controlled space.[17] 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 line of political control.[18] B. Isaac (1992), together with the advocates of an ideologically driven *limes* system, such as S. Mattern (1999) and F. Millar (1982), 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 found wide acceptance in other scholarly quarters,[19] and indeed, the two perspectives need not be seen as entirely antithetical. Summarized succinctly, we could characterize Whittaker's basic model as one where political processes (i.e., the centrally produced capital and manpower needed to create *limes* roads or secure political control over rivers) shaped the nature of concurrent economic processes and ideologies.

One of the most important, if perhaps somewhat underappreciated, studies to build on Whittaker's work was J. Drinkwater's *The Alamanni and Rome: 213–496* (2007). By limiting his focus to a small section of the Roman *limes* system, Drinkwater was more easily able to incorporate individuals and small population 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

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16. Whittaker 1994, 26.

17. Benjamin Isaac made essentially the same argument, in *The Limits of Empire: The Roman Army in the East* (1992, chs. 6, 7, 9), although he insisted, perhaps too myopically, that the mobility afforded by such *limes* structures was mainly designed to facilitate the quelling of internal unrest.

18. Whittaker 1994, 72–84.

19. 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 features 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, 77–79). This economic perspective has been readily accepted among the luminaries of "barbarian studies," most notably Herwig Wolfram (1988), Peter Heather (e.g., 1991), Peter Wells (e.g., 1999), and Michael Kulikowski (2007).

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 images they wanted to project as fierce warriors.[20] Over time, these group names became linked—both in Alamannic and Roman eyes—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.[21]

A critically 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 group 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 to the ethnographic ideologies which shaped the way their employers thought about non-Roman peoples.[22] Second, Roman support for friendly Alamannic

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20. 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 community ethnonyms (2007, 62–67).

21. For the full discussion, see Drinkwater 2007, ch. 2.

22. 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.

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 very similar dynamics playing out in the Middle Danube Borderland in chapters 2 and 3.

From a structural perspective, Drinkwater's 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.

A third monograph that we must consider briefly is R. Batty's 2007 study, *Rome and the Nomads: The Pontic-Danubian Realm in Antiquity*, since it is the first of only two recent works which examine the Danubian region holistically, and is the only major monograph to approach the task from a strong ecological/geographical perspective. For Batty, the world of the Danube is pictured as an extension of the Eurasian (Pontic) Steppe, based on three pillars: (1) topography, (2) climate, and (3) economy/culture. *Rome and the Nomads* contains much solid, detailed research, and is important for its efforts to rehabilitate migration and mobility as viable historical processes within a Roman borderland, while avoiding old models of barbarian invasion. Ultimately, however, the work proves somewhat unbalanced in its insistence on the primacy of archaeologically invisible nomads as the cultural glue uniting the entire region.[23]

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 face of the Carpathian Mountains. This broad grassland, encompassing the modern regions of Moldavia, Bessarabia, and the Dobrogea, serves as a great natural highway linking

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23. Batty 2007, chs. 1–3.

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 this book. Batty's regional picture is flawed, however, because he essentially ignores the Danube Basin's other great lowland region, the Hungarian Plain, which 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 topographically separated from Batty's Pontic-Danubian realm by a significant natural divider: the Carpathian-Balkan mountain chain, which may explain why the Middle Danube region falls outside the scope of his analysis. As we will see, however, the Middle Danubian world of the Hungarian Plain was never really cut off from the Lower Danubian realm and the Scythian Corridor. 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 semi-permeable dividers. In essence, by 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. Another puzzling absence from Batty's study is any systematic treatment of archaeological material. Batty justifies his decision to largely eschew material evidence on the premise that the nomadic peoples he views as the region's indispensable inhabitants are chronically underrepresented in the archaeological record thanks to their mobile, materially ephemeral lifestyle.[24] While the difficulties encountered when attempting to study the archaeology of nomads are very real, they are not, as Batty essentially claims, insurmountable. Many scholars have wrestled with this problem, including, most recently the Hungarian scholars we will discuss next. In chapter 3, we will offer our own solution.

Scholars of Rome's Danubian world received a long-awaited gift in 2017 when E. Istvánovits and V. Kulcsár, respected Hungarian archaeologists, published *Sarmatians: History and Archaeology of a Forgotten People*. This detailed work represents the first attempt to synthesize the extensive archaeological material relating to the Sarmatians on both the Pontic Steppe and the Hungarian Plain, and present it in an English-language format. Because this volume deals directly with some of the core topics of this book, a short

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24. Batty 2007, 33, 50–52, 277–78.

discussion of its merits and shortcomings is necessary. For sheer mastery of the archaeological literature, *Sarmatians* is unmatched and stands as an invaluable source for any future work on the people of the Roman-era Hungarian Plain.[25] In addition to making a great deal of Hungarian- and Russian-language scholarship accessible to a wider audience, the authors also present a significant amount of their own, previously unpublished material. This wealth of archaeological data gives the authors a much-needed wider perspective on thorny questions of chronology and cultural linkages between the people of the Pontic Steppe and Hungarian Plain.

Despite *Sarmatians*' excellent archaeological material, however, the book's interpretational framework leaves something to be desired. The conception of Roman frontier and barbarian history that Istvánovits and Kulcsár employ is, essentially, a conservative one. They rely heavily on older Hungarian authors, particularly the mid-twentieth-century work of András Alföldi, when interpreting ancient authors or summarizing historical events. The result is an unusual hybrid of older methodologies and new data. Material evidence, including cutting-edge findings from the authors' own excavations are, all too frequently, put to work as evidence for historical models no longer most commonly accepted.[26] In particular, throughout the book, the authors uncritically accept models of population change based on the traditional idea of mass barbarian migration, while generally eschewing newer models which tend to emphasize a more complex mixture of migration and acculturation and generally view ancient migration narratives with a critical eye. This perspective leads Istvánovits and Kulcsár to interpret their archaeological evidence in a way reminiscent of the *Siedlungsarchäologie* school, popular during the previous century.[27] The end result is a highly useful monograph, but one which must be handled carefully, particularly when moving from sections presenting primary evidence to those concerned with interpretation.

Our brief survey of borderland and frontier scholarship has provided

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25. Indeed, the research required for the present book would have been greatly facilitated had *Sarmatians* appeared in print even a year earlier!

26. For example, the authors note, when discussing the collapse of the later Roman empire, that "one of the obvious reasons for the fall of the Roman empire was its barbarisation" (Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2017, 338).

27. In this school of archaeological interpretation, specific elements of material culture were tracked through space and time as straightforward evidence for the movement of stable, ethnically cohesive population groups. We will discuss the problems inherent to this model in chapter 3.

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 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.[28] From Whittaker, we observe that even in the absence of a well-developed, modern, capitalist ideology, the *limes* system seems best designed to give structure to and control over intense economic exchange across and along its line of military 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 third chapter, with an additional focus on the faunal evidence for animal husbandry and foodways. Much of this analysis, in turn, relies on archaeological data, of which Istvánovits and Kulcsár are two of the most important providers.

Turning next to Drinkwater, we find 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 ability to shape identities as well as political entities on the margins of the empire. 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 groups like the Alamanni.

Finally, our two regional analyses offer insights and caveats. From *Rome and the Nomads*, we observe the importance of ecological and topographical forces in shaping subsistence patterns 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 connectivity of the entire Middle-Lower Danube basin in mind as we examine events and cultures within specific subregions. To lose sight of the underlying, natural whole would be to risk ignoring important regional dynamics as does

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28. Clement 2004.

Rome and the Nomads in its general disregard for the Hungarian Plain and the Middle Danube region, more broadly. *Sarmatians*, on the other hand, deftly synthesizes disparate and inaccessible archaeological material, but too often places that data within outdated historical frameworks. Throughout this book, we will emphasize the need to constantly reevaluate the canons of Roman frontier studies, particularly traditional ideas about barbarian migration and ethnogenesis.

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, but we must go further and consider how these three broad categories should be analyzed within the specific context of the Danubian Borderland. Based on the three categories just described, we can identify four major divisions of analysis:

(A) Material evidence of changes in consumption and 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 undertaken 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 book, influencing all the other dynamics examined in our study.

V. The Shape of the Project

This book does not lend itself to neat chapters of equal length, but does divide easily into two major parts. The first part, consisting of the first three chapters, seeks to investigate the natural and human forces that shaped the development of the Danubian Borderland in the first three centuries CE. Chapter 1 is devoted entirely to a survey and analysis of the geography and ecology of the Danube drainage basin and will provide the needed background for readers to understand the natural setting at the root of the Danubian Borderland's fundamental disjunction. The chapter focuses particularly on 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 subregions, separated by the great backward-S of the Carpathian-Balkan mountain chain. While the Danube itself unites the entire region, and connects the two divisions, each subregion has its own particular character made up of a unique constellation of natural features common across the entire Danube Basin.

Chapter 2 is a study of the "human half" of the disjunction at the heart of the Danubian Borderland. Here, I chart the development of Rome's *limes* and the co-option and modification of Greek ethnographic ideas about Scythians by Roman authors and decision-makers in order to give their emerging military frontier an ideological foundation. This chapter demonstrates 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 2 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—the two "bookend" events of the second century CE—will receive particular attention as catalysts for important changes in the way Romans viewed the free people living beyond the Middle 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. By examining Roman reactions to these raids and the language they used to describe them, it becomes clear 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 3 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 practical effects of Rome's political and ethnographic power. Chapter 3 will conclude the first part of this book with a theoretical model characterizing the people of the Hungarian Plain as a borderland society, drawing on the human and natural forces examined in the previous two chapters.

The second half of this book, chapters 4, 5, and 6, examines 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 CE. Chapter 4 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 Goths within the old provincial borders. The final part of the chapter examines the material evidence of this Constantinian policy and its crucial role in supporting the spread and fluorescence of the so-called Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov culture, usually associated with the Tervingi and other Gothic groups within the Lower Danube Borderland and western Pontic Steppe.

Chapter 5 covers a short period between 367 and 378 CE when Roman imperial actions during the reign 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 his less-than-glorious war, and discuss the old-fashioned, regionally inappropriate ethnographic stereotypes which shaped the emperor's particular policy decisions. By comparing the material and geographical differences between Iazygian and Tervingian society, we can see that Valens' peacemaking tactics were based on Rome's experience with the former, and therefore bound to fail when misapplied to the different social, political, and geographic situation of the latter. In the final section of the chapter we will demonstrate how similar inappropriate assumptions about

the Tervingi, based on ingrained Scythian topoi, paved every step of the way from the moment the Goths first crossed the Danube to Valens' death in 378 at the disastrous Battle of Adrianople.

Chapter 6 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 their Scythian mantle in the Roman imagination, and how Roman thinkers then draped it about the shoulders of the next transdanubian menace: the Huns. This chapter also readdresses the fundamental disjunction of the Danubian Borderland by demonstrating how Attila disregarded Rome's *limes* when seeking to establish a new Danubian hegemony in the mid-fifth century. Attila's world view, free from Greco-Roman ethnographic and climatic ideologies, was emulated by later transdanubian invaders, and the final section of chapter 6 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, we find medieval Roman writers and emperors continuing to cling to their traditional view of the Danubian world, where the river marked the eternal border between Roman civilization and Scythian barbarism.

Before the *Limes*

Natural Rhythms in the Danube Basin

I. Introduction: Peoples, Power, and Places

For most of a millennium, beginning in the early first century CE, the river Danube marked the north-central edge of the Roman empire. The great stream served admirably as an avenue of communication along its length—a *limes* in the word's original meaning of "pathway"—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 Carpathian Basin. 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 do not stem from parallel divisions in the natural environment extending on either side of the river.

Rather than marking a divide between distinct ecozones, the Danube cuts its way through the middle of a large region united environmentally by a common orientation inward toward the river, and by a high degree of macrolevel climatic continuity. This zone, which can be roughly 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. A profitable way to think about this vast geographic zone is as a collection of subregions, each with a slightly different natural profile, separated—often

incompletely—by various environmental features and processes, while at the same time bound together by others.[1] Thus, while we can find similar natural features in many different parts of the Danubian region, no two subregions possess identical environmental profiles.[2] The Danubian region is thus a setting of gradual environmental change across its many smaller subregions, and consequently, of only gradual change in traditional human economies and lifeways.

From the Paleolithic through the Iron Age, cultures developed locally 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.[3] This millennial process changed when the Romans arrived on the scene around the beginning of the Common Era, and decided to stay. Just as the river cuts its way through the mountains and plains of the greater Danubian region, so Roman political boundaries came to cut their way through long-established human landscapes. Whereas the river acted as a conduit for movement and connection, the Roman *limes* served 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 subregions disconnected from naturally meaningful environmental boundaries. In order to understand and interpret the history of this borderland—a history characterized by the forced establishment of an artificial border through the geographic heart of an ecologically connected zone—it is imperative first to understand the ecological and topographic rhythms and boundaries of that Danubian world.

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

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1. 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.

2. 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 subregions might be made by a river running down the elevation gradient toward the sea or a confluence with another stream. The end result would be two distinct, but distinctly interconnected subregions.

3. 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 indigenous Thracian/Dacian/Getic cultures and Celtic/La Tène immigrants from Central Europe.

Europe, and fall, therefore, beyond the scope of this project for both topo-graphical and cultural reasons. 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 disgorges its waters into the Black Sea some 1,700 kilometers downstream. This subsection of the river can be further split into two smaller divisions: 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 its remaining 950 kilometers, the modern border between Romania and Bulgaria.

As it cuts its way toward the Black Sea, 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. Farther east, northern tributaries run the full north-south length of Moldavia and Bessarabia (the modern borderland between Romania and Moldova). 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.

In antiquity, the Danubian Borderland broadly encompassed the Roman provinces of lower and upper Pannonia, the three Dacias, and the two Moesias,[4] 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, and which is often referred to as the Sarmatian *barbaricum* when discussing the Roman era. This region, roughly between the rivers Tisza and Danube, 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. Despite the anachronism (there will not be any Hungarians in the area until the tenth century), I will generally use the term "Hungarian Plain" to refer to these lowlands at the center of the Middle Danube Basin. As for the Roman term, "Sarmatian *barbaricum*," both parts of this label reflect Roman perceptions

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4. The internal divisions of Pannonia and Moesia were redrawn repeatedly during the fourth century. I refer here to the original provincial divisions of the principate.

of the people living there rather than 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 order to avoid constant perlocution (i.e., "the people of what is now the Hungarian Plain"), I will frequently rely on the Roman labels (i.e., "Sarmatia," "Sarmatian," "Sarmatian *barbaricum*") but we must be mindful of their external, potentially totalizing nature. Whenever possible, I will employ more specific group designations (e.g., "Iazyges," "Limigantes"), although even in these cases we are still dealing with terms of identity filtered through an *interpretatio Romana*.

II: The Climate of the Danubian Borderland

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 Central European geography.[5] Using the river in such a manner is irresponsible, however, since the Danube does not mark any sort of 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.[6] The gradient interacts with these altitudinal

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5. e.g., Turrill 1929, 3; Roglić 1950, 13; Chataigneau 1934, 396. For a succinct discussion of the various definitions of the Balkans, see Carter 1977, 7–10.

6. The tallest peak 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, 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).

zones to create a rich diversity of microclimates 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. 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.[7] The Balkan peninsula, although highly mountainous in its topography, is 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 (Pontic) steppe. Elsewhere, the mountains running through Serbia, Hungary, and Romania are lower than the Alps and Pyrenees, nor are they as continuous.[8] 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.[9]

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7. Turrill 1929, 40.

8. 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, 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, accessed 9/2/2015).

9. 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, 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, 39; Magyari et al. 2010, 916).

The most extreme form of the continental climate occurs on the Pontic Steppe where stable high-pressure systems produce extremely frigid temperatures throughout the winter months. The swath of largely uninterrupted grassland connecting this region north of the Black Sea with the plains of Moldavia, Wallachia, and Bulgaria functions as an ideal atmospheric 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 Pontic cold to extend far south into Romania and Bulgaria, often in the form of strong winter gales and snow-bearing storms.[10] 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.[11] 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 Pontic 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 the Pontic lands.

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10. *Roumania* 1920, 7–42; *Bulgaria* 1920, 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 (i.e., *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, *Bessarabia* 1920, *Bulgaria* 1920, *Roumania* 1920, *Transylvania and the Banat* 1920) were commissioned during and just after 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 on 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 contemporary climate change and the massive upheavals 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 twentieth century. The *Handbook of the River Danube* captures a picture of the river in the final moments of its premodern state and is of supreme value for it.

11. *Roumania* 1920, 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.

Elevation Zones and Climate

While regional weather patterns provide the entire Danubian Borderland with basic climatic similarity at the regional level, the area's varied topography exerts profound influence on local conditions. Five major ecological divisions can be drawn based on elevation: (1) lowlands such as coastal belts 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, and (5) alpine zones above 1,500 meters.[12] These 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.

Topographical peculiarities limited to one or more particular subregion often shape local conditions in unique ways, but there are some environmental trends common to each of the five altitudinal zones across the entire region. 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.[13]

Elevation tends to influence the natural plant communities and ecosystems across the region in predictable ways. Working from lowest elevation, upward, we come first to the river valleys and coastal zones. Across the Danubian Borderland, these areas tend to feature extensive, vibrant wetland ecosystems. The Lower Danube, with its massive delta system, and plethora of riparian swamps and dead-arms, exhibits the largest, but by no means only, collection of such biomes.[14] Next, we come to the plains of the

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12. Turrill 1929, ch. 8, 111–17.
13. *Roumania* 1920, 37–42; *Bulgaria* 1920, 39–42.
14. On the delta, see Tudorancea and Tudorancea 2006. For a detailed ecological analy-

Danubian Borderland, which share an ecological link with the steppe lands of Ukraine, 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 subregions, to quickly wick away moisture. The result is a grassland ecosystem more arid in nature than the amount of rainfall would suggest.[15] The exact historical extent of steppe ecosystems within the lowlands of the Danubian Borderland, however, remains a controversial topic, to which we will return below.

Moving out of the lowlands, we first encounter the hills and foothills of the Danubian Borderland. In their natural state, these areas are largely home to forests of broadleaf, deciduous trees. In recent times, this type of 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 nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but the process has its roots in much earlier periods.[16] Moving upward, 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 more precipitous terrain makes agricultural exploitation more difficult, there has generally been much less deforestation at elevations above 1000 meters. This would have been particularly true in antiquity, when we can postulate nearly unbroken forest at higher elevations.[17] Finally, 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 enduring human rhythms within the Danubian Borderland.[18]

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sis of a riparian ecosystem in the context of human habitation, see Borojević 2006, especially ch. 4, 107–17.

15. Turrill 1929, 158–59.

16. For a detailed discussion of the evidence for deforestation and its mechanisms, see Turrill 1929, ch. 10, especially 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.

17. Turrill 1929, 189–91; *Roumania* 1920, 51–52.

18. Turrill 1929, 181; *Roumania* 1920, 52.

III. Topography of the Danubian Borderland

The Mountains: Semipermeable Membranes

As Braudel said, mountains come first,[19] since they usually 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 the Apuseni Mountains of western Transylvania, a smaller, geologically distinct massif.

Of the region's two mountain groups, the Carpathian-Balkan chain is, by far, the more important, both ecologically, and for the history of human subsistence within the region. Shaped like a great backward *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 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 subregions 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.

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, Bulgaria. 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
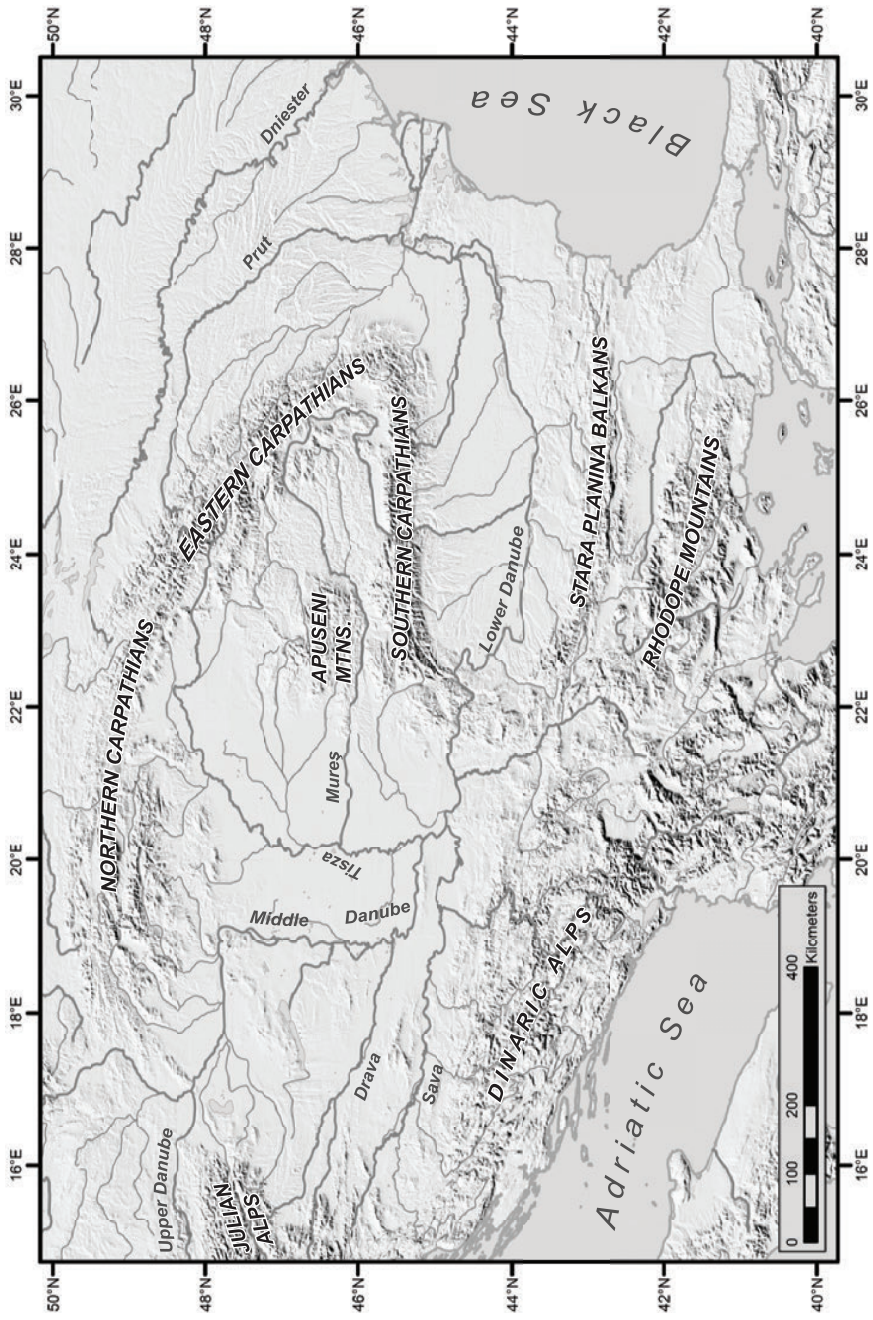
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19. Braudel 1972, 25.

Fig. 1.1. Mountains and rivers of the Danubian-Balkan region

Fig. 1.2. High Southern Carpathians, looking south into the Predeal Pass, Romania

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.

Hills and Foothills: The Transitional Zone

The mountain chains of the Danubian Borderland were nearly all thickly forested in antiquity, and many sections have remained so to modern times.[20] 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 pastureland for their flocks. 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 occu-

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20. Pounds 1969, 31; See also Giurescu 1980.

pies this ecological niche for the Apuseni Mountains, as well as the north-
ern 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 val-
leys and passes to allow movement into the mountainous zones.[21]

A broad belt of foothills also lies on the other, "outer" side of both Car-
pathian ranges. The entirety of western Moldavia consists of hills and pla-
teaus deeply cut by the north-south rivers Siret and Prut and their various
tributaries.[22] 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 moun-
tains. This sub-Carpathian hill country, like the mountains to the north,
is cut into a number of subregions by the many Danube tributaries flowing
south from the mountains.[23]

South of the Danube, the northern foothills of the Stara Planina func-
tion similarly to the Wallachian hills just described. In most places they
transition gradually 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.[24] Unlike
most of the northern foothills of the Southern Carpathians on the "other
side" of the system, however, 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, Bulgaria, 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.[25]

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

21. Gudea 1979, 65.
22. *Roumania* 1920, 22.
23. *Roumania* 1920, 17–21.
24. *Bulgaria* 1920, 13–20.
25. *Bulgaria* 1920, 27, 33.

importance for understanding the region's human and natural dynamics. There are five major grassland subregions within the borderland, 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 from northeast to southwest, (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) farthest to the 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.

While each of these subregions has its own distinctive character, they all have some features in common, particularly the presence of **steppe biomes** covering some percentage of their areas. 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 part of the Wallachian Plain directly east of Bucharest,[26] 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 deciduous forest groves.[27]

In a setting free from human influence, which the Danubian Basin has not 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, 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 surface 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 more difficult time taking root in deep loess, and thus, according to

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26. *Roumania* 1920, 24, 34.
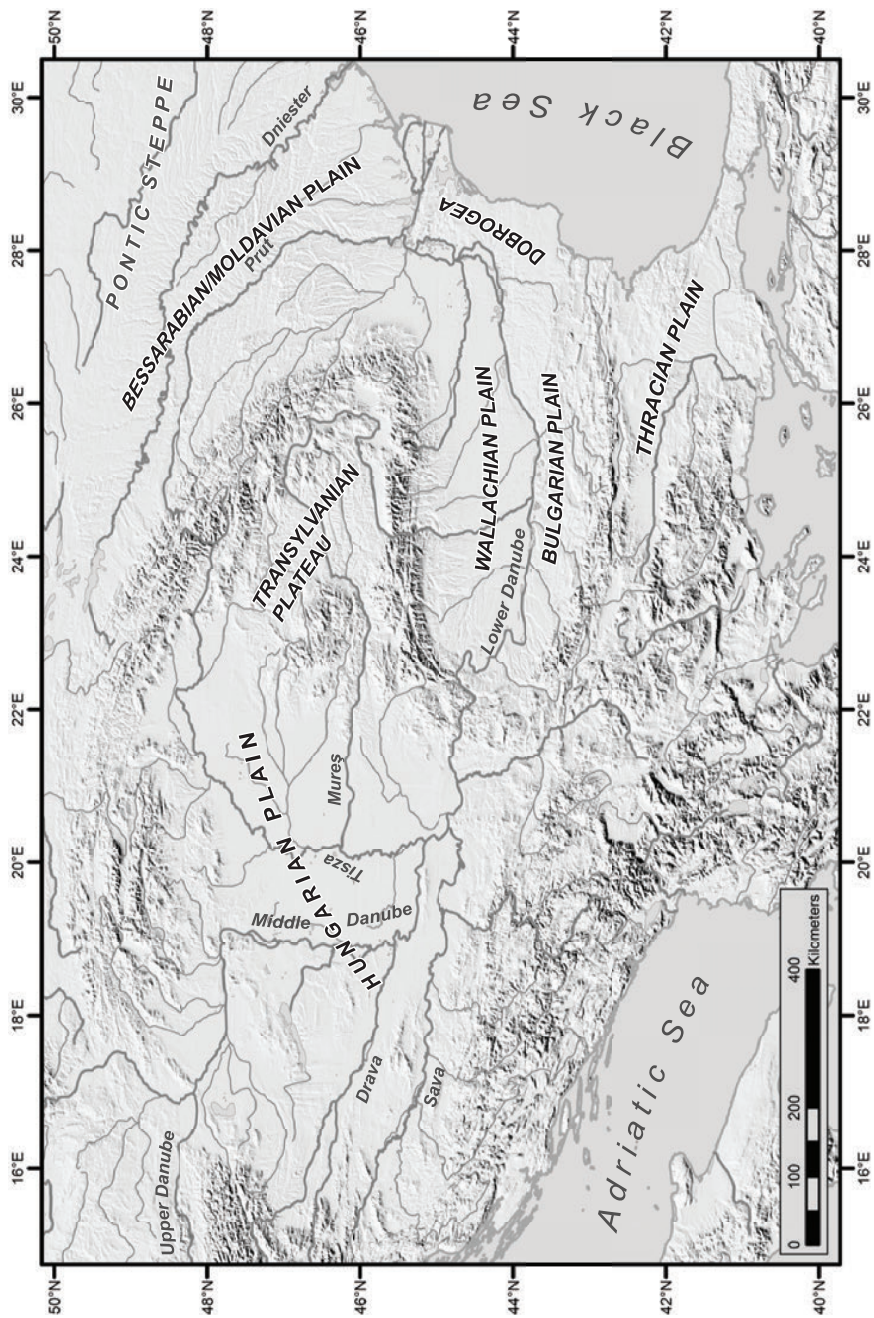27. Magyari et al. 2010, 916.

Fig. 1.3. Major lowland topographic zones of the Danubian-Balkan region

Fig. 1.4. Forest-steppe environment in the central Hungarian Plain near Fülöpszállás, Hungary

traditional interpretations, steppe reigned as the dominant lowland biome prior to intensive cultivation of loess zones during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[28]

The assumption that the Hungarian steppe, and by extension, other Danubian grasslands, evolved naturally during the early Holocene has been questioned since the middle twentieth 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.[29] In recent years, however, scholars have noted that most Danubian lowlands are far from homogeneous, exhibiting, instead, the for-

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28. Childe 1929, 3–4; Magyari et al. 2010, 916.

29. For a discussion of these early arguments on the natural openness of the loess lowlands of the Danubian region, see Garnett 1945, 133–34. Fleure (1960) is a good example of mid-twentieth-century scholarship that begins from an a priori assumption that the region's loess soil zones were naturally open environments.

est steppe ecosystem described above. Further, in many places, grasslands and oak-lime parkland exist in close proximity under virtually identical soil, water, and atmospheric conditions, a phenomenon which has caused some to argue that the extensive steppe lands of the early modern period were not purely natural phenomena. The continental climate, with its more even rain distributions, still exerts a strong influence over much of the Danubian Borderland, particularly in the northwest region where the Hungarian Plain is located, and so it has been argued that much of the lowlands can theoretically support trees despite the dominance of historically attested steppe ecosystems. According to this theory, the great steppes of the Danubian Borderland grew out of a more thickly forested period during the earlier Holocene 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.[30]

Even if human actions did have a hand in spreading steppe biomes through the Danube Basin, the extent of this phenomenon and the dates 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.[31] Overall, the case for some degree of very early deforestation seems most persuasive, yet the possibility that there was somewhat less steppe present in antiquity 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 mechanized plow.[32] 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 the water-wicking abilities of the loess. Grassland reigns elsewhere in the loess zones, although not through natural means alone.

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30. Borojević 2006, 110–16.

31. For the Neolithic case, see Willis et al. 1997. For the medieval argument, see Pounds 1969, 500.

32. 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.

The Major Lowland Zones

The Bessarabian/Moldavian Plain begins east of the river Prut, and south of Chişinău, Moldova as hill systems extending out from the western face of the central Carpathians dwindle away into undulating grassland.[33] The plain's southern boundary is marked by the Black Sea coast and the final length of the Danube, including its great marshy delta.[34] The plain's eastern edge is usually drawn at the Dniester, but, in truth, the Bessarabian plain has no geographic eastern border since it is simply the westernmost portion of the Pontic 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.[35]

Movement into the Bessarabian Plain from the Pontic Steppe involves crossing the Dniester which, in common with many larger rivers in the region, is flanked in its lower reaches by significant marshland.[36] The Danube presents similar obstacles when one leaves the region to the south, but the Prut offers less challenge in this regard.[37] In the fourth century, Tervingi Goths attempted to use the Dniester as a bulwark against hostile Hunnic and Alan raiders, yet the ease with which this ersatz barrier was crossed should warn us against viewing even the largest rivers as serious impediments to human mobility.[38]

The region of the Dobrogea begins on the southern edge 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 Dobrogea's 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.[39]

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33. *Bessarabia* 1920, 1–2.
34. *Bessarabia* 1920, 4.
35. *Bessarabia* 1920, 4–5.
36. *Bessarabia* 1920, 3.
37. *Bessarabia* 1920, 4.
38. A.M. 31.3.4–7.
39. *Roumania* 1920, 33; *Bulgaria* 1920, 14–15.

The highest elevations in the Dobrogea are found in the northwest 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.[40] 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 where steppe conditions do not prevail, such as near rivers or in hillier districts, the land appears much more vibrant and verdant.[41] As with Bessarabia to the north, Boreas keeps an icy grip on Dobrogea during the winter months, bringing harsh, frigid conditions out of the Pontic Steppe. Dobrogea is blessed during the other three seasons, however, with a 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.[42]

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 toward the north before merging seamlessly into the foothills of the Southern Carpathians.[43] 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 hold 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.[44] 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.[45]

The counterpart to the Wallachian Plain is the North Bulgarian Plain, which extends south from the Danube until it merges with the northern

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40. Zahariade 2006, 8–10.

41. *Roumania* 1920, 34.

42. Zahariade 2006, 11–12.

43. *Roumania* 1920, 23.

44. *Roumania* 1920, 23–24.

45. *Roumania* 1920, 23–24.

foothills of the Stara Planina Balkans. The topography of this region is somewhat similar to that of the Wallachian Plain, in terms of the 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.[46] 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 in earlier eras.[47]

The final grassland region within the Danubian Borderland is the Hungarian Plain, or Alföld. This subregion is massive: over 40,000 square kilometers of lowland,[48] 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.[49] 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. Steppe ecosystems extend out to the east and west of these rivers, but coverage is less complete, and tends to taper off farther away from the Danube-Tisza core.[50] By the early twentieth century, the fertility of the Hungarian Plain had been fully recognized and exploited, but this was a phenomenon only begun in earnest during the early modern age; in antiquity, forest steppe was extensive between the Danube and the Tisza.[51] The Hungarian Plain is somewhat isolated from the other grasslands within the Danubian Borderland, leading some scholars to exclude it from regional Danubian stud-

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46. *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, 18–19; *Bulgaria* 1920, 13–14.
47. *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, 70–71.
48. Lindner 1981, 14.
49. Pounds 1969, 14–17.
50. *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, 84; Magyari et al. 2010, 916.
51. *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, 82–85.

ies.[52] However, analysis of the plant taxa found in both the Hungarian, Wallachian/Bulgarian, and Pontic plains strongly suggests that there has been long-standing ecological exchange between these regions, most likely through the Iron Gates region, although perhaps also through gaps in the Northern Carpathians.[53]

Rivers: Arteries and Road-Blocks

The Danube itself is the centerpiece of the region's complex drainage system, running, as it does, clean through the region from northwest to southeast. Virtually all the other rivers within the region 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. The Danube is the largest river in Europe by volume; and in length, at about 2,800 kilometers, only the Volga surpasses it.[54] While the Upper Danube falls outside the scope of this study, the river's lower divisions form the backbone of the Danubian Borderland.

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.[55] Even when not in spate, the Middle Danube is flanked in many areas by extensive wetlands, requiring the Roman *limes* road, which tried to run as close to the river's main course as possible, to fall back from the shore as much as ten kilometers in order to avoid the swamps and seasonal floods.[56] 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.[57] Despite the presence of riparian marshes in some areas, the Danube tends to

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52. As mentioned in our Introduction, this is the case in Roger Batty's 2007 *Rome and the Nomads* (e.g., p. 69).
53. Magyari et al. 2010, 930.
54. *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, 8.
55. *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, 28.
56. Visy 2003, 45–46.
57. *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, 130.

Fig. 1.5. Narrowing of the Danube near the western entrance to the Iron Gates

be 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,[58] and while the Lower Danube runs slower still, the high bluffs and even more extensive riparian marshlands characteristic of the river's lower course present additional challenges for crossing there. Passage over the Middle Danube is made even easier during the winter, as, historically, this section of the river freezes over nearly every year between later December and February, sometimes for up to thirty days,[59] a phenomenon well documented by ancient authors, such as Cassius Dio and Ammianus Marcellinus.[60] About ten kilometers northwest of Belgrade, the Danube is joined from the north by the Tisza, marking the third major confluence of the great river's middle section.

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—down to a mere 36.5 meters at the Iron Gates proper—creating fast currents

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58. *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, 19–20.
59. *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, 30.
60. Dio 54.36.2; A.M. 29.11.4.

of up to 3.5 meters per second.[61] No outright cataracts exist here, making it possible for nonmotorized vessels to travel through the gates both downstream and against the current when under tow, but there are a number of submerged ledges and boulders which, prior to modernization efforts in the twentieth century, made the passage extremely dangerous without the aid of a navigator knowledgeable of local conditions.[62]

Below the Iron Gates, the river assumes a different character, marking the beginning of the Lower Danube. 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 it does anywhere upstream.[63] 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.[64] 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.[65] The northern edges, on the other hand, tend to be marshy and less clearly delineated. East of Giurgiu, there exist only two stretches—near Hârşova and between Brăila and Galaţi—where the premodern river followed a single channel and was not flanked by extensive marshland on the north/west bank.[66] 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. The Lower Danube, like the middle section, is prone to freezing over, remaining icebound in its lower third for up to forty days between December and the end

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61. *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, 12–13.

62. *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, 13–15, 130.

63. *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, 19–20. The average ratio of descent for the whole Lower Danube is, therefore 1/25,944 meters (.000039%). The final leg of the river from Brăila to the mouth of the delta descends a mere one meter over 187 kilometers, for a ratio of 1/187,000 meters (.0000053%).

64. *Roumania* 1920, 26–27.

65. *Bulgaria* 1920, 12.

66. *Roumania* 1920, 27–28.

of February.[67] 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 wild-life, present a significant obstacle to human movement between Bessarabia and the Dobrogea.[68]

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 themselves large enough—or which 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 stretches which are conducive to mobility and other sections which are not.

Moving upstream from the Danube delta, the river's first important tributaries are the Prut and the Siret. These are the two great rivers of Moldavia, which together drain all of that region, as well as the western half of Bessarabia.[69] Both the Prut and Siret run essentially north-south, in line with the 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, with no troublesome cataracts, thus permitting navigation far upstream by boats drawing up to one meter of water.[70] 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-Mureș/Černjachov Culture during the fourth century.

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67. *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, 30. Ovid repeatedly mentions the frozen river in his exilic poems written from Tomis in the Dobrogea (*Tr.* 3.10.27–34, 51–56, 3.12.27–30).

68. For a comprehensive study of the topography and ecology of the Danube delta, see Tudorancea and Tudorancea 2006.

69. 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, 3).

70. *Roumania* 1920, 27, 30–31.

Continuing west, the Danube is fed by a great number of rivers flowing south out of the Southern Carpathians and north from the Stara Planina. Most of the Carpathian tributaries[71] begin as fast mountain torrents, cutting deep valleys through the Carpathian foothills; but they 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.[72] 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 southeast quarter of that region. The river is already quite large when it makes its way across the Carpathians through a narrow pass known as the Red Tower. This pass, although quite narrow, does allow for land movement parallel to the river's course.[73] 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 reduce the growth of riparian marshes.[74]

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 the lower part of their lengths through the Wallachian Plain and into the Carpathian foothills, and thus represent important natural lines of north-south communication and movement. Progress farther 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. Farther north

71. 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.

72. *Roumania* 1920, 28–29.

73. *Roumania* 1920, 12–14, 28–29.

74. *Roumania* 1920, 29.

Fig. 1.6. Riparian cliffs along the Iskar River, south of Pleven, Bulgaria

in the foothills, the difficulty lies in crossing the deep valleys these rivers frequently carve.

The Balkan tributaries flowing north from the Stara Planina are numerous,[75] and like their northern counterparts often serve as significant impediments to longitudinal movement across 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.

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

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75. The most important of these rivers are, from east to west, the Rusenski Lom, Yantra, Vit, Iskar, Ogosta, Tsibritsa, Lom, and Timok.

tributaries somewhat easier to cross than their Wallachian counterparts, but the eastern cliffs still pose significant difficulties, to the point where, during the late nineteenth century, they were proposed as fortification lines by the Bulgarians when contemplating invasion from the west.[76] 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 farther into the mountains, where currents become swifter and valleys narrower, the rivers often become less conducive to human use.[77]

The Balkan tributaries mirror the Wallachian in a final way, namely, that 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 Dagh, the northernmost spur of the Rhodope Mountains south of the Stara Planina. 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.[78] The lower courses of the Iskar follow the expected pattern, 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.[79]

Turning to the Middle Danube, 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 upstream from the Iron Gates, the Middle Danube tributaries are the Timiş, which drains southwest Transylvania and the southern Banat, the Tisza, which, together with its own important tributary the Mureş, 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 farther north and drains the central Pannonian Basin and Dinarics.

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76. *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, 69; *Bulgaria* 1920, 16–20. The most defensible river banks are those of the Timok in the far west of Bulgaria, and the Yantra farther east, although most of the rivers in this region possess eastern cliffs to one degree or another.

77. *Bulgaria* 1920, 16–20.

78. *Bulgaria* 1920, 22. During the late nineteenth century, construction of a railway following the course of the Iskar gorge required twenty-two separate tunnels in order for the rails to pass through the narrowest sections.

79. *Bulgaria* 1920, 17–18.

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.[80]

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 Slanka-men in Serbia. For most of its length, the river flows through 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.[81] The river is navigable by larger craft as far north as Szeged, Hungary, where it converges with the Mureș, and by lower-draught barges over much of its remaining length upstream. The Mureș itself is a significant riverway which drains a large portion of Transylvania and flows through fertile agricultural land for much of its length. The Mureș is deep enough to accommodate navigation by barges for over 600 kilometers upstream from its convergence with the Tisza.[82] Together, these two streams ensure that the region of the central Hungarian Plain is characterized by easy fluvial mobility in both a north-south and east-west direction.

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

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80. Fodorean 2013, 39–40.
81. *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, 80–82.
82. *Transylvania and the Banat* 1920, 41.

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 meltwater 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.[83]

IV. Fitting the Pieces: Subregions 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 subregions within the larger Middle and Lower Danube zones, and allow for certain types of connection and movement between these subregions. These natural boundaries and points of connection, together with the larger macroregional themes already discussed, form the stage upon which human life was enacted 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.

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, the 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 backward-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.

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

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83. Pounds 1969, 655–56.
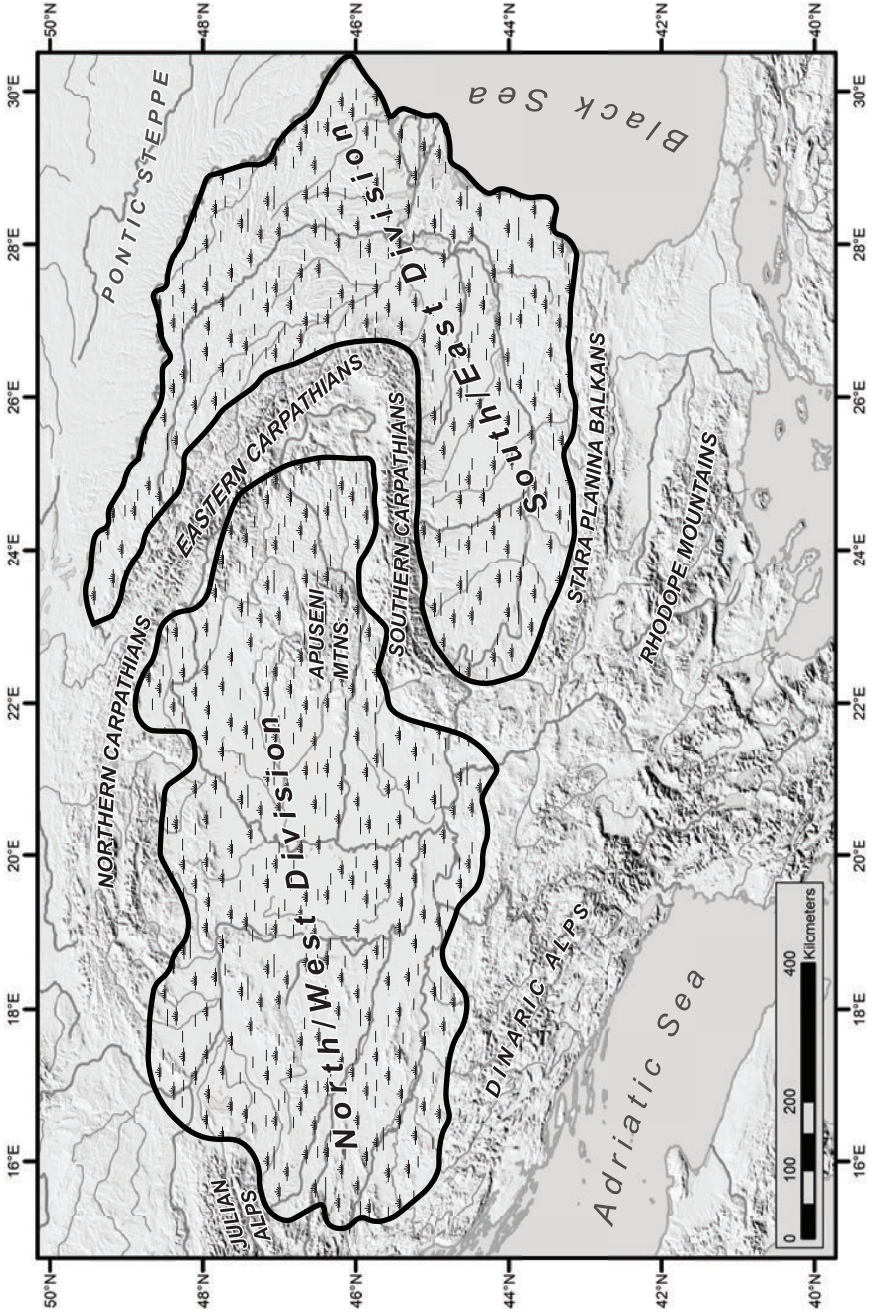
Fig. 1.7. The two major natural divisions of the Danubian region

Fig. 1.8. View north up the easily traversed Cerna Valley, Romania

importance of this nexus 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 (modern Turnu Severin) at its northern terminus in order to secure control over both the north-south and east-west routes.[84] Even after the bridge fell into disrepair sometime in the third century, Drobeta was maintained as a crucial crossing point until at least the mid-sixth century.[85]

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. The Danube flows somewhat east of

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84. Fodorean 2013, 15–16, 19–21, 39–40.
85. Bondoc 2009, 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.

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 Timiş, Mureş, 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 here again, the low valleys and generally modest angle of descent makes it not extremely difficult to get from one bank to the other, while annual freezes further facilitate winter crossings.

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, but do present more 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 individually pose much of a challenge to movement, since they run mainly through low plains.[86]

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 subregion 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,

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86. Pounds 1969, 496.

and western Moldavia,[87] (2) the provinces 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.

In light of the region's topography and geographic features, it becomes clear 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. Farther 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.[88] 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.

The South/East Division (Malvensis-Moesia-Scythia): A More Divided Land

The southeast 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 northwest division, and one not nearly as conducive to unfettered human movement, although it contains important natural highways capable of channeling movement in certain directions. In general, the elevational zones in this half of the

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87. The third Dacian province, Malvensis, lay primarily south of the Carpathians in what is now Wallachia, and should be assigned, therefore, to the southeast division of the Danubian Borderland.

88. Gudea 1979, 70 and 70n19. 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.

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 northwest 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 outward and away from one another. In general, the southeast division is a land of thin, linear natural features, while the northwest division is characterized by large enclosed spaces.

It would be incorrect to characterize the southeast 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 northwest 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 southeast division can be divided into two distinct subsections. Both subsections focus on portions of the network of grasslands which form the core of the southeast division. The first subsection 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. Farther 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 Galaţi. Unsurprisingly, this bend played host to multiple Roman installations designed to guard the

most obvious crossing zone.[89] Once south of the delta, movement is largely unrestricted through the steppes of the Dobrogea. Farther south, the low hills of the far eastern Stara Planina present the only real natural roadblock to movement into the plains of Thrace and farther south to Constantinople and the northern Aegean.

The second macrodivision 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 smaller and 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 homogeneous as the grasslands of the Middle Danube Basin, and the rivers here generally pose greater challenges to mobility thanks to 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. 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.

As in the north/west division, Roman political boundaries in the south/east took no heed of the natural divisions in the landscape. 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

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89. 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- through fifth-century) fortifications, but references from Ptolemy's *Geography* (3.8.2, 10.1; 3.10.2) suggest earlier initial fortification (Scorpan 1980, 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 Tervingian *iudex*, Athanaric, aboard a ship in the middle of the river (A.M. 27.5.6–10).
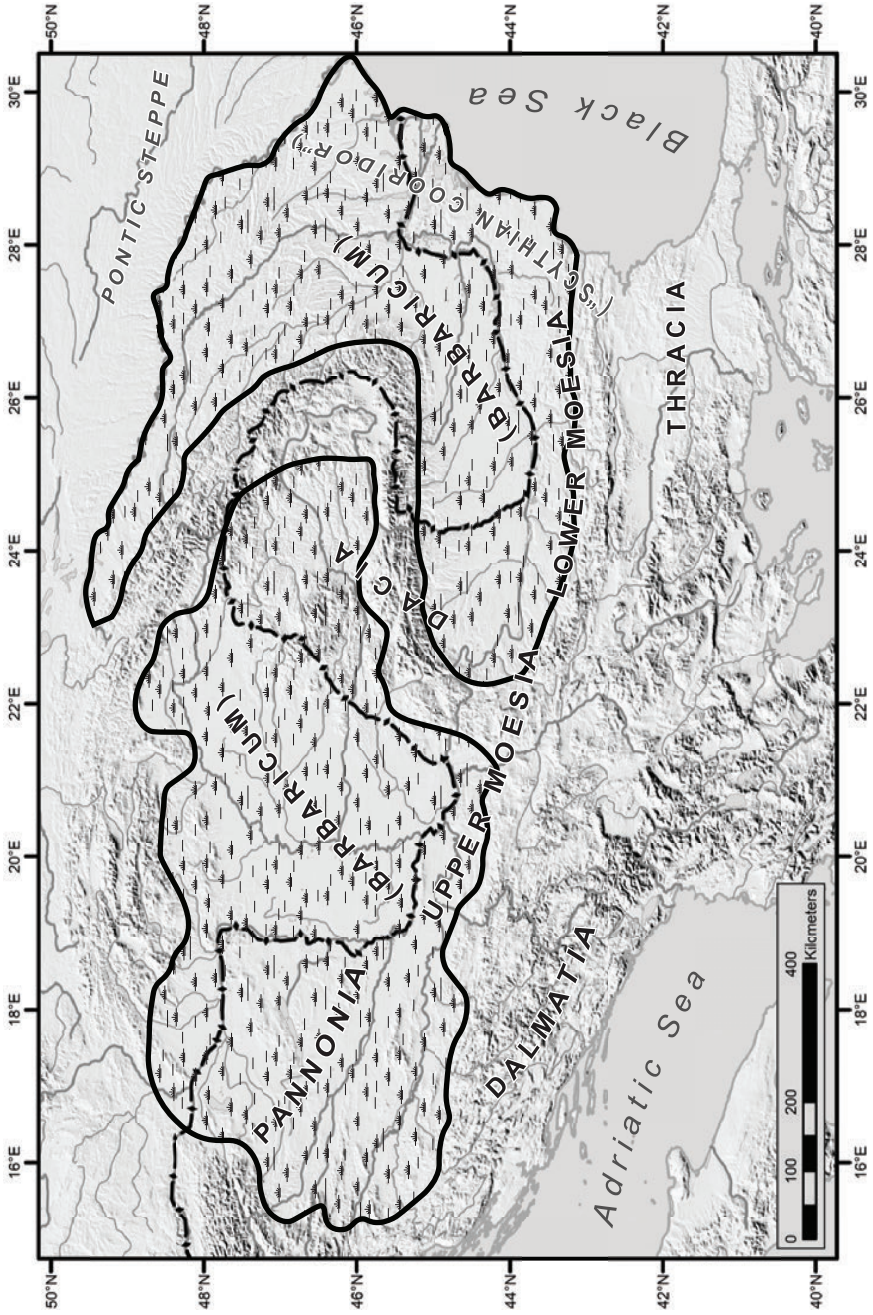
Fig. 1.9. Roman political boundaries in the two natural divisions of the Danubian Borderland

south. Farther 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 initially part of Moesia before being split off as its own province of Scythia Minor following Diocletian's reforms in the late third century. Whereas 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.

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 the enclosed Transylvanian highlands. Second, the plains of the southeast division are less conducive to general mobility because, save for along the Danube itself, 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 of 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 for Rome to maintain the ability to interdict would-be river-crossers north of the Danube near its mouth than it was in the Middle Danube theater, a fact we see reflected in the greater use of transdanubian bridgeheads in eastern Wallachia and the Dobrogea.

The Middle Danube was the preferred invasion/raiding route for armies and bands looking to gain access to Pannonia and the West, since 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 communities and the Roman *limes*, any hostile raiders able to cross over the Northern Carpathians would find the plains and hills of Pannonia ripe fruit for the picking, to say nothing of Italy just over the Julian Alps. Indeed, the Marcomannic Wars began in the later second century precisely because Rome's clients beyond the Middle Danube failed to interdict raiders from farther afield, who subsequently raided through Pannonia and into northern Italy.[90] Similarly, when Attila finally broke down the Middle Danube *limes* system in the mid-fifth century, the Middle Danube Basin proved an extremely productive base for his Hunnic-Gothic coalition, as it did for other would-be raiders and invaders of Italy and the western provinces.[91]

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 during the third and fourth centuries. 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 raiders south through the Scythian Corridor into Thrace, Macedonia, and Greece, while western Moesia, Pannonia, Dacia, and the rest of Illyricum remained largely untouched by the third-century marauders.[92] The second round of Gothic "invasions" a century later followed a similar pattern. Tervingi and Greuthungi crossed the Lower Danube in the Dobrogea with Roman permission, but when relations broke down and the migrants became hostile, the region's geography ensured that most of their initial movements occurred in 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

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90. Dio 72.1a (*exc. de leg. gent.* 6).

91. 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. Before Attila, Alaric's march into Italy began from a base in Pannonia, with further examples going back as far as the Marcomannic Wars.

92. Batty 2007, 387–95.

Rome controlled the Danube itself, the risk of hostile movement westward across the Bulgarian and Wallachian plains was greatly reduced.[93]

One important Roman modification of the Danubian Borderland's mobility profile was the creation of a 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. Roads stood as visible markers of Roman power within the natural landscape, and once constructed, they 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 facilitate movement by Romans and non-Romans alike. 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 where roads do not closely shadow rivers, they still 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 the same basic function as the navigable rivers. In the northwest division, where movement through the lowlands was generally easy, roads may not have done much to alter the basic, natural mobility profile of the region. In the southeast 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 the Lower Danube realm than in the lands of the Middle Danube.

V. Conclusions

The Danube's vast watershed encompasses over 800,000 square kilometers[94] sandwiched between the heart of the Balkan Peninsula to the south, and the continental regions of Central Europe and the Pontic Steppe to the

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93. Batty 2007, 397–99.
94. *The Danube River Basin District Management Plan—Update 2015*, v.

north. While this region stands as a natural climatic borderland 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-Mureș, Iskar, Olt, Siret, and Prut, tie the region together by creating easy avenues for the movement of plants, animals, and humans. 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 sociopolitical 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, Bastarnae, Dacians, Bistonians, Odrysians, Moesians, and more—were found across the Middle and Lower Danube Basins, interspersed with immigrant communities of European Celts and Pontic Sarmatians.[95]

When Rome consolidated its political hegemony over the Balkans at about the same moment that Strabo finished his *Geography*, the new overlords found the Danube just as useful a highway as had the local populations, and so the imperial *limes* was drawn along the course of the river. Although Roman *limites* 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.[96] The establishment of strict, military control over what had previously been the region's greatest source of internal mobility, represented a profound disruption of the Danubian watershed's existing cultural rhythms, and aftershocks from the establishment of the Danubian *limes* continued to exert a disruptive influence for the next four centuries, and beyond.

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 existing patterns of exchange and mobility. It also required a concurrent ideological transformation in order to justify the effort and

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95. See chapter 2, section IV for discussion of Strabo's Danubian ethnography.
96. Luttwak 1976; Whittaker 1994; Isaac 1990; Mattingly 1994.

expense of building a barrier where none had existed before. By "happy" coincidence, there existed an almost tailor-made world view first popular among Greeks since the fifth century BCE, but with enduring appeal some four centuries later. This outlook, the earliest surviving elaboration of which is found in 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 our next task will be to examine how, following the establishment of the Danubian *limes*, that particular ethnographic label—together with a whole host of dependent barbarous topoi—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 before the Common Era, beyond encouraging Greek cultural chauvinism regarding Danubian peoples, when coupled with the might of Rome's legions, the Scythian world view caused real harm, first to the people of the transdanubian regions, but ultimately to Roman provincials and power brokers as well.

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 Bastarnae.
  —Strabo, *Geography* 2.5.12 (c. 20 CE)[1]

From this point [at the Danube] all the peoples are, generally speak-
ing, Scythian, although various specific groups hold the lands adja-
cent 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* 4.80 (c. 77 CE)[2]

I. Introduction: Explaining a World Gone Mad

Reflecting upon the death of Marcus Aurelius in 180 CE, the historian Cas-
sius Dio claimed that at that moment, the Roman empire descended "from

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  1. Μάλιστα δ᾿ οἱ νῦν ἄμεινον ἔχοιεν ἄν τι λέγειν περὶ τῶν κατὰ Βρεττανοὺς καὶ
Γερμανοὺς καὶ τοὺς περὶ τὸν Ἴστρον τούς τε ἐντὸς καὶ τοὺς ἐκτός, Γέτας τε καὶ Τυρεγέτας
καὶ Βαστάρνας.

  2. *Ab eo in plenum quidem omnes Scytharum sunt gentes, variae tamen litori apposita tenu-
ere, alias Getae, Daci Romanis dicti, alias Sarmatae, Graecis Sauromatae, eorumque Hamaxo-
bii aut Aorsi, alias Scythae degeneres et a servis orti aut Trogodytae, mox Alani et Rhoxolani.*

a kingdom of gold to one of iron and rust,"[3] yet such a gloomy prognosis would have seemed out of place seven decades later 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 restored along the Danube *limes* following a series of raids by the Carpi, a group of free Dacians who really should have known better.[4] It was true that Olbia, a nominally Roman city far north along the Black Sea coast, had been sacked by Scythians in 238, but it was hardly the first time that that distant bastion of Hellenism had suffered disaster.[5] With the recent Carpic unpleasantness tidied up and a huge festival in the works at Rome, the people of Philippopolis—the largest city in the province of Thrace— might, indeed, have looked to the future with some degree of optimism. Any such happy notions 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.[6]

We can thank Herennius Dexippus, third-century historian and prominent citizen of Athens, for most of what we know about the siege of Philippopolis and the other episodes of these third-century Scythian troubles. Dexippus was a contemporary of, and possible participant in, the events which he chronicled at length in a work entitled, fittingly, *Scythica*. In the surviving fragments we see barbarians identified as Scythians conducting sieges—sometimes with success—involving complex towers and mining operations. In the field, they defeat the legions of Roman emperor Decius on multiple occasions before killing both him and his son in 251 near the

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3. Dio 72.36.4.

4. For a succinct discussion of the chaotic period since the murder of Severus Alexander in 235, including the *ludi saeculares* and Philip's relationship with the Senate, see Potter 2014, 162–71, 225–37. For the Carpic wars, see Kovács 2014, 230–34. 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 backwoods 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, 376–79; Ioniţa 1982, 76–77; Bichir 1976).

5. Batty 2007, 198–99, 433–34. The earlier tragic history of Olbia is remarked upon by Dio Chrysostom in his *Borysthenitic Oration* (see sec. 2.3.1 below).

6. *Scyth.* fr. Mec. 30/Mar. 24; *Cod. Vind. Hist. gr.* 73 fol. 195; A.M. 31.5.17.

Moesian city of Abritus.[7] We learn of Athens' capture in 267, where the Hellenic defenders, perhaps with Dexippus among them, were forced to rely on guerrilla tactics to resist the Scythian menace. A rousing battlefield speech to the Athenian defenders—long thought to have been delivered by Dexippus himself—is partially preserved in the *Scythica*.[8] Despite being full of classical commonplaces, the oration cannot hide the fact that the world has been turned upside down: civilized Greeks reduced to sniping from the woods, unable to resist the unified strength of a barbarian army.[9] Even if many of the details in Dexippus' battle narratives and speeches stem from the Hellenic warfare of Thucydides,[10] the basic facts of the *Scythica* appear reliable.[11] These Scythians were organized, aggressive, and capable of capturing Roman cities. Even worse, 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, to a Greek or Roman of the third century, these raiders failed to act in the ways Scythians were supposed to.

At the time of the third-century invasions, there were two dominant schools of thought regarding Scythians, neither of which seemed to fit the

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7. For Scythian siege narratives, see, e.g., *Scyth.* fr. Mec. 28/Mar. 22 (Marcianople), fr. Mec. 30/Mar. 24 (Philippopolis), fr. Mec. 33/Mar. 27 (Side). For the death of Decius, *Scyth.* fr. Mec. 23/Mar. 17. See also Zos. 1.23, Jord. *Get.* 101–3, both of which are dependent on Dexippus.

8. The unnamed speaker in the *Scythica* fragment has been traditionally identified as Dexippus himself based on a line in the *Historia Augusta* that claims the historian also led troops during the Herulian invasion of Athens (*SHA, Gallien.* 13.8). Despite this clear reference, there is no internal evidence for Dexippus' generalship within the surviving fragments of his own works, nor is he listed as a participating general by other, later sources. The dubious nature of the *H.A.*, together with a lack of epigraphic evidence for Dexippus' supposed military service, led G. E. M. de Ste. Croix to strongly reject the idea that Dexippus is the speaker in fr. Mec. 31/Mar. 25 (de Ste. Croix 1981, 654–55n42). The matter remains unresolved to this day.

9. For the speech and the defenders' guerrilla tactics, see *Scyth.* fr. Mec. 31/Mar. 25. For the strength of the Scythians, see also Decius' speech in *Scyth.* fr. Mec. 30/Mar. 24.

10. For an assessment of the many linguistic and thematic parallels, particularly in the siege narrative from fr. Mec. 30/Mar. 24, see Blockley 1972.

11. Millar 1969. While Potter questions Dexippus' historical acuity and objectivity (2014, 228–30), 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).

enemies that actually showed up at the walls of Philippopolis. Some pictured Scythians as dangerous, nomadic horsemen. These Scythians knew that the secret key to invincibility lay in mobility and disavowal of landed property, relying on the truth that one cannot defeat what one cannot catch. This "strong Scythian" was popularized in the ethnographic writings of Herodotus and his fifth-century BCE contemporaries, but had been transmitted, more or less unchanged, through the centuries, arriving alive and well in the minds of nonspecialist 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.[12] These barbarians had no place besieging cities; such a sedentary act went against their very nature.[13]

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, most importantly the Sarmatian Iazyges, as the quintessential Scythians. The conflation of Scythians and Sarmatians/Sauromatae also dated back to Herodotus and his

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12. Hartog's *The Mirror of Herodotus* (1988) revolutionized the field by interpreting Herodotus' Scythian Logos as a reflection of 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.

13. Herodotus' Scythians mainly stay in their own world beyond the Danube and Black Sea. We see this fact most clearly at the end of Persian king Darius' failed invasion of Scythia. When Darius and his army managed to get across the Danube ahead of their Scythian pursuers, the barbarians chose not to pursue despite having chased the Persians around the Pontic Steppe for months (Hdt. 4.140–42). This reticence appears based on an earlier episode. 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 (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, they rode around and plundered whatsoever it was that anyone possessed" (1.106). Unmatched on the battlefield, these 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.

contemporaries,[14] but whereas the original Sauromatae were described as even more fearsome than the standard Herodotean Scythians, the most well-known group of contemporary second- and third-century CE Sarmatians were long-standing clients of Rome beyond the Middle Danube, who were popularly seen as impotent, feckless wanderers prone to minor acts of banditry across the river, but who posed 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 by 250, there had been nothing even remotely similar from them in nearly a century.[15] This sort of "weak Scythian" certainly was not considered capable of storming cities and killing emperors.

Despite these divergent definitions of Scythian-ness, 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 the raiders of the third century had alternative names: Borani, Heruli, and Goths of various tribal affiliations.[16] When some of these people sacked Olbia in 238 and

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14. In Herodotus, the Sauromatae are the offspring 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 (4.110–17). The Hippocratic author of the *Airs, Waters, and Places* also describes the Sauromatae 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).

15. Maximinus Thrax may have campaigned briefly against the Sarmatians in 236–37, however Herodian (7.1.2) gives 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, 225–30. By Kovács' reckoning, Maximinus first waged war against Germanic peoples beyond the Rhine and Upper Danube in 235–36, then moved his operations to the Hungarian Plain where he subdued apparently rebellious Sarmatians and Dacians in 236–37. This latter campaign is poorly documented, and may have been more propaganda than reality.

16. Gregory Thaumaturgus, a contemporary of the third-century troubles, describes the barbarians as "Boradoi and Gotthoi" (*Ep. Can. 5*). Fragment 23/17 of Dexippus appears to acknowledge 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. It is also worth noting that the term "Goth" itself, as used by Greek and Roman authors, served to gloss over a number of smaller-scale group identities. We will discuss what was actually going

began raiding into the empire a decade later, they revealed the lie behind both popular stereotypes. This chapter examines the intellectual history of Rome's various preconceptions about Scythians during the principate in order to understand why Roman decision-makers so badly misunderstood and underestimated the third-century raiders from beyond the Danube. Rather than focus on the emergence of the vibrant, multiethnic Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov Culture probably responsible for the bulk of the third-century "Scythians,"[17] this chapter considers how Romans adopted and modified Greek ethnographic stereotypes about Scythians, and how these topoi 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 world view that went along with the ethnographic topoi—one 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 firmly established in the Roman imagination, emperors and authors began to use it more intentionally, emphasizing certain of the canonical topoi 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 peoples, a topic to be explored in chapter 3. Modern scholars examining the interactions between Rome and other foreign peoples, most notably Carthaginians, Germans, and Persians, have recognized that the stereotypes and prejudices Romans held about barbarians exerted a strong influence on how the Roman state

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on among these transdanubian Goths during the third and fourth centuries in the final chapters of this book.

17. The topic of Gothic origins is hugely complex and controversial and has—in some ways—been argued as far as the limited evidence will allow. The association between the Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov 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.) I will not seek to greatly advance this field here or elsewhere in this book, although I will return to the Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov Culture in chapter 5 as an important point of comparison to archaeological trends from the Hungarian Plain to the west.

interacted with them.[18] To date, however, there has been less correspond-
ing 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 topoi by
Roman authors and policymakers up to the third-century turmoil. Ste-
reotypical ideas about Scythians and Sarmatians underlie nearly every
Roman-barbarian interaction known from the Danubian Borderland, both
the imperial triumphs and the disasters. By charting the development of
Scythian and Sarmatian topoi in the Roman imagination, this chapter lays
an intellectual foundation upon which to interpret the political and social
history of the Danubian Borderland. Beginning with the Scythian depreda-
tions of the third century described by Dexippus, topoi 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 misunder-
stand their northern neighbors. By the later third century, the Scythians
had changed, Rome's intellectual arsenal failed to keep up, and the results
proved disastrous on multiple occasions.

II. Thinking about the Ancients Thinking about Barbarians

The Scythian Logos

The fact that Dexippus and his third-century contemporaries knew various
collective designations for their barbarian enemies raises an obvious ques-
tion: 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 peoples from beyond their political and social worlds
whom they labeled as barbarians. In order to make sense of the diversity of
these barbarian peoples, Greek thinkers tended to group foreigners into cat-
egories based on common geographic locations and perceived cultural simi-

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18. Isaac 2004; Drinkwater 2007; Mattern 1999; Lee 1993.

larities.[19] In a sense, then, 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 steppe nomadic pastoralism 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 throughout the nearly eight centuries separating Dexippus from the "father of history."

The power of these Scythian topoi was great. Once it had infiltrated 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 community 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 endonyms and identities, some of which were known to Roman writers. They were *Gotthoi*, *Iouthoungoi*, *Boradoi*, and more, but, to put it bluntly, calling someone from beyond the Danube a Goth in the third century meant nothing because it was a fresh nametag.[20] As soon as you labeled that individual a Scythian, however, you provided them with an eight-hundred-year pedigree that 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.

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19. The literature on this topic is vast, but see particularly Sherwin-White 1967, Momigliano 1975, Dauge 1981, Hall 2002, McCoskey 2002, Burns 2003, and Isaac 2004.

20. Iouthoungoi 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 barbarian peoples reflect third-century realities as opposed to his own fifth-century context.

The ability of this Scythian Logos—to adopt Hartog's term[21]—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.[22] The chief source for this Greco-Roman doctrine of environmental determinism, or at least the oldest surviving expression of the theory, is the Hippocratic treatise *Airs, Waters, and Places*, which dates from the late fifth century BCE. The work contains explicit statements suggesting that the physical and moral characteristics of 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 the Hippocratic treatise—and subsequently taken up by 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.[23] The Scythians, living in the farthest north, under the very shadow of the bear-star, were, naturally, the most extreme example of a northern people, save only the mythic Hyperboreans.

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 were thought to acquire the characteristics of their 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.[24] Fierce but unsophisticated northern barbarians were thought to become weak when settled in southern lands, yet they always remained stupid. One of the clearest examples of this phenomenon, and also a strong testament to the longevity of this world view, comes from the sixth-century CE historian Procopius. When describing the lifestyle of the Vandals, a people with roots in Central Europe who had usurped control of Roman North Africa in the mid-fifth century, Procopius emphasized the decadent

21. Hartog 1988, 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.

22. This concept was ably discussed in the first chapter of Benjamin Isaac's 2004 monograph *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*.

23. Isaac 2004, 62–74; ps. Hip. *AWP* 16.

24. Isaac 2004, 108.

nature of Vandal society, explaining that the luxuries of the south had entirely enervated and emasculated the formerly fearsome warrior society.[25]

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 ecozone, or ones with similar climatic and topographic features, as Scythians.

The basic package of Scythian topoi 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.[26] The historian explains:

> When it comes to that greatest of human concerns, the cleverest dis
> covery that we know of has been made by the Scythians, although
> I do not admire everything [about them]. That said, they have fig
> ured out the most important thing, namely, how no one who comes
> against them can escape, and how no one exists who can catch them,
> unless they should wish to be found. (3) For neither cities nor perma
> nently built fortifications exist among them, but instead they are all
> mounted archers who go about carrying their houses with them, liv

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25. *Wars* 4.6.5–9.

26. 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 completely immune to attack and invasion (4.46). The narrative of Darius' failed invasion of Scythia serves to validate the 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 1988, 61).

ing not by cultivation, but relying instead on their flocks, and whose homes are on their wagons; [indeed, living such a nomadic life,] how can they not be both invincible and impossible to approach?[27]

While not all the communities described as Scythian by Herodotus check every expected ethnographic box presented here (there are farming Scythians living close to the Black Sea coast, for example),[28] the most quintessential subgroup—the Ruling Scythians—fit the archetype perfectly, and when speaking of the *ethnos* as a whole, Herodotus and his followers always assume a fundamentally nomadic identity.

Although for Herodotus and his followers, the Danube marked the southern boundary between the Scythian world and the rest of the *oikoumene*, the Scythian heartland lay far to the north beyond the Black Sea, at the outer edge of Classical Greek geographic knowledge.[29] Thus, the Scythians 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. When Herodotus' nomads did attempt to extend their domain into 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.[30]

Ovid in Exile

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

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27. Hdt. 4.46.2–3 τῷ δὲ Σκυθικῷ γένεϊ ἓν μὲν τὸ μέγιστον τῶν ἀνθρωπηίων πρηγμάτων σοφώτατα πάντων ἐξεύρηται τῶν ἡμεῖς ἴδμεν, τὰ μέντοι ἄλλα οὐκ ἄγαμαι· τὸ δὲ μέγιστον οὕτω σφι ἀνεύρηται ὥστε ἀποφυγεῖν τε μηδένα ἐπελθόντα ἐπὶ σφέας, μὴ βουλομένους τε ἐξευρεθῆναι καταλαβεῖν μὴ οἷόν τε εἶναι. (3) τοῖσι γὰρ μήτε ἄστεα μήτε τείχεα ᾖ ἐκτισμένα, ἀλλὰ φερέοικοι ἐόντες πάντες ἔωσι ἱπποτοξόται, ζῶντες μὴ ἀπ᾽ ἀρότου ἀλλ᾽ ἀπὸ κτηνέων, οἰκήματα τε σφι ᾖ ἐπὶ ζευγέων, κῶς οὐκ ἂν εἴησαν οὗτοι ἄμαχοί τε καὶ ἄποροι προσμίσγειν;

28. Hdt. 4.18.

29. Hdt. 4.17–31, 48–50, 99–101.

30. Hdt. 1.103–6.

Horace.[31] Greek ethnographic topoi became commonplace among Rome's educated, decision-making elite, part and parcel with the broader adoption of Greek literary culture following Roman annexation of the Aegean and much of the Hellenistic world during the second and first centuries BCE. With the Herodotean ethnographic world view 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.[32] Ovid's Scythicizing descriptions of Tomis, its people, and the surrounding barbarians owe much to Herodotus and clearly show the relevance of the original topoi 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 Roman control over the Danubian region was transitioning from loose hegemony to firmer political dominion.[33]

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 uniformed reader would be forgiven for imagining the city as 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,

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31. 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.

32. 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, 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 homogeneous, his exilic missives from the other end of the river would still have seemed topical.

33. 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, leading to the organization of the province of Moesia around the year 6 CE, and, finally, Tiberius had recently quashed a major revolt in Pannonia (Kovács 2014, 25–40).

and he takes strength from a place nearer to him."[34] Simple mention of *Boreas*, *Arctus*, or *Aquilo* were enough to situate Ovid in, or at least on the verge of, the wretched Scythian world,[35] but the poet also employed other climate-based topoi to emphasize his pitiable position. Echoing Herodotus' picture of Scythian wagons crossing the frozen Cimmerian Bosporus,[36] 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 hoofbeat of the horse, while across the new bridge, above the gliding current, the carts of the barbarians are drawn by Sarmatian oxen." When winter finally, briefly, relents, all Ovid can say about the region is that the ice reluctantly melts.[37]

While trees bud and grape vines send up new shoots in his beloved Italy, these temperate flora are absent from the Getic shore.[38] It would seem that the poet resides in a treeless 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

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34. *Pont.* 4.10.39–42. Vergil's digression on the winters of Scythia (*Georg.* 3.349–83) served to popularize the topos 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 (e.g., *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: e.g., *sidera praebentia formam plaustri* (*Pont.* 4.10.39)*, Parrhasiae gelido virginis axe premor* (*Tr.* 2.1.190), *proxima sideribus tellus Erymanthidos Ursae* (*Tr.* 3.4.1).

35. E.g., *polus* (*Tr.* 4.10.108), *Arctus* (*Tr.*1.2.29; 1.3.48; 3.10.11; 5.5.39; *Pont.* 2.7.58).

36. Hdt. 4.28–31.

37. *Tr.* 3.10.27–34: *ipse, papyrifero qui non angustior amne / miscetur vasto multa per ora freto, / caeruleos ventis latices durantibus, Hister / congelat et tectis in mare serpit aquis; / quaque rates ierant, pedibus nunc itur, et undas / frigore concretas ungula pulsat equi; / perque novos pontes, subter labentibus undis, / ducunt Sarmatici barbara plaustra boves.* The freezing of the river and the resultant nomadic migrations are a recurring refrain throughout the poems (e.g., *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.

38. *Tr.* 3.12.13–16: *quoque loco est vitis, de palmite gemma movetur:/ nam procul a Getico litore vitis abest. / quoque loco est arbor, turgescit in arbore ramus: / nam procul a Geticis finibus arbor abest.*

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.[39]

This sort of steppe landscape is the natural home of the Scythian, as anyone who has read Herodotus, or any subsequent Pontic ethnography knows.[40]

The overall effect of Ovid's pessimistic description of the environment around Tomis is to rhetorically transport the city 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 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*.[41] 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] Bosporus 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![42]

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39. *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 orba tument. / quocumque aspicies, campi cultore carentes / vastaque, quae nemo vindicat, arva iacent.* The imagery of Ovid bereft on the beach is probably also designed to invoke the popular topos of Ariadne abandoned by Theseus.

40. Pomponius Mela, for example, writing his geography only slightly after Ovid, relies almost exclusively on Herodotus for his description of Scythia (1.110–17). 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, 10–12; personal observation, 2014).

41. 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).

42. *Tr.* 3.4.47–52: *Proxima sideribus tellus Erymanthidos Ursae / me tenet, adstricto terra perusta gelu. / Bosphoros et Tanais superant Scythiaeque paludes / vix satis et noti nomina pauca*

Geographically, the Dobrogea lies on the natural movement route we have labeled 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 rhetorical sense for the poet to describe his setting using topoi 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."[43]

"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!"[44] Thus Ovid described the local barbarian peoples in the hinterland of Tomis, and while—as we see here—he does not always call them Scythians, he does consistently characterize his neighbors using established Scythian topoi 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:

> Great 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 arrows 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.[45]

The physical and physiognomic descriptions are generic Roman stereotypes applicable to most barbarians,[46] but adding the particular archery-related

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loci. / ulterius nihil est nisi non habitabile frigus. / heu quam vicina est ultima terra mihi!

43. *Tr.* 3.12.51.

44. *Tr.* 3.10.5–6: *Sauromatae cingunt, fera gens, Bessique Getaeque, / quam non ingenio nomina digna meo!*

45. *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 gerat. / vox fera, trux vultus, verissima mentis imago, / non coma, non trita barba resecta manu, / dextra non segnis fixo dare vulera cultro, / quem iunctum lateri barbarus omnis habet.*

46. E.g., Josephus applies the same stereotypes of brutality and uncouthness to the Ger-

details places these barbarians in the Scythian category.[47] The poisoned arrows seem to be Ovid's own addition to the topos, and one he repeats elsewhere.[48] In Ovid's poetry, 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 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.[49]

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.[50] We even hear of the

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mans (*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).

47. 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).

48. E.g., *Pont.* 1.2.13; 4.7.7–12. In particular, the poisoned arrows topos appears to be an imported stereotype usually attributed to the Parthians (e.g., Vergil, *Aen.* 12.857–88; see also Williams 1994, 19).

49. *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.

50. *Tr.* 5.10.19–28, *Pont.* 1.2.13–22.

poet's reluctant assumption of real arms in defense of the town, inviting us to speculate on just how far the man who once rejected the arms of epic poetry has now fallen.[51]

The final component of Ovid's stereotypical ethnography is the attribution of a pastoral 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."[52] In several places, the poet mentions the movement of nomadic wagon trains across the frozen Danube.[53] While the annual freezing of the Danube probably did permit some degree of small-scale winter crossing by transdanubian pastoralists, we can deduce that Ovid's poetic crossings are more formulaic than observational because the poet wants to have his cake and eat it too. He describes raids as preventing cultivation,[54] that is, as taking place during the spring and summer months, while also insisting that only the frozen Danube allows the barbarians access to the Dobrogea south of the river. It could be argued that Ovid is simply a poor ethnographer and has misunderstood the annual migration rhythms, but in all likelihood, the correct reading is even less charitable. Ovid is not even trying to accurately describe the world around him. Perpetual fear of 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 topos was so popular. Capturing reality was never the goal.

Despite painting the barbarians of Tomis with a consistent, Herodo-

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51. *Tr.* 4.1.65–86. For Ovid's rejection of the epic genre in favor of love elegy, see *Amores* 1.1.

52. *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 (4.125–27) before scornfully telling the King of Kings to flee while he still can (4.130–32).

53. *Tr.* 3.10.33–34; *Tr.* 3.12.29–30; *Pont.* 4.7.9–10.

54. *Tr.* 5.10.19–28.

tean brush, Ovid clearly understood that the specific human landscape in the Danubian Borderland was actually rather more varied. The ethnonyms used by Ovid can be broadly divided into three categories: first, general ethnic terms, such as Getae, Sarmatae/Sauromatae,[55] and Scythian; second, throwaway references to obscure peoples from earlier accounts of the Scythian world; and third, specific group labels reflecting contemporary realities in and around the Dobrogea.[56] Within this literary landscape of human communities, 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 appear much less frequently.[57] These numbers suggest that despite characterizing the local population using topoi and stereotypes derived from the Scythian world, Ovid still recognized that the majority of the population were Getae, a subset of the larger Thracian ethnographic category. The Getae are particularly dominant in the nominal category. *Geta* occurs 57 times as opposed to a mere 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.[58]

Although admittedly a crude tool, these calculations do add their support to the overall picture emerging from the actual topoi 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

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55. Ovid seems to use the older Greek Sauromatae and the newer Sarmatae interchangeably, the specific choice depending on metrical constraints.

56. One can appreciate that the second and third categories cannot always be separated with absolute certainty.

57. 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 for a concordance of these references**.

58. As usual, the seven Thracian/Bistonian adjectives represent a distinct minority.

commodity at Rome,[59] 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 barbarous topoi,[60] or north to the Scythian world of the Crimea and beyond. Even without the climatic and ethnographic topoi already examined, Ovid's strong preference for Scytho-Sarmatian adjectives over Thracian ones makes the poet's choice obvious.

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 toward securing his recall, Ovid relied on Scythian topoi well known among his Roman readers, and by so doing, effectively obscured the Getic culture 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 topoi were tied to peoples or places traditionally located north of the Black Sea 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.

59. 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, 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 world view characterized by similar conflations, was the way of the future.

60. Mela's discussion of Thracian customs (2.16–21) is indicative of the path not taken by Ovid. The major topoi 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 topoi associated with nomadic life.

III. The Later Scythian Tradition

Ovid's Scythian Logos is important because it stands as one of the two earliest extensive collections of transdanubian topoi from the principate.[61] 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 nonspecialist writing 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.[62]

Valerius Flaccus and Martial both discuss Scythians in their poetic works, reflecting, perhaps, contemporary tensions along the *limes*. Both authors wrote during the later decades of the first century when the Danube was on everyone's mind. Sarmatian raids were repelled in 69–70, and Domitian waged two wars in the 90s against Dacia and its aggressive king Decebalus.[63] Despite these recent events, the poets' treatments are highly traditional. Valerius Flaccus, perhaps 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,[64] the chapter is populated by peoples lifted directly from

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61. The other is found in Strabo's *Geography*, which will be considered below.

62. 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 inadvisable.

63. For the Sarmatian raids, see Tacitus, *Hist.* 1.79. For Domitian's Dacian debacle, Dio 68. Kovács (2014, 70–84) offers a detailed, recent analysis of the rather confused and unsatisfactory sources.

64. Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, 1–11. Aeschylus was familiar with the same basic set of Scythian topoi 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 (709–11).

Herodotus' Scythian steppe.[65] Martial's use of stereotypes also broadly mirrors Ovid; in his epigrams, the lands beyond the Danube are a frozen waste inhabited by fierce, nomadic, and frequently conflated Getae/Dacians and Sarmatae.[66] One specific passage is worth considering. Describing an enslaved person, Martial notes that the errand boy "should not be of the type that plays on the frozen river [Danube] with a Sarmatian wheel, fed full with the milk of a Getic heifer."[67] This one passage manages to pack in a full bouquet of Scythian topoi. 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.[68] Third, and finally, the reference to milk as a staple food is designed to invoke the usual stereotypes of nomadic subsistence.[69] 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.[70] In general, Martial's traditional post-Ovidian use of Scythian topoi makes sense in the context of Domitian's less-than-convincing record in his Dacian wars of

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

66. The first polar astronomical reference comes in Book 6 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 topoi is standard and requires no further elaboration.

67. Mart. 7.80.6–8. *[. . .] ferat carmina nostra puer, / non qualis Geticae satiatus lacte iuvencae / Sarmatica rigido ludit in amne rota*.

68. 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.

69. See Shaw 1982, for a detailed analysis of this particular dietary topos. This passage also raises another interesting point. In the wake of Domitian's Dacian wars, enslaved captives 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. Enslaved people from beyond the frontiers were probably one of the only ways common Romans ever interacted with such people.

70. Martial covers the martial topoi 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.

86–88 CE. 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," 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 topoi to denigrate an enemy as unworthy of full 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 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.[71] His picture of Scythian life, although broadly consistent with the established classical topoi, tends toward the idealized noble savage model, a modification of the original topoi with a pedigree nearly as long.[72] 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.[73] While the details of Lucian's Scythian tales can be connected with

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71. These are, *Anacharsis, or On Athletics*; *Toxaris, or On 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.

72. 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 toward 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, 3–7, for an analysis of Ephorus that suggests a parallel, largely independent tradition. The "noble savage" topos plays out in Lucian's *Toxaris*, in particular, where we find story after story of extreme, and extremely barbaric Scythian loyalty and friendship.

73. 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

contemporaneous fears and concerns stemming from the ongoing Marco-mannic Wars along the Danube frontier,[74] everything is seen through the lens of the traditional Herodotean topoi.

The Christian writer Tertullian is another interesting case for the ubiquity of the most traditional Scythian topoi during the middle empire. He was raised in North Africa, about as far 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.[75] Tertullian's writings, despite their Christian overtones, show that he held all the classical prejudices about Scythians. We see Scythian topoi 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 topoi about harsh climate and nomadic subsistence make their due appearances.[76] As the third century dawned, then, Scythian topoi 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 Scythicizing world view 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 designations more reflective of their own internal identities. As a writer of Thucydidean history, Dexippus generally avoids ethnographic digressions, including Scyth-

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hostile Bosporans, together with the Alani. 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.

74. For analysis of the importance of the Marcomannic Wars, see section VI at 109–24.

75. 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, 601–3). His familiarity with traditional Scythian topoi 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* (1.231–51, 3.190–201, 3.339–83) 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.

76. *Adv. Marc.* 1.3–5. In his *De anima* (25.7), Tertullian revisits the climatic topoi, showing a strong belief in environmental determinism in the style of the *Airs, Waters, and Places*.

ian topoi, but the centuries-old lineage of the Scythian Logos meant that simply labeling the transdanubian raiders as Scythians shaped how they were perceived by most of his readers, and indeed, by the author as well.

IV. 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 were, first and foremost, consummate horsemen.[77] They lived their transient lives in the saddle, and were 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.[78] Indeed, when attempting to repel Scythian invaders from Attica, the Greek defenders knew they were no match for their transdanubian enemies in close combat and so resorted to unorthodox guerrilla warfare until reinforced by Roman regulars.[79] So much for the heirs of Marathon 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.[80]

From our perspective outside the totalizing world view of Greco-Roman ethnographic thought, 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 topoi examined thus far. While details of the siege descrip-

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77. See also Dio Chrysostom's *Borysthenitic Oration* (*Or.* 36). Here, when describing the "Scythicized" Greek inhabitants of first-century CE Olbia, Dio dresses them all in black after the Scythian Melanchlaeni of Herodotus (Hdt. 4.20, 107), and also emphasizes the horsemanship of Callistratus, his paragon of Olbian Greco-Scythian civilization (*Or.* 36.7–8).

78. *Scyth.* fr. Mec. 29.6/Mar. 23.6.

79. *Scyth.* fr. Mec. 31.1–5/Mar. 25.1–5.

80. *Scyth.* fr. Mec. 30/Mar. 24.

tions owe much to the language of Thucydides,[81] interspersed among the traditional scenes are some details which seem to match up much more closely to how ancient authors tended to describe the warfare of northern European agricultural peoples (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 Germanic warfare in Ammianus Marcellinus' battle narratives.[82] Even if we question the theory that Dexippus himself led troops during the defense of Athens, he still personally lived through the third-century Scythian wars, so it is reasonable to assume that there is more truth than fancy in his *militaria*, at least when not sidetracked by Thucydidean allusions. 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" of barbarian, covered by a separate set of topoi and stereotypes.[83] The juxtaposition, then, of the Scythian label—with all its unspoken cultural baggage—and Dexippus' very unScythian descriptions of warfare and siegecraft demands investigation. How

81. 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 counterwalls, etc.) without rejecting the entire scene. Wholesale fabrication seems unlikely given Dexippus' chronological proximity and potential personal connections to his literary subject.

82. A.M. 16.12.20, 42–45, 63. The battle in question is the so-called Battle of Strassbourg between an Alamannic 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.

83. Isaac 2004, chs. 11 and 12. For the importance of Julius Caesar's *Bellum Gallicum* on shaping Roman conceptions of northern, nonnomadic barbarians, see Schadee 2008. For a discussion of Caesar's own manipulation of Scythian topoi 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 (e.g., Tacitus, *Germ.* 1.1, 4–5, 17.1–2, 26, 46.1–2).

did Dexippus, and Roman writers more generally, reconcile contemporary information about people they called Scythians or Sarmatians with older, established stereotypes, and where did new information, such as Dexippus' battle array, come from?

<p style="text-align:center">Ethnographic Investigations: A Parallel Tradition</p>

Jumping back a couple of centuries, we begin with Ovid's rough contemporary, Strabo of Amaseia. As part of his monumental survey of the known world, he described the geography and peoples of the Danubian Borderland, so consideration of his ethnographic writings will start us on our attempt to decipher the enigma of Dexippus' abnormal Scythians. While the traditional Scythian topoi were passing through the generations relatively unchanged, a parallel ethnographic tradition also existed which sought to describe Rome's barbarian neighbors based on up-to-date knowledge instead of ancient topoi. When these two parallel literary traditions occasionally converged, the corpus of Scythian topoi could expand and evolve, but operating as it did on an agglutinative principle, old stereotypes were rarely fully abandoned, even as new ones were being absorbed into the cultural canon.

Strabo, an Anatolian Pontic noble with scholarly training in historiography and Homeric textual criticism, produced a seventeen-volume geographic treatise in Greek around the year 25 CE. This *Geography* was based on a half century of personal observation and scholarly enquiry across many regions of the Mediterranean world.[84] While Strabo admits that his knowledge of the regions north and east of the Black Sea is only secondhand and sometimes too reliant on mythic or otherwise-unverifiable sources,[85] he offers a great deal of detailed information about the peoples dwelling immediately north and south of the Danube and may well have personally visited the borderland.[86] 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.

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84. Roller 2015, 167–70.

85. Strabo, 11.6.2–4.

86. 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 traveled over much more of the distances just mentioned than I" (2.5.11).

Some fifty years after Strabo, the sophist Dio Chrysostom attempted—or at least claimed to have attempted—a similar expedition to gather firsthand information for an ethnography of the Getae:

> I happened to be on vacation in Borysthenes [i.e., Olbia on the northwestern coast of the Black Sea] one summer, since I'd sailed there after my exile, intending to travel onward, if possible, through the lands of the Scythians [west] into those of the Getae with the plan of observing local conditions there.[87]

Strabo relied heavily on fieldwork and analysis of existing works, most notably Homer,[88] but he also 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 reason than to ensure a column's grain supply.[89] In so doing, the army acquired information about the peoples in, and immediately beyond, their spheres of operation.[90] 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 knowledge of the Danubian Borderland also shows a sophistication reflective of recent military intelligence.[91]

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87. *Or.* 36.1: Ἐτύγχανον μὲν ἐπιδημῶν ἐν Βορυσθένει τὸ θέρος, ὁπότε εἰσέπλευσα μετὰ τὴν φυγήν, βουλόμενος ἐλθεῖν, ἐὰν δύνωμαι, διὰ Σκυθῶν εἰς Γέτας, ὅπως θεάσωμαι τἀκεῖ πράγματα ὁποῖά ἐστι. 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.

88. 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).

89. Hence the title *frumentarii* for such scouts/spies. For analysis, see Sinnigen 1961 and Mann 1988; for their late antique successors, the *protectores domestici*, see Jones 1964, 636–40.

90. Lee 1993; Austin and Rankov 1995.

91. For the new information brought back by Gallus, see Strabo 2.5.12. In inferring a military source for some of Strabo's Danubian material, we might point to his discussions

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.[92] 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 military intelligence could further filter into otherwise-traditional treatments of barbarian peoples. Here, amid the standard collection of ethnographic and epic topoi employed in his catalogue of Scythian enemies (*Argonautica*, Book 6), the poet provides some unexpected contemporary details on Sarmatian arms and tactics.[93] Most of the groups included in the Scythian catalogue first appear in Herodotus and are described using standard topoi 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:

> But look, a fierce troop of Sarmatian youths appeared with savage shouts. Their armor is rigid with pliant chain-mail, and so also is the barding of their mounts; and extending out over the head and shoulders of [each] horse, the fir-wood spear-shaft—resting steady on riders' knees—casts a long shadow upon the enemy field and [in

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of local-level community 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 edge of the empire.

92. The inscription is *CIL* 14.3608 (*ILS* 986). For analysis see Conole and Milns 1983 and Sarnowski 2006.

93. *Arg.* 6.162, 231–38.

battle] pierces its way with all the power of both man and steed, [and is, after the blow] easily regathered and placed again at rest, and once again ready to just as swiftly transfix the enemy.[94]

On this passage, Ronald Syme's venerable point was well made: Valerius Flaccus' lancers reflect the real Sarmatians Rome was then dealing with in the plains beyond the Danube.[95] The poet presumably included this modern information in order to connect his mythic narrative to a topic of contemporary interest. With Roman legates repulsing Roxolani Sarmatians in 69–70 CE,[96] and Domitian facing down their Iazygian cousins during his Dacian campaigns of 85–86 and 92,[97] Sarmatians would have been on people's minds at Rome, wherever we may date the *Argonautica*. Juxtaposing these 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.

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 ethnographic knowledge about these people increased to unprecedented levels following the establishment of the Danube *limes*. Returning to Dexippus, it is now possible to interpret his unusual descriptions of Scythian battle tactics in the *Scythica*. These scenes do not resemble the war-making of the Herodotean Scythians, but generally do match what we know about early Gothic/Germanic warfare because they are based on knowledge Dexippus gleaned, presumably, from interviews with participants in the events he describes, and perhaps his own personal experiences. For most of Dexippus' readers, however, all this "accurate" information would have been subsumed by the Scythian label the author chose to employ. Once that label was applied—and because of the prevailing world view, Dexippus had virtually no choice but to apply

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94. *Arg.* 6.231–38: *cum saevior ecce iuventus (231) / Sarmaticae coire manus fremitusque virorum / semiferi; riget his molli lorica catena; / id quoque tegmen equis; at equi porrecta per armos / et caput ingentem campis hostilibus umbram (235) / fert abies obnixa genu vaditque virum vi, / vadit equum, docilis relegi docilisque reponi / atque iterum medios non tardior ire per hostes.*

95. For the original analysis of Valerius Flaccus' Sarmatians, see Syme 1929.

96. Tacitus, *Hist.* 1.79.

97. Dio 67.7–8, 67.12.5. On the complicated dating of Domitian's Danubian campaigns, see Kovács 2014, 75–84.

it—the new information would have been crushed under the weight of the conjured topoi 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.

V. Situating the Scythians in the Danubian Borderland

The ability of the third-century Scythians to besiege and sometimes capture cities was highly unusual. 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 Persians, but Roman cities were very rarely sacked by barbarians. The obvious question, then, is what had changed. How did the third-century Scythian chaos come to happen? One line of investigation would be to consider the political instability then shaking the Roman world, attempting thereby to understand Rome's failed military response to the incursions.[98] Another well-trodden approach would be to investigate the invaders. Who were these Scythians, known elsewhere as Goths?[99] 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, elements of the Scythian Logos appearing in Roman and Greek texts attest to an emerging ideological frontier. The world view expressed so eloquently in Ovid's exilic poetry pictured the Danube as the firm edge of both the Roman empire and the *oikoumene*: the world of farmers, cities, and laws. Beyond existed only arctic cold and horrible Scythian nomads.[100] Then something unexpected hap-

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98. E.g., Kovács 2014; Watson 1999.

99. E.g., Thompson 1966; Wolfram 1988; Heather 1991; Heather and Matthews 1991; Kulikowski 2007.

100. The elder Pliny (4.80–81) presents the clearest example of the pre-Trajanic geographic orthodoxy where the Danube stood as the border between Scythia and the *oikoumene* (more on that below), but see also Quintus Curtius Rufus 7.7.3; and Josephus, *BJ* 7.4.3.

pened: Trajan invaded, defeated, and then—most surprising of all—annexed the Dacian kingdom. Almost without warning, Rome found itself directly administering territory beyond the Danube. With the whole Herodotean-Ovidian world view thrown into chaos, 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, a 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, effectively reversing Herodotus' original conclusion regarding the unbeatable secret of Scythian nomadism. 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 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 topos only actually applicable to certain segments of the transdanubian population, but too often applied indiscriminately by later writers. An analysis of how Scythian stereotypes changed within the borderland, then, can help shed light on how Roman authorities came to so profoundly underestimate the transdanubian barbarians who raided into Moesia, Thrace, and Asia Minor in the mid-third century.

Strabo's Hellenistic Danube

Stepping back more than two centuries to the early first century CE, we return to the *Geography* of Strabo of Amaseia. Writing in the early decades of the first century CE, 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 Ovid emphasized the Scythian character of the Danubian Borderland's population, Strabo's ethnographic survey focused on the Getic nature of this population, thereby 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 Danube on its southern side and on the opposite along the mountainside of the Hercynian forest (for the land of the Getae also embraces a part of the mountains), afterward broadens out toward the north as far as the Tyregetae; but I cannot tell the precise boundaries.[101]

Scythians and Sarmatians are present in this landscape as peripheral figures, either dwelling in the north beyond the Black Sea, or representing transient migratory communities, which, although disruptive, could not fundamentally upset the Carpathian Basin's Getic cultural character.[102]

Strabo repeats the general Greek consensus regarding the Getae and Dacians, namely that they were types of Thracians since they were thought to speak dialects of that language.[103] Strabo also equates the Getae with the Mysians/Moesians, and describes both groups, in earlier times at least, as dwelling on both sides of the Danube.[104] Confusion between Getae, Dacians, Moesians, and Thracians apparently still reigned during Strabo's own day when "the migrations [the Getae] make to either side of the Ister

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101. Strabo 7.3.1: εἶτ᾽ εὐθὺς ἡ τῶν Γετῶν συνάπτει γῆ, κατ᾽ ἀρχὰς μὲν στενή, παρατεταμένη τῷ Ἴστρῳ κατὰ τὸ νότιον μέρος, κατὰ δὲ τοὐναντίον τῇ παρωρείᾳ τοῦ Ἐρκυνίου δρυμοῦ, μέρος τι τῶν ὀρῶν καὶ αὐτὴ κατέχουσα, εἶτα πλατύνεται πρὸς τὰς ἄρκτους μέχρι Τυρεγετῶν· τοὺς δὲ ἀκριβεῖς ὅρους οὐκ ἔχομεν φράζειν. This description seems to encompass the entire Carpathian Basin as well as the Wallachian Plain and Moldavia. The narrow beginnings of "Getia" 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 Darius the son of 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).

102. 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 farther east he goes, forcing him to rely on old stories and myths (11.62–64). This is a remarkable admission for an ancient author!

103. Strabo 7.3.2; 7.3.11.

104. Strabo 7.3.2.

are continuous, such that they are intermingled with the Thracians and Moesians."[105] This is an extremely important observation. Some time after Herodotus, for whom we know the Danube was seen as the outer boundary of the rational world, the river came to be seen, by some at least, 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 something more rooted in the actual landscape.[106] Strabo's Danubian ethnography does not truly 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' topoi 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 pre-Roman cultural divisions in the Danubian world.

The Birth of the Danubian Limes

Although recent Roman military activities along the Danube contributed to the detailed picture of the borderland Strabo was able to describe in his *Geography*, ironically, 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 the full imposition of Roman authority. By Nero's reign, the Danube line had been drawn, as testified by the Plautius Silvanus inscription's record of new client leaders journeying south to the river in order to swear loyalty to the Roman standards.[107] While Silvanus used the ethnically neutral *transdanuvius* to collectively describe the Sarmatians, Bastarnae, Roxolani, Dacians, and Scythians he lists elsewhere as dwelling beyond the river, the idea of the Danube as a particularly ethnic divider had become more entrenched by the time

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105. Strabo 7.3.13.

106. As described in chapter 1, 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.

107. *CIL* 14.3608.16–18: *ignotos ante aut infensos p(opulo) R(omano) reges signa / Romana adoraturos in ripam quam tuebatur perduxit*. For similar, roughly contemporaneous use of the Danube as a marker between peoples, see Quintus Curtius Rufus 7.7.3.

Pliny wrote his *Historia Naturalis* a decade or so later, during the reign of Vespasian. Beginning south of the Danube, Pliny's ethnographic roll-call of the peoples living in the Bulgarian Plain provides a detailed list of peoples which captures the same type of ethnic complexities seen in Strabo's earlier account:

> [The opposite side of the Haemus Mountains] sloping north toward the Danube is inhabited by the Moesians, 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.[108]

These various inhabitants of the province of Moesia, including, presumably, some of Silvanus' resettled *transdanuvii*, 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 specific larger category of barbarian since their provincial identity now mattered more. In less than two hundred years, this region would be producing Roman emperors.

Many different peoples 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 peoples in general are Scythian."[109] Gone is Strabo's Getia; Ovid's expanded Scythia has come to stay. Here, near the end of the first century CE, the transdanubian peoples are *gentes Scytharum*. The use of a partative genitive rather than the adjective *Scythicus* strengthens Pliny's claim of identity.[110] Ovid's language led to the

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108. 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.

109. 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 groups culminating in the north with Alani and Roxolani.

110. 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.

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*. Whatever the specific community affiliation, for Pliny, a Scythian identity lay above all in Transdanubia.

Pliny repeats and refines his claim about the Scythian nature of the transdanubian peoples a few sections later:

> The collective name of the Scythians has everywhere changed into "Sarmatians" and "Germans," nor has the archaic designation endured for any but the most distant of these peoples, living almost unknown to the rest of humankind.[111]

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 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.[112] Pliny is not disputing the accuracy of such "modern" information. We should not read this passage as a claim that recent relabeling 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 farthest regions,

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111. Pliny 4.12.81: *Scytharum nomen usquequaque transiit in Sarmatas atque Germanos; nec aliis prisca 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 this is a mistranslation of *transeo in* which ought to mean "changed to" or "redefined as," rather than "spread as far as." For similar uses of *transeo in* in Pliny, see *HN* 13.11, 14.30, 14.83, 17.242, 18.85, 19.61, 21.15, 22.112, 23.54, 25.103, 29.13, 29.139, 31.95.

112. 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 ethnonyms. 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 Bastarnae (see above).

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.

The Dacian Exception

Pliny's simultaneous abandonment of large-scale ethnic labeling of the cisdanubian peoples and imposition of a totalizing Scythian identity on the transdanubians reflects a reality of Roman political thought. The *Res Publica* ruled over peoples and cities (*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.[113] 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 homogeneous region:

> 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?[114]

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

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113. Isaac 1990, 394–99.

114. Seneca, *Q Nat.* Prl.7.9–10: *O quam ridiculi sunt mortalium termini! Ultra Istrum Dacos <nostrum> <arc>eat imperium, Haemo Thraces includat; Parthis obstet Euphrates; Danuuius Sarmatica ac Romana disterminet; Rhenus Germaniae modum faciat; Pyrenaeus medium inter Gallias et Hispanias iugum extollat; inter Aegyptum et Aethiopas harenarum inculta uastitas iaceat. Si quis formicis det intellectum hominis, nonne et illae unam aream in multas prouincias diuident?* Later, Seneca explains that the Rhine and Danube separate pacified and hostile peoples: *[amnes sunt], qui medius inter pacata et hostilia fluit, Danuuius et Rhenus* (*Q Nat.* 6.7.1). Note the use of both Ister and Danuuius to refer to different stretches of the Danube. The former refers to the Middle Danube, above the Iron Gates, while the latter indicates the river's lower division, below the gates.

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 that 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,[115] but regardless, what is important here, is simply that he did annex territory beyond the river. After that, the old Scythian formula no longer fit, and so in our post-Trajanic sources, we find new elements of the Logos highlighted in order to make sense of, and perhaps 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 ethnonym *Dacus* over *Geta*.[116] We might speculate that Tacitus' language choices are a product of his Trajanic dates, reflecting common usage following the wars and annexation.[117] With Dacia defeated

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115. 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 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 (Suetonius, *Dom.* 6; Tacitus, *Agr.* 41.2; Dio 67.6–10, 12; Mart. 5.3, 7.2, 7.6, 7.7, 9.35, 9.101) 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, 84–88, and, for the reactive model, Griffin 2008, 111–13.

116. He refers to Daci a mere seven times in his entire corpus, and Dacia only twice. Tacitus never uses the term Getae.

117. 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 semicivilized 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).

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 topoi, such as those employed by Martial during Domitian's Dacian campaigns. Now, however, with Dacia officially part of the empire of the Roman people, characterization using nomadic topoi 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 full 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 settled barbarian people.[118]

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 their first great king, Burebista (c. 30 BCE). The succeeding chapter explains that the Sarmatians were also defeated during the same period.[119] The text includes a few important details. Whereas the Dacians "stick close to the mountains," the Sarmatians "range their horses over the widespread plains," in a land where "they possess nothing except snow, ice, and forests."[120] 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."[121] There is much to infer from this seemingly superficial discussion. 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

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118. Griffin 2008, 109. While no emperor ever assumed the title *Scythicus*, *Sarmaticus* would eventually become a common imperial victory title. The invention of the *Sarmaticus* title, however, only occurred during the specific circumstances of the Marcomannic Wars, which began more than a half century after Trajan's Dacian campaigns. We will discuss this topic in more depth below.

119. 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).

120. *Florus* 28: *Daci montibus inhaerent*; 29: *Sarmatae patentibus campis inequitant. [. . .] Nihil praeter nives privinasque et silvas habent.*

121. *Florus* 29: *Tanta barbaria est, ut nec intellegant pacem.*

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 topos of arctic climate. The groups are also separated by mode of life. Only the Sarmatians *inequitant* (go about on horseback), a verb surely intended to invoke the full gamut of Scythian nomadic topoi, when used here in conjunction with *campus* (plain, or steppe). 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 topoi to the Dacians. The age-old Scythian Logos was as present in the *zeitgeist* of Trajanic Rome as in previous periods, but now, the label could not be as easily applied to the new provincials of Dacia, as it could to client barbarians like the Sarmatians, even when looking back to periods before Trajan's conquests.

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.[122] 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.[123] 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 structure of the kingdom is also explicitly shown; these are not mere savages. 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—also frequently 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.[124] The legions are shown in the best light possible as bringers of civilization to a land inhabited by a barbarian people worthy

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122. Wolfram Thill 2011, 284–85, 308–9. On the question of whether the column was commissioned by Trajan or Hadrian, see Claridge 1993 and Claridge 2007.

123. 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.

124. Wolfram Thill 2011; Dillon 2006.

of incorporation because of their bravery and organization.[125] Given these 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, on the column it falls to the Sarmatians to fill the entire niche, where they show up as allies of Decebalus. Graphically, these Sarmatians are clearly set off from the Dacians by their unique armor, and the fact that they only appear in battle scenes, where one usually finds them fleeing, pell-mell, from Roman pursuers.[126]

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 Danube frontier. The main fragment is invaluable for its insight into contemporary attitudes toward 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], 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.[127]

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125. 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.

126. Sarmatians appear unambiguously in only two panels, nos. 31 and 37. Istvánovits and Kulcsár identify foot-archers fighting on the Roman side (panels 70, 80, 81, and 83) as allied Sarmatian Iazyges (2017, 220–23), but I see no reason to reject the more traditional reading of these figures as eastern archer auxiliaries (e.g., Richmond 1935, 16).

127. *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.*

Although Fronto has omitted the name of the people he is describing, an earlier passage together with the details he provides here make interpretation easy. Fronto notes that "the dominion of the Roman people was extended beyond the hostile rivers by the emperor Trajan."[128] This statement sets up a dichotomy between the two theaters in which Trajan campaigned—beyond the Danube and the Euphrates—making the later passage an elaboration on that dichotomy. In Fronto's day, of the two hostile regions of Trajan, only Parthia remained a threat. The unnamed land of nomads, then, must be the transdanubian plains. Returning to the main passage, of particular importance 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 stands 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 topos would prove popular over the next century.

VI. The Marcomannic Wars: Plague, War, and Terror

Fronto's assessment of the Danubian Borderland was called into question in 166 CE, when after decades of relative tranquility following Trajan's conquests, war returned to the region. In that year, a single raid into Pannonia sparked a border crisis that quickly escalated into a series of protracted conflicts between Rome and a coalition of transdanubian peoples led by the Marcomanni, Quadi, and Sarmatian Iazyges. These Marcomannic Wars, which dominated the remainder of emperor Marcus Aurelius' reign, 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.[129] Such

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128. *Princ. Hist.* 4: *Imperium populi Romani a Traiano imperatore trans flumina hostilia porrectum.*

129. E.g., Mommsen 1906, 248–56 (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 the same peoples that had been involved in the Marcomannic Wars); Mócsy 1974, 185 (who accepts the notion that the ultimate cause of the Marcomannic Wars was pressure on the frontier caused by Gothic migrations farther east); Garzetti

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 accept the tone of desperate defense present in many late imperial sources.[130] The war was, indeed, a lengthy, bloody affair, but it was far from an existential struggle. Indeed, after the first round of attacks were repulsed, we cannot even characterize the continued conflict as a war of defensive necessity. Rather, with an incurable pandemic ravaging the known world, Marcus Aurelius found political refuge in prolonging what began as a fairly typical border war.[131] Crucially for our purposes, this period of frontier strife also solidified a curious ethnographic notion, which we have already introduced as the topos 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.

In the century and a half prior to the outbreak of war, the Marcomanni and Quadi—Germanic peoples dwelling beyond the Danube in what is now Slovakia—had developed close relationships with Rome based on economic exchange and political support for friendly local leaders. This client relationship has long been known archaeologically, both through the presence of Roman imported goods in Marcomannic and Quadic graves and in a handful of Roman-style buildings located inside or near their settlements, which have usually been interpreted as trading outposts or Roman-built elite dwellings.[132] The wartime treaties preserved in Cassius Dio make clear that the primary goal of the war was to reestablish the hegemonic control over the transdanubian peoples that had produced the archaeological remains known from before the conflict. Further territorial expansion was not a priority, despite ancient statements to the contrary.[133] The transdanu-

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1974, 506 and Birley 1987, 253–55 (who cast the war as the first stage of the "barbarian invasions").

130. Drinkwater 2007, 28–32; Kovács 2014, 113–74.

131. 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.

132. Böhme 1975, 182–97.

133. Beginning as early as Dio and Herodian, historians have argued that Marcus intended the wars 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

bians sought peace and alliance almost as soon as hostilities began,[134] and so we must ask why the Marcomannic Wars 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.[135]

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180 CE (Dio 72.33.4.2 [Xiph. 267]; Hdn. 1.5.6; *SHA, Marc.* 24.5). There has been, and continues to be, fierce debate as to whether we should take these claims seriously. For a sympathetic reading of the evidence, see Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2017, 267–73; for a critical analysis, see Böhme 1975, 196 and Kovács 2014, 115–18, 154–60. While we will probably never be able to definitively answer the question of Marcus' original war goals, I am strongly inclined toward Böhme and Kovács' position against a policy of further annexation beyond the Danube. In addition to Kovács' arguments—in short, that the textual evidence is hopelessly compromised, that the archaeological evidence of Roman military installations beyond the Danube is ambiguous as to motive, and that the creation of new provinces would have required a continuing break from the Augustan precept of stable *limites*—we might add that the creation of a Marcomannia and Sarmatia beyond the river would indicate the ideological collapse of the barbarian topoi and stereotypes that characterized the Danube as the empire's north-central boundary. Such an ideological collapse certainly did not occur; Dacia was an outlier, not a model to be emulated.

134. 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 peoples 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, 119–21). 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, 121; Strobel 2001, 109; Dobesch 1994, 93–94; Zwikker 1941, 87). Despite the initial truce brokered by Ballomarius, Marcus soon launched a punitive expedition (Kovács 2014, 128–29) which can be considered the first act in the war proper.

135. 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 advisers 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 on Marcus' death, 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).

The importance of plague for understanding this period should not be underestimated. Disease followed Lucius Verus back from that Parthian campaign Florus had so eagerly advocated, and while calculating its demographic and economic impacts is notoriously difficult, this so-called Antonine Plague seems to have been unusually severe and persistent, lasting until at least 182.[136] 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 *Historia Augusta*'s biography of Marcus, where the author describes thousands of plague dead at Rome being removed by the cartload and burned at public expense.[137]

> There was such terror of this Marcomannic War that Marcus Aurelius 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 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

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136. 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 topos in Greco-Roman literature with roots stretching back to Thucydides (Duncan-Jones 1996, 111–14), 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 (124–25), new building inscriptions vanish at Rome, and decrease in other parts of Italy, only to pick back up afterward (125–28), dateable stamped bricks decrease noticeably at Rome (129–30), and the documented taxable population at several Egyptian villages suffer declines of between 70 and 93 percent (120–21). This data is scattered and individually inconclusive, but together seems to paint a 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).

137. 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, 25–26, for a defense).

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.[138]

That Marcus felt compelled to reintroduce archaic rituals like the Feast of the Gods (*Lectisternia*), hints at imperial desperation to exert some shred of influence over an exceptional, destabilizing force beyond human control. Indeed, much of Lucian's contemporaneous *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, reaching the walls of Aquileia and sacking the town of Opitergium along the way, while Sarmatians and Costoboci plundered the Sanctuary of Demeter at Eleusis.[139] For the first time since the Cimbri breached the Alps in 101 BCE, barbarians dared to touch the empire's heartlands in both east and west, ravaging the countryside and—in the west, at least—defeating Roman defenders along the way.[140] Together with the ongoing plague, these raids were a direct chal-

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138. *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 profectione 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.*

139. In Italy, Dio 72.3.2; Lucian, *Alex.* 41; A.M. 29.6.1. For the hopelessly confused dating, see Kovács 2014, 121–29. 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).

140. 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

lenge to the emperor's ability to steer the ship of state through 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 secondhand witnesses.[141] Even though on an empire-wide scale, 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, while the long memory of Eleusis' violation among Greek authors suggests similar collective trauma there.

The passage from the *Vita Marci* discussed above includes a second impetus for Marcus' rituals beyond the ravages of plague: terror of the Marcomanni among the population of Rome. As we have seen, "so great was the dread of this Marcomannic War, that Marcus Aurelius summoned priests from all sides, performed foreign religious ceremonies, and purified the city in every way."[142] Assigning a fixed date for the events described in *Marc*. 13.1 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 specific moment.[143] Rome itself was never threatened by the Marcomanni, but fear of barbarians, and

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did occur as the raiders passed through Pannonia on their way toward Italy (Kovács 2014, 129). Rome shrugged off the loss with little apparent difficulty. This is the demographic reality of Roman frontier warfare. The empire could endure defeats that would have forced barbarian antagonists to sue for peace.

141. Much has been written along these lines on the impact of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the collective American psyche (e.g., Debrix 2005, Altheide 2006, Gardner 2008, Skrimshire 2008). The common 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" nearly two decades later.

142. *SHA, Marc*. 13.1. As noted above, part of the impetus for these unusual rituals was the ongoing plague. Marcus' actions, however, must have also been designed to counteract the fear and anxiety felt at Rome following the attack in northern Italy.

143. 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.

particularly Germans, was always latent among the populace.[144] 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 tenuous shield, together with their terrifying Scythian allies, would have provided an obvious outlet for the people's fear. Afterward, 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 supposedly 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. In such an atmosphere, 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, as Trajan had done with his Dacian enemies. Instead, Marcus' foes became the plague incarnate: a subhuman blight for which the only cure was supposed to be death or enslavement. It is this politics of nightmare that lies behind Dio's famous charge that Marcus yearned to utterly eradicate the Iazyges:

> The Iazyges sent envoys to Marcus to request peace, but they did not obtain anything. For Marcus wished to destroy them completely, both because he knew them to be an untrustworthy people and also because he had been deceived by the Quadi.[145]

The circumstances of the Marcomannic Wars also for the first time made it politically useful for an emperor to assume the victory honorific *Sarmaticus*. In previous generations, successes against various Scythian peoples had either failed to warrant an honorific, or else—in the case of Trajan—an alternative ethnic term was employed in order to separate the defeated

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144. E.g., 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.

145. Dio 72.13: Ὅτι ἐπρεσβεύσαντο οἱ Ἰάζυγες εἰρήνης δεόμενοι πρὸς Μᾶρκον, οὐ μέντοι καὶ ἔτυχόν τινος· ἄπιστόν τε γὰρ τὸ φῦλον αὐτῶν ὁ Μᾶρκος εἰδὼς ὄν, καὶ προσέτι καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν Κουάδων ἀπατηθείς, ἐπίπαν ἐξελεῖν ἠθέλησεν.

enemy (in this case the Dacians) from their association with wretched Scythia. During the Marcomannic Wars, however, the demonization of the transdanubian enemies had effectively raised the status of the Sarmatians to the point that Marcus found it politic to add them to his official titulature, on both inscriptions and coins.[146] Once the precedent had been set, the ease with which the Sarmatians of the Hungarian Plain could be conquered by future emperors assured that *Sarmaticus* would go on to become one of the most commonly claimed victory titles.[147]

The portrayal of Sarmatians in Lucian's *Toxaris*, which dates to the period of the Marcomannic Wars or their immediate aftermath, further captures the anxieties of the age. Here, the narrator tells the story of Dandamis and Amizoces, two Scythian friends who end up in a nasty war with neighboring Sarmatians. First, the enemy invades across the Tanais River, whereupon:

> They immediately began to round up the cattle, secure the prisoners, loot the tents, and make off with the wagons, taking most of them with all their occupants inside and violating our concubines and wives before our very eyes.[148]

Nearly every treaty struck between Rome and the belligerent peoples 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 borderland 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. Jumping

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146. Victory over the Sarmatians, though they were a type of Scythian, was still seen as somewhat lesser. We see this signaled by the secondary position of *Sarmaticus* within the full titulature 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 (e.g., *RIC* 3.337, 340, 342, 362, 365), and the trend is followed by all later emperors.

147. *Sarmaticus* is the third most commonly assumed victory title throughout Roman history (12 different emperors took it) after only *Germanicus* (29 emperors) and *Parthicus/Persicus* (20 emperors) (*ILS* 3.1, 272–312).

148. *Tox.* 39: εὐθὺς οὖν ἥ τε λεία περιηλαύνετο καὶ τὰ αἰχμάλωτα συνείχετο καὶ τὰς σκηνὰς διήρπαζον καὶ τὰς ἁμάξας κατελαμβάνοντο, αὐτάνδρους τὰς πλείστας ἁλισκομένας, καὶ ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν ὑβρίζοντες τὰς παλλακίδας καὶ τὰς γυναῖκας.

Fig. 2.1. Scene of chaotic battle (Petersen et al. 117B)

Fig. 2.2. Burning and enslavement of a barbarian village (Petersen et al. 110B)

Fig. 2.3. Enslavement of prisoners (Petersen et al. 106B)

into action, Dandamis swims the Tanais and approaches the Sarmatians to pay his friend's ransom. In the story, 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 solidarity.[149]

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 war on the frontier, which he uses to give his Scythian tales greater power and relevance to his 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' topoi 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,

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149. *Tox.* 40–41.

Fig. 2.4. Prisoners forced to execute one another (Petersen et al. 70A)

violent, savage force from beyond civilization was just waiting to fall upon the unwary or unfortunate. The rhetorical innovation of the weak Sarmatian would not achieve prominence until after the end of the Marcomannic conflict.

Marcus' monumental column offers a final, powerful 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, also building forts and structures within the conquered territory, thereby giving birth to a new Daco-Roman provincial society.[150] 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.[151]

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150. Wolfram Thill 2011.
151. For examples of the violent imagery on Marcus' Column, see figs. 2.2–2.6 at the

Fig. 2.5. Politics of terror: women and children forced to watch the execution of their menfolk (Petersen et al. 77A–B)

Fig. 2.6. Marcus' Danubian policies on display: assault, sack, execution, and enslavement (Petersen et al. 27B–29)

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 appealed to popular opinion and claimed to want the Iazyges dead and gone, but his actions reveal a different, more traditional 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 subhuman enemies: barbarians to be feared but unworthy of any respect. This dehumanization would play out in Commodus' postwar characterization of the Iazyges of the Hungarian Plain.

Nothing but Bandits over the Danube

When Commodus assumed the purple in 180 CE, he opted 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 his policy change amounted to more than simply turning around and going home. Before packing it in, 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.[152] After many years of warfare characterized by dehumanization of the barbarian enemy, however, Commodus had to justify his decision to make peace without utterly eradicating his foes. The emperor's explanation appears in the form of a series of official inscriptions from military sites along the Middle Danube *limes*, 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)

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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 his erstwhile transdanubian enemies.

152. Mócsy 1974, 196–204; Kovács 2014, ch. 4.

VI imp(erator) IIII co(n)sul IIII p(ater) p(atriae) ripam omnem
    burgis
a solo extructis 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)]].

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 suit-
able for the furtive crossings of bandits; executed by [Lucius Corne-
lius Felix Plotianus, pro-praetorian legate].[153]

From this context, it is clear that the *latrunculi* are the Sarmatian Iazyges
and other peoples dwelling beyond the river in the central Hungarian Plain,
over whom the emperor had just claimed victory.[154] 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 indicated a return to the Trajanic world view 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 popular ideas about outlaws in medieval and early modern
Europe, it seems clear that most Romans despised and feared those they
labeled as *latrones*.[155] With these public inscriptions, therefore, Commodus
skillfully manipulated an already fearful provincial populace. As word of
Commodus' treaties spread, the citizens of Pannonia would, perhaps, have
first breathed a sigh of relief, but then wondered why the emperor was going

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153. A number of identical inscriptions are known: *CIL* 3.3385; *RIU* 1127–37, 1426; Tit.
Aq. 935; AntTan 47 (2003): 291–99.

154. Alföldi 1941, 30–37; Kovács 2014, 161–62. Shaw (1984, 12) is wrong when he inter-
prets these inscriptions as referring primarily to common, internal banditry.

155. For the "social bandit," see Hobsbawm 1969, and 1974, ch.4. For Roman fear and
loathing of bandits, see Shaw 1984, 18–24.

soft on the enemy which had plagued them for over a decade.[156] With the rhetoric of these inscriptions, Commodus first restoked smoldering fears of barbarian violence, such as those expressed in Lucian's *Toxaris*, 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.

VII. Conclusions

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 ecoregion which, although representing a borderland 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 Rome's political control, yet because the river did not follow any sort of ecological or cultural division, it required some sort of new logic to support and justify its existence.

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

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156. Coin hoards represent one indicator of the damage wrought on the civilian populace by transdanubian raiders during the Marcomannic Wars. The number of hoards found in Pannonia and Upper Moesia datable to the period of the wars is significantly higher than the numbers known from both the preceding and succeeding periods of relative peace (Gazdac 2012, 169–72). The usual way to read this evidence is as an indicator of the region's general level of security, since in times of peace people either do not bury their wealth, or are able to later return to retrieve it. Abandoned hoards, therefore, represent casualties of war or lawlessness.

by Herodotus, but still very much alive and kicking in popular imagination across the Mediterranean world when Ovid chose to employ its topoi 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 a Scythian world extending far north beyond the Black Sea, it proved suitable to explain Rome's newly established borderland, despite the Danube's lesser importance as a cultural divider for the people actually living in its drainage basin. We see in Ovid's exilic poetry one Roman's early, eager adoption of Scythian topoi to describe not the world of the Pontic Steppe—as Herodotus had primarily done—but instead the lands immediately beyond the Danube. This modification of the original topos—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 just over the river as Scythians, and their lands as the sort of brutal arctic wastes Greek writers had once pictured lying at the outer edges of their knowledge horizon.

While the Roman take on traditional Greek Scythian topoi 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 topos—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 in Anatolia. The remarkable success of these marauders was greatly facilitated by Rome's popular misconceptions about Scythians. Both strains of Roman thinking about transdanubian peoples—the enduring Herodotean Scythian topoi, 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 borderland communities 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 topoi 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.

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)[1]

I. Introduction: Ammianus Marcellinus and the Attack on the Sarmatian Village

In 359 CE, the banks of the Middle Danube River bore witness to an unprecedented event. Somebody threw a shoe at Roman emperor Constantius II.

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1. *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, quidam 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.*

According to Ammianus Marcellinus, who recorded the incident in book 19 of his histories, the shoe and accompanying war cries prompted gathered Sarmatian warriors 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.[2] As Constantius mounted a horse and fled to safety, his soldiers got to work butchering the Sarmatian rebels who, fighting on foot with no 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.[3] 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.[4] The Sarmatian petitioners of 359 were the last holdouts and their previous requests for a treaty can, perhaps, 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,[5]

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2. A.M. 19.11.7–17.

3. A.M. 17.13.5–11. The similar events of the years 358 and 359 in Ammianus suggest 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 eyewitness to the Danubian affairs he describes in Books 17 and 19. Kovács argues persuasively against such a reading, however, noting a significant number of 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 that shoe 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, 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, 115–19). 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!

4. A.M. 17.13.1–20.

5. The incident in question is the 2008 assault on US 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 superficial similarities between the

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 topoi 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 topoi, 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 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 the previous chapter, 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 topoi we have labeled as the Roman Scythian Logos, namely the weak Scythian topos 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 that 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 preexisting 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.

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ancient and modern incidents, the motivations and underlying ideologies cannot be directly compared (Meyers and Rubin 2008).

Returning to Ammianus, the first item to note is that the Sarmatian war-riors 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.[6] The larger context of these two battles is the revolt of the Limigantes, who, according to Ammianus, were a sort of Sarmatian underclass. These Limigantes, it seems, had expelled their Roman-supported aristocracy over twenty years earlier, destabilizing the usually predictable client system of the Hungarian Plain, and leading ulti-mately to conflict with Rome.[7] 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' offi-cial 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.[8] For these reasons, we can put some faith in the details of the historian's description of the Limigantes war, particularly in terms of military actions and where he describes the sort of topographi-cal and ethnographic information regularly reported to commanders in the course of routine military reconnaissance.

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 their specific homeland. Following raiding activity across the Danube into Pannonia—always a good way 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 acknowledgment of their total subservience to Rome, but they absolutely

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6. cf. A.M. 17.13.9; 19.11.11–15.

7. A.M. 18.13.1; *Orig. Const.* 6.32.

8. Them., *Or.* 4.56d–57a. For analysis of the reliability of Ammianus' account of these campaigns, see Kovács 2016, 115–19. For a general assessment of his military sources, see Austin 1979, 19, 117–40. 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 reli-ance on his history for reconstructing military events, we must remember that we are still getting a picture shaped by Ammianus' personal hostility toward Constantius.

refused to relocate from their homes as Constantius had earlier requested.[9] 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.[10]

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 marshland and poplar/willow groves interspersed with scattered loess bluffs and islands where mixed grassland and oak/maple forests prevail.[11] Such a landscape would not support a traditional pastoral, nomadic economy, but it would be well suited for sedentary or semisedentary communities engaged in a mixture of agriculture and short-distance transhumance. Once again, Ammianus' descriptions ring true.

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9. The Limigantes offer terms: A.M. 17.13.3. *Verum aspectu primo exercitus tamquam fulminis ictu perculsi, ultimaque cogitantes, vitam precati, tributum annuum delectumque validae iuventutis et servitium spoponderunt, abnuere parati si iuberentur aliorsum 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 ultione porrecta, ut ad longinqua translati, amitterent copiam nostra vexandi.*

10. A.M. 17.13.4. *Has enim terras Parthiscus irruens obliquatis meatibus, Histro miscetur. Sed dum solus licentius fluit, spatia longa et lata sensim praelabens, et ea coartans prope exitum in angustias, accolas 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.*

11. Medzihradszky 1996, 447–49; *Handbook of the River Danube* 1915, 80–82; Knipl and Sümegi 2012.

We catch a glimpse of some aspects of these Sarmatians' 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 everyday 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 by fire, or else fleeing the flames and emerging to escape one impending torment, were slaughtered by the hostile 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.[12]

The point of Ammianus' description was not to paint an ethnographic picture of Sarmatian life, but in describing the carnage of the massacre he

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12. 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 obtruncabant, 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 hostili. (15) Fugientes tamen aliqui tela, incendiorumque magnitudinem, amnis vicini se commisere 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 vincentium ira virtusque delevit.*

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.[13] In Latin usage, *tuguria* are always primitive dwellings, but they have no attested association with nomads.[14] 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.[15] This is the skill of a river-person, not a nomad.

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 loessland 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 in the Danubian Borderland, and, crucially, the often-fraught relationship between these transdanubian people 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 topoi still prevalent in Ammianus' day bore little resemblance to actual life among the people of the Middle Danube Rome labeled as Sarmatians.

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 stereotypes. In order to test the nomadic heart of the Scythian Logos, we will exam-

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13. 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 Alani).

14. *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 (*Iug.* 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 (*Iug.* 18).

15. A.M. 17.13.15.

ine faunal remains and domestic architecture from Roman-era settlements in the Hungarian Plain. The picture that emerges can be further refined through an analysis of the region's burial culture, which itself can only be properly understood in dialog with the evidence for subsistence and food-ways. Finally, we will attempt to fit the pieces together in order to draw a hypothetical model of the social, political, and economic systems driving the society we see blurrily reflected in Ammianus' battlefield narrative.

II. Group Identity, Ethnicity, and the 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, from closer to the present, the malignant legacy of nineteenth- and twentieth-century ethnonationalism—particularly of the German variety—continues to be felt in contemporary and recent scholarship. As discussed in the previous chapter, ancient conceptions of foreign peoples relied heavily on theories of environmental determinism to posit a predictable, unchanging barbarian world beyond the limits of the civilized *oikoumene*. This framework must remain in mind when we place ancient texts in dialog with material evidence.

The influence of early nationalistic scholarship is even more dangerous than the lingering legacy of ancient environmental theory. Archaeology emerged as an academic field during the second half of the nineteenth century, at the same moment as the crystallization of national consciousness in Germany, Italy, and beyond, and the developing academic discipline was quickly put to use in service of evolving national narratives. The need to locate and describe an ancient lineage was most keenly felt in the young German Reich, which lacked either the famous antiquities of the Eternal City or the more secure medieval and 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*,[16] even more scholarly energy was directed toward providing the fledgling German 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 a 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 nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, led by Gustav Kossinna, advanced a three-part model for settlement archaeology (*Siedlungsarchäologie*).[17] First, archaeological cultures were identified based on patterns of material form, use, and geographic distribution. Next, when possible, these material complexes were paired with known historical groups, usually based on the convergence of textual and material location, although linguistics also frequently played a supporting role. Finally, Kossinna 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 Germani and Gothi of Tacitus and Jordanes, and the various ethnicities of imperial Germany.

No single element of Kossinna's approach is completely invalid, but all

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16. 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, 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 2015, passim).

17. 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 twentieth-century Germany, see Arnold (1990).

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.[18] 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 co-option by nationalists and others wishing to stake claims to specific territories or justify the mistreatment of other groups conveniently lacking a long, archaeological pedigree. The Kossinna model also relied on theories of how personal and group identities work which cannot be sustained in light of more recent scholarly work, an issue of particular importance for our own analysis.[19] Nonetheless, the *Siedlungsarchäologie* model was foundational to much twentieth-century Romanian and Hungarian scholarship, and its lingering effects can still be felt today. More often than not, 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 peoples.[20]

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 backward from collected artifacts in order to identify and analyze the people who deposited them in the same way scholars were eagerly collect-

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18. Arnold 1990.

19. Reinhard Wenskus (1961) offered the fundamental critique, arguing that the various Germanic-speaking peoples known from late antiquity and the early Middle Ages were not simply the latest manifestations of primordial ethnic communities (the Kossinna model), but instead were newer, polyethnic communities whose group identities coalesced around particular leaders or lineages, leading to the development of new ethnic groups over time. This ethnogenesis model proved very influential (e.g., Wolfram 1988; Heather 1991), but has, itself, been criticized by those who argue that the *gentes* of late antiquity organized themselves—at least initially—around various non-ethnic principles (e.g., Whittaker 1994; Amory 1997; Goffart 2006; Drinkwater 2007).

20. E.g., Párducz 1941, 1944, 1950; Harmatta 1950; but also Vaday 1989, 1991, 1999; Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2015, 2017.

ing and categorizing the earth's plants, animals, and minerals in order to understand the intricate clockwork of the natural world.[21] Although the rigid nineteenth-century conception of natural law has been sharply critiqued in its own right, 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. 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 held together with bronze fibulae,[22] 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 type of 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 our aristocracy*")? Perhaps the burial costume broadcast both messages, or something else altogether. Further, we must ask whether the costume reflected anything at all of the dead woman's own personal identity ("*In life, my status a Iazyx/elite/ etc., was important to me*") or whether we should 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/those around us*")?

Traditional models of settlement archaeology 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.[23] Not only does such an assumption indicate a poor

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21. Kohler 2007; Conn 1998, ch. 2.

22. See below at "The Sarmatian Clothing *Koine*" (under section IV) for the main discussion of burial ritual and personal adornment.

23. 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

understanding of how ethnicities form and manifest themselves, but it also overlooks the many other potential messages material objects might have been intended to send. There is no academic consensus on how ethnicity functions, a fact no doubt reflective of the great diversity of organizing principles among humanity's many ethnic divisions, past and present.[24] 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.[25] Right away, this definition causes problems for the scholar of Rome's transdanubian 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 the details of a particular ancient account, we must remember that the political divisions and defining characteristics given by Herodotus, Ovid, Tacitus, Pliny, Ammianus, and others, reflect outside impositions rather than unfiltered expressions of internal 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 material evidence may

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in note 20, above, all of which rely on this mindset to a certain extent; see Vaday, Istvánovits, and Kulcsár 1989, for a discussion of Sarmatian costume. The "burial items = ethnic expression" mindset underlying the entire work is revealed in the final discussion (114).

24. The most basic disagreement is between those scholars (e.g., 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, and those (e.g., Geertz 1963; Grosby 1994; Fishman 1980) who posit a model where more primordial ties of lineage, language, or phenotypic expression tend to be of particular ethnic salience and thereby limit individuals' ability to move between ethnic communities. 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.

25. Barth 1969, 9–10. It is worth noting that this does not mean that ethnic identities cannot have origins in some form of outside imposition. Group labels originally imposed by an outside hegemony can attain ethnic salience if accepted as internally meaningful by the group upon which they were originally applied.

not actually be organized according to the same criteria used by 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 hypothetic 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.[26] 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 actually used 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 as a Iazyx, and that that label was to her an ethnic one, we must consider whether perhaps this 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 language, membership in a particular lineage—real or fictive—or profession of a certain religious belief.[27] In such a scenario, the material elements preserved in her grave might be 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 polities choose ethnic affiliation as a defining feature.[28] The rise

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26. Barth 1969, 13–15.

27. 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.

28. The Roman empire, for one, can be interpreted as essentially non-ethnic, particularly after Caracalla's extension of citizenship in 212, with legal citizen status overlying local or ethnic affiliation (Mathisen 2006), even as certain ethnic groups—most notably for our purposes, Scythians—were excluded or marginalized.

of the ethnostate in nineteenth-century Europe and the continuation of the principle of ethnonationalism in the twentieth-century Balkans following the successive, messy dismemberments of the polyethnic Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and Yugoslav states, encouraged scholars from those regions to retroject their own concern with ethnic identity onto earlier inhabitants of their lands. 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.[29] 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 a product of our own society and academic world view than a reflection of the ancient evidence, textual or material. In the case of our particular study, as we will discuss below, we can be fairly certain that a population known to the Romans as the Iazyges did migrate into the Hungarian Plain from somewhere on the Pontic Steppe in the early first century CE, but 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 exemplary 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.

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 sociopolitical 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,[30] but much less about how the acquisition of Roman imports reflected self-perception among translimitine populations.

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29. For a discussion of how this feature of the postcolonial critique impacts the study of the ancient world, see Mattingly 2011, ch. 2.

30. Whittaker 1994.

In the remainder of this 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 consider immigration into the Hungarian Plain and the cultural connections between the Roman-era society that emerged and the surrounding provinces and transdanubian 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 sociopolitical 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 a specific profession/lifestyle, or some other type of collective.

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 macrolevel, and Goths and Iazyges—to name only two attested groups—at a subregional 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.[31] For the preexisting population, I will attempt to employ

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31. The archaeological identification of the Iazyges' initial immigration within the

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.

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—like people everywhere and at all times—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 hypothetical woman buried in the beaded dress an immigrant from the Pontic Steppe bringing with her a cultural practice from the east—perhaps together with an ethnic identity—or was she someone with deep roots in the Danubian place where she died who adopted certain "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 independent regions outside the borderland. While the ethnic history of the "real" Sarmatians may remain beyond our reach, and perhaps fundamentally imaginary, we will be able to say something about how the people of the borderland—

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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—as opposed to some other type of collective—as has been the usual practice.

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 ironclad 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.[32] 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*.[33] Batty conceived of archaeology as a potential way of positively identifying nomadic com-

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32. 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.).

33. For his justifications (in my opinion unsatisfactory), see Batty 2007, 33, 50–52, 277–78.
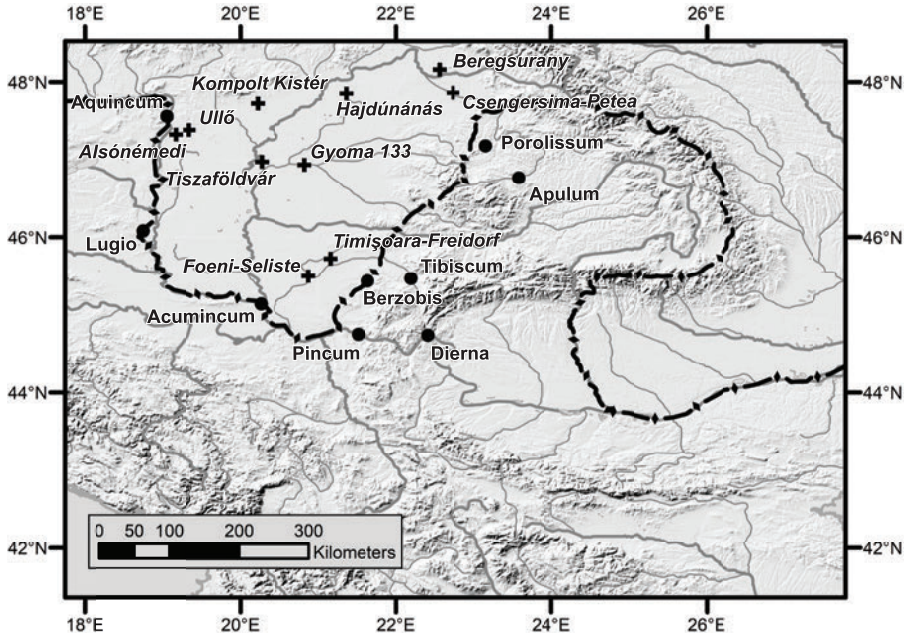
Fig. 3.1. Important Roman-era Hungarian Plain settlements and Roman frontier sites

munities 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 backward. The ancient sources, as we have seen, are wont to characterize *all* the peoples beyond the Danube as nomads (with the general exception of Dacians, as previously discussed). Our job is to complicate this picture archaeologically as we have already done literarily. It is surely true that the archaeological record underrepresents nomadic peoples, but this is not a problem. 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 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 together with analysis of the natural environment.

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,[34] and the site of Üllő, located just southeast of Budapest.[35] A third, and particularly thoroughly published Sarmatian settlement of the Roman-era Hungarian Plain is the site of Gyoma 133, located near the Körös River in southeastern 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 ceramics and faunal remains, and will serve as our entry point into a larger discussion of the region's archaeology.[36] Today, 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.[37] Taken together, the houses, ditches, wells, pits,

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34. Márkus 2005.

35. Kulcsár and Merai 2011.

36. Vaday 1996a.

37. Vaday 1996b, 13–14; Vaday 1996c, 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 (e.g., Párducz, Vaday) have attempted to produce more detailed chronologies based on items of personal adornment from burials, these are still not entirely satisfactory. For the current state of this chronological problem, see Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2017, 191–94. 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

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 relatively peaceful century following the Marcomannic Wars.

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 × 2.2 m (appx. 4.25 square meters) to 4.3 × 6.16 m (appx. 26.5 square meters). 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.[38] The upper architecture of the posthole houses would most likely have been wood-framed with wattle-and-daub walls and thatched roofing.[39] Scattered adobe bricks were found at Gyoma 133, suggesting that some buildings may have been built with this material, but the small number recovered and the prevalence of central post-holes suggest that these would have been a minority.[40] Standing architecture does not survive, but the preserved architectural footprints and postholes combine to paint a clear picture of a village largely, if not entirely, made up of so-called *grubenhäuser*: semisubterranean houses known from many areas of the European Iron Age.[41] The houses of Gyoma 133 are scattered throughout an excavated area of about 1.5 hectares following no observable organization scheme, although the whole ancient settlement may have been significantly larger.[42] Other domestic features, such as wells, ovens, and storage pits lie

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.

38. Vaday 1996c, 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.

39. Wells 1999, 57–58.

40. Vaday 1996c, 157.

41. Wells 1999, 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.

42. Vaday 1996b, 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

scattered throughout the excavated area with a greater overall density in the southern half of the site.[43] 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.[44] 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.

Sarmatian Settlements: Larger Patterns and Potential Origins

Gyoma 133 was hardly alone in the microregion around the Körös River. Extensive state-sponsored field surveys of the 42 square-kilometer 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.[45] 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.[46]

Looking beyond the Gyoma-Endrőd region, evidence for nucleated settlements from the Roman/Sarmatian period appears throughout the central Hungarian Plain between Pannonia and Dacia. The largest known Sarmatian settlement was excavated near the village of Üllő in the southeast suburbs of Budapest. Excavations of only one-fifth of the survey-identified settlement area revealed around 8,000 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

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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 15,000 square meters (1.5 hectares). 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.

43. Vaday 1996c, 105.
44. Vaday 1996c, 78–82, 105.
45. Bökönyi 1992, iii.
46. Jankovich, Kvassay, and Pattantyús-Á. 1992, 99–120.

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.[47]

Farther north and east, the upper Tisza-Someș Valley stands as an important transitional zone between the northwest *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 1,000 features dating from the Roman period, including the expected semi-subterranean houses and several pottery workshops and kilns.[48] A similar settlement was excavated at Beregsurány some forty kilometers 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.[49] The Csengersima and Beregsurány sites are far from isolated within their region. Indeed, the entire upper-Tisza Basin is dotted with the remains of similar settlements from the 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 southwest and the northern portion of Roman Dacia to the east.[50]

A similar settlement situation can be reconstructed for the Banat, the region adjacent to the main Hungarian Plain in the southeast and presently divided between Hungary, Serbia, and Romania. Because the bulk of the region falls within Romania, most scholars from that country have interpreted their findings in dialog with trends observed in the (Romanian) Transylvanian Highlands to the east (that is, in Dacia) rather than in dialog with sites from the plains to the west (which largely fall within modern Hungary) 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.[51] Recent work by Micle and Grumeza has begun to bring the significant body of Romanian

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47. Kulcsár and Merai 2011, 61.
48. Gindele and Istvánovits 2011, 85.
49. Istvánovits 1997, 717–20.
50. Istvánovits 1997, 719; Gindele and Istvánovits 2011, 87.
51. Grumeza 2015, 76–77.

literature on settlement archaeology from the Romanian Banat into dialog with the Hungarian world of Sarmatian archaeology, and it appears that the settlements in this region just beyond the southwestern edge of Dacia bear numerous similarities to those found in the Hungarian Plain and Upper Tisza regions.[52]

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.[53] Among excavated settlements, multiple organizational schemes are known,[54] but the basic toolkit of domestic structures remains constant. Houses are usually semi-subterranean (Mare identifies two distinct categories based on depth[55]), irregularly oblong in shape, of modest size (appx. 10–14 square meters) 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,

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52. Micle 2011, 179; Grumeza 2015. Recent work has moved in promising directions, but it is important to note the nationalism that colors many of the older archaeologies on which this study necessarily relies. Just as Romanian scholars (e.g., Benea 1996) have a tendency to too-quickly identify objects as "Dacian" or "Daco-Roman" when interpreting Roman-era archaeology within their ambit, so too have Hungarian scholars been eager to label their material from beyond the *limites* as Sarmatian (e.g., Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2017, 222–31, especially 225: "It has been long-since proven that the western Banat was occupied by the Sarmatians and that the fertile plain between the Olt, the Danube, the Siret and the Carpathians had never been part of the province of Dacia"). My use of the term Sarmatian 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 identifications of sites and artifacts as "Dacian" or "Sarmatian." I use these terms purposefully to reflect Roman conceptions of the peoples and regions under investigation (e.g., Roman writers identified the inhabitants of this area as Sarmatians). As we will discuss below, the actual ethnic makeup of the people of the Roman-era Hungarian Plain was complex and, in all likelihood, fluid 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.

53. Grumeza 2015, 75–77; Mare 2004, 28.

54. Grumeza 2015, 78. E.g., 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.

55. Mare 2004, 137.

and encircling ditches round out the usual domestic assemblage in the Banat, as in the rest of the region.[56] Reconstructing the group identities of the people who once inhabited these settlements remains extremely controversial in the scholarship,[57] a topic on which we will only partially weigh in below, but the basic identification of the ancient Banaters as settled people, as opposed to nomads seems clear.[58]

From our selective 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 burning barbarian houses found on the Column of Marcus Aurelius.[59]

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[60]—but also a society that was sedentary enough to require mass storage from year to year. Regardless of 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 these villages appears variable, and the small percentage known from actual excavation makes generalizing difficult. Some broad observations can be ventured, nonetheless. All of the Banat settlements surveyed by Grumeza were single-phase sites, and even Gyoma 133 only appears to have been occupied for about three generations. Although clearly following an agricultural subsistence strategy, this was still a society that moved to

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56. Grumeza 2015, 80–81.

57. 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).

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

59. A.M. 17.13.12.

60. Grumeza 2015, 79. The pollen profile of the soils from Gyoma 133 also indicates cultivation of cereals (wheat and barley) there (Medzihradszky 1996, 449).

greener pastures after 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 to which we will return later.

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, certain Sarmatian villages do show significant evidence for industry, usually in the form of ceramic production (e.g., Üllő and Csengersima), but also metalworking (e.g., Gyoma 133, possibly Beregsurány). The location of 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.

Eating like a Sarmatian

The excavations at Gyoma 133 recovered a large corpus of faunal remains,[61] 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*).[62] These four species represent the dominant food-producing mammalian domesticates in most past (and present) Eurasian societies,[63]

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61. 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, 72) and King (1999a, 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 cited in this discussion.

62. 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, 370–77).

63. Cows, sheep, and goats are multipurpose 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. Pigs are only used for their meat, but are extremely prolific and can live well off little more than domestic trash, an ability that has encouraged their use by many settled cultures (Khazanov 1994, 26–27).

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 homogeneous herd of small to medium sized (withers height appx. 110–125 centimeters) 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.[64] These features of the bovine skeletal assemblage can tentatively suggest how the people of Gyoma 133 used their stock. The overrepresentation of females, together with a mature slaughter-pattern suggests the animals killed at the site had previously been used for diary and breeding purposes. The underrepresentation of young animals is extremely important, strongly hinting that the inhabitants sold or exchanged stock—particularly 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 an even larger percentage of remains from young animals, killed for meat at one or two years of age.[65]

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64. Bartosiewicz 1996, 370–71.

65. Groot 2016, 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 those at the ends of their useful lives. 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 133 did not exist as a self-contained community and got rid of their extra cattle somewhere other than in the stew pot.

Pigs, despite being an important domesticate in many parts of Europe, do not feature prominently in the faunal material from Gyoma 133, making up only about 10 percent of the total faunal assemblage and 13.5 percent of the major domesticate quartet.[66] Of the material conducive to age-determination, we find a high percentage of juvenile and subadult animals. This slaughter pattern is in keeping with an animal exploited exclusively for meat.[67]

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 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.[68] Within the assemblage, sheep/goats account for 20 percent of the total and 26 percent of the major quartet.[69] While of secondary prevalence 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,[70] 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.[71] 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.[72] Dogs represent only 3.7

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66. Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2015, 53, table 3.

67. Bartosiewicz 1996, 372.

68. Bartosiewicz 1996, 371–72.

69. Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2015, 53, table 3.

70. Bartosiewicz 1996, 371. The same multiuse husbandry applies here, for sheep and goats as discussed above for cattle.

71. Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2015, 53, table 3. This is a slightly lower percentage than the 19.5 percent seen on table A3.2 at the end of this chapter 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.

72. Bartosiewicz 1996, 372–73. Horses may also have been exploited for their milk, a

percent of the faunal assemblage,[73] and while these individuals were large enough for use as herding animals,[74] 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.[75] Taken as a whole, the size of the recovered faunal assemblage from Gyoma 133 (9,695 identifiable bone fragments in total) indicates a community 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 many cattle were exported, the more balanced slaughter-age profile produced by the sheep/goat remains points toward mainly local 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 contemporaneous 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,[76] we will focus on the relative proportions of the three

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practice common among later Eurasian nomadic societies (Bruun 2006, 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.

73. Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2015, 53, table 3.

74. Bartosiewicz 1996, 373–74.

75. 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, 61–62).

76. 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.
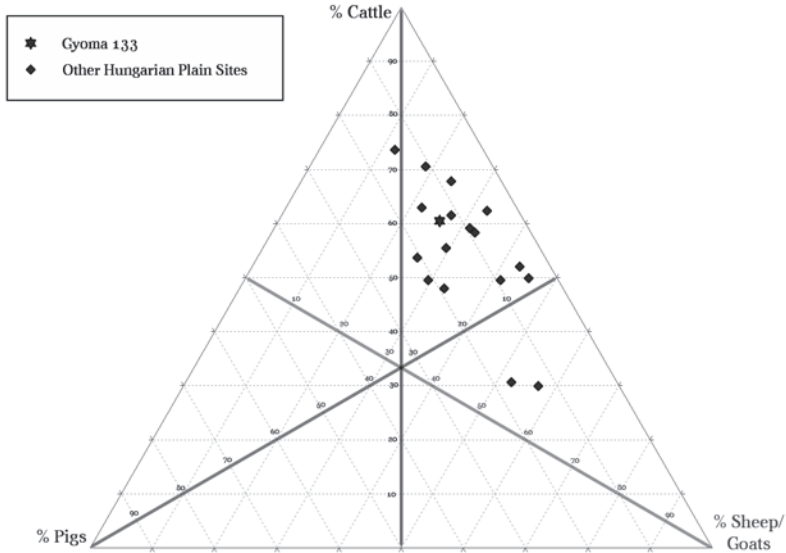
Fig. 3.2. Triplot showing relative percentages of cattle, pig, and sheep/goat bones from Gyoma 113 and other Roman-era sites in the Hungarian Plain

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.[77] Of the eighteen surveyed Sarmatian settlements, cattle remains are most numerous in all but two, represent clear majorities (55 percent or higher) at nine sites, and hover around 50 percent (45–55 percent) in the remaining seven cases. Gyoma 133's 60.5 percent appears toward the higher end 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 percent), and represent large minorities in the rest of the assemblages, ranging between 21.8 percent and 45.5 percent with only two low outliers under 20 percent.[78] Once again, the trend is very clear: sheep

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77. See table A3.1 at the end of this chapter for a complete table of the data discussed in the following sections, including references. See table A3.2 for the relative percentage of horse remains within the settlements of the Hungarian Plain.

78. Although the site of Szirmabesenyo produced a mere 12 percent caprine remains, and Örménykút only 18.6 percent, this is less anomalous when one takes into account the overwhelming dominance of cattle bones at the two sites (73.6 percent and 70.5 percent).

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 percent 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 percent with more sites toward 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 only two significant, sheep-heavy outliers.

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 toward a sedentary population inhabiting Gyoma 133 and the other Sarmatian villages. The cattle-heavy faunal assemblage further supports this picture of sedentary 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.[79] 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.[80] The Iron

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79. For Pannonia, Bökönyi 1984, Lyublyanovics 2010; for Northern Gaul (Batavia), Groot 2016; for the Rhineland, Gaul in general, and Britain, King 1984, 1999a, 2001.

80. 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

Age, "Celtic" pattern of animal exploitation is broad to the point of almost appearing bimodal. While a fairly sizable number of sites display pigs as the dominant domesticate,[81] cattle are important in all the assemblages and dominant in a majority of the cases.[82] The Roman-era Sarmatian data set falls squarely within this cattle-dominant majority of the Iron Age "Celtic" 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 nonexistent. 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 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.[83]

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more reasonable model involving more limited migration and broad cultural diffusion and mixing. See Wells 1999, chs. 2 and 3, for a survey of Celtic/La Tène archaeology and one possible road forward.

81. See King 2001, 6–7.

82. 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 region 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, 2–4).

83. On the difficulties of tracking down steppe assemblages, see Bartosiewicz and Gál 2010 for a revealing study. The authors aim to look for Scythian (i.e., 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, 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 homogeneous because livestock profiles are based on the underlying environmental constraints of specific climatic zones, which have remained relatively constant throughout the Holocene, at least until recent times. Premodern 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
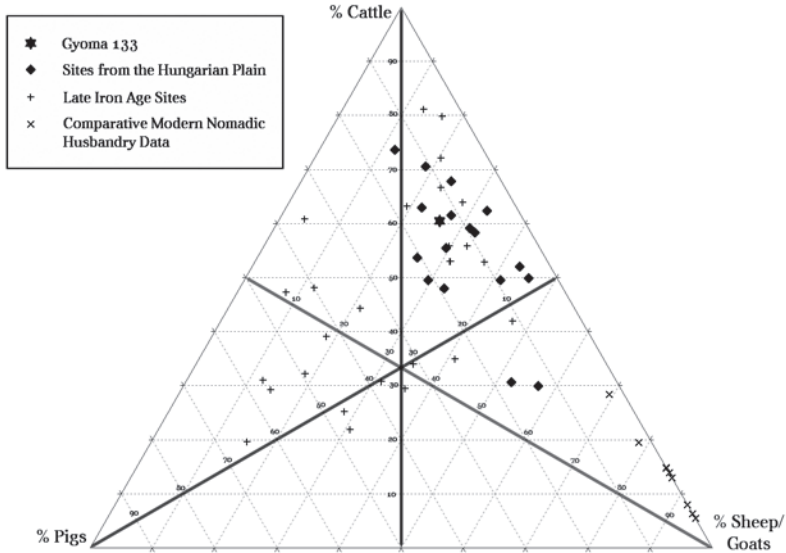
Fig. 3.3. Triplot showing comparison of faunal assemblages from the Roman-era Hungarian Plain, pre-Roman Iron Age (La Tène), and contemporary steppe nomadic sites

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 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.[84] Pigs, meanwhile, play virtually no role in nomadic husbandry because they cannot be herded over long distances.

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bit environmentally deterministic, it appears to be borne out in Khazanov's comparative analyses.

84. Cribb 1990, 27–34; Barfield 1993, 136–40; Khazanov 1994, 69–84; Kradin 2015, 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.

Nomads and Farmers

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 between settled communities where we can assume the hypothetical nomadic communities held sway.[85]

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.[86] Even if we discard the notion of hostile relations between nomad and peasant in favor of some more cooperative form of interaction,

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85. Cribb 1990, 26. Cribb 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.

86. Cribb 1990, 26; Golden 2003, 16–20; Kradin 2015, 56–59.

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 noncultivated parts of the Hungarian Plain could support, *and* emigration back to the greater steppe was also not a feasible option. In our case, 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 conquests 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 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 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 herdsmen, 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.[87] 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, Celtic origins within individual settlements and burial grounds. Moreover, to move beyond evidence of cultural exchange to a model of nomadic-sedentary entanglement, we would expect to find some traces of steppe subsistence practices within the settled communities, even as traditional sedentary ways

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87. Cribb 1990, 25.
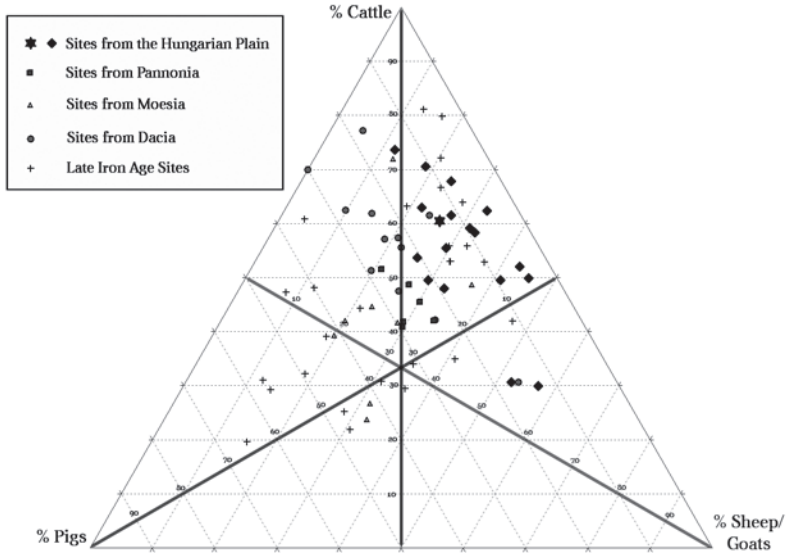
Fig. 3.4. Triplot showing comparison of faunal assemblages from the Roman-era Hungarian Plain, surrounding Roman provinces, and pre-Roman Iron Age (La Tène)

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 kept more sheep and fewer pigs than the inhabitants of the 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,[88] 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 sug-

88. King 1999a , fig. 13.

gests that something in the cultural history of the Roman-controlled provinces vs. the Sarmatian *barbaricum* pushed the populations of each area toward slightly different husbandry patterns sometime *after* the establishment of the *limes*. While the legacy of Roman Italy's pig-dominated diet may be partially responsible for the higher percentages of pigs within the provincial assemblages, 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.[89]

The preference for sheep over pigs in the Sarmatian material is clear, however, and one plausible interpretation would be cultural influence of sheep-herding immigrants from the Pontic Steppe.[90] The importance of horses at Gyoma 133 and other Sarmatian settlements, including scattered evidence of horse butchery and ritual deposition,[91] may also hint at some degree of steppe influence on husbandry practices in the Hungarian Plain.[92] This evidence is suggestive but not entirely conclusive. Even if we accept steppe elements within the cultural complex(es) 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.

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89. King 1999a.

90. Bartosiewicz 1996, 378.

91. Vaday 1996c, 152; Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2015, 59–60.

92. See this chapter's appendix table A3.2 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 percent of the faunal assemblage of horses, cows, pigs, sheep, and goats, one of the highest percentages among the surveyed assemblages.

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 four centuries CE. To refine the picture, 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.[93] 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,[94] 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. A basic difficulty stems from the interpretive framework employed by most past, and some current researchers. In much Hungarian and Romanian scholarship, the old model of persistent, strong ethnic group identities exists as an underlying assumption, leaving scholars free to identify different waves of Sarmatian immigration based on small changes in burial orientation or construc-

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93. Vaday 1996c, 111–38, 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.

94. Vaday 1996c, 149–53; Vaday 1999, 550–54.

tion, and the presence of stylistically Pontic grave goods.[95] These migration models may not be wrong, even if the understanding of ancient ethnicity underlying them is questionable, but there needs to be more consideration given to nonmigratory 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 70 percent of all scholarly publications on the Sarmatians between the 1930s and 1970s.[96] His *magnum opus*, a 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.[97] 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 original 69 sites) and refined the chronological divisions.[98] These scholars, and virtually all others to this day,[99] 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 collective identities over other forms of cultural exchange.

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95. Istvánovits and Kulcsár (2017) stands as the most recent example influenced by this mindset, as discussed in the Introduction. To briefly sum up, despite the work's wealth of detailed, valuable data derived from the authors' decades of excavation experience, and familiarity with the vast body of Russophone Pontic archaeological scholarship, the underlying assumptions about group identity and the nature of ancient ethnicity remain largely traditional.

96. Vaday 1989, 36.

97. Vaday 1989, 36–37.

98. Vaday 1989, 39.

99. E.g., Vaday, Istvánovits, and Kulcsár 1989; Istvánovits and Kulcsár 1998; Dobrzańska 2001; Simonenko 2001.

Nomads and Farmers: Funerary Evidence

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 contemporaneous funerary patterns in Dacia and Pannonia, but with clear stylistic and ritual similarities to concurrent 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.[100] 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,[101] 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 and beyond, that is, from approximately the same moment as the textually attested migration of the Sarmatian Iazyges into the region.[102]

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

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100. Szabó 1971, 24–25; Rustiou 2011, 95–96; Hellebrandt 1999, passim (but particularly 9–10 for an overview).

101. See Wells 1999, 35–36, 57–58, 171.

102. Strabo places the Iazyges in the western Pontic Steppe near the Dnieper River around the beginning of the Common Era (7.3.17). A half century later, the elder Pliny describes the Iazyges as having recently expelled the Dacians from the Hungarian Plain (4.80), thus dating their westward migration to the first half of the first century CE. For a detailed discussion of the date of the Iazyges' arrival, see Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2017, 183–91.

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.[103] In the following centuries, Sarmatian burial material continues to evolve, usually toward greater inclusion of Roman provincial imports and away from explicitly Pontic material, 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 Iazygian 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.[104] Indeed, Michael Kulikowski, usually a migration skeptic, 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.[105]

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

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103. Vaday 1989; Vaday, Istvánovits, and Kulcsár 1989; Kovács and Vaday 1999. For the Pontic evidence, Häusler 1986; Lebedynsky 2002, ch. 3; Barca 2006.

104. 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. 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.

105. Kulikowski 2007, 65. We will return to the Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov Culture in the following chapters.

apparent arrival of the Iazyges and their burial grounds.[106] 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 (perhaps 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 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.[107] 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*).[108]

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106. Vaday 1991, 78. See also Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2017, 246–47. Here, the authors suggest that the small number of burials securely datable to the period immediately before the arrival of the Iazyges points to a largely abandoned landscape, although they admit that this *terra deserta* model could be a figment of the surviving evidence (or lack thereof). I am inclined to agree with their caveat, since to argue for an abandoned Hungarian Plain would fundamentally be to make a case *ex silentio*.

107. Hellebrandt 1999, 9–10.

108. Vaday 1996a; Kulcsár and Merai 2011, 62; Grumeza 2015, 76–77.

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[109] 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 shortly, 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.[110] For men, decorated belt-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*.[111] *Lunula* pendants continue in female graves, but they are overshadowed by a massive increase in decorative beads. These come in many shapes and materials, with glass the most common type, representing, for example, 89 percent of the 1,594 beads excavated at the Foeni necropolis in the Banat.[112] Beaded necklaces and bracelets were common accessories, but based on their positioning within undisturbed burials, it appears that beads were even more frequently sewn directly onto female clothing as a form of decoration.[113] 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 either in the provinces or elsewhere in the *barbaricum*.[114] These ubiquitous, simple, glass beads known from Sarmatian graves across the Hungarian Plain and the Banat were Roman-produced specifically for trade with the Iazyges. One production center has been excavated in the *vicus* of the important auxiliary fort

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109. Vaday 1991, 78.
110. Vaday, Istvánovits, and Kulcsár 1989, 111–13; Grumeza 2011, 186–87.
111. Vaday, Istvánovits, and Kulcsár 1989, 111–13.
112. Grumeza 2011, 184.
113. Vaday, Istvánovits, and Kulcsár 1989, 111; Grumeza 2011, 185; Szekeres 1999, 509.
114. Vaday, Istvánovits, and Kulcsár 1989, 113.

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.[115] The existence of the Tibiscum bead workshop is clear testament to a thriving trade between the Hungarian Plain and the Roman provinces, and the location of production at a major military site is not insignificant, a point to which we will return.

Looking at the entire corpus of Sarmatian clothing items, Vaday identified two moments of renewed Pontic influence in the burial material. These broadly equate, first, to a period in the later second century during and after the Marcomannic Wars—when Dio reports that Marcus Aurelius granted permission for the Iazyges to trade with the Sarmatians of the Pontic Steppe by passing through Dacia, probably along the Cerna-Timiș route and through Wallachia[116]—and, second, to the end of the third century, following Aurelian's evacuation of the Roman army from the Dacian provinces north of the Danube.[117] 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 looser Roman control on movement, 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. Instead, 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

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115. Grumeza 2011, 186; Benea, Regep-Vlascici, and Crînguș 2006, 173–74; Doina Benea, personal communication, July 2014.

116. 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 ἐγίγνοντο, πολλὰ καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἐπιτεταγμένων σφίσιν ἀφῆκε, μᾶλλον δὲ πάντα πλὴν τῶν κατά τε τὰς συνόδους αὐτῶν καὶ κατὰ τὰς ἐπιμιξίας συγκειμένων, τοῦ τε μὴ ἰδίοις πλοίοις σφᾶς χρῆσθαι καὶ τοῦ τῶν νήσων τῶν ἐν τῷ Ἴστρῳ ἀπέχεσθαι. καὶ ἐφῆκεν αὐτοῖς πρὸς τοὺς Ῥοξολάνους διὰ τῆς Δακίας ἐπιμίγνυσθαι, ὁσάκις ἂν ὁ ἄρχων αὐτῆς ἐπιτρέψῃ σφίσιν.

117. Vaday 1989, 190–91.

symbols rather than simple indications of wealth or payment for passage to the underworld. Large-denomination, old 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.[118] 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.[119] 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 nearly all things flashy and luxurious within Sarmatian society.

Roman Imports at Gyoma 133 and Other Settlements

Returning to the settlement of Gyoma 133, we find the trend toward 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 acquired from local sources within the *barbaricum*.[120] 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

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118. Grumeza 2013, 121–23; Vaday 1989, 186–87.
119. Grumeza 2013, 122.
120. Vaday 1996c, 109–10, fig. 48.

known from the site, but also in very small numbers.[121] 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*,[122] and the paucity of metal and other luxury objects is also typical.[123] Common ceramics are always overrepresented 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. Nonetheless, small pieces of jewelry and coinage are prone to loss, meaning they tend to turn up in domestic assemblages at predictable rates related to the wealth of the community. 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 Iazygian elite.

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 toward the social elites who kept them in such a way that they largely 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.[124] At other sites, most notably the large villages of Üllő and Beregsurány, located close to the Pannonian and

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121. Vaday 1996c,107, 110, 149–51.

122. Vaday 1996c, 111–12, fig. 48.

123. Vaday 1999, 551–53; Simon 2006, 42.

124. Vaday 1996c, 157; but note Vaday's assumption that the presence of ironworking means an "ethnically mixed" population because apparently Sarmatians cannot work iron, but Dacians can. This *may* 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.*

Dacian *limites*, respectively, major ceramics industries show a vibrant mixture of local, Roman, and Northern European traditions, both reflecting the heterogeneous nature of the village cultures of the Roman-era Hungarian Plain and adjacent lowlands, and testifying to strong networks of intellectual and economic exchange beyond 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.[125] The settlement was inhabited beginning sometime in the second half of the second century CE, and was very large by Sarmatian standards.[126] The village's location—as close to the river as allowed by the treaty of 175 between Marcus Aurelius and the Sarmatians[127]—allowed the inhabitants easy access to the people and markets of the Roman 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 Iazyges at the end of the Marcomannic Wars.[128] The most archaeologically visible manifestation of economic activity at the site comes in the form of a large ceramics industry. From forty-eight known kilns, the inhabitants of Üllő produced thousands

125. Kulcsár and Merai 2011, 61.

126. Kulcsár and Merai 2011, 62–63.

127. 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 προσταχθέντα σφίσι χαλεπῶς μὲν καὶ μόλις, ἐποίησαν δ᾽ οὖν, τό τε ἥμισυ τῆς χώρας τῆς μεθορίας ἀνῆκεν, ὥστε αὐτοὺς ὀκτώ που καὶ τριάκοντα σταδίους ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἴστρου ἀποικεῖν, καὶ τὰ χωρία τάς τε ἡμέρας τῆς ἐπιμιξίας ἀφώρισε ᾽πρότερον γὰρ οὐ διεκέκριντό, τούς τε ὁμήρους ἠλλάξατο. (16) ὅτι οἱ Ἰάζυγες κακωθέντες ἐς ὁμολογίαν ἦλθον, αὐτοῦ Ζαντικοῦ τὸν Ἀντωνῖνον ἱκετεύσαντος. [. . .] καὶ συνέθεντο τὰ αὐτὰ τοῖς Κουάδοις καὶ τοῖς Μαρκομάνοις, πλὴν καθ᾽ ὅσον τὸ διπλάσιον αὐτῶν ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἴστρου ἀποικήσειν ἤμελλον. 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.

128. Dio 72.19; 73.2.

of cooking vessels from the coarse local clay.[129] 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 wares in shapes originally designed in the workshops of Roman Pannonia. Indeed, pots from either side of the river are almost identical, visually, although the Üllő clay is a bit coarser.[130]

Pannonian cookware was mainly produced on a fast potter's wheel, but petrographic analysis of the Üllő cookware has 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.[131] In essence, the Üllő potters were producing local knock-offs of popular Pannonian vessel types, adapting Roman styles to local 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.[132] This distribution pattern points toward 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*.[133] 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.[134]

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129. Kulcsár and Merai 2011, 62–67; Istvánovits, Kulcsár, and Mérai 2011, 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.

130. Istvánovits, Kulcsár, and Mérai 2011, 346–48.

131. Kulcsár and Merai 2011, 66–67; Istvánovits, Kulcsár, and Mérai 2011, 348–49.

132. Kulcsár and Merai 2011, 66–67. In particular, the technique is documented at the Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov Culture center of Zofipole, near Kraków (Dobrzańska and Piekarczyk 1999–2000, 107–8).

133. 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. Nonetheless, the wide distribution of identical cooking technology should still reflect some basic, low-level similarities in cultural practice across borders and between regions.

134. The problem is that the Üllő potters were too good at faking Pannonian-style cook-

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 forty-eight 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.[135] There is no evidence to suggest Roman potters were outsourcing production beyond the *limes*, and much to suggest a genuine Sarmatian industry combining Roman, La Tène, 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 fifty-two kilns were excavated and a further fifty-two 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.[136] Here too, local potters[137] 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 barbar-

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ware. 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.

135. Kulcsár and Merai 2011, 63–66. For the Pannonian originals, see Vámos 2010.

136. Gindele and Istvánovits 2011, 88.

137. The group identity of these borderland people remains obscure. All we really can (and ought) to say is that the people living beyond the North-West Dacian *limes* were heterogeneous in their material culture more than those living farther south in the Hungarian Plain. At the same time, as we have seen, their architecture is basically the same as what we see farther south. Regardless, they formed part of the larger world of the Hungarian Plain and were frequently lumped in with the Sarmatians by Roman writers (e.g., *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.

ian 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.[138]

V. Explaining the Evidence:
A Model of Sarmatian Borderland Dynamics

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 known, 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 in Dacia. 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.[139]

That the Aquincum-Porolissum axis, and the Tisza and Mureş river

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138. Gindele and Istvánovits 2011, 86–90.
139. Vaday 2003.
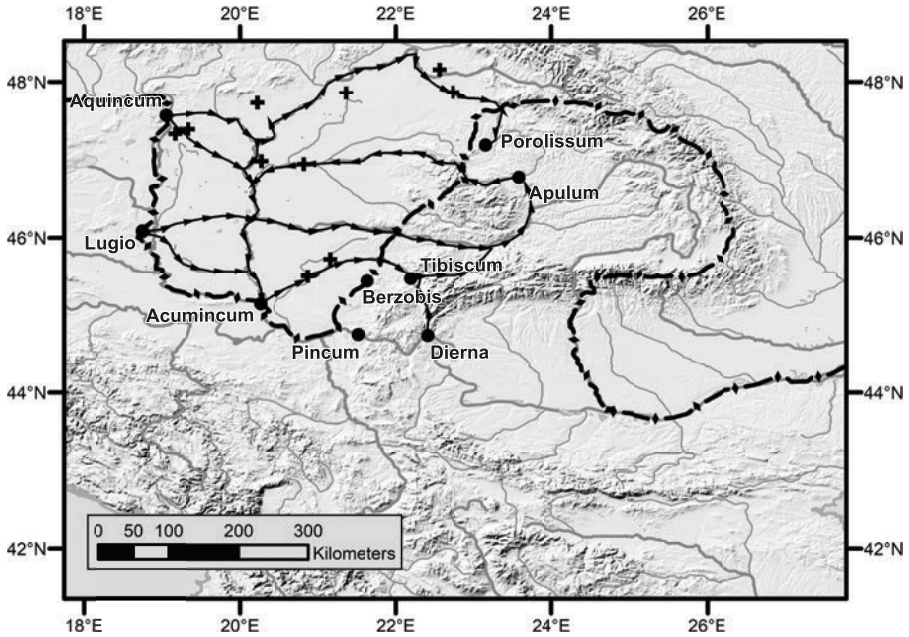
Fig. 3.5. Major riverine and overland movement routes in the Hungarian Plain

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, but by the fourth century, we see the pattern extended to the southern Mureş route as well.[140] This clustering is significant since burial with weapons represents one of the most potent displays of elite status and wealth known from the region.[141]

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140. Vaday 2001, 177–79, 188–89.

141. 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

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 Iron Age 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 Iazygian control of either bank of the Danube. The Iazygian 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.[142] Traditional nomadic raiding or extortion of goods from the settled communities would have proven much more difficult, 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 sociopolitical 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

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been great in order to justify the significant resource sink. The relative scarcity of such displays in the Hungarian Plain stands in contrast to the roughly contemporary Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov 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, 84). We will discuss this aspect of the Černjachov Culture in the following chapters.

142. For analysis of this nomad-farmer dynamic, see Khazanov 1994, 202–12, 222–27. 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" topos, but nonetheless 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. If their vassals fail to pay their tribute, however, the nomads wage war on them.* οἱ μὲν οὖν νομάδες πολεμισταὶ μᾶλλόν εἰσιν ἢ λῃστρικοί, πολεμοῦσι δὲ ὑπὲρ τῶν φόρων. ἐπιτρέψαντες γὰρ ἔχειν τὴν γῆν τοῖς ἐθέλουσι γεωργεῖν ἀντὶ ταύτης ἀγαπῶσι φόρους λαμβάνοντες τοὺς συντεταγμένους μετρίους τινάς, οὐκ εἰς περιουσίαν ἀλλ᾿ εἰς τὰ ἐφήμερα καὶ τὰ ἀναγκαῖα τοῦ βίου· μὴ διδόντων δὲ αὐτοῖς πολεμοῦσιν (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.

life, but also 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 that flowed 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 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 Iazygian elite.

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 topography of the Carpathian Basin. As discussed in chapter 1, the Hungarian Plain represents the farthest western annex of the Eurasian steppe system. That said, 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, as we have discussed, most of the Hungarian Plain consists of 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. Using early modern data on the availability of good-quality, available, grazing land in the Hungarian Plain, Rudi Lindner estimated it could support a maximum of 150,000 horses as part of a typical nomadic herd profile, which in turn could support a mere 15,000 fully nomadic Huns—the objects of his research—each possessing ten horses.[143]

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143. Lindner 1981, 14–16. Lindner begins with the area of the contiguous steppe at the

Ammianus Marcellinus says that Sarmatian raiders led only one or two remounts on their expeditions, so by Lindner's numbers, the plain may have been able to support around 60,000 Sarmatian warriors,[144] for a total population of about 300,000 men, women, and children,[145] or 7.5 percent of the probable population of the surrounding Danubian provinces.[146] In reality, however, the number of Iazyges actually able to practice a nomadic lifestyle in the Hungarian Plains would have been rather lower than this. First, Lindner assumed that most of the extant grasslands would be devoted to nomadic pasturage, but in terms of Roman-era land-use, the numerous settlements indicate that some significant, if unquantifiable, portion of the plains must have been devoted to agriculture and sedentary stock-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 we have seen, more of the region was probably forested or otherwise unimproved than reflected in the modern statistics underlying Lindner's calculations.[147] While Lindner does acknowledge that the whole area of the Hungarian Plain could never have been devoted solely to the rearing of horses, his 150,000-horse estimate is still too optimistic, mainly because it doesn't recognize the significant increase in grassland on the Hungarian Plain since antiquity. Let us assume—rather arbitrarily—that half of the region's area was unsuited for nomadic pasturage, being either under cultivation by the village communities or else consisting of forests or wetlands. From this beginning, we are

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heart of the Hungarian Plain (c. 42,400 km²) and then cites nineteenth-century Hungarian studies to determine that on the Hungarian Plain, a single horse, fed on grass alone, requires 25 acres of grass, per year. From this, Lindner derives a maximum horse population of 320,000. Note, however, that this number does not reflect simple math based on his previous data points. Working from a land area of 42,400 square kilometers (10,477,268 acres) and 25 acres per horse, the number ought to be 419,090 horses. This error ultimately doesn't meaningfully impact Lindner's conclusions. The 150,000 number at which he arrives reflects the reality that not all of the existing grassland would have been available to horses.

144. A.M. 17.12.7. 150,000 horses divided by 2.5 horses per man, gives us 60,000 Sarmatian warriors.

145. Following the mortality tables used by Frier (2000, 795, table 3), we can roughly estimate that about 40 percent 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 percent.

146. 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 km²—and yet the region's total population would still have dwarfed the largest possible nomadic population in the Hungarian Plain (Frier 2000, 814, table 6).

147. See chapter 1, section 1.3.3.

left with about 21,000 square kilometers of usable grassland. 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 toward the non-equine,[148] 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[149]—we come up with an absolute maximum equine population of around 70,000 animals.[150] Continuing our speculative math, if we accept Ammianus that Sarmatian warriors each owned, on average, 2.5 horses, we come up with a total of about 28,000 warriors and a general population of about 150,000 souls, but perhaps many fewer.[151]

We will return to the 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 Iazygian 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. We must

148. Of the recent steppe societies surveyed by Barfield, the highest percentage of horses was only 12.8 percent (Barfield 1993, 138, table 5.1).

149. 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 percent 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 Iazygian immigrants, as we have seen, remains rather murky.

150. Again, based on Lindner's calculations which estimate 10 horses per km² as the carrying capacity of the Hungarian Plain (Lindner 1981, 14).

151. If we run the same calculus based on Barfield's maximum horse percentage of 12.8 percent, we get only 2,700 km² 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. With so small a population, the Sarmatians of the Hungarian Plain could pose only a limited threat to the surrounding Roman provinces. Our largest estimate—28,000 warriors—represents a small fraction of Rome's military strength (just over 5 legions' worth).

either assume, therefore, a fairly small immigrant population—perhaps much smaller than the calculated numbers—or expect to find evidence of population displacement among the settled communities. As we have seen, the villages of Sarmatia show some steppe influences in their husbandry choices, but the influence of the preceding Iron Age is much stronger both in habitation and subsistence. We should conclude, therefore, that the number of initial Pontic migrants was not particularly large.

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, Andrea Vaday's suggestion is persuasive that livestock was the chief product of the region.[152] Not only is Roman military acquisition of cattle from beyond the frontier archaeologically supported in other Roman borderlands,[153] 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 military sites all over Northern Europe abundantly testify.[154] Further, massive amounts of leather would have been needed for tents, shield-covers, equipment straps, and—most importantly—shoes.[155] 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.[156] Meanwhile, on the other side of the river, the

152. Vaday 1989, 189–92. See also Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2015, 56, for citation of additional Hungarian scholarship on this theory.

153. Kooistra 1996, 17–22, 354; Roth 1999, 239. For a dissenting view, see King 1999b.

154. King 1999b; Roth 1999, 25–32.

155. 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.

156. Such is the conclusion reached by Choyke (1998, 10–11) when considering the limited faunal remains from the suburbs of Aquincum. Positively proving importation of stock vs. local acquisition is difficult. King points to larger average animal size in Roman military sites in Gaul as compared to sites from free Germania as evidence against trade from across the frontier (1999b). Regardless of whether we accept these conclusions for the west, the

slaughter-age and gender profiles for Sarmatian cattle from the settlements of the Hungarian Plain shows a clear bias toward adult females, suggesting exploitation for dairy at home and exportation of the male population.[157] This pattern could reflect exactions by an Iazygian elite, or direct exchange between the villages and the Roman army, but in either case, army markets were almost certainly the ultimate destination for most of the missing steers.[158] Based on the preponderance of this evidence, it seems highly likely that the Sarmatian elite, and probably elements of the village population, 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 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 village population. Once established, large-scale trade in cattle would also have given the Roman military great economic leverage over the Iazygian elite; such leverage could then 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.[159] Should the military markets be closed, the Sarmatian elite would

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withers height of cattle remains from Aquincum, at least, appear comparable to those found in Sarmatian sites (cf. Choyke 1998, 11, table 1 [Aquincum]; and Gál 2010, 210; Bartosiewicz and Choyke 2011, 279 [Sarmatian]).

157. Bartosiewicz 1996, 370–71 (Gyoma 133); Gál 2010, 210–11 (Hajdúnánás-Fürjhalom-Dűlő); Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2015, 57 (regional trends); Groot 2016, 19; Kooistra 1996, 17–22, 354 (theory).

158. The model for medieval cattle trade across the Danube at Vác, Hungary, proposed by Bartosiewicz (1995) based on analysis of excavated faunal remains is probably fundamentally similar to what would have existed in the Roman-era Danubian region. In short, riverine centers (like Vác, or Aquincum in our period) served as commercial hubs for livestock raised on the Hungarian Plain. Some percentage of cattle were slaughtered and consumed there, and some significant percentage were dispatched, on the hoof, to centers farther away from the river.

159. 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

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 Iazygian 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.[160] 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.[161]

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 Iazygian elite. That these immigrants practiced a fully nomadic lifestyle after the first generation seems unlikely,

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.* 10.205/135–10.207/137). We will return to both of these treaties in the following chapter.

160. Khazanov 1994, 29.

161. 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 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.

but they do appear to have maintained elements of culture from their Pontic past, including extensive raising of horses for their warrior aristocracy and 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.

Second, further immigration from the steppe would be traumatic once the Hungarian Plain reached its carrying capacity. In the event of new immigration such as may have taken place to some extent after the abandonment of Dacia at the end of the third century,[162] we can expect that 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.[163]

The nature of the economic relations between the Iazyges and the Roman army also pushed the Sarmatian elite toward 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,[164] and we see a resul-

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162. Vaday 2001, 179–80; Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2017, 303.

163. A.M. 18.13.1; *Orig. Const.* 6.32.

164. 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 2, we can confidently assert that this treaty reflects the postwar reestablishment of trade relations dating back at least to the period of Trajan's annexation and Hadrian's settlement of Dacia.

tant 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 probably weakened the Sarmatian cavalry and potentially destabilized the Iazygian elite's dominant position in the Hungarian Plain if, indeed, 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 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 Iazygian's attested penchant for small-scale raiding over the river.[165]

The sociopolitical situation had apparently only gotten worse by the time Ammianus described the Sarmatians as a people "more suited to banditry than open warfare," and decried their habit of long-distance raiding.[166] By then, it would seem, the effects of centuries of subjugation as an exploitable client state had reached a breaking point. Only a couple of decades prior, the settled majority, labeled Limigantes or *Sarmatae servi*, had 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 outlined in this chapter 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 village majority.

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165. Such raids feature prominently in Ovid and Strabo's characterizations of the Sarmatians (including Iazyges, premigration) as discussed in chapter 2, 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. This real penchant for raiding must surely have facilitated Commodus' rhetorical denigration of the Iazyges as mere brigands at the end of the Marcomannic Wars in his series of refortification inscriptions from the Danube *limes*. See also Kovács 2014, 161, for a cogent discussion.

166. 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, sequentes alios vel ipsi terga vertentes, insidendo velocibus equis et morigeris, trahentesque singulos, interdum et binos, uti permutatio vires foveat iumentorum, vigorque otio integretur alterno.*

Appendix

See the tables on the following pages for faunal data and horse remains as discussed in chapter 3. NISP indicates number of identified specimens.

Table A3.1. Faunal Data, with Citations

I. Roman-Era
Region: Sarmatia

Site	Period	Type	NISP	% Cattle	% Sheep/Goat	% Pig	Horse NISP (not in n-value)	Citation	Secondary Citation
Gyoma 133	c.150–250 CE	Settlement	7459	60.4	26	13.6	1802	Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2015: table 3	Bartosiewicz 1996
Hajdúnánás	2nd–5th CE	Settlement	4904	62.9	21.8	15.3	795	Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2015: table 3	Gál 2010: table 1
Endrőd 170	4th–5th CE	Settlement	784	49.5	41.2	9.3	97	Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2015: table 3	Bartosiewicz and Choyke 2011: table 1
Dunavecse	Roman	Settlement	626	59.1	31.5	9.4	151	Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2015: table 3	
Ártánd-Nagyf.	Roman	Settlement	230	49.6	29.6	20.9	47	Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2015: table 3	
Alsónémedi	Roman	Settlement	4534	55.5	29.5	15.1	280	Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2015: table 3	
Kompolt	Roman	Settlement	739	52	43	5	58	Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2015: table 3	
Kunszállás	2nd–4th CE	Settlement	418	30.6	52.4	17	41	Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2015: table 3	Bartosiewicz 2003: appendix, table 1
Pócspetri	Roman	Settlement	828	53.6	25.7	20.7	180	Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2015: table 3	
Szegvár	Roman	Settlement	1518	30	57	13	54	Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2015: table 3	
Tázlar	4th–5th CE	Settlement	1450	49.9	45.5	4.6	25	Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2015: table 3	Bartosiewicz 2003: appendix, table 1
Tiszaföldvár	4th–5th CE	Settlement	4227	61.6	27.2	11.2	408	Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2015: table 3	Bartosiewicz 2003: appendix, table 1

Table A3.1—*Continued*

Site	Period	Type	NISP	% Cattle	% Sheep/Goat	% Pig	Horse NISP (not in n-value)	Citation	Secondary Citation
Biharkeresztes	2nd–3rd CE	Settlement	298	48	32.9	19.1	70	Bartosiewicz 2003: appendix, table 1	
Kompolt 14+15	2nd–3rd CE	Settlement	4135	58.3	32.7	9	252	Bartosiewicz 2003: appendix, table 1	
Örménykút	4th–5th CE	Settlement	855	70.5	18.6	10.9	0	Bartosiewicz 2003: appendix, table 1	
Tiszavasvári-Városföld	5th CE	Settlement	497	67.8	24.1	8	25	Bartosiewicz 2003: appendix, table 1	
Timişoara-Freidorf	Roman	Settlement	64	42.2	23.4	23.4	15	Gudea and Gudea 2000: table 3.1.10	El Susi 1988
Region: Pannonia									
Ács-Vaspuszta	1st–5th CE	Military	157	51.6	21	27.4	9	Bartosiewicz 1989: table 1	
Tác-Gorsium	1st–5th CE	Urban Domestic	36867	48.7	26.9	24.5	3072	Bökönyi 1984: table 1	
Albertfalva Vicus	Roman	Military/Domestic	344	41.9	29.4	28.8	31	Choyke 1998: table 3	
Sirmium	1st–6th CE	Urban Domestic	10507	42.1	34.2	23.7	555	Marković et al. 2014: table 1	
Vranj (outside Sirm.)	3rd–4th CE	Villa	1241	40.9	29.7	29.4	9	Marković et al. 2014: table 1	
Davidovac-Gradiste	3rd–5th CE	Settlement	718	45.5	30.2	24.2	32	Miladinović-Radmilović et al. 2016: table 5	
Sopron	4th–6th CE	Urban Domestic	1419	70.3	11.7	18	n/a	King 1999a: appendix	Bökönyi 1986
Szakály—Roman Imperial	1st–3rd CE	Settlement	725	65.2	17.4	17.4	45	Vörös 1982: table 1	

Site	Date	Context	Count	%	%	%	n	Reference	Reference
Szakály—Late Roman	4th CE	Settlement	137	62.8	10.2	27	9	Vörös 1982: table 1	
Region: Moesia									
Iatrus (B–C)	Late 4th–mid-5th CE	Settlement	1066	71.8	12.8	15.5	28	Bartosiewicz and Choyke 1991: table 2	Iliev et al. 1992
Iatrus (A)	Mid-4th CE	Military	126	44.4	23	32.5	4	Bartosiewicz and Choyke 1991: table 2	
Bela voda	3rd–6th CE	Settlement	330	41.8	20	38.2	18	Beech 2007: table 10.24	Iliev et al. 1992
Dichin	5th–6th CE	Urban Domestic	3692	26.5	31.7	41.8	56	Beech 2007: table 10.24	
Novae, areas X, IX, V	2nd–6th	Urban Domestic	5758	41.4	28.7	29.9	254	Beech 2007: table 10.24	Schramm 1975, 1979
Novae, principium, scamnum	1st–6th CE	Military	808	39.1	19.7	41.2	29	Beech 2007: table 10.24	Makowiecki 1999
Ratiaria	2nd–4th CE	Urban Domestic	97	48.5	37.1	14.4	7	Beech 2007: table 10.24	Iliev et al. 1993
Nicopolis 1	100–175 CE	Urban Domestic	351	26.8	36.2	37	9	Beech 2007: table 10.1	
Nicopolis 2	175–250 CE	Urban Domestic	313	16.9	30.4	52.7	5	Beech 2007: table 10.1	
Nicopolis 3	250–450 CE	Urban Domestic	4593	23.7	32.5	43.7	98	Beech 2007: table 10.1	
Nicopolis 1–3	2nd–5th CE	Urban Domestic	5257	23.5	32.7	43.8	112	Beech 2007: table 10.1	
Krivina C	5th–6th CE	Military/Domestic	703	66.6	12.9	20.5	n/a	King 1999a: appendix	Barosiewicz and Choyke 1991

Table A3.1—*Continued*

Site	Period	Type	NISP	% Cattle	% Sheep/Goat	% Pig	Horse NISP (not in n-value)	Citation	Secondary Citation
Region: Dacia									
Brâncovenești	Roman	Military	112	57.1	18.8	24.1	23	Gudea and Gudea 2000: table 3.1.1	Haimovici 1986—pp. 298–301
Hinova	Roman	Military	105	61.9	14.3	32.8	4	Gudea and Gudea 2000: table 3.1.2	El Susi 1999
Micia-Hunedoara	Roman	Military	1558	57.4	20.8	21.8	60	Gudea and Gudea 2000: table 3.1.3	Ionescu and Brăileanu 1979; Uddrescu 1985
Pojejena	Roman	Military	1176	51.4	19.5	29.2	44	Gudea and Gudea 2000: table 3.1.4	El Susi 1996
Bologa-jud. Cluj	Roman	Military	1059	61.5	23.8	14.7	45	Gudea and Gudea 2000: table 3.1.5	Georoceanu et al. 1979
Apulum	Roman	Urban Domestic	1426	55.5	22.2	22.2	229	Gudea and Gudea 2000: table 3.1.6	Georoceanu et al. 1992
Porolissum-Vama	Roman	Urban Domestic	1480	30.7	53.4	15.9	69	Gudea and Gudea 2000: table 3.1.7	Lisovschi and Gudea 1996
Porolissum (taberna)	Roman	Urban Domestic	781	69.9	0	30.1	488	Gudea and Gudea 2000: table 3.1.8	Gudea 1998, Gudea et al. 1998
Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa	Roman	Urban Domestic	213	62.4	9.9	27.7	9	Gudea and Gudea 2000: table 3.1.9	Gudea and Lisovschi 1997
Săliște-jud. Alba	Roman	Settlement	57	77.2	5.3	17.5	16	Gudea and Gudea 2000: table 3.1.11	Georoceanu et al. 1978
Stolniceni-Vâlcea	Roman	Urban Domestic	728	47.5	25.8	26.6	57	Gudea and Gudea 2000: table 3.1.13	Udrescu 1990; Udrescu 1979
Cicau	2nd–4th CE	Settlement	57	77.2	5.3	17.5	n/a	King 1999a: appendix	Georoceanu et al. 1978
Micasasa	2nd CE	Military/ Domestic	208	68.3	26.9	4.8	n/a	King 1999a: appendix	Blăjan et al. 1978
Tirnavioara	2nd CE	Military/ Domestic	101	61.4	37.6	1	n/a	King 1999: appendix	Ghiurco et al. 1992

II. Iron Age
Region: Batavia

Tiel-Passewaaijse Hogeweg 1	400–175 BC	Settlement	289	52.9	31.5	15.6	18	Groot 2016—sup. tab. E5.1
Tiel-Oude Tielsweg 1	300–175 BCE	Settlement	234	66.7	23.1	10.3	34	Groot 2016—sup. tab. E5.1
Lith-De Bergen	200–100 BCE	Settlement	879	63.9	27.9	8.2	50	Groot 2016—sup. tab. E5.1
Geldermalsen-Hondesgemet 1	120–50 BCE	Settlement	921	79.8	16.7	3.5	76	Groot 2016—sup. tab. E5.1
Houten-Doornkade a	LIA	Settlement	154	81.2	13	5.8	16	Groot 2016—sup. tab. E5.1
Bunnik-Werkhoven	LIA	Settlement	138	52.9	37	10.1	16	Groot 2016—sup. tab. E5.1
Odijk-Singel West/Schoudermantel	LIA	Settlement	315	63.2	19.4	17.5	21	Groot 2016—sup. tab. E5.1

Region: Britain

Nazeingbury	LIA—1st BCE–1st CE	Settlement	197	72.1	20.3	7.6	n/a	King 1984: appendix
Puckeridge A	LIA–1st CE	Settlement	188	21.8	30.9	47.3	n/a	King 1984: appendix Croft 1979
Puckeridge B	LIA–1st CE	Settlement	692	34	35	31	n/a	King 1984: appendix Croft 1979
Puckeridge C	LIA–1st CE	Settlement	407	29.5	35.9	34.6	n/a	King 1984: appendix Croft 1979
Skeleton Green	LIA–1st CE	Settlement	2439	32.2	18.5	49.3	n/a	King 1984: appendix Ashdown and Evans 1981
Wakerly	LIA–1st BCE–1st CE	Settlement	468	41.9	47	11.1	n/a	King 1984: appendix Jones 1978

Table A3.1—*Continued*

Site	Period	Type	NISP	% Cattle	% Sheep/ Goat	% Pig	Horse NISP (not in n-value)	Citation	Secondary Citation
Region: Germania									
Bad Nauheim	LIA–1st BCE	Settlement	9233	48.1	12	39.9	n/a	King 1984: appendix	Geilhausen 1967
Basel, Museum	LIA–1st BCE	Settlement	631	25.2	28.2	46.6	n/a	King 1984: appendix	Schmid and Zeller 1979
Basel, Voltastr.	LIA–1st BCE	Settlement	412	47.3	7.8	44.9	n/a	King 1984: appendix	Schmid 1973
Berne, Enge A	LIA–1st BCE	Settlement	507	34.9	41.2	23.9	n/a	King 1984: appendix	Stampfli 1962
Berne, Enge B	LIA–1st BCE	Settlement	300	53	31.3	15.7	n/a	King 1984: appendix	Stampfli 1962
Chur-Welschdörfli	LIA–1st BCE	Settlement	516	60.9	4.1	35.1	n/a	King 1984: appendix	Stampfli 1967
Manching	LIA–1st BCE	Oppidum	366507	44.4	21.3	34.4	n/a	King 1984: appendix	Boessneck et al. 1971
Region: Gaul									
Alst	LIA–1st BCE	Settlement	2341	30.8	31.4	37.8	n/a	King 1984: appendix	Poulain 1979
Beauvais	LIA–1st BCE	Settlement	2245	31	12.2	56.7	n/a	King 1984: appendix	Meniel 1983
Mont Avrollat	LIA–1st BCE	Settlement	243	29.2	14.4	56.4	n/a	King 1984: appendix	Poulain 1977
Vielle-Toulouse	LIA–1st BCE	Settlement	233	39.1	18.5	42.5	n/a	King 1984: appendix	Poulain-Josien 1958
Villeneuve-St. Germain	LIA–1st BCE	Settlement	1632	19.6	15.4	65	n/a	King 1984: appendix	Claassen 1977
Region: Pannonia									
Szakály—La-Tène	1st BCE–1st CE	Settlement	401	55.9	32.7	11.5	n/a	Vörös 1982: table 1	
Velem-Szent-Vid	LIA–2nd–1st BCE	Settlement	299	63.2	17.1	19.7	n/a	King 1999a: appendix	Horard 1992
Gellerthegy-Taban (Bdpst)	LIA–2	Settlement	60	38.3	25	26.7	n/a	King 1999a: appendix	Matolsci 1979
Region: Sarmatia									
Sajópetri	Celtic (3rd BCE)	Settlement	1781	55.9	29.8	14.3	108	Bartosiewicz and Gál 2010: table 9.1	

III. Nomadic

Site	Period	Type	NISP (% total corpus)	% Cattle	% Sheep/ Goat	% Pig	Horse NISP (not in n-value) (% horse, out of full corpus)	Citation
Eurasia								
Kradin's Steppe avg,	diachronic	Nomadic	80	25	75	0	20	Kradin 2015, 47–48
Mongolia								
Eastern Steppe	1940s	Nomadic	84.3	13.9	86.1	0	12.8	Barfield 1993: table 5.1, p. 138
Khanghai Forest-Steppe	1940s	Nomadic	87.7	14.8	85.2	0	11.1	Barfield 1993: table 5.1, p. 138
Gobi Desert Steppe	1940s	Nomadic	83.2	5.4	94.6	0	9.2	Barfield 1993: table 5.1, p. 138
Altai Mountain Steppe	1940s	Nomadic	90.8	6.3	93.7	0	2.7	Barfield 1993: table 5.1, p. 138
Turkistan								
Xinjiang	1933	Nomadic	93	12.9	87.1	0	6	Barfield 1993: table 5.1, p. 138
Kuldja	1877	Nomadic	88	8	92	0	11	Barfield 1993: table 5.1, p. 138
Kazakhstan	1920s	Nomadic	83.8	29.1	70.9	2.4	12	Barfield 1993: table 5.1, p. 138
Kirghizia	1920s	Nomadic	85.6	19.9	80.1	2.1	11.4	Barfield 1993: table 5.1, p. 138
Turkmenia	1920s	Nomadic	86.8	14.7	85.3	0	6.9	Barfield 1993: table 5.1, p. 138

Table A3.2. Percentage of Horse Remains within Faunal Assemblages from the Roman-Era Hungarian Plain

Site	Cattle NISP	Sheep/ Goat NISP	Pig NISP	Horse NISP	Total NISP	% Horse
Gyoma 133	4511	1937	1011	1802	9261	19.5
Hajdúnánás	3084	1069	751	795	5699	13.9
Endrőd 170	388	323	73	97	881	11
Dunavecse	370	197	59	151	777	19.4
Ártánd-Nagyf.	114	68	48	47	277	17
Alsónémedi	2515	1336	683	280	4814	5.8
Kompolt	384	318	37	58	797	7.3
Kunszállás	128	219	71	41	459	8.9
Pócspetri	444	213	171	180	1008	17.9
Szegvár	455	865	198	54	1572	3.4
Tázlar	724	660	66	25	1475	1.7
Tiszaföldvár	2602	1151	474	408	4635	8.8
Ujhartyán	273	143	22	36	474	7.6
Szirmabesenyo	661	109	128	29	927	3.1
Biharkeresztes	143	98	57	70	368	19
Kompolt 14+15	2412	1352	371	252	4387	5.7
Örménykút	603	159	93	0	855	0
Tiszavasvári-Városföld	337	120	40	25	522	4.8
Ludányhalászi	95	98	81	4	278	1.4
Salgótarján	1695	1669	454	119	3937	3
Balassagyarmat	88	103	49	6	246	2.4
Jászfelsőszentgyörgy	58	17	5	23	103	22.3
Timişoara-Freidorf	27	22	15	15	79	19

PART II

Constantine's Gothic Treaty and the Sântana-de-Mureş/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 societies in the Hungarian Plain beyond the Middle Danube, and how Rome interacted with them. Our focus now shifts downstream to the south/east division of the Danube Basin. Most of the events discussed hereafter took place in the Roman provinces of Lower Moesia, Scythia Minor, and Thrace, as well as in areas north of the Lower Danube, including the Dacian provinces and 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 subgroup labeled the Tervingi in our sources. Rome's relationship with the Tervingi has been studied extensively, and so rather than attempting to rewrite our understanding of who these people were, or what the material aspects of their culture looked like, our task will be to situate the Tervingi as they are currently understood within our larger discussion of the Roman Scythian Logos and its impact on Roman policies and actions toward transdanubian peoples.

Two treaties between Rome and the Tervingi, the first struck by Constantine in 332 CE, and the second by Valens in 369, exerted a particularly strong influence over Roman-Gothic interactions during the fourth cen-

tury. Our first task will be to unravel the details of Constantine's treaty and explore what it reveals about how the emperor and his circle 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's withdrawal of the military and civil infrastructure in the 270s. In order to fully appreciate the importance of Constantine's treaty, however, we must consider its impact on the people with whom it was struck, by examining the material evidence for Gothic life in the fourth-century Lower Danubian Borderland. The picture that emerges from text and trowel is of a society that benefited greatly from Constantine's neo-Trajanic world view and policies, thereby inadvertently creating a situation where Valens' antithetical treaty of 369 proved 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 approaching affairs in the Lower Danubian Borderland, however, we must first briefly revisit the river's middle course. We start here, because the treaties we will be examining in this and the following chapter were both shaped, albeit in different ways, by the sort of legal pacts that bound the Sarmatian Iazyges to Rome in the system of exploitative clientage previously explored. In the Middle Danube theater, the treaties that ended the Marcomannic Wars established a template for future Roman-barbarian 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*, at least in theory
3. The giving of hostages and sometimes troops as part of initial settlements
4. The payment of subsidies by Rome to support friendly transdanubian rulers

As already illustrated, 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 peoples. By decreasing or closing the military markets, Roman officials could put the squeeze on any particular community 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 often appointed directly by Roman emperors, and it appears that the treaties in general were seen as existing between specific rulers.[1] 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 Severus Alexander in 235, when the transition from one Roman 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, which makes sense given his violent path to the purple, but we find no evidence of raiding or a Roman campaign.[2] The only documented moment of real unrest in the period appeared during the reign of Caracalla, when the emperor executed the king of the Quadi.[3] 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 general Quadic population strongly argues that the whole thing was viewed by Rome as a diplomatic matter.[4] 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 peoples living 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 Severus Alexander, and the patterns that emerged during the chaotic bulk of the third century prove to

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1. Braund 1984, 57–58, 185.
2. Dio 73.6.1; Hdn. 2.2.8, 2.4.3.
3. Dio 77.20.3–4, 78.27.5.
4. Kovács 2014, 195–98.

be extremely important for understanding later policy toward all the people the Romans considered Scythians/Sarmatians. As soon as Maximinus Thrax had secured his position by orchestrating the murder of Severus Alexander and his mother, he led the army his predecessor had been assembling on a several-year tour of the *barbaricum*, mainly beyond the Rhine—as Severus Alexander had intended—but also against the Sarmatians of the Hungarian Plain.[5] The evidence is too sparse to assess whether the brief Sarmatian campaign was conducted out of necessity or for other reasons, but given Maximinus' flimsy, blood-soaked, claim to the purple, we must read all of his wars as designed—at least in part—to retrench the military reputation upon which he had based his usurpation. In other words, this shadowy campaign is, in all probability, the first example, since the reign of Marcus Aurelius, of an emperor warring against Sarmatians in order to shine up his military laurals.[6] It would hardly be the last.

Beginning with the sack of Olbia in 238,[7] the sources—when not detailing the near-constant civil wars—are dominated by tales of raids by Scythians from beyond the Black Sea. Within the setting of this third-century crisis, it is crucial to note that the Sarmatians and other peoples from beyond the Middle Danube play a puzzlingly ambiguous role. 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,[8] and is mentioned frequently enough in the sources to appear genuine.[9] The matter seems to have been cleared up during the reign of Gallienus, but the lack of a detailed narrative makes further 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.[10] From Zosimus we hear that the emperor fought an indecisive battle in Pannonia with raiders identified only as Scythians, while Dexippus pro-

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5. *SHA, Max.* 13.3–4.

6. For this particular impetus for war, see Drinkwater 2007, passim, but particularly ch. 1; Mattern 1999, ch. 5.

7. *Scyth.* frs. 14, 16.

8. Thirty coin hoards datable to 260 are known from Pannonia. There are also destruction layers at Aquincum, Gorsium, Intercisa, Albertfalva, and Annamatia which date to this period (Kovács 2014, 251–52).

9. *Pan. Lat.* 8.10.2; Eutr. 9.8; Jer., *Chron.* 3021; Oros. 2.22.7; Prosp. 441, no. 878.

10. *Scyth.* fr. 34; *SHA, Aurel.* 18.2, 30.2, 33.4; Zos. 1.48–50; Pet. Pat. fr. 11.

vides a full account of the succeeding peace negotiations. The picture that emerges is entirely typical of the 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 Aurelian had just concluded against the Iuthungi, farther west along the Upper Danube.[11] In the end, a new, yet entirely traditional treaty of clientage was struck under which the Vandals were required to furnish hostages and 2,000 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*,[12] 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 east-Germanic speaking Vandals[13] could be labeled as Sarmatians, it would seem, by virtue of their geographic location beyond the Middle Danube—the *ripa Sarmatica*—most likely in the Upper Tisza Valley.[14] Whether or not any Iazyges, or other groups more commonly labeled as Sarmatians, took part in the Vandalic raid is unknown, but not improbable.

The next Sarmatian war happened under Probus, and since it is only known from the *Historia Augusta*, we should treat it with caution.[15] If it happened at all, it would have taken place somewhere between 278 and 279 CE, when coinage suggests Probus was in the Pannonian region.[16] From

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11. *Scyth.* fr. 28.

12. White 2005, 80–81.

13. The language spoken by the third- and fourth-century 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 conviviis barbaris* in the manuscripts: *Inter 'eils' Goticum 'scapia matzia ia drincan' / non audet quisquam dignos edicere versus!* ("Amid Gothic cries of 'cheers! Let's eat and drink!' nobody dares to write decent poetry!"). The '*eils Goticum*' here probably refers to the Vandalic language, given the poem's Carthaginian pedigree, but the association is by no means certain.

14. Zosimus' reference to the barbarians as Scythians, meanwhile, shows the continued importance of the macrolevel Scythian label in his own, late fifth-century context.

15. *SHA, Prob.* 16.2, 11.9, 12.4, 19.8.

16. Kovács 2014, 265–66.

this point 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.[17]

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 access to the full *Scythica* and cite it in their own histories—most importantly Zosimus and Jordanes—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 farther west in Noricum and Raetia,[18] as well as the single section on the Vandal/Sarmatian treaty just discussed. From this evidence, we must conclude that compared to events in Moesia and Asia Minor, Sarmatian affairs were simply not that interesting to Dexippus.

Put simply, 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 as adventures driven by imperial politics. Dubious emperors like Maximinus, Probus, Carus, and Carinus were looking to score easy victories when they led their troops into the Hungarian Plain. The region's population was hemmed in by a ring of mountains and provincial *limites* and was—as we have demonstrated archaeologically—too settled to flee north over the Carpathians, 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 fighting each other and dealing with the latest rampaging Boranoi, but given how Dexippus' *Scythica* was entirely devoted to the topic of barbarian incursions,

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17. The existence of these campaigns is almost wholly deduced from imperial victory honorifics and coin issues with inscriptions reading some variation on VICTORIA SARMATICA (e.g., *RIC* 6.101, Trier, and many, many more).

18. *Scyth.* fr. Mec. 34/Mar. 28.

we would expect to know more about the vaguely attested Sarmatian events had they been significant enough to register on the author's radar to the same level as the campaigns of the Gothic leader Cniva and the high-seas adventures of the Black Sea raiders.

When Diocletian secured the purple 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. Instead, we should imagine them as having two goals unrelated to necessary defense: first, to stabilize the new regime's control over the borderland through renewed client alliances, and second to prove the martial legitimacy of the tetrarchs, as testified by their regular stream of transdanubian honorifics.[19]

III. How Do You Solve a Problem like Dacia (Again)?

While Roman relations with the peoples of the Hungarian Plain had been proceeding more or less according to the Antonine playbook throughout the third century, the same could not be said for the areas farther downstream, along the Lower Danube in the region later known, at least in one source, as the *ripa Gothica*.[20] By the time Claudius II won his decisive victory at Naissus in 270, defeating barbarians Zosimus calls Scythians and thereby earning the cognomen *Gothicus*,[21] the provinces of Moesia and Thrace, as well as many parts of Macedonia, Achaea, and the provinces of Asia Minor, had endured a solid twenty years of near-constant raiding and chaos. To briefly recap the highlights of this period, the first attested raid into Moesia occurred in 249 and resulted in the unsuccessful siege of Marcianople, an important Thracian city.[22] This was followed by the large-scale

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19. Kovács 2016, 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. The Carpic losers eventually petitioned for resettlement inside the empire (see below).

20. *Orig. Const.* 35.

21. Zos. 1.43, 45.

22. *SHA, Gord.* 31.1; Jord., *Get.* 91; *Scyth.* fr. Mec. 28/Mar. 22.

raids of Cniva and Ostrogotha in 250 and 251, which culminated in the sack of Philippopolis, an even more important city, and the death of emperor Decius at Abritus.[23] The remainder of the 250s and the whole decade of the 260s witnessed widespread seaborne raiding by a number of Scythian peoples, 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 what may be a description of his own role in the defense of Attica from Herulian raiders.[24]

It is no coincidence that the periods of most active Gothic raiding corresponded with the worst political chaos of the so-called third-century crisis. As he went about piecing the Roman state back together, Aurelian delivered the knock-out punch against the Danubian raiders with a decisive victory in 271, earning the title *Gothicus Maximus*.[25] It would be up to the emperor Tacitus in 276, however, to handle the final round of Black Sea pirates.[26]

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 south of the Danube, carved out of Moesia. He took the action, we are told, because the old Dacia had become militarily untenable, and in order to help repair the ruinous state of Illyricum by consolidating the greater Danubian region's population south of the river.[27] The basic reality of Aurelian's withdrawal is not in question, but there has

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23. Zos. 1.23; Lactant., *De mort. pers.* 4.1; *Scyth.* fr. Mec. 30/Mar. 24.

24. *Scyth.* fr. Mec. 31/Mar. 25. See also Zos. 1.31–46.

25. *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, 31–32; Barnes 1978, 70).

26. For Tacitus' campaign see Zos. 1.63. The *Vita Probi* records additional warfare against various transdanubian peoples (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.

27. *SHA, Aurel.* 39.7; Eutrop. 9.15. See also Festus 8; Jord., *Rom.* 217; Sync.722; Mal. 12.30. For a succinct, recent assessment of the evidence, see Watson 1999, 154–57.

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 school of thought—largely Hungarian and German—that pictured the evacuation as near-total. The staggering logistics required to remove 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 later pundits eager to sever any perceived ethnic links between Transylvania and the Romanian heartlands in Wallachia and Moldavia, and so the idea of post-Aurelian Dacia as a *terra deserta* lived on, first to justify Austro-Hungarian imperialism, and later in the fraught atmosphere after the Treaty of Trianon, when large areas of what had been eastern Hungary were assigned to Romania by the League of Nations.[28] The picture that emerges from the material remains of post-Aurelian Dacia, however, is one of partial continuity, and this material evidence must be considered in order to properly understand the ideologies behind Aurelian's withdrawal.

Post-Aurelian Dacia: The Material Evidence

The Dacian provinces in 271 CE had undergone over a century and a half of Roman occupation and extensive colonization by military veterans and civilians from across the empire, although older models that saw a near-complete removal or destruction of the preconquest Dacian populations are probably overstated.[29] The region was characterized by fairly extensive urbanism with a heavy military flavor, reflecting the fifty-five to sixty 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, even taking into account its mineral

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28. Ellis 1998, 221–25. 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, despite the apparent linguistic linkages.

29. While the 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 period, and may reflect a cultural aversion to settlement nucleation among the Dacians (Diaconescu 2004, 121–25; Oltean 2004).

resources. This dynamic can explain, perhaps, why there is virtually no evidence of strife between the military and civilian elements of provincial Dacian society.[30] Agricultural villas in a Moeso-Pannonian style, and rural settlements 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 western Wallachia and the Transylvanian plateau, to the minerals and timber of the Apuseni and Carpathian mountains.[31]

During the chaos of the third century, there were, perhaps surprisingly, no major recorded barbarian incursions into Dacia,[32] suggesting that prior to Aurelian's withdrawal, Dacia was still effectively serving its key function as a wedge, redirecting hostile raiders east and south into Moldavia and eastern Wallachia, or, less frequently, west over the Carpathians into the Hungarian Plain.[33] 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 in which 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,[34] and the resultant economic slump may well have encouraged more of the population to leave when the troops eventually packed up.

Evidence for population continuity after the withdrawal is spotty, but present. In Transylvania, Sarmizegetusa—the capital of the former Dacian kingdom and an important center under Roman administration—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. At Napoca—a major administrative hub for Dacia Porolissensis—the urban center appears to have declined shortly after the retreat, but a new village that appeared

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30. Diaconescu 2004, 120.

31. Oltean 2004, 147, 154–55; Mitrofan 1974, 46.

32. Diaconescu 2004, 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.

33. 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.

34. Diaconescu 2004, 130; Gazdac 1998.

nearby in the early fourth century shows Roman material continuity, including late Roman coinage. A sub-Roman population has also been identified in the Someş Valley as late as the seventh century.[35]

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, 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 the one at Tibiscum, were located well beyond the river.[36] 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.[37] The linchpin for the entire late Roman Lower Danube *limes* was located on the Danube 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 least the sixth century.[38] Taken together, the evidence for post-Aurelian Dacia seems to depict a strong Roman interest in maintaining control over the river, and access to the lands beyond, if not a desire for direct administration of the interior. 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. On top of this post-provincial substrate, we will need to consider a population of immigrants well known from both settlement and burial evidence in the region, but first we must return to the question of how Roman minds conceived of Aurelian's withdrawal, and the status of Dacia in the following century.

Conceptualizing Dacia after the Withdrawal

Ceding territory was a rare event throughout Roman history and when it had occurred in the centuries prior to Aurelian's reign, it had followed a

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35. Diaconescu 2004, 131–34.

36. Diaconescu 2004, 130; Bondoc 2009, ch. 3.

37. Bondoc 2009, 53–68. The most important of these routes were located along the Cerna River north from Dierna (the Cerna-Timiş route), and north from Drobeta where Trajan's original bridge had stood (the Olt route).

38. Bondoc 2009, 76–81.

fairly clear pattern. Hadrian opted to abandon much of Trajan's Mesopotamian conquests (and perhaps part of his Dacian annexation as well),[39] but in this case, the evacuated regions had only recently been conquered, and had not yet been fully integrated into the imperial administrative system.[40] 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 before the solidification of frontier lines.[41] The example of the so-called Antonine Wall in Scotland offers crucial insight into how such "abandoned" territory was conceived by Roman decision-makers. This wall, which spanned the so-called central belt of Scotland, between the Firth of Clyde and the Firth of Forth, was begun in 142, completed about a decade later, and then abandoned in 162. Thus, Rome only ever held the territory between the Hadrianic and Antonine walls for a couple of decades, and yet Septimius Severus' effort to reestablish the abandoned Antonine frontier about a half century later[42] suggests that to Roman minds, the territory between the walls had never been ceded to anyone, even if actual control had lapsed.[43]

Aurelian's withdrawal from Dacia is somewhat different from the preceding examples because the region had been provincially administered for nearly two hundred years. After this protracted Roman interlude, Dacia was too intimately connected to the rest of the empire, both ideologically and socioeconomically, 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 CE, the unfortunate demise of Julian while on campaign in Mesopotamia offers further illumination. In this case, the death of the emperor forced his successor, Jovian, to strike a humiliating treaty with Persia. Peace was bought at the steep price of official cession of a number of fortified cities and their territories in the disputed border-

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39. Gudea 1979.

40. Isaac 1990, 23–26; Mattern 1999, 94.

41. Luttwak 1976, 46–50.

42. Mattern 1999, 94.

43. 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).

land of northern Mesopotamia, most importantly the bastion-city of Nisibis.[44] Ammianus' comments 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,[45] reflects the outlook of someone who had lived through the debacle and surely mirrored popular sentiment. Ammianus apparently did not place the earlier abandonment of Dacia in the same category as the Mesopotamian cessions. Indeed, 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 than what the abandonment of Dacia *was not*, would be what exactly Aurelian and his successors thought the status of the old Dacian provinces *was* after the withdrawal. The establishment of a new Dacia south of the river may indicate that the old territory was no longer considered "Dacian," even if Roman thinkers did not see it as wholly abandoned and outside imperial jurisdiction. The whole region beyond the river remained Scythia in Roman minds, of course, but this does not preclude a more specific designation for the former transdanubian provinces. The evidence is rather scanty, but it is perhaps important that only after Aurelian do we begin to hear the region referred to as Gothia, and find the Lower Danube labeled the *ripa Gothica*.[46]

IV. Constantine's Neo-Trajanic Vision for the Danubian Borderland

Material evidence from the Dacian military sites of Drobeta, Sucidava, Gornea, and a number of smaller bridgeheads, show tetrarchic occupation, and, as mentioned above, in 328 CE, Constantine built an elaborate new bridge over the Danube between Oescus and Sucidava, which he celebrated with commemorative coin issues (*RIC* 7.298, Rome; *RIC* 8.21, Constantinople).[47] This ongoing presence beyond the Danube demonstrates that in the early fourth century, emperors continued to view the old Dacian provinces as part of the empire in some capacity, whether they could still be called Dacian

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44. Blockley 1992, 24–30.
45. A.M. 25.9.9.
46. For *Gothia*, see *Pas. Sab.* 1.1, 3.1. For the *ripa Gothica*, see *Orig. Const.* 35.
47. Bondoc 2009, ch. 3.

or not, and this perspective can help us understand a watershed moment of fourth-century history: Constantine's treaty of 332 with the Tervingi Goths.

Prior to 332 CE, 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.[48] 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,[49] and that following the defeat of *indomiti reges*, Constantine, *victor Sarmatiae totiens*, concluded the war with a *foedus*,[50] before divvying up the spoils at Bononia (Vidin) back in Moesia.[51] Constantine celebrated his Danubian victory in coinage, most notably a bronze issue from Trier with the inscription SARMATIA DEVICTA.[52] Whether it was the handling of this entirely typical Sarmatian war or an even more obscure Gothic incursion farther east in Moesia, some sort of anti-barbarian action by Constantine prompted his imperial rival, Licinius, to claim a breach of his territory, and Constantine soon found himself engaged in a brutal civil conflict with his erstwhile eastern colleague.[53] On his eventual victory in 325, the emperor of the reunified Roman state found fresh Danubian troubles just around the corner.

Whatever Aurelian's withdrawal from Dacia may have meant for Rome's political claim to the transdanubian provinces, his physical removal of the legions undeniably created a power vacuum in Wallachia and Transylvania. There is broad consensus that by 332, hegemony in at least part of Trajan's Dacia had been assumed by a new society the Romans identified as Scythian, and which most modern historians call Gothic.[54] Whatever these new hegemons called themselves—some of them, at least, labeled 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 pro-

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48. Zos. 2.21.

49. Opt. Por. 6.18–21.

50. Opt. Por. 7.20–32.

51. Opt. Por. 6.26–28. See Kovács 2016, 45–50, for a more detailed assessment of the patchy evidence from Porphyrius and Zosimus.

52. *RIC* 7.429, Trier.

53. *Orig. Const.* 5.21.

54. Thompson 1966, 1–7; Wolfram 1988, 57–61; Heather 1991, 84–97; Heather 2007, 165–67; Kulikowski 2007, 71–83.

liferation of a predictable, coherent material culture complex, both in terms of settlement and burial practice. The specific material characteristics of this society, known to archaeologists as the Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov Culture, reveal much about how it worked, 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.[55] Not enough is known 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 what does appear clearly enough—from both material and textual evidence—is that while the tetrarchs were busy putting the Roman house in order, the barbarians were doing their own housecleaning north of the Danube.[56]

For the period between Aurelian and Constantine, there is strong textual evidence for a shifting political landscape among the transdanubian barbarians. First, Maximian's birthday panegyric of 291 gives us our earliest attestation of three barbarian groups well known from later decades: the Tervingi, Taifali, and Gepids. All three groups are described as battling for supremacy north of the Danube, along with Vandals, Alamanni, and Burgundians, while the Sarmatians are noticeably absent from the list, as are other "pacified" client peoples like the Quadi and Marcomanni.[57] One might suspect the panegyricist of simply listing off all the barbarian groups currently "in the news," but it still makes sense to imagine a period of chaos north of the river in the decades following the evacuation of Dacia. Probus' war with the Bastarnae and Galerius' campaigns against the Carpi, for which he assumed no less than six *Carpicus Maximus* honorifics, should also be seen as part of the shifting power dynamics after Aurelian.[58] Both groups petitioned for

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55. As emphasized in chapter 3, however, association between a material culture complex and a 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.

56. For a detailed discussion of this period, see Wolfram 1988, 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 long-standing friendship between the Iazyges and Germanic Quadi, not to mention the exempla of other contemporary Sarmatian leaders with Germanic names (e.g., Fragiledus and Araharius, A.M. 17.12.11–12) make it clear that onomastics cannot be used to identify Sarmatians.

57. *Pan. Lat.* 11.17.

58. For Probus's campaigns, *SHA, Prob.* 18.1; for Galerius' Carpic titles, see Kovács 2016,

resettlement south of the Danube, which was accomplished in multiple stages between 280 and 303.[59] From this transitional period, the Tervingi eventually emerged as the most powerful unit in and around former Dacia.

Pushing out Bastarnae and Carpi from the plains and hills of Moldavia was one thing, but when Goths—who in this case are given no 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 previously struck between Constantine and the Sarmatians in 322 at the conclusion of the emperor's first transdanubian campaign.[60] The sequence of events is clear enough: hard-pressed by Gothic enemies, the Sarmatians called on Roman aid, probably in late 331, citing their status as imperial dependents. In response, Constantine dispatched his son of the same name, at the head of an army, which crossed the Danube in the spring of 332, 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*.[61] Constantine proceeded to celebrate this victory in an utterly typical fashion. He

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1–6, 23, table 2. It is worth noting that Galerius' victories over the Carpi were not mirrored directly in the tetrarchic coinage. There are no issues celebrating any *victoria Carpica* but we do find a great number of issues with some variation on the inscription VICTORIA SARMATICA (e.g., *RIC* 6.26, Rome; 6.33b, Antioch; 6.36b, Rome). It seems likely that some of these Sarmatian victory issues refer to Galerius' Carpic adventures, suggesting, perhaps, that during this period the Carpi—like the Vandals in Dexippus—could be classed as a type of Sarmatian.

59. *SHA, Prob.* 18.1; Zos. 1.71.1; Aur. Vict. 39.43; Jerome, *Chron.* 226b Helm; *Chron. Min.* 1:230; *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, 83–84).

60. The conflict between the Sarmatians and Goths also appears to have been the catalyst for the Limigantes revolt discussed at length in the third 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.* 1:234; Euseb., *v. Const.* 4.6; Soz. 1.8.9). We should not take the labeling of the Limigantes as slaves too literally. As previously argued, these events probably represent 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.

61. *Orig. Const.* 6.31; Julian, *Or.* 1.9D. For a full list of the sources relevant to this war, see Kovács 2016, 53–61.

received the honorific *Gothicus Maximus* for the second time,[62] erected a monumental victory column in Constantinople to celebrate the *devictos Gothos*,[63] and issued a number of coins highlighting his victory over the Tervingi while simultaneously invoking the memory of Trajan's earlier conquest of the same region. Of the several coin issues associated with this war, the most important are three medallions: large ceremonial pieces designed as overt propaganda statements distributed to victorious soldiers, officials, and client leaders.[64] In one postwar bronze medallion (*RIC* 7.298, Rome), Constantine celebrates his rebridging of the Danube in another overt nod to Trajan's earlier campaigns. In a second bronze medallion with the inscription VICTORIA GOTHICA (*RIC* 7.306, Trier), we see victory presenting a bowed, captive Goth to the personification of Rome. Finally, a gold medallion—aimed, no doubt, for more elite distribution—hails Constantine with the inscription DEBELLATORI GENTIVM BARBARARVM (*RIC* 7.531,534, Trier). The image on the obverse shows a soldier dragging a barbarian captive by the hair toward the armored figure of the emperor. To make the identity of the defeated enemy clear, the inscription continues on the exergue with the title GOTHIA.

Reconstructing Constantine's Gothic Treaty of 332

The Gothic War which Constantine so thoroughly celebrated, was brought to an end with a new *foedus*, the terms of which seem to reflect both an accurate assessment of the transdanubian balance of power, as it stood at the time, and the enduring ideology of imperial control over Dacia. The terms of the 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 nonspecialists, Jordanes' claim that the Constantinian *foedus* required the Goths to maintain a forty-thousand-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.[65] The facts appear to be these:

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62. *CIL* 6.40776.

63. This is the so-called Column of the Goths. The inscription reads *Fortunae / reduci ob / devictos Gothos* (*CIL* 3.733/*ILS* 820).

64. My thanks to my second scholarly referee for making this point about the ideological impact of medallion coinage.

65. For the supposed *foedus*, see Jord., *Get.* 112, 115. For interpretation, I follow Kulikowski (2007, 84–86) here. Heather (1991, 108–9) offers a similar, if more measured critique. Wolfram (1988, 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

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.[66]

2. Rome demanded high-ranking hostages, including the son of the Gothic king.[67]

3. The initial agreement did not involve payment of subsidies to the Goths, a fact Eusebius praises highly in his biography of Constantine.[68]

4. The Goths were allowed to trade freely across the Danube.[69]

5. After the treaty, the Goths were considered to be dependents of Rome.[70]

6. No initial levy of troops appears to have taken place,[71] although we find Gothic contingents serving in all the major wars of the following decades.[72]

7. The treaty appears to have allowed the Constantinian dynasty to brag that it had restored Trajan's Dacia.[73]

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 treaty, some degree of control over exchange with the empire was a hallmark of

sources (e.g., 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 nonspecialist in the field of Gothic studies, is even more explicit in his use of Jordanes (1992, 8).

66. *Orig. Const.* 6.31; Julian, *Or.* 1.9D.

67. *Orig. Const.* 6.31.

68. Euseb., *v. Const.* 4.5. Some sort of subsidy appears to have begun sometime between 332 and 369 when Themistius praises Valens for reversing the policy in his own treaty with the Goths (*Or.* 9.179/119; 10.205/135). 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, 115–16).

69. Them., *Or.* 10.206/135.

70. Euseb., *v. Const.* 4.5.

71. Euseb., *v. Const.* 4.5–6. The main evidentiary argument against Jordanes' claims of an initial forty-thousand-man levy is 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, 85–86, note ch. 4.23.

72. In 348, Libanius, *Or.* 59.89; in 360, A.M. 20.8.1; in 363, A.M. 23.2.7.

73. Julian, *Caes.* 329B–C; Opt. Por. 18.5–10.

Antonine-style client treaties with northern peoples. Further, 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, 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,[74] and the practice continued periodically throughout the next three centuries.[75] Most resettlements came about as the result of Roman victories against barbarians both inside and outside the *limites*, although there were occasions where barbarian communities spontaneously petitioned Rome for admittance.[76] 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,[77] appear to have repeatedly settled defeated barbarians on lands left abandoned or underpopulated by the upheavals of the third century.[78] 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 [i.e., 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?[79]

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74. Strabo 4.3.4.

75. For a complete catalog of attested resettlements, see de Ste. Croix 1981, Appendix III (509–18).

76. E.g., Appian, prf.7.

77. For Claudius II: Zos. 1.46.2; *SHA, Claud.* 9.4. For Probus: *SHA, Prob.* 18.1; Zos. 1.71.1.

78. *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.* 1:230; A.M. 28.1.5 on the tetrarchic wars against barbarians.

79. *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 iuvarent et arma dilectu?*

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 reconstruct the relationship established by the treaty of 332. Our first piece of evidence comes from Ammianus. In his narrative of the Danubian war conducted by Constantius II, the Sarmatians defeated in 359 promise— treacherously, as it turns out—to assume the name and status of *tributarii* as the condition of their resettlement inside the *limes*.[80] The historian uses the same term 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.[81] 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.[82] Here, too, Rome would have retained some sense of ownership over the lost territory, so Ammianus' use of the same term for both the Sarmatians (who were offered a real resettlement inside the *limes*) and the Alamanni (who merely had their previous squatting in the Agri Decumates 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 describes Julian offering 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 nearer [Roman] side of the Rhine."[83] 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 Roman felicity from among many barbarian

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80. A.M. 19.11.6.

81. A.M. 20.4.1; Drinkwater 2007, ch. 7.

82. Okamura 1996, 12–17.

83. A.M. 20.8.13. Simpson argued that the references to *laeti* here indicate a particular community/ethnic identity (Simpson 1977) but this does not make sense in light of the rest of the textual evidence (Mathisen 2006, 1023–28; Nixon and Rogers 1994, 142–44n76).

peoples."[84] A century earlier, we find *laeti* restored to the lands in Gaul granted them by Rome, according to the right of *postliminium*,[85] the important Late Roman legal principle 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 more importantly, it also indicates that *laeti* enjoyed at least part of the legal status of Roman citizens.[86] 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 citizen veterans.[87] 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.[88] They were simply one more source of manpower upon which the empire could draw.

When such manpower was needed, Rome could marshal it in two different ways. First, there is clear evidence that some *laeti* served in "ethnic" units recruited exclusively from a specific community of settled barbarians. The *Notitia Dignitatum* includes several military units labeled as *laeti* and further identified by an ethnic designation.[89] These bodies of soldiers were all stationed in Gaul, and based on the group names attached to each unit, probably had their main, peacetime posting at the place where they (or their ancestors) had originally been settled. Second, Ammianus explains that Julian's offer to send Constantius *laeti* was aimed at filling gaps in the ranks

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84. *CTh* 13.11.10: *Quoniam ex multis gentibus sequentes Romanam felicitatem se ad nostrum imperium contulerunt, quibus terrae laeticae administrandae sunt, nullus ex his agris aliquid nisi ex nostra adnotatione mereatur.*

85. *Pan. Lat.* 8/5.21.1.

86. 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.

87. *CTh* 7.20.12 (400 CE).

88. Mathisen 2006, 1026–27.

89. *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/community designation. While the unit of *Franci* reflects an existing late antique barbarian entity, most of the ethnic labels are either generic (*Suevi, Teutonici*), oddly archaic (*Batavii, Lingones, Nervii, Tungri*), or simply obscure (*Actori, Lagensii*). The presence of old, first-generation barbarian peoples among the *laeti* may be evidence of the institution's early existence as an otherwise-invisible organizational aspect of auxiliary recruitment.

of two general-service regiments, the Gentiles and Scutarii (*et miscendos Gentilibus atque Scutariis adulescentes laetos quosdam*).[90] That *laeti* could be integrated into these existing bodies of soldiers suggests that they were not exclusively used in ethnic units, and were, instead, 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 believable 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 pattern indicated in the *Notitia*, these units probably went home across the Danube after each campaign. Other Tervingi may well have been recruited into regular army units, along the model of Julian's laetic reinforcements, and have subsequently disappeared from visibility.

Thinking about the Constantinian Tervingi as *laeti/tributarii*, or at least as having a similar, "pseudo-laetic" relationship with Rome, can help 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, from a certain point of view he was correct.[91] By defeating the Tervingi and then establishing them (or, more accurately, legitimating their prior, independent settlement) in parts of old Dacia as *laeti/tributarii*, 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 must have been 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 Constantius II in which he extolled the lasting peace brought by Constantine's Gothic settlement,[92] one of Rome's

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90. 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*.

91. 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.

92. Julian, *Or.* 1.9D.

strengths—particularly since the issue of the *Constitutio Antoniniana*—was that "even if men are born elsewhere, they adopt Rome's constitution and use the laws and customs she has promulgated, and by that fact become Roman citizens."[93]

Within this context, free trade across the Danube should come as no surprise. Trajan's Dacia might have been on its way to becoming Constantine's Gothia, but it was still seen as imperial territory, and the new inhabitants enjoyed a status similar to provincials 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 peoples 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,[94] 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 to have restored Trajan's province, which he duly celebrated in coinage at the end of his son's campaign, as we have seen, and by assuming the title Dacicus Maximus for the first time since Aurelian's withdrawal.[95]

V. The Lower Danubian Borderland and the Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov Culture

Constantine's treaty of 332 CE 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 that was totally new for the people

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93. Julian, *Or.* 1.5C: τυγχάνωσι, τῷ μετέχειν ἅπαντας ἤδη τοῦ πολιτεύματος καὶ τοῖς ἐκεῖθεν ἡμῖν καταδειχθεῖσιν ἔθεσι καὶ νόμοις χρῆσθαι πολῖται γεγόνασιν. See also Mathisen 2006, 1021–23.

94. E.g., Thompson 1966, 10–11; Wolfram 1988, 61–62; Heather 1991, 107–8.

95. For the honorific *Dacicus Maximus*, see Kovács 2016, 50.

of the Scythian Corridor and which had not been seen in Dacia since Aurelian. In order to appreciate the true impact of the Constantinian settlement, we must look beyond what Ammianus and Zosimus have to say, to what can be gleaned archaeologically. 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, there has existed a fairly clear, detailed picture of how these transdanubians organized themselves and lived their lives. A survey of the major trends in habitation, subsistence, and exchange, is essential to accurately interpret Roman interactions with the Tervingi and to put the people of the Lower Danube in dialog with their Sarmatian neighbors on the Hungarian Plain.

A coherent, though internally diverse, material culture complex has been identified in the large region extending from the Lower Danube north and east through the Scythian Corridor at least as far as the Dnieper, including most of Transylvania, and extending as far north as Kiev and Lviv in Ukraine. This complex is usually called the Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov Culture after two important cemeteries discovered in the early twentieth century: Sântana de Mureş, located on the Mureş River in Transylvania, and Černjachov, near Kiev, neatly illustrating the culture's range.

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 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 southeast 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 limits on the culture.[96]

Because the geographical spread of the culture and its chronology map closely onto the setting for both the third-century Scythian raiders, and the territories of the fourth-century Tervingi and Greuthungi Goths, it is generally accepted that there is some sort of meaningful connection between the material culture complex and these textually attested peoples.

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96. Heather and Matthews 1991, 50–51; Diaconu 1975, 68; Horedt 1986, 8ff. The late arrival of the Černjachov Culture in Transylvania has important implications for our understanding of Roman-Gothic relations, as we will discuss below.
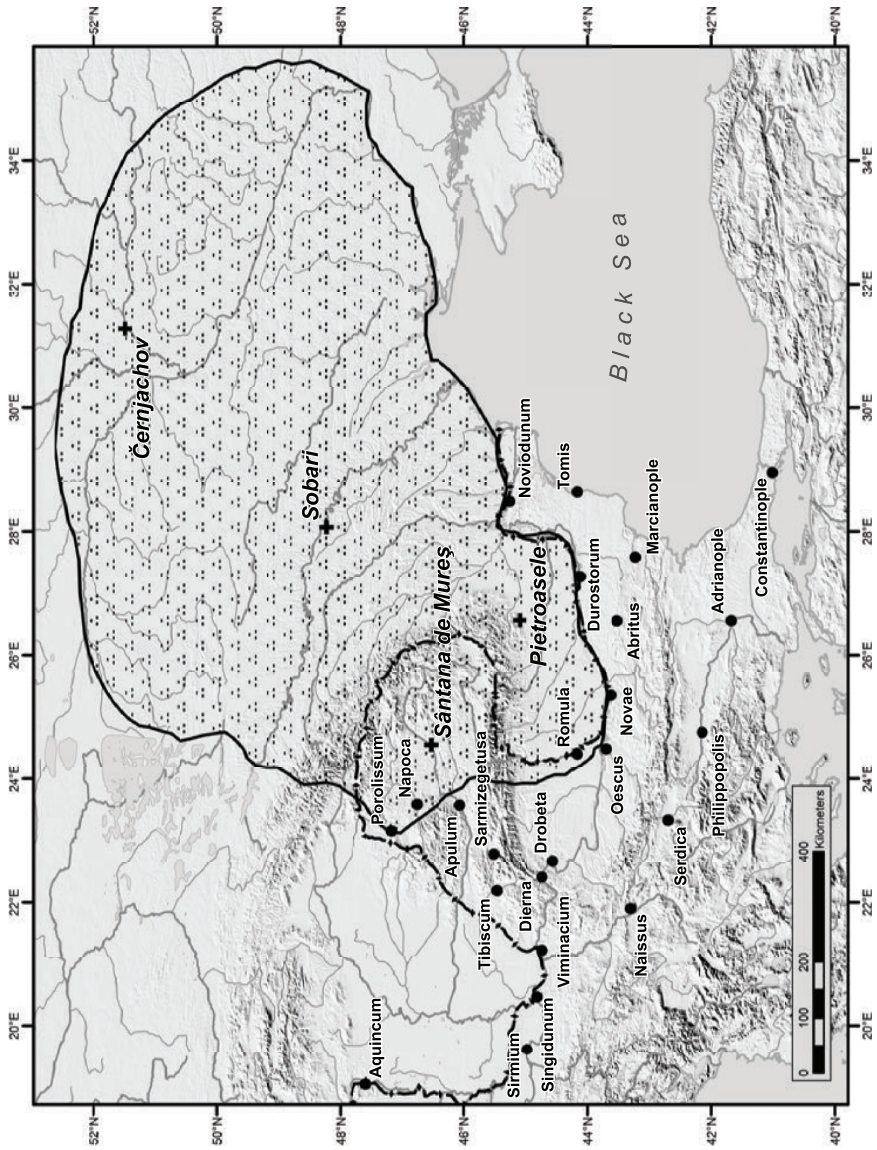
Fig. 4.1. Approximate extent of the Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov material culture complex

Older scholars assumed a simple one-to-one relationship, and described the Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov Culture as the material manifestation of the unified Gothic state anachronistically described by Jordanes.[97] Such models are to be avoided. Kulikowski offers a better way forward, suggesting that while scholars 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 Černjachov Culture life, albeit filtered through the distorting lens of the Roman ethnography and historiography. Thus, even if the exact details remain fuzzy, analysis of the material culture complex can reveal a lot about the social systems and economic networks in play beyond the Lower Danube, which in turn can help scholars assess and contextualize what the textual sources have to say.[98]

The Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov Culture: Settlement and Subsistence

Excavation of settlements reveals that the people of the Sântana-de-Mureș/ Černjachov Culture lived a sedentary life in nucleated villages characterized by modest post-and-beam houses, often arranged in parallel rows. Three different types of house are found in Černjachov settlements. The most common type is the familiar pit-house (*Grubenhaus*), virtually identical to the dominant dwelling type found in the Sarmatian villages examined in chapter 3. Less common are similarly simple houses built at surface level. 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 Černjachov Culture, *Wohnstallhäuser* have only been identified at sites in 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 their counterparts do in the villages of the Roman-era Hungarian Plain.[99]

Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov Culture villages were typically located

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97. E.g., Thompson 1966, ch. 2.
98. Kulikowski 2007, 60–70, 98–99.
99. Kulikowski 2007, 89–90; Heather and Matthews 1991, 53–54; Diaconu 1975, 69–70; Ioniţa 1975, 77.

on the high ground along the major rivers of the region, most densely along the Don, Dniester, Prut, and Lower Danube.[100] This settlement pattern suggests that river-borne movement linked 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, thereby abetting the rapid spread of the Černjachov Culture over a large area. The settlements themselves were unfortified and could be quite large, up to thirty-five hectares.[101] Elite centers have been identified both in Ukraine and in Wallachia, most notably at the site of Pietroasa/Pietroasele, in Wallachia, where Černjachov Culture houses and burials were excavated in and around a Roman fort of Constantinian origin.[102] In addition to houses, Černjachov 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.[103] Faunal remains from Černjachov Culture settlements show a fairly typical agriculturalist pattern with cows predominant, and sheep/goats and pigs making up significant minorities. In contrast to the Sarmatian pattern, however, horses are rare except at sites well out on the Pontic Steppe.[104]

The 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

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100. Kulikowski 2007, 88–89; Heather and Matthews 1991, 52; Ioniţa 1975, 77.

101. This is, perhaps, about the size of Üllő, the largest Sarmatian settlement examined in chapter 3, but far larger than Gyoma 133, or most of the other villages from the Hungarian Plain.

102. For the size of the settlements, Heather and Matthews 1991, 52. For the Ukrainian centers, Kulikowski 2007, 92–94. For the settlement at Pietroasa/Pietroasele, Bondoc 2009, 85–86; Heather and Matthews 1991, 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 36; Janes 1996, 148–49). 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 Černjachov Culture settlement associated with the fort does hint obliquely at the site's importance during the earlier period.

103. Heather and Matthews 1991, 81–82; Ioniţa 1975, 77–79.

104. Kulikowski 2007, 89–90; Heather and Matthews 1991, 84; Häusler 1979, 27ff.; Ioniţa 1966, 254; Diaconu 1975, 69–70.

from the many cemeteries identified and excavated in the region. Indeed, the material culture complex was originally defined solely based on 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, Černjachov Culture cemeteries follow a predictable pattern, but one is 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 Černjachov cemeteries include both cremation and inhumation graves, with the latter usually forming the majority.[105] By contrast, Moldavian cemeteries from the second and third centuries commonly associated with the Carpi show almost exclusive use of cremation,[106] while, as we have seen, inhumations dominate in the Sarmatian cemeteries of the Hungarian Plain, a ritual also followed on the Pontic Steppe.[107] 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.[108] Kulikowski, and Heather and Matthews are right to suggest that the observed diversity of burial ritual found in the cemeteries of the Černjachov Culture probably reflect a society with multiple traditions regarding the afterlife, rather than one where ethnically distinct subgroups cohabited with limited cultural amalgamation.[109] Whatever the reason, Černjachov cemeteries undoubtably show greater diversity of burial ritual than is found in other burial complexes from the same and adjacent regions.

Whether cremated or buried, members of the Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov Culture tended to choose their grave goods from a consistent corpus of objects found across the entire geographic range of the culture.

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105. Heather and Matthews 1991, 55.

106. Bichir 1976, 18–32.

107. For the Pontic Sarmatians, see Lebedynsky 2002, 113–30.

108. Heather and Matthews 1991, 55. Multiple orientations within single cemeteries is hardly a phenomenon unique to the Černjachov Culture, and rather too much has been made over the years about this exact feature of Sarmatian cemeteries (e.g., Vaday 1989, 195; Kulcsár 1998, 109; Simonenko 2001, 117).

109. Kulikowski 2007, 94–97; Heather and Matthews 1991, 55–58. Diaconu (1975, 70) presents the older way of interpreting this heterogeneous burial culture, suggesting that we can divide the members of the Černjachov 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.

Thus, since individuals living in different parts of the Černjachov world, who frequently practiced 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 that do appear within individual cemeteries as reflecting differences in gender, status, and perhaps religious belief, rather than origin or ethnicity.[110] 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 nonarchitectural finds at settlement sites). These largely consist of wheel-thrown, fineware vessels made from a gray fabric, and coarser storage vessels also produced on a potter's wheel.[111] In general, Černjachov Culture vessels reflect continuity with earlier Dacian and La Tène material culture, but these ceramic traditions appear to have reached the Černjachov Culture from two directions: both directly from Carpi and Dacians living outside the *limites*, and through provincial Dacian pottery centers like the one at Porolissum.

Second, while many Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov Culture graves contain few or no luxury items, those that do include 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 men and women.[112] Elite female burials also frequently feature pendants and beads, although only worn as necklaces.[113] The habit of decorating women's shoes and clothing with Roman-made glass beads common among the people of the Hungarian Plain appears to have remained a quirk of their particular regional culture, neither reflected in Černjachov Culture burials nor Pontic Sarmatian graves. At the same time, Černjachov use of cowrie shell pendants appears to be a habit taken from the Sarmatians of the Pontic Steppe by both the members of the Černjachov Culture, and the inhabitants of the Hungarian Plain.[114] Bone combs, an object-type with clear antecedents in Germanic Central Europe, are also frequently found in Černjachov graves, and workshops for producing these popular—and perhaps not very expensive—items have been located within

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110. Kulikowski 2007, 96–97.
111. Heather and Matthews 1991, 64–65, 71–72.
112. 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.
113. Gopkalo 2011, 66; Heather and Matthews 1991, 73–79.
114. Kovács and Vaday 1999.

Černjachov Culture villages.[115] 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.[116] Finally, although weapons other than small knives are rare in Černjachov graves, iron tools of various types are not uncommon, suggesting a society rich enough to produce and widely employ such implements, in marked contrast to the metal-impoverished Sarmatians of the Hungarian Plain.[117]

Modeling Fourth-Century "Gothic" Society

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.[118] There is little evidence of social stratification within the villages of the Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov Culture, although fairly modest differences in material wealth are more easily identified in the cemeteries by the presence or lack of grave goods, such as jewelry and farming implements. Although far from ostentatious in terms of architecture, the Černjachov Culture was quite affluent by the standards of the day. A culture that can afford to bury iron implements on a semiregular 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 Černjachov Culture also reflected in the great number of Roman coins discovered in hoards and single finds throughout the region.[119] Preda's 1975 catalog of finds within the territory of modern Romania, while not covering the entire territory inhabited by members of the Černjachov Culture,

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115. Heather and Matthews 1991, 79; Palade 1966, 261–77.

116. Heather and Matthews 1991, 85–87; Häusler 1979, 54ff; Ioniţa 1975, 86.

117. Heather and Matthews 1991, 84–85; Häusler 1979, 29–33; Vaday 1996c, 80, 149–52.

118. The *Passio Sabae*, an anonymous fourth-century hagiography of St. Saba, an apostle to the Goths, describes village life beyond the Danube in a manner that essentially rings true. We must be careful when using this text, however, 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*. We will discuss this text in more depth below.

119. Kulikowski 2007, 86–87.

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 the years 320 and 360, and the far less numerous silver finds follow the same pattern.[120] In other words, the vast majority of late Roman coins from the territory of the Černjachov Culture date to the period of Constantine's Gothic treaty, when trade with the empire was unrestricted and thriving.

There is also material evidence of what Rome sold to the people beyond the Danube. Commonly excavated imports include fine-ware ceramics, glass vessels, luxury objects like fibulae and belt-fittings, and amphorae used to transport food items, most importantly wine, oil, and fish sauce.[121] What Roman merchants received in exchange, however, is less materially clear. We hear in Ammianus of slaves being a major export from the lands beyond the Danube, a believable claim,[122] and based on the village subsistence patterns among the Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov Culture just examined, we may reasonably speculate that cattle and other livestock were also important exports from the region as they were for the Sarmatians to the west. The metal and salt works of Dacia may also have continued to produce in the century following Aurelian's withdrawal, although the evidence is nonexistent 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 newcomers.[123] Regardless, the overall picture is one of thriving economic exchange, and we have textual evidence that when Valens decided to end the free-trade policy, the decision 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.[124] That this law was deemed necessary in the immediate

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120. Preda 1975, 444; Heather and Matthews 1991, 85–86. Gold coins were generally not used in regular economic transactions and would not necessarily be expected to follow the same pattern.

121. Kulikowski 2007, 91–92; Heather and Matthews 1991, ch. 3.

122. A.M. 22.7.8. This is enthusiastically accepted by Thompson (1966, 40–43).

123. For a solid overview of what we do know about Roman intentions during their post-Aurelian reoccupation, see Bondoc 2009, 160–67.

124. *Cod. Iust.* 4.41.1: *Imppp. Valentinianus Valens et Gratianus AAA. ad Theodotum magistrum militum. Ad barbaricum* transferendi vini et olei et liquaminis nullam quisquam

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.[125]

The distribution of villages and elite centers within the territory of the Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov Culture can also help reveal the political and social systems that shaped the material remains. As discussed above, the clustering of villages along major, navigable rivers suggests significant movement within the region. The villages of the Černjachov Culture were each nodes in a vibrant social network, the existence of which helps explain the regionally homogeneous, yet locally 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- and fourth-century Černjachov. *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 elements include cowrie-shell pendants and, perhaps, certain burial rituals.[126] The habit of consuming wine, oil, and fish sauce, in turn, surely reflects the Roman tastes of the remaining provincial population of Dacia.

The disparate origins of elements of Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov material culture strongly argue against viewing the complex as the product of a single, cohesive ethnic group. To find such diverse 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, all under the aegis of some form of collective identity which both permitted and fostered continued internal diversity.[127] There was probably a great deal of human movement, facilitated by the region's open topography and many navigable

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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, 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, 2:993n210).

125. The decision to refer to the lands beyond the Lower Danube as *barbaricum* also reflects the ideology of Valens' treaty.

126. On the influence of Pontic Sarmatian burial ritual, see also Schwarcz 1999, 448; Kazanski 1991, 55–57.

127. Kulikowski 2007, 98–99.

rivers, but the movement of ideas was surely even more extensive. 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 beyond the Danube during the fourth century, regardless of what later Gothic apologists like Jordanes might say.

Scattered elite sites are known, like Pietroasele on the Danube, and Sobari in Moldova, between the Prut and Dniester Rivers. At the latter, far from both the Danube and the former Dacian provinces, excavations have revealed a large fourth-century porticoed building, constructed of stone and roofed with Roman tile, as well as some evidence for partial fortification.[128] Together, Sobari and Pietroasele represent the clearest evidence for the political elite of the Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov Culture, and the most striking features of that evidence are strong Roman influence, and a military/defensive nature. We can safely deduce that these sites were the headquarters of a military elite with Romanizing pretentions, 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 Černjachov "capital" that stands out above all other sites. This lack, together with the existence of multiple, 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 peoples or confederations, the Greuthungi to the north, and the Tervingi to the south,[129] and there may well have been others within the vast territory of the Černjachov Culture. What can be said, is that the subregional hegemonies created by textually attested fourth-century 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-Mureş/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. The *Passio Sabae*, a martyrology written in the early 370s, offers some glimmers of an insider's perspective, but the unknown authorship of the work argues for caution. The martyr in question, Saba, has a name that appears to be Syriac or Cappadocian, rather than Danu-

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128. Kulikowski 2007, 93.
129. E.g., A.M. 31.3.

bian or Germanic,[130] yet he is identified as an ethnic Goth.[131] 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.[132] 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. The *Passio* illustrates 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 from 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.[133] Thus, within this text 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 enjoying an elevated status over the villagers. This clearly shows that the Roman author viewed the major criterion for Gothicness to be very wide, namely residence (and probably also personal 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 Pietroasele and Sobari with their Roman and military aspects. Whether both of these social groups (the peasants and the soldiers) would have identified themselves as Goths, or Tervingi, or used 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-Mureș/Černjachov Culture depended on men like Atharidus, and the power systems that maintained their local authority, as well as the

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130. Heather and Matthews 1991, 104n18.
131. *Pas. Sab.* 1.1.
132. Philost., *Church History* 2.5.
133. *Pas. Sab.* 4.5–7.6.

larger-scale hegemonies of his own superiors, that is, of figures like Athanaric and Fritigern, about whom we shall shortly be hearing much more.[134]

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 a more 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 world view 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 access to Roman markets, and the resulting 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-Mureş/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 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

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134. 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 described 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 Iazygian 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 in the following chapter.

connection with the Constantinian dynasty meant trouble when someone unrelated found himself wearing the purple. Second, and more fundamentally, Constantine's treaty reflected a world view at odds with prevailing ethnographic thought about transdanubian barbarians. Nothing in his actions indicates 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.

Valens' Scythian Folly

I. An Old-Fashioned Scythian Treaty

In 369 CE, a mere decade after a disgruntled Sarmatian threw his shoe at Constantius II during treaty negotiations, the waters of the Danube witnessed another unusual peacemaking ceremony: a Roman emperor and a Scythian king negotiating from boats in the middle of the great river.[1] This time, nothing disrupted the conference between Roman emperor Flavius Julius Valens and Athanaric, leader of the Tervingi Goths. What set the conference apart was its novel location—to which we will return—not the proposed treaty's terms. Indeed, these were highly traditional. In them, Valens sought to impose an anachronistic state of clientage on a barbarian people unconditioned to the sorts of economic and political control such agreements demanded. As events would show, the pact ultimately struck between Valens and Athanaric had a profoundly negative impact on individuals and societies beyond the Danube in the years after 369, leading ultimately to one of the most significant migrant crises known from the Roman world.

The flash-point occurred seven years after the midriver treaty, in 376 CE, when a large body of Tervingi arrived on the banks of the Danube seeking asylum and resettlement south of the river. Roman actions leading up to this moment, and the bungled Roman response to the resulting crisis have rightly been seen as a crucial turning point in the history of the eastern Roman empire. In this chapter, we will consider how Rome's experience handling the Sarmatians of the Hungarian Plain during the previous three

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1. For the shoe-flinging scene, see A.M. 19.11.7–17. For the treaty of 369, A.M. 27.5.8–9; and Them., *Or.* 10. For another midriver negotiation, see A.M. 30.3.4–5.

centuries conditioned Valens and his decision-makers to view and interact with the Tervingi according to a political playbook built on a flawed combination of traditional ethnographic ideas and outdated intelligence. While simple incompetence and greed played significant roles in the tragedy leading up to, and away from the great battle of Adrianople in 378, where Valens himself would lose his life, many of Rome's almost comically misguided decisions during the Tervingi migrant crisis could only have fallen out as they did within an intellectual landscape dominated by obsolete ethnographic ideas about the people from beyond the Danube.

When Valens was appointed eastern Augustus by his brother, Valentinian, 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 new emperor and his circle of advisers. While the ideology of Roman control over Trajanic Dacia had been strong among 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 were also refortified, but there is nothing to suggest that any sort of formal provincial administration was put in place, or that even limited military control extended much beyond the plains of Wallachia and the Banat. Literal re-creation 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 Valens' 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 an ultimately unsuccessful bid for the throne by three thousand Gothic troops, who, when later asked by Valens to justify their actions, explained that they had moved to support the claimant they had seen as legitimate from their perspective as signatories of the treaty with Constantine.[2] These Goths, it seems, viewed themselves much like any other Roman military unit of the time: willing to use their blades politically, and expect-

2. A.M. 26.10.3, 27.5.1; Eunap. fr. 37.

ant of a fairly lenient reconciliation afterward. Valens had other ideas. After intercepting Procopius' Tervingian auxiliaries (or perhaps additional reinforcements to the original three thousand[3]) 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 Rome, and that no treaty existed between him and the Tervingi.[4]

Once Procopius was safely out of the way, Valens launched a three-year punitive campaign against the Tervingi in 367—a war he may have been considering even before they threw in with the usurper—citing Gothic support for Procopius as an excuse.[5] The expedition was ill-starred from the beginning. Based on Ammianus' account, and supported by Themistius' official damage-control, we read 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[6]), 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—perhaps unrealistically—had nearly died of thirst almost nine hundred years before.[7] 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 to negotiate, rather than face another year of war.

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3. Blockley argues that the Goths discussed in Eunapius fr. 38 were not the same as the original troops sent to aid Procopius (Blockley 1983, 138n81). There seems to me no clear evidence one way or the other, but the exact identity of the troops in question does not significantly change the interpretation of the passage.

4. Eunap. fr. 38.

5. 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.

6. Ammianus' mistake is odd considering that he discusses the Greuthungi royal family in some depth in his final book while describing 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).

7. Hdt. 4.18–19, 140.

The treaty that Valens eventually struck with Athanaric in 369 represented a major shift from Constantine's Gothic policy. It was, in almost every respect, a conservative, backward-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 some sort of annual subsidy begun sometime later. The new order on the Lower Danube would emphasize a fortified *limes*, designed to keep the Tervingi at arm's length.[8] Henceforth, the Goths would be excluded from the economic, political, and social life of the empire, to the greatest extent possible.

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.[9] Such a view, however, does not take into account the recent economic history discussed in the previous chapter, or the longer view of the ideologies that shaped Roman-barbarian interactions along the Danube during the preceding four centuries. Considering the treaty in these larger contexts, it becomes clear that the terms Valens brokered in 369 reflect a very 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.[10] Specifically, the treaty of 369 bears a close resemblance to 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 their populations. Constantine appears to have at least partially recognized these differences as demonstrated by the differing policies he adopted toward the Sarmatians and Goths. Valens' world view, on the other hand, was driven by older Scythian topoi that assumed an equivalence between all the people living beyond the river.

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8. 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).

9. Blockley 1992, 32–33; Wolfram 1988, 68–69; Heather 1991, 115–16.

10. For a lucid assessment of Valens' treaty of 369 within the larger context of Valentinian's foreign policy, see Lenski 2002, 133–37.

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-Mureș/Černjachov peoples identified by the Romans as Scythians, of ethnographic topoi 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 groups first appeared as troublemakers on the northern coast of the Black Sea. The equation of Scythians and Sarmatians, as we know, 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, 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 world view 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 the moment of their arrival on the Hungarian Plain in the first century, and particularly during the second-century Marcomannic Wars, yet never incorporated into the empire, these "lesser Scythians" acquired a different set of Roman-imposed characteristics. What developed were the topoi of the weak Sarmatian: nomads who, far from being a genuine threat to the empire, were instead thought to be 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 topoi about steppe nomadism and rapacity, with new military and political intelligence derived from real actions across the Pannonian *limes* during the first three centuries CE. Even if most of the people on the Hungarian Plain that 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 semi-nomadic Iazygian 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 barbarian peoples raiding from across the Lower Danube and Black Sea were collectively identified as Scythians, and since the old Greek ethnographic topoi remained deeply ingrained in both Latin and Greek literature of many genres, we can confidently state 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 250s and 260s. Even if historians like Dexippus generally opted not to include traditional ethnographic details in their descriptions of these contemporary Scythians, traditional topoi 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 combined Trajanic and tetrarchic models 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 extending farther north and east, 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.[11] Gothic

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11. 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.

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 tied more personally to Constantine and his descendants.[12]

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 world view toward 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 topos—and with limited education or military experience to broaden his perspective,[13] Valens' attitude toward the Tervingi should come as no surprise. That the new emperor was also relatively isolated as a Latin-speaking monolinguist attempting to rule the Greek East,[14] may have further prompted his desire to win a prestige-boosting victory. When circumstance made this outcome impossible, Valens reacted instinctively with 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 Danube to break the spirit of potentially restive client peoples. This "Sarmatian" policy, however, was to prove poorly suited for the sociopolitical setting of the fourth-century Lower Danube, which does not answer 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

The tenth oration of Themistius offers strong evidence to suggest the idea that Valens' Gothic treaty rested on an ideological foundation heavily influenced by long-standing ethnographic ideas about the Sarmatians

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12. 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. Either model would work to explain Valens' subsequent actions against the Tervingi.

13. Lenski 2002, 86, 94–97.

14. Lenski 2002, 61–62.

of the Hungarian Plain. Casting the partially defeated Goths of 369 as
weak Scythians of the Sarmatian type was one of the main ways Them-
istius attempted to justify Valens' brokered peace in the oration, which he
delivered in Constantinople as a quasi-official communication designed to
explain to the Constantinopolitan senatorial elite how they should think
about (and promote) the new Gothic policy.[15] 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 mili-
tary victory. The audience had already been primed for less than total vic-
tory 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 barbar-
ians, 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 Danube.[16] This
speech was delivered in 368 as the legions idled in camp with the Danube
made impassable by unseasonal flooding,[17] and should be read as an indi-
cation that even in the second year of the war, Valens was considering his
exit strategies.[18] At the same time, peace was not yet the official policy, so
we find Themistius also including standard boilerplate about the barbar-
ian threats looming from every quarter.[19] A year later, a decision had been
made. Valens opted against a fourth season of campaigning following his
indecisive victory over Athanaric in the summer of 369.[20]

Themistius begins his pitch in *Oration* 10 with some paternalistic lan-
guage about how it is better for an emperor to rule over and protect the bar-
barians than to destroy them outright: an appropriate initial justification of
a treaty designed to turn the Tervingi into subjugated, dependent clients.[21]

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15. Heather and Matthews 1991, 22. For a more general discussion of Themistius and
his connection to/influence on imperial authority, see Heather and Moncur 2001, preface.

16. Them., *Or.* 8.172–73/114–15.

17. A.M. 27.5.5.

18. Heather and Matthews 1991, 22.

19. Them., *Or.* 8.179/119.

20. A.M. 27.5.7–8; Zos. 4.11.

21. Them., *Or.* 10.199–200/131–32. 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.

From there, we hear a report of the treaty negotiations with an emphasis on the terrified state of the barbarian warriors lining the north bank of the Danube, as they watch Valens dictating terms to their chiefs.[22] The orator revisits the theme of Gothic terror later, noting that while in theory, fortifications can be overcome, fear of Rome remains "an obstacle which no one has ever overcome, once he is convinced that he is inferior."[23]

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 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 an adamantine wall had been delineated, with such a defensive bulwark of forts, arms, and soldiers has [the south bank of the Danube] been consolidated.[24]

This argument is exactly the same one made by Commodus on his Middle Danube refortification inscriptions, erected at the end of the Marcomannic Wars.[25] As we have seen, characterization of the inhabitants of the Hungar-

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22. Them., *Or.* 10.201–2/132–33.

23. Them., *Or.* 10.210–11/138: ἀλλὰ φόβος ὃν οὐδεὶς πώποτε ὑπερέβη καταδεέστερον εἶναι πεπιστευκώς.

24. Them., *Or.* 10.207/136: κἂν ἄρα δοκῇ τὸν ἐκ τοῦ προφανοῦς πόλεμον τέως δυσωπεῖσθαι, ἀλλὰ τό γε κλωπεύειν αὐτοῖς ἐπ᾽ ἀδείας καθεστηκέναι. διεσπείροντο οὖν ἁπανταχόσε τῆς ὄχθης οὐ καθ᾽ ἕνα καὶ δύο μόνον, ἀλλ᾽ ἤδη καὶ κατὰ λόχους καὶ οὐλαμούς, λῃσταὶ δῆθεν, οὐ στρατιῶται, φώρια τὰ λάφυρα ὀνομάζοντες. ἀλλ᾽ οὐ νῦν, ἀλλ᾽ ἄνωθεν μέχρι θαλάττης δόξαις ἂν τεῖχος ἀδαμάντινον ἐληλάσθαι· τοιούτῳ καταπεπύκνωται χαρακώματι φρουρίων, ὅπλων, στρατιωτῶν.

25. *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(atriae) ripam omnem burgis / a solo extructis item prae-*

ian 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 Epistle* 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, a Christian bishop, 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 depredations are "a crisis that brought ruin to all."[26] 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 does the violence of the Scythians.[27]

Portraying the Scythians as bandits also 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 toward 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. The 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.[28]

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sidiis 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 2 and 3 for further discussion of Commodus' inscription and the policies that underlay it, as well as additional citations.

26. *Can. ep.* 2: Τὸ δὲ ἐν καιρῷ τῆς καταδρομῆς, ἐν τοσαύτῃ οἰμωγῇ καὶ τοσούτοις θρήνοις, τολμῆσαί τινας **τὸν καιρὸν τὸν πᾶσιν ὄλεθρον φέροντα** νομίσαι ἑαυτοῖς καιρὸν εἶναι κέρδους, ἀνθρώπων ἐστὶν ἀσεβῶν καὶ θεοστυγῶν, οὐδὲ ὑπερβολὴν ἀτοπίας ἐχόντων.

27. For more prohibitions, *Can. ep.* 2–5. For the punishments for theft and abetment of the barbarians, *Can. ep.* 7–10.

28. Them., *Or.* 10.206/135–36: Γινώσκει γάρ, οἶμαι, σῴζειν τοὺς βαρβάρους δυνάμεως

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 revivified transdanubian Dacia. From this point forward, they were officially classed as 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 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.[29]

"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 found across the region, Rome's divergent policies toward 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 Goths 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 equate the two regional "Scythian" cultures.

As we described in chapter 1, the **physical landscape** of the Danube

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ἔχων, τὴν φύσιν δὲ αὐτῶν ἀμείβειν οὐχ οἷός τε ὤν· ὥστε ἀφῄρητο αὐτῶν τὴν ῥᾳστώνην τῆς ἀπιστίας. διὰ τοῦτο γὰρ καὶ τῶν φρουρίων τὰ μὲν ᾠκοδόμησεν ἐκ καινῆς, τὰ δὲ ἀνέστησε κατατετριμμένα, τοῖς δὲ προσέθηκε τὸ ἐνδέον.

29. 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, 30–34, 166–67; for a catalog of individual bridgehead sites, Bondoc 2009, 34–90).

drainage basin is split into two coherent subregions by the 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), but 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 characterized by forest steppe environments, where grassland is interspersed with isolated glades, small forests, and riverine parklands characterized by a mosaic mixture of oak-poplar forests and marshy riparian ecosystems.

If the "building blocks" are the same throughout the region, however, the final subregional products are not quite as homogeneous. 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. 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 Mureș 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 peoples of the Middle Danube Borderland was facilitated by the region's political and natural geography which neatly hemmed in the client peoples between the *limites* and the barrier of the Carpathians, despite the enclosed region's great potential for internal 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 foe. As Valens found out, achieving total victory in this landscape was simply too time-consuming and costly to be worth the effort.

The physical evidence for the cultural landscape, that is, for settlement and subsistence patterns among the people of the Hungarian Plain and the Sântana-de-Mureș/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 rather materially similar lives. This is not surprising from an ecological perspective given the macroregion'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 has 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 Černjachov 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-Mureș/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 Černjachov 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 macroregion. 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 Gothic town that produced the martyred Saba appears materially similar to the Sarmatian village Ammianus described being 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 mold.[30]

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, we can imagine, to think of transdanubians as weaklings—as for an equally inexperienced Constantinopolitan politico like Themistius, who probably only knew about Scythians from traditional literary descriptions and popular stereotypes. Further, even without the encouragement of ingrained 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 macroregion'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 peoples had developed

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30. 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 (its 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 over three 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. In marked contrast, the people of the Černjachov 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 late first century,[31] 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 two centuries of the Common Era 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 campaigns against the Sarmatians during 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 Sarmatian elite seeking Roman assistance to solve their internal troubles with the Limigantes,[32] and later calling on imperial aid when threatened by the Tervingi.[33]

The emergence of Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov hegemony in Wallachia and Moldavia, by contrast, happened more organically, with only limited 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

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31. The sources for Domitian's wars are quite terrible. See Kovács 2014, 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 later, during Domitian's reign, we find the Iazyges 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).

32. A.M. 17.12.17–20; *Orig. Const.* 6.32.

33. *Orig. Const.* 6.31.

direct control over the elites of the Černjachov 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 the large regional culture described in the previous chapter, with important centers of power far beyond the reach of Roman arms. Neither united as a single polity, nor arbitrarily divided into small, containable communities by Roman treaties, the Černjachov 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 the opportunity 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.

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 messy Dacian withdrawal. Once again, provincial affairs came first, leading to Constantine's pseudo-resettlement policy designed to begin the process of returning Dacia 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 offering unrestricted trade with other parts of the empire south of the Danube. This quasi-provincial status resulted in broader, more monetized sub-elite trade than in other borderland regions as testified by the large concentration of coinage—both high-denomination gold and low-value bronze—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[34]—and using diplomacy to challenge perceived mistreatment rather than simply accepting the tyranny of imperial caprice, or immediately resorting to revolt.[35] In the other direction came imperially sponsored proselytization and, ultimately, the Gothic Bible. 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 had adopted 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.[36] To our knowledge, neither Constantine, nor Valens, nor any other emperor ever took an interest in the faith of the Sarmatians, Quadi, or other northern barbarian clients of the older generation. The fact that the Goths were deemed an appropriate target for proselytization while the other northern borderlanders were not stands as another proof that Constantine conceived of Rome's relationship with the Tervingi as something other than a normal imperial-client relationship.

III. The Lower Danubian Borderland Destabilized

Our narrative now moves forward to 376 CE, about seven years after Valens and Athanaric ended the first Gothic War. At some point in that year, 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 Mars."[37]

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34. Philost. 2.5

35. 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 multistage diplomatic wrangle with Valens prior to the outbreak of war.

36. 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.

37. A.M. 31.3.8: *populi pars maior, quae Athanaricum attenuata necessariorum penuria deseruerat, quaeritabat domicilium remotum ab omni notitia barbarorum, diuque deliberans,*

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 quietly during peacetime and offering their services to the army in times of war.[38] Valens eagerly accepted the Goths' proposal and signed off on a resettlement effort. From such optimistic beginnings, however, events did not quite work out as the emperor expected.

From Valens' Treaty to the Danube Crossing

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,[39] 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.[40] We are not so fortunate, however, for the seven years between Valens' midriver 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 as well as the other barbarians who remained behind in Scythia. The narrative that Ammianus does provide is linear and continues to be accepted more or less at face value by many scholars to this day.[41] The broad outline requires only a few comments. The Huns, a previously unknown group of *bipedes bestiae* dwelling east of the Maeotic Lake are described living a stereotypical nomadic life using exaggerated Herodotean topoi.[42] For

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quas eligeret sedes, cogitavit Thraciae receptaculum gemina ratione sibi conveniens, quod et caespitis est feracissimi, et amplitudine fluentorum Histri distinguitur ab **arvis patentibus iam peregrini fulminibus Martis:** hoc quoque idem residui velut mente cogitavere communi.

38. A.M. 31.4.1. 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.

39. E.g., A.M. 31.4.6: *Ita turbido instantium studio orbis Romani pernicies ducebatur*!

40. 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.

41. E.g., Thompson 1966, 21–22; Heather 1991, 122; Zahariade 2006, 27; contra Kulikowski 2009, 111–12, 124–26; Kim 2013, 43–45.

42. A.M. 31.2.1–11 (31.2.2 particularly for the "bipedal beasts" line).

no apparent reason,[43] "this highly mobile, untamed branch of humanity, 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."[44] After defeating and absorbing the culturally similar 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 campaign eventually 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.[45]

There are two related problems with Ammianus' narrative of the period between 369 and 376. First, the chronologically condensed 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 year or two. As Michael Kulikowski has pointed out, this makes little sense, and is reflected in the text by the lack of any external chronological markers within the narrative of Hunnic expansion and Gothic collapse.[46] Second, and more fundamentally, although Ammianus' narrative captures a genuine period of social and political upheaval in the lands of the Pontic Steppe, his impulse to place the blame on the misshapen shoulders of a Hunnic ethnographic bogeyman falls wide of the mark. That Ammianus relied on long-standing ethnographic topoi to describe the Huns is well known, and his "domino"

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43. 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 slight 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.* 24.123–26). 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 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 farther out toward the knowledge horizon one gets.

44. 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.*

45. 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.

46. Kulikowski 2007, 124–27.

model of barbarian invasion and social collapse is equally venerable. At a more basic level, the demographic realities of the Roman borderland make it highly improbable that any of the peoples described in Ammianus' Hunnic logos were populous enough to pose any kind of existential threat to the Roman state. The idea of wave upon wave of barbarian invaders slowly battering down the Roman empire comes, in part, from Ammianus. This model has had its day, and should now be rightly consigned to the dustbin of history. In order to understand what was actually going on, we need to look to the social structures of the Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov Culture and the impact of the Gothic treaties of Constantine and Valens.

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' midriver peace conference was a far cry from the lofty Sarmatian tribunal, from which Constantius II dictated terms only a decade before.[47] 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.[48]

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 major battle of the war in 369.[49] 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.[50] As

47. A.M. 19.11.7–14. Of course, we know how those negotiations fared . . .

48. 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, 126–27). Even provided this rationale, Valens' inability to force the Gothic leader to abandon his stance and pay proper homage would have appeared weak.

49. A.M. 25.5.2–7.

50. 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.*

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 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.[51] This is surely correct, yet there is 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.[52] The likelihood that Athanaric 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, Athanaric's rival, 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 a few years later, 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, together with many of his followers, an act which the church historian rightly connects to Fritigern's postrevolt client obligations to the Christian emperor who had supported him. If we ascribe any nonpolitical Christian leanings to Fritigern, a possibility supported by his later negotiations by means of a Christian priest whom Ammianus describes as both a trusted adviser and

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51. Heather and Matthews 1991, 96; Kulikowski 2007, 109.
52. Soc. 4.33.

close confidant of the Tervingi leader (*conscius arcanorum et fidus*),[53] then we should entertain the possibility that Athanaric's persecutions were aimed as much at internal threats from Fritigern or those of a similar persuasion, as at perceived imperial sympathies.

Looking farther 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-Mureş/Černjachov material culture extended far to the north into the western portion of the Pontic Steppe. Rather than seeing the Huns and Alani of Ammianus as culturally alien bolts from the blue, we should, instead, imagine a continuum of contact and exchange between the northern Černjachov Culture and the steppe peoples dwelling farther 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.[54] Rather, we should see long-standing east-west interactions in the northern half of the Černjachov Culture zone between agriculturalists like the Greuthungi, and pastoral Sarmatians, Alani, and Huns from the Pontic Steppe. Indeed, if we can extract any truth from Ammianus' account of hostility between Huns and Alani in the lands abutting the Greuthungi, then we can imagine the regional hegemony of Greuthungi leaders like Ammianus' 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 onward is attested by the fluorescence and spread of Černjachov material culture from its origins in what is now western Ukraine, 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 benefited from trade with the empire just like their southern Tervingi neighbors, and so we must see Valens' embargo as hurting everyone in the lands north of the Lower Danube. Across the Sântana-de-Mureş/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

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53. A.M. 31.12.8–9.
54. A.M. 31.3.1.

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 subregional hegemonies.[55] The mysterious suicide of the Greuthungi leader, Ermanaric, recorded by Ammianus, may be our only vague reference to the collapse of the pre-Valens order in the north. Ammianus attributes Ermanaric's suicide to his inability to "maintain a firm and continued stand," in the face of a growing Hunnic/Alanic threat,[56] but he never describes an actual battle between the Greuthungi and the Huns during this period. Rather, with its language of 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 rival claimants for regional power following the death of Ermanaric.[57] 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 temporarily stabilize an unspecified time later, we find two powerful warlords (Alatheus and Saphrax) in charge as regents for the young son of a previous, short-lived ruler.[58] 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 seemingly inexorable tide of Hunnic expansion.[59] 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

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55. For the use of Roman goods to support barbarian networks of patronage and power, see Whittaker 1994, 121–31; and Drinkwater 2007, 92, 104–6.

56. A.M. 31.3.1–2: *Igitur Huni pervasis Halanorum regionibus, quos Greuthungis confines Tanaïtas consuetudo cognominavit, interfectisque multis et spoliatis, reliquos sibi concordandi fide pacta iunxerunt, eisque adhibitis confidentius Ermenrichi late patentes et uberes pagos repentino impetu perruperunt, bellicosissimi regis, et per multa variaque fortiter facta, vicinis nationibus formidati. (2) Qui vi subitae procellae perculsus, quamvis manere fundatus et stabilis diu conatus est, impendentium tamen diritatem augente vulgatius fama, magnorum discriminum metum voluntaria morte sedavit.*

57. A.M. 31.3.3.

58. A.M. 31.3.3.

59. A.M. 31.3.4.

position at this point. His own hegemony in the south was shaky following a chain of military and political setbacks at the hands, first of Valens and then of 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 construct defensive earthworks somewhere in Moldavia.[60] Fritigern now emerges as a major Tervingi leader, and the main proponent of settlement inside the empire. Given his at least nominal 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 same 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 population.[61]

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-style embargo exerted a profoundly negative effect beyond the river. 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 peoples as similar tactics had repeatedly done in and around the Hungarian Plain. Because the Tervingi were only the southern part of a larger sociocultural system extending far beyond the scope of Roman political authority, the effects of the Roman embargo were passed farther and farther 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 the Roman boot. At the same time, instability caused by the breakdown of patronage networks reliant on Roman imports must have emboldened Hunnic and 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 several stable subregional 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

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60. A.M. 31.3.5–8.
61. A.M. 31.4.1.

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.[62] 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 monster than an actual existential danger to either the Goths or the empire. Instead, blame for upsetting the transdanubian apple cart should be placed squarely at the feet of Valens, or perhaps more charitably his clique of advisers, and their thoughtless transferal of Sarmatian tactics onto the world of the Lower Danubian Borderland.

The Road to Adrianople

A litany of incompetence and outright villainy characterized the treatment of the Tervingi refugees following their admittance into the empire in 376 CE. Ammianus tells the story, as usual, with additional contributions from Zosimus and the fragments of Eunapius. Sometime after they showed up on the northern bank of the Lower Danube, Valens agreed to admit the Tervingi into the empire, and we have no real reason to doubt Eunapius' claim that he saw Fritigern's petition as a godsend of fresh manpower as he prepared for a new war with Persia.[63] Ammianus next reports that as they crossed the Danube, the Tervingi were detained on the southern bank where they were denied food outright, or else forced to purchase it by selling their own people into slavery.[64] Whether this cruel mistreatment of the Tervingi by Valens' generals, Lupicinus and Maximus, as they awaited resettlement was another misguided attempt to render the Goths submissive through economic 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. 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

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62. 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 westward into the Crimea where they, in turn, expelled the Cimmerians who were already living there.

63. Eunap. fr. 42.11–19; A.M. 31.4.4–5.

64. A.M. 31.4.11–5.2.

Roman empire,[65] 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, reincorporate themselves) into the Roman world appears to have been genuine, and given the chaos then racking the lands beyond the Lower Danube, this intention is easy to understand. Indeed, Ammianus has the Tervingi grumble as they languish, starving, on the banks of the Danube, that they were being driven toward rebellion not because of any disloyalty, but by cruel necessity.[66]

From Eunapius, we learn that the first phase of the planned 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.[67] This tactic strongly suggests that those men not intended for immediate conscription for Valens' looming Persian war could expect similar division and dispersal. This resettlement plan clearly illustrates how the Roman decision-makers were turning to a traditional playbook. A generation earlier, Constantine had overseen two distinct resettlement efforts. First, as discussed in the preceding chapter, he resettled the Tervingi within the theoretical boundaries of his revivified transdanubian Dacia. This pseudo-laetic settlement plan finds its best parallels in Gaul, where Julian

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65. Eunap. fr. 59 (*exc. de leg. gent.* 7): οἱ μὲν ἀγαπᾶν καὶ δέχεσθαι τὴν παροῦσαν εὐδαιμονίαν κελεύοντες, οἱ δὲ τὸν οἴκοι γεγονότα φυλάττειν ὅρκον αὐτοῖς καὶ μὴ παραβαίνειν ἐκείνας τὰς συνθήκας. αὗται 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 ἁπάσης χώρας ἐγκρατεῖς γένωνται. *[After they passed 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.

66. A.M. 31.5.2: *Quo intellecto, ad perfidiam instantium malorum subsidium verti mussabant.*

67. 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, 343n136). The defeat of Farnobius, a Gothic war leader 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).

used the same technique when dealing with the Alamanni, and perhaps also the Franks.[68] In these cases, the barbarian *laeti* were allowed to live together in their existing community units, with their presettlement leadership left largely intact. By contrast, when Constantine settled large numbers of Sarmatians following the Limigantes revolt, he spread them across several provinces, implying the removal of presettlement leaders and the breakup of their power bases.[69] 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 ethnic units distinct from the laetic forces serving in Gaul.[70] 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, was taken from the Middle Danube, Sarmatian playbook, rather than drawing inspiration from Constantine's earlier dealings with the Goths. The Tervingi, 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, ideally, remain disorganized and unable to form any sort of power bloc. For this resettlement plan to succeed, it required either the support or the removal of the presettlement 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.

The one-two punch of Valens' divisive resettlement policy—families split up and the men detained on the Danube—and the horrendous mistreatment of the detained refugees by Maximus and Lupicinus, led to unrest rather than docility in the Gothic camps. To diffuse the situation, the generals eventually began the process of moving the Tervingi men away from the river to a staging ground at Marcianople, and it was there that open rebellion broke out following more Roman ineptitude based, again, on poor interpretation of Sarmatian precedents. Ammianus reports that the generals feted Fritigern, Alavivus, and their Tervingi elite upon their arrival at Marcianople.[71] As Fritigern, Alavivus, and their retinues were invited inside,

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68. Mathisen 2006, 1023–27; Nixon and Rogers 1994, 141–43n75.

69. *Orig. Const.* 6.32.

70. *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.

71. A.M. 31.5.4–8.

Roman troops kept the bulk of the Tervingi men away from the city. When the Roman soldiers refused to provide any sort of food for the common Goths, fighting broke out. At this point, a half-drunk Lupicinus got word of the growing crisis, panicked, ordered the Gothic chiefs' retainers killed, and attempted to detain both Fritigern and Alavivus. Only Fritigern managed to bluff his way out of the trap. The fate of Alavivus remains unknown, but since he vanishes from the textual record at this point, we can reasonably assume he was killed during the fracas. Perhaps Lupicinus had always intended to kill the Gothic leaders, remembering, we might imagine, how the Medes had once done the same when dealing with their own Scythian problem,[72] or perhaps he had planned to wine and dine them into supporting Constantinople's plan for divvying up the Tervingi settlers, only to be interrupted by unrest among the Gothic commons. Either way, the Roman general 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 Constantine's submissive Sarmatians—the group most recently resettled in large numbers within the Danubian region— seems the most likely candidate.

From its beginnings at the 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 new recruits not only included Goths settled in the region previously, but also individuals without any given group 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.[73] The

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72. Hdt. 1.106. Herodotus relates that after suffering twenty-eight 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.

73. 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, two aspects stand out in particular. First, he acquired a large baggage train of wagons to carry supplies and equipment (A.M. 31.7.5), and second, he 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 power base, then there really wouldn't have been any reason for Fritigern to attempt the capture of walled cities. His goal was better

provincials who joined his cause may not have seen much of a difference between Fritigern and contemporary Roman armies, which were frequently barbarian-led, and likewise prone to violent "foraging" as they moved from place to place. In contrast to this enthusiastic rural support, Fritigern was only reluctantly aided by Sueridus and Colias, two Goths already serving as the leaders of Gothic units in Valens' army. These men only joined the rebellion when nervous citizens physically drove them and their soldiers out of their garrison at Adrianople.[74] The episode is of particular interest for two reasons. First, it illustrates the latent fear of transdanubian Scythians still common among the Roman provincial populations, and second, it shows that not all individuals and groups identified as Goths were initially supportive of Fritigern and his rebellion. In other words, we cannot read the revolt as a simple matter of Goths vs. Romans, that is, as a "barbarian invasion." 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, despite the undercurrent of popular fear of the Tervingi as dangerous transdanubians.

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 9, 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 a cadre of Constantinopolitan advisers and allies of the old regime. His new order, however, was built on fundamental misreadings of the political and social structures present among the Lower Danubian people Valens and his advisers considered Scythians. The treaty of 369 had always been doomed to failure because it was based on

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accomplished by either a battlefield victory, or by wearing down Roman resolve through provincial looting, a tactic, incidentally, that Valens himself had used in 367–369 to force Athanaric to the bargaining table.

74. A.M. 31.6.1–3.

entrenched ideas about how to handle barbarians derived from the different sociohistorical realities of the Hungarian Plain to the west.

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, according to Ammianus, 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 Roman defeats in imperial history.[75] Although old claims that Adrianople marked the beginning of the fall of the Roman empire are overblown, the destruction of two-thirds of the eastern field army caused real immediate problems. It took until 383 for Rome to reestablish order in the Danubian realm, and when Theodosius eventually came to terms with Fritigern, 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.[76] 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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75. A.M. 31.12–13. Fritigern first attempted to negotiate by sending a Christian priest who acted as a close adviser (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 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 in the end, Fortuna had other ideas.

76. Them., *Or.* 16. We will discuss Theodosius' Gothic settlement in depth in the following chapter.

Goths, Huns, and the Immortal Scythian Logos

I. The Post-Adrianople Spin Room

The debacle at Adrianople in 378 CE was unexpected for both the Romans and Tervingi 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.[1] 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,[2] and the disaster threw the entire eastern empire into chaos. Beginning at this moment of crisis, this final chapter will consider how Romans talked about and acted toward trans-danubian 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 world view that pictured the Danube as the boundary between worlds proved more durable than the Roman *limes* it had been co-opted to support.

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1. A.M. 31.12.14–15.
2. *Scyth.* fr. 17; Jord., *Get.* 101–3.

Theodosius' Gothic War

In the immediate aftermath of Valens' battlefield death, when the eastern field army had "vanished away more quickly than a shadow,"[3] and with no emperor to issue commands, Roman 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,[4] 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.[5] 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 out of necessity.[6] Regardless, the new emperor's chief

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3. Them., *Or.* 14.181a. Cf. *Or.* 16.206d, where Themistius describes the situation as "an indescribable Iliad of evils on the Ister."

4. 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, 145–47).

5. Zos. 4.25. Zosimus makes this victory sound more important than it probably was, although such overinflation is understandable as Romans grasped at any shred of good news following the main defeat.

6. Zos. 4.24.4. For scholarly interpretation, cf. Kulikowski 2007, 147–50; and Heather and Moncur 2001, 205–6. 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 own elevation in 379. Theodosius' resumé 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 made him not the most obvious candidate for elevation unless he (or his political allies) had 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 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.

concern was to restore order in the Balkans where Fritigern's followers continued to support themselves by living off 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,[7] and the new emperor's serious illness during much of 380 appears to have further complicated the Roman war effort, with the western emperor, Gratian, forced to manage affairs during Theodosius' convalescence.[8] Eventually, Theodosius recovered, entering Constantinople in triumph in late 380,[9] and reassuming command of the Gothic War. In the following campaigning seasons, 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,[10] Theodosius was unable to force a decisive battle within his own ambit, and in late 382 opted to follow Valens' example by offering the Goths a brokered peace. The Goths, in a position of strength, jumped at the chance to put an end to the marching and inconclusive fighting.

The terms of Theodosius' treaty, which was solemnized on the third of October 382,[11] 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 diplomatic information we learn from this oration, namely that the treaty included the symbolic surrender of the Gothic army,[12] and their subsequent assignment of farmland in Thrace.[13] Synesius of Cyrene later claimed that these newly settled Goths continued to live under their own laws,[14] but as Heather and Moncur note, the source of this information is a hostile diatribe highlighting the folly of Theodosius' treaty, so we should use this information with

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7. Zos. 4.31.3–5.

8. Jord., *Get.* 28.141; Zos. 4.34.4.

9. Wolfram 1988, 132; Zos. 4.33.1.

10. Zos. 4.33.1–2.

11. Cons. Const., s.a. 382.

12. 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.

13. Them., *Or.* 16.211a–b.

14. Synesius, *de Reg.* 19.

caution.[15] Themistius himself chose to emphasize the potential the Goths held for becoming assimilated provincials, citing the example of the Galatians in Anatolia as proof of Rome's civilizing power.[16] 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 in Synesius' speech delivered a decade or so later.[17] The two sources, however, need not necessarily contradict each other. Even if imperial policy was to settle the defeated Goths as *laeti* in Thrace and thereby turn them into good Roman *coloni*, the reality need not have matched the intention. At any rate, in the years after the war, we find Goths serving en masse in Theodosius' campaigns against Magnus Maximus, as well as in regular units, indicating that normal individual enlistment and short-service mass recruitment into the Roman army must both have been part of the settlement of 382.[18] 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 previously unknown. 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 toward Fritigern's 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.[19]

Goths on the Eastern Roman Political Stage

Fritigern himself was probably dead by the time his followers struck their treaty with Theodosius. His final named appearance in the texts dates from 380 in connection with a Gothic raid into Epirus Nova, and we can reasonably assume that he died relatively soon thereafter, particularly since his name is absent from surviving discussions of the eventual treaty.[20] The history of the twenty-seven years between the end of Theodosius' Gothic

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15. Heather and Moncur 2001, 261–62.

16. Them., *Or.* 16.211b–212a.

17. We will look at the *de Regno* in some depth below.

18. Heather and Montur 2001, 262–63. For Gothic service against Magnus Maximus, see Pacatus 2.32.3–4.

19. See sections 4.5 in chapter 4.

20. Thanks to my second referee for helping untangle the sources surrounding Fritigern's death. For his final attested action, see Jord., *Get.* 28.140; and Philost. 9.17.

War and Alaric's 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,[21] 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.[22] A certain Tribigild recorded by Zosimus and Claudian as a Gothic noble in charge of Gothic troops in Asia Minor in the late 390s,[23] 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, when Constantine's treaty was still in effect. Tribigild, however, was not content to remain a political nobody, and if we are to believe Claudian, raised a rebellion in Phrygia in 399 after his petition to emperor Arcadius for higher promotion was rejected.[24]

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, 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,[25] rose through the military ranks on merit, particularly

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21. Kulikowski offers as succinct and cogent an overview of the period as possible given the evidentiary problems (2007, 154–77). 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.

22. 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.

23. Zos. 5.13ff.; Claudian, *in Eut.* 2.174ff.

24. Claudian, *in Eut.* 2.174ff.

25. Zos. 5.21.9.

thanks to his efforts in putting down the usurpation of Eugenius.[26] He was rewarded with the rank of *comes rei militaris*, a promotion unheard of for a Scythian/Goth.[27] Perhaps it was Gainas' promotion that prompted Tribigild to seek his own further advancement. Regardless, when Tribigild was denied promotion and then took up arms against the state, Gainas was tasked with quashing his fellow Goth's rebellion. The intricacies of the plotting and politicking that surrounded this revolt need not concern us,[28] except in so far as they led to Gainas' further promotion to *magister militum praesentalis* in 399,[29] followed swiftly by his fall from grace, military defeat, and death while attempting to regroup beyond the Danube.[30] One of the generals responsible for doing away with Gainas was yet another Goth named Fravitta who had served as a Roman officer since the days of Theodosius. On Gainas' death, Fravitta was rewarded first with the dead general's recently vacated post of *magister militum*, and then with a consulship in 401, making him the first Goth to hold that exalted—if now largely ceremonial—position.[31]

The third major Gothic politico of the age was Alaric, whose career ran more or less parallel to those of Gainas and Fravitta up to the end of the fourth century. Like Gainas, Alaric appears to have gotten his start as a middle-rank officer during Theodosius' war against Eugenius.[32] Alaric's own unrivaled ambition, however, revealed itself when he resorted to open revolt in 395 after being passed over for promotion following the war.[33] The next fifteen years saw the Gothic general on an obsessive quest to break into

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26. 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.

27. Marc. Com., s.a. 395; *Rom.* 319–20; *Get.* 176; Joh. Ant. fr. 190.

28. Again, see Kulikowski 2007, 168–71 for an overview. The main ancient authority is Zosimus with contributions from others.

29. Soz. 8.4.5; Soc. 6.6.1.

30. 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 advisers (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.

31. Fravitta had 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* 1:373.

32. Soc. 7.10.

33. Zos. 5.5.4.

the upper echelons of Roman military society, frequently relying on force when faced with political setbacks.[34] Alaric managed to extort some sort of high commission (probably *magister militum per Illyricum*) in 397,[35] 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 Alaric found the Constantinopolitan political scene too hot after the fracas over Tribigild and Gainas is persuasive.[36] Alaric had spent over half a decade attempting to advance his career in the east by means of the sword, and his subsequent 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.[37]

Gothic meddling in imperial politics by Gainas, Alaric, and Tribigild, as well as the less revolutionary military career of Fravitta, had numerous precedents in the western empire, where Alamannic and Frankish elites had routinely made careers for themselves as military officers since at least the reign of Constantius II.[38] This access to high office was probably related to periodic settlement of Alamanni (and also Franks) in Gaul as *laeti* beginning under the tetrarchy.[39] Since Theodosius' Gothic settlement was hardly the first time transdanubian populations had been granted land inside the empire, the fact that we know of very few Gothic, Sarmatian, Carpic, or Vandal holders of high office from the period when Franks and Alamanni were first joining the ranks of the western military elite probably reflects enduring prejudice against people considered to be Scythians.[40] After Adrianople, Goths finally began to be promoted into the high military aristoc-

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34. See Kulikowski 2007, 164–68, 170–77 for a cogent overview of Alaric's career.

35. Kulikowski 2007, 167; Claud., *in Eut.* 2.211–18, *Goth.* 533–40.

36. Kulikowski 2007, 170.

37. 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 topos of Alaric's insatiable desire to "feed his horses on the Tiber's grassy bank" (*Cos.VI Hon.* 182–83, cf. *Goth.* 544).

38. 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.

39. Drinkwater 2007, 166–69; Mathisen 2006.

40. There are only two exceptions to this pattern. The first is a certain Victor, a long-time general of Constantius II, 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).

racy. It is up to us, therefore, to explore how popular ideas about Goths and other transdanubians changed in the wake of Adrianople in order to explain and justify the existence of these new Scythian generals.

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 world view was not shaken by the changed circumstances in Thrace.[41] We do, however, find one important innovation. When Athanaric, the venerable *iudex* of the Tervingi sought sanctuary at Constantinople in 381,[42] he was received with great honor by Theodosius and buried in state when he died shortly after arriving.[43] 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

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41. *Or.* 14.181b; 15.185b; 16.207c, 210d, 211d, 212a.

42. 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 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 Alani and Huns from farther 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.

43. 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.

iudex of the Tervingi on his arrival at the imperial court. At any event, the difference between Athanaric and the other Goths discussed in Themistius' 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.[44] Themistius may have hoped that Rome's civilizing influence would, in time, turn these newly settled Goths into good Roman citizens,[45] 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 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 CE, Goths are always identified as Scythians, even those in Roman service, like Gainas.[46] 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.[47] As we have seen, Dexippus always

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44. 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 world view 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 world view 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 Alani. 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.

45. *Or.* 16.211b–212a.

46. Eunap. frs. 27.1; 37; 39; 41.1; 42; 44; 59. For the identification of Gainas as a Scythian, see fr. 60.

47. Phot., *Bibl. Cod.* 77.1.158–60 [Eunap. test. 1]. The *Chronicle* is not to be confused with Dexippus' *Scythica*, a separate, shorter, more focused work.

identified his transdanubian terrors as Scythians in the *Scythica*—a practice he continued in his *Chronicle*—and so it seems likely that Eunapius was following suit if for no other reason, then 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 book have 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.[48] 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 barbarian groups and individuals with the most specific applicable ethnographic terms throughout his work, while still relying on the established set of macroscale ethnographic topoi 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, themselves, identified as subsets of the Sarmatians.[49] To the east, in the Lower Danube Borderland we see both Tervingi and Greuthungi described as types of Goth.[50] 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 Alani and Huns rely mainly on those terms rather than the archaic ethnonym, despite the traditional nature of the underlying characterization of these peoples.[51]

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 world view relied on essentially the same Scythian topoi as everyone else's. This

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48. Matthews 1989, 17–27.

49. 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. For an assessment of Ammianus' sources for the Sarmatians, see Barnes 1998, 95–96; and Dittrich 1984.

50. For the Tervingi, see 31.3.4. For the Greuthungi, see 27.5.6, 31.3.1.

51. For the general language on the Huns and Alani, see 31.2. For Ammianus' reliance on earlier sources, see King 1995.

is most obvious in his geographic digressions,[52] and in the twin ethnographies of the Alani and Huns, who are described using almost identical language drawn directly from the corpus of Herodotean Scythian topoi.[53] His aside regarding the thieving nature of the Sarmatians,[54] on the other hand, suggests that he was also steeped in the more recent "weak Sarmatian" military topoi. Interestingly, 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.[55] 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 lofty 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 Alani. The Goths could still be decried as bringers of destruction, but they were becoming something of a homegrown problem, rather than a lurking foreign threat.

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

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52. For the Scythian geographic setting north of the Black Sea, see 31.2.13–16. See Sundwell 1996 for an assessment of Ammianus' geographic knowledge.

53. For the ethnographies, see 31.2.1–11 (Huns) and 31.2.16–25 (Alani). Ammianus clearly sees the Alani 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' groups (31.2.12) and later tacitly acknowledges their Scythian status when describing the Scythian origins of the Persians (31.2.20). For the general balance between autopsy, textual research, and invention in Ammianus' ethnographies, see Barnes 1998, ch. 9.

54. 17.12.2–3.

55. 31.4.6: *Ita turbido instantium studio orbis Romani pernicies ducebatur.*

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. More importantly, in his characterization, we see a developing set of new ethnographic stereotypes, modified to fit the Thracian Goths' specific status as Danubian barbarians living inside the empire. A revealing passage comes from Claudian's second diatribe against Rufinus, a powerful noble of the eastern court:[56]

> 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 military standards. He himself, lest he leave out 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.[57]

The terms and details used here are extremely revealing. First, the barbarians referenced must be the Goths, yet they are cast as Getae rather than Scythians, a habit used throughout Claudian's corpus.[58] This Getic label

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56. Rufinus 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, 165–66).

57. *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.*

58. Claudian also occasionally refers to the Goths as Geloni, a non-Scythian, Pontic people with a pedigree stretching back to Herodotus (Hdt. 4.108–9). 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 people beyond the Crimea to dwell in cities and grow crops. This would be a fitting reworking of the Goths' traditional transdanubian origin story.

was first used to refer to the Goths by Themistius, as we have seen, but from Claudian's day onward it becomes the preferred term for the Goths in poetic works in place of the earlier Scythian label.[59]

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,[60] 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.[61] Finally, Claudian identifies Rufinus—who, despite his barbarous fashion sense, is not actually described as being of barbarian descent—as a *iudex*. This term was commonly used in the later empire to refer generically to Roman officials with judicial authority,[62] including consuls (like Rufinus) or provincial governors, but within the context of this passage it probably also represents a nod to Athanaric's Gothic title which, to judge by Ammianus' rendering, was translated into Latin as *iudex*.[63]

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 receptat / auxilio.*"[64] The language clearly suggests multiple conceptual separations. The most obvious is that the Getae and Scythians are two distinct groups, governed grammatically by different verbs, reflecting a basic difference in terms of their relationship with Rome. Looking closely, this distinction is

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59. Sidonius Apollinaris, for example, employs the Getic label relentlessly whenever discussing Goths in his poetry of the mid- to late fifth century. 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—is another, later example of the changing terminology. Given Themistius' pioneering usage, it is also insufficient to characterize Getic language as a solely Latin development.

60. E.g., *Tr.* 5.7.49–50: *Pellibus et laxis arcent mala frigora bracis, / oraque sunt longis horrida tecta comis.*

61. *Cos. IV Hon.* 486; *Goth.* 485.

62. Frier et al. 2016, 3:3016.

63. A.M. 31.3.4.

64. *in Ruf.* 1.308–9: "And now [Rufinus] stirs up the Getae, and the peoples of the Danube, and admits Scythia [into the empire?] for aid."

actually tripartite and closely 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 (Hister), standing in for the peoples 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 Alani.[65] What is important here, is that the Goths/Getae have become endemic to Rome's Danubian provinces rather than the transdanubian world. To gain their aid, Rufinus must simply rouse them (*movere*) as one might any other rebellious internal faction. The Scythians, by contrast, must be admitted (*receptare*) into the empire from their homeland outside the *oikoumene*. 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 when 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![66]

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

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65. E.g., *in Eut.* 2.341; *in Ruf.* 1.323–31; 2.272–73.

66. *Cos. IV Hon.* 49–58: *nam cum barbaries penitus commota gementem / inrueret 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 adflictis et vel labentibus ictu. vel prope casuris: unus tot funera contra / restitit extinxitque faces agrisque colonos / reddidit et leti rapuit de faucibus urbes.*

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 (here, the Getae) and those from the transdanubian lands. 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 stars,"[67] but there, too, as we see in the two passages just surveyed, a world view was emerging that took pains to separate the Thracian Goths from the greater Scythian horde still lurking beyond the Danube.

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,"[68] and later admits that these Getae/Goths are one of three contemporary manifestations of the Scythians, together with the Alani and Huns.[69] When discussing the Gothic troubles around the year 400, however, Orosius clarifies his position somewhat, noting that

> at that time, two Gothic peoples, 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.[70]

Underlying this remarkable characterization is the fact that Radagaisus was an invader from beyond the *limes*, while Alaric was a more homegrown sort of warlord, and as such more Roman than Scythian, despite his Gothic heritage.

The turn away from directly referring to the Thracian Goths as Scythians is also seen in Claudian and Orosius' rough contemporary, Olympiodorus of Thebes. Olympiodorus wrote a traditional, classicizing Greek

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67. *Goth.* 169: *patrios gens [. . .] oblita Triones.*
68. Oros. 1.16.2.
69. Oros. 7.34.5.
70. Oros. 7.37.7–8.

history covering the years 407 to 423 CE,[71] 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."[72] Throughout his work, the Goths have passed firmly out from under the Scythian yoke, being described either generically as barbarians, or else as Goths.[73]

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 382. 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, whence they came.[74] From this stance, and his frequent use of the Scythian label to describe the barbarians in question, it would be easy to read Synesius' world view 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.[75] There are hints, however, that all is not quite as it seems. When first discussing the Goths, Synesius, too, labels them as Getae rather than Scythians.[76] Later, when decrying the high office enjoyed by certain Goths (probably Gainas and Fravitta), Synesius describes them wearing skins and leather in essentially the same way Claudian used Getic topoi to slander Rufinus.[77] These two passages together suggest that Synesius was fully aware and conversant with current Gothic stereotypes and topoi. We must read his insistence on employing the archaic Scyth-

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71. Olymp. test. 1 [Phot., *Bibl. Cod.* 80, 166–67].

72. Olymp. fr. 4 [Soz. 1.6.5].

73. Olymp. frs. 1.2; 6; 24; 25; 26; 27; 29.

74. *De reg.* 14.

75. *De reg.* 15.7–8. He references the Scythian campaigns in Media and the Levant (cf. Hdt. 1.103–6), and puts special emphasis on the "feminine affliction" endemic among them. The idea that some Scythian men adopt female garb and behavior as the result of pathological impotency is spelled out clearly in the Hippocratic *Airs, Waters, and Places* (22) and more briefly referenced in Herodotus (4.67).

76. *De reg.* 11.6.

77. *De reg.* 15.1.

ian label as a rhetorical tool designed to support his oration's 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 transdanubians] 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 sprung from the earth.[78]

Synesius is insisting here that the Goths whom 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 thinking about the Goths had shifted significantly from the pre-Adrianople world view.

II. Attila and the Hunnic Alternative

If, by the early fifth century, the Thracian Goths had begun to assume 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 world view which pictured the Danube—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. As we have previously mentioned, Ammianus presents us with one of the earliest ethnographic pictures of the Huns, and the topoi he employs are nearly all lifted directly 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

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78. *de Reg.* 11.6: οἱ δ᾽ οὖν ἕτερα ἀντὶ τούτων ὀνόματα θέμενοι, ἕτεροι δὲ αὐτῶν καὶ τὰ πρόσωπα τέχνῃ παραποιήσαντες, ἵνα δὴ δοκοίη γένος ἄλλο νέον τε καὶ ἀλλόκοτον ἐκφῦναι τῆς γῆς, δεδίττονται ὑμᾶς ἀντιδιαβαίνοντες.

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 from where he comes, since they are born far from where they were conceived, and are raised even further afield.[79]

For the moment, these nomadic terrors, whom Jerome called Transdanubia's *nova feritas* at about the same time,[80] lived far enough off to require no more than pat repetition of long-established Scythian topoi, but this situation was not to endure long into the fifth century.

The End of Roman Military Dominance along the Danube

Assessments of the 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 nomadic terrors forcing panicked Goths and Germans into the less-than-welcoming arms of the empire like so many leaves driven before the storm.[81] More recent reassessments of the fifth-century Roman collapse have tended to downplay the significance of the Huns either in favor of the emerging Gothic, Vandalic, and Frankish proto-states,[82] or internal Roman divisions and weaknesses,[83] although recent interventions by Luttwak and Kim have once again reasserted a "strong Hun" model.[84] Neither of these authors'

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79. 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 contexunt, 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.* As we have noted elsewhere, Ammianus' ethnography of the Alani is practically identical to his characterization of the Huns. Both were clearly Scythian peoples in his mind, and both remote enough to require no more than a rehashing of the traditional topoi, even as he uses more modern labels to name these groups.

80. *Adv. Iovinian.* 2.7: *Nomades, et Troglodytae, et Scythae, et Hunnorum nova feritas, semicrudis vescuntur carnibus.*

81. E.g., Rostovtsev 1922, 119; 1931, 103ff.; Thompson 1948, 41–43; Gordon 2013, ch. 3, especially 106–11. The continuation of this narrative in some recent scholarship (e.g., Istvánovits and Kulcsár 2017, 367, 376–79) must also be noted.

82. Wolfram 1988; Heather 2006, 2009.

83. Halsall 2007; Goffart 2006. See also Lindner 1981.

84. Luttwak 2009, ch. 1; Kim 2013. Maenchen-Helfen (1973) should also be given credit for beginning the process of Hunnic rehabilitation.

work is unproblematic,[85] 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.[86] 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 CE, 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.[87] These first raids apparently led Rome to buy off the Huns for a time, 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.[88] While we might be wary of ancient claims that a hundred Danubian and Balkan cities were razed in this period,[89] 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 [i.e., Theodosius' Gothic War]—was brought down on us by King Attila: a war that afflicted nearly all of Europe and saw the devastation and sack of cities and fortresses."[90]

To forestall further devastation, Constantinople paid Attila a hefty tribute,[91] but the payout appears not to have required the Huns to relinquish control over the lands south and west of the Danube which they had occupied during their campaigns. Rome's loss of this land represents a crucial—if largely temporary—territorial reconfiguration.[92] As for Attila, he

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85. 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, 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).

86. Luttwak 2009, 22–40; Kim 2013, 69–88.

87. This, and the following historical synopsis is based on Kim's excellent synthesis of the primary and secondary literature (2013, 70–72, 79–85), with additional details from Blockley's older, but still essentially correct assessment (1992, 59–67).

88. Marc. Com. 19; Priscus fr. 9.3.

89. E.g., Theophanes, *Chron.* a.m. 5942.

90. Marc. Com. 447.2: *ingens bellum et priore maius per Attilam regem nostris inflictum paene totam Europam excisis invasisque civitatibus atque castellis conrasit.*

91. 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, 71–73), but see also Luttwak 2009, 53–55.

92. We will discuss Attila's annexations south of the Danube further below.

next campaigned west in 451 CE in what was probably a bid to consolidate his control over the Germanic peoples 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.[93]

Attila died the following year, at the height of his power, with both halves of the Roman empire paying annual tribute and with their ability to protect imperial territory through arms severely diminished. On the conqueror's death, Attila's Hunnic imperial edifice quickly collapsed as the Gepids and other subjugated peoples 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,[94] but regardless, the death of the Hunnic king must have appeared the work of some *deus ex machina* to the Romans of the day.

Attila Bursts Rome's Danubian Bubble

Whether we fully accept Luttwak and Kim's revivified 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 temporary demolition of Rome's Danube *limes*, and its replacement

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93. Kim 2013, 78–84.

94. 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 (e.g., Gordon 2013, 111). Kim, ever the iconoclast, suggests 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 nonexistence) that caused the nascent empire to break up, but rather Attila's undermining of the diarchic system that had given earlier steppe empires stability and strength (Kim 2013, 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.
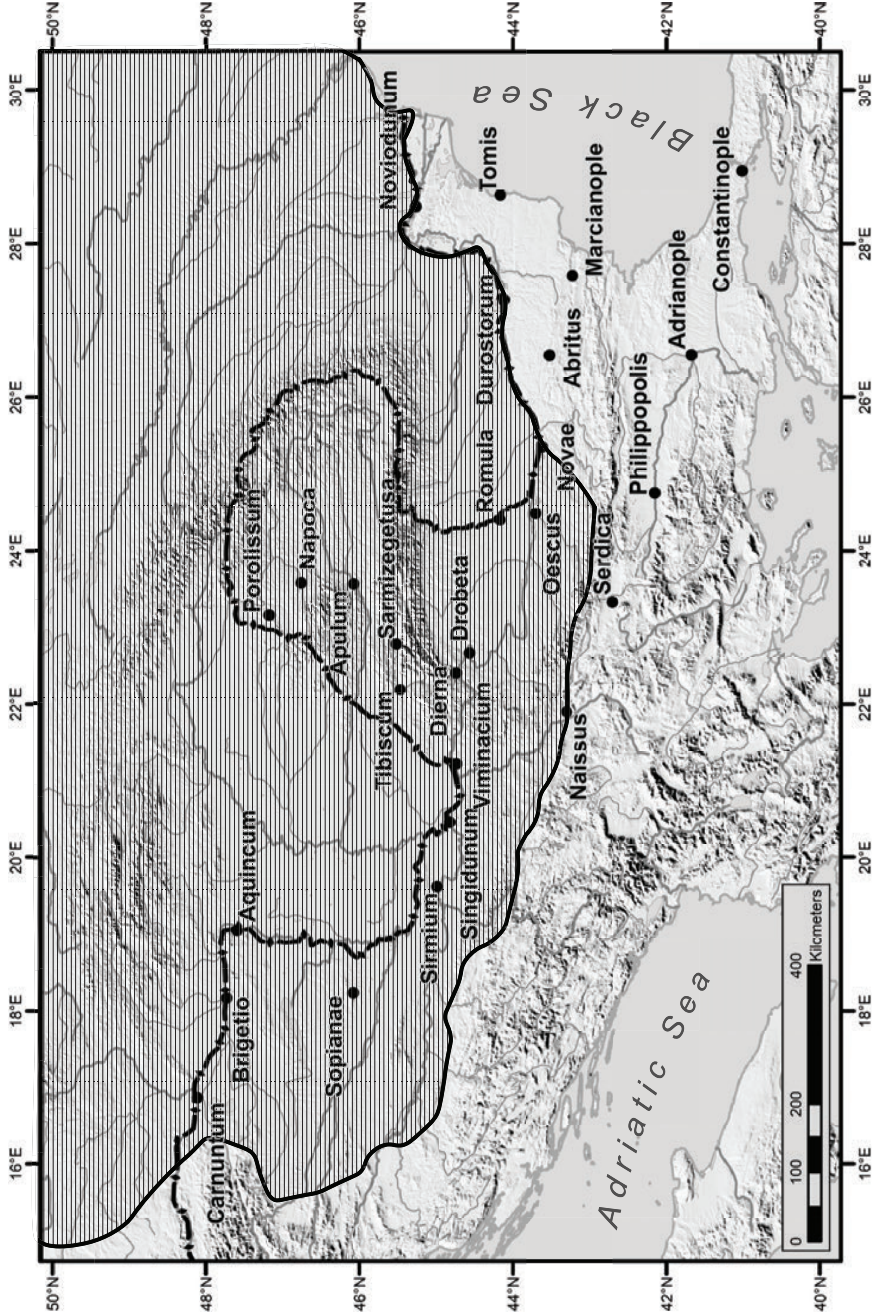
Fig. 6.1. The political realm of Attila the Hun within the Danubian Borderland

with 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, that survives in substantial fragments. The most famous of Priscus' fragments (nos. 11, 13, and 14) describe his experiences on an official eastern 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, west Roman officials had officially ceded Pannonia to Attila by treaty. One of the Hunnic king's demands which Priscus' own mission 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 unladen man.[95]

Depending on the pace, which we can estimate as somewhere between 20 and 40 kilometers 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.[96] These territorial demands, which amounted to no more than acknowledgment of a Hunnic *fait accompli*, would have included the entire western half of the Bulgarian Plain, not to mention much of 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 greater Hunnic hegemony. Further, Attila's efforts to establish and control markets in places of his choosing shows a complete understanding of Roman client treaty procedures—now flipped on their head—an irony surely not lost on Priscus and his fellow diplomats.[97]

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95. Priscus, fr. 11.1 [*exc. de leg. gent.* 5].

96. Priscus, fr. 11.1. For the possible rates of travel, road network, and distances between cities, see Stanford's Orbis Project, accessed 7/18/2017, http://orbis.stanford.edu/. The only way this demand makes any sort of geographical sense is for the man in question to be traveling on foot.

97. E.g., Marcus and Commodus' Danubian treaties (Dio 72.15–16, 73.2); and Valens' Gothic treaty (Them., *Or.* 10).

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 Timiş and Tisza before arriving at the Hunnic capital after a journey of seven days beyond the Danube.[98] 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.[99] 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.[100] Thus, we find Romans negotiating with a barbarian king from an inferior position, in essentially the same location described as the home of lowly Sarmatian bandits by authors as recent as Ammianus.[101]

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 Borderland might look like if it were no longer a borderland at all. Attila's conquests destroyed the Danube *limes*, for the time being, 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 natural geographic 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.[102] Movement and communication within this realm

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98. Priscus fr. 11.2.

99. Blockley 1983, 384n44.

100. Priscus, fr. 11.2.356–72.

101. A.M. 17.12.2–3.

102. 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. 11.2.241–63.). Thus, while the Danubian Basin

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.[103]

Priscus, Attila, and the Scythian Logos

If the power of Attila forced Rome to change its Hunnic stance from military resistance to diplomatic persuasion and clandestine destabilization,[104] it did nothing to alter the way people like Priscus 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 we see Attila and his followers fully assume the Scythian mantle in the writings of Priscus.[105] The historian appears to have conceived of the Hunnic war as something of a nightmare sequel to the third-century Scythian invasions, and he therefore models elements of his history on Dexippus. Thus, for example, Priscus' narrative of the Hunnic siege of Naissus includes a description of Hunnic/Scythian war

cannot be considered conterminous with the entire Hunnic realm, it does appear to match the western division under Attila's personal rule at the time of Priscus' embassy.

103. The problems with limited grazing land raised by Lindner (1981) and discussed here in chapter 3 are not directly addressed by Kim, but I see no 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 (i.e., 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.

104. The entire Hunnic portion of Priscus' surviving history is dominated by Roman attempts to ensure peace through diplomatic means. The picture of Roman policy toward the Huns which emerges from these fragments is, admittedly, somewhat biased since most of what we have of Priscus comes from Byzantine *excerpta* explicitly devoted to historical embassies and diplomatic missions. Nonetheless, since it is clear that Roman military deterrence was severely undermined by Attila, it seems safe to accept that—by necessity—Rome increasingly attempted to mitigate the Hunnic threat with words rather than swords. As for the cloak-and-dagger aspect, Priscus describes an elaborate—if ultimately unsuccessful—attempt to assassinate Attila in fragments 11.1 and 15.

105. Sidonius Apollinaris, a contemporary of Priscus from the Latin west, also consistently labels the Huns as Scythians and describes them using traditional topoi; we will focus on Priscus in this discussion, however.

machines, and the defenders' attempts to dislodge the besiegers by hurling huge rocks from the ramparts.[106] This last detail directly imitates Dexippus' narrative of the siege of Philippopolis, which in turn references Thucydides' Plataean siege logos.[107]

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 Οὔννων), 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 themselves. This is shortly clarified when Priscus described Attila and Bleda as "Royal Scythians" (βασίλειοι Σκύθαι), a term derived directly from Herodotus' Scythian ethnography.[108] Here, we have a statement about identity, and unsurprisingly, Attila turns out to be a Scythian, who happens to rule over the Huns, now a subset of the larger Scythian identity.[109]

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,[110] 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,[111] and describes the cisdanubian land held by Attila as Roman territory.[112] 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 just 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 ingrained. The Scythian Logos had survived Cniva, Fritigern, and Alaric, and it would long outlive Attila.

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106. Priscus, fr. 6.2.

107. Blockley 1972.

108. For Herodotus (4.20), the βασίλειοι Σκύθαι were a particular clan or lineage from which all the Scythian rulers derived.

109. Priscus, fr. 2.

110. Priscus, fr. 11.1.12–14.

111. Priscus, frs. 11.1.43–44, 15.4.1–2.

112. Priscus, fr. 15.4.5–10.

III. Shifting Frontiers and the Indestructible Scythian Logos

After the death of Attila, Rome managed to restore order along the Lower Danube *limes*, although the Middle Danube line was never again as securely maintained.[113] While Hunnic hegemony beyond the river had proven ephemeral, it was, in a very real sense a glimpse 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 more durable polities which viewed the river in ways more similar to Attila than to Priscus. First came the Avars. Despite a concerted effort by Justinian to refortify the lower Danube *limes* and introduce a defense-in-depth system in Moesia and Thrace,[114] by the end of the sixth century, the Avars had created a state that straddled the Danube, much as Attila's had done a century and a half before.[115] Next, in the late seventh century, Bulgars, migrating down the Scythian Corridor and across the Lower Danube, defeated Roman forces and established a polity 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.[116] 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,[117] while Pechenegs (10th–12th centuries) and Cumans/Qipčaqs (11th–13th 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.[118]

An Unshakable Roman Mindset

Throughout these centuries, Roman writers continued to cast the empire's various Danubian foes as Scythians. A brief look forward demonstrates

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113. Blockley 1992, 71; Wolfram 1988, 258–68.

114. For a thorough treatment of the literary and archaeological evidence for Justinian's program, see Curta 2001, ch. 4 (120–89).

115. Kim 2013, 142–43; Batty 2007, 111; Curta 2001, 204–8. See also Pohl 1988.

116. Kim 2013, 142–43; Batty 2007, 110; Shepard 2008. See also Gyuzelev 1979.

117. Bakay 2008.

118. Batty 2007, 111–12; Golden 2005.

clearly that the basic Scythian Logos and its underlying geographic/climatic supports remained vibrant long after the age of Attila. We will begin in the sixth century with the historian Procopius, but first, a note is required regarding two problematic sources: the *Historia Augusta* and Zosimus' *Historia Nova*. While we have carefully employed both texts 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 inventing fake authors for the various biographies. Further, the author 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.[119] For this reason, we cannot reasonably expect his Scythian terminology to match his fifth-century dates. The author does slip up once and labels 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 attempting to unravel the mess. Zosimus, on the other hand, is simply a plagiarist. As previously noted, 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.

Procopius, writing in the mid-sixth century, presents a clearer ethnographic voice. For him, Attila's Huns were still Massagetae, an explicitly Asian subset of Scythians,[120] while 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.[121] 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.[122] That term was reserved for peoples more closely linked with the transdanubian world in his own day. Evagrius Scholasticus, writing near the end of the sixth century, employs ethnic labels in a similar manner in his *Ecclesiastical History*. For him, as for Procopius, the Scythian label is most commonly reserved for

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119. Rohrbacher 2016, 7.

120. *Wars* 3.4.24. Herodotus, as usual, stands as the originator (1.201).

121. *Wars* 3.19.7.

122. *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.

transdanubian threats like Huns or Avars.[123] Theodoric the Great and his Ostrogoths, by contrast are referred to as Goths throughout.[124] One apparent exception to this pattern is Theodoric Strabo, the Ostrogothic rival to Theodoric the Great, active in the third quarter of the fifth century. This warlord is identified as a Scythian despite his origins among the Goths settled in Thrace.[125] We can, most likely, explain this unusual deviation by the fact that Strabo ultimately came out worse in his conflict with Theodoric the Great, and was remembered as an enemy of Rome, despite his early career in imperial service. Evagrius appears to be using the Scythian label to rhetorically separate the two similarly named Ostrogothic warlords, with the loser condemned to a Scythian identity. Clearly the term still carried strong negative connotations at the dawn of the seventh century such that it could be wielded as a rhetorical bludgeon as Synesius of Cyrene had done about two centuries earlier.

Menander Protector, a late sixth-century contemporary of Evagrius, is worth considering next because although he uses contemporary terminology throughout his history, he nonetheless maintains the underlying ethnographic divisions.[126] We see this when occasionally he slips up, and Avars and Turks get labeled as Scythians.[127] The same principle 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 ethnonyms (Persians, Avars, Turks, Antes, Slavs, Franks, and Lombards), but are grouped according to prevailing ethnographic divisions. These are worth considering because they reflect an "official" imperial world view which appears largely unchanged from earlier centuries. Thus, the major barbarian divisions are Persians (11.1), Scythians (11.2), the blond peoples of Northern Europe (11.3), and finally the Slavic peoples (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

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123. E.g., Evag. 1.17, 3.2, 5.1, 5.14.
124. Evag. 3.27; 4.19, 21. Interestingly, Evagrius also describes an invasion of Goths from the region of the Crimea (4.23), an unusual bit of ethnic specificity in his otherwise consistent use of the Scythian label for Transdanubian threats.
125. Evag. 3.25.
126. Blockley 1985, 9.
127. Men. Prot. frs. 10.1, 10.3, 12.5, 15, 19.

"all the rest who resemble the Hunnic peoples in their way of life."[128] 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 groups."[129] The description of Scythian arms, tactics, and Roman counter-measures that follows reflects a mixture of contemporary knowledge on specific topics such as arms and armor,[130] and traditional topoi 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.[131]

Three and a half centuries later, in the mid-tenth century, another imperially penned treatise bears witness to Rome's enduring Scythian mindset. Chapter 42 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 43, Constantine groups all the preceding Pontic peoples together and identifies them as "northern Scythians."[132] Earlier in the work, the author suggests ways to handle embassies from the "Khazars or Turks, or again Russians, or any other nation of the northerners and Scythians."[133]

The ethnographic divisions of the durable Herodotean world view 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,[134] 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

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128. *Strat.*11.2.1–2 πῶς δεῖ Σκύθαις ἁρμόζεσθαι, τουτέστιν Ἀβάροις καὶ Τούρκοις καὶ λοιποῖς ὁμοδιαίτοις αὐτῶν Οὐννικοῖς ἔθνεσιν.

129. *Strat.* 11.2.4–5: τὰ Σκυθικὰ ἔθνη μιᾶς εἰσιν, ὡς εἰπεῖν, ἀναστροφῆς τε καὶ τάξεως πολύαρχά τε καὶ ἀπράγμονα.

130. *Strat.* 11.2.24–30.

131. *Strat.* 11.2.67–70. Cf. A.M. 31.2.6; cf. ps. Hip. *AWP* 20.

132. *De admin.* 43.1–3.

133. *De admin.* 13.24–26: Χάζαροι, εἴτε Τοῦρκοι, εἴτε καὶ Ῥῶς, ἢ ἕτερόν τι ἔθνος τῶν βορείων καὶ Σκυθικῶν.

134. Men. Prot. fr. 5.4.

enduring strength and ubiquity of the Scythian Logos.[135] 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.[136]

Anna Komnene's Danubian World

One final twelfth-century history deserves mention in this brief survey. Anna Komnene's *Alexiad* was written by a Byzantine princess, "born in the purple" according to her own account,[137] based on notes produced by her husband, a general active in many of the campaigns described in the work.[138] This perspective allows the *Alexiad*, which chronicles the life and reign of Anna's father, Emperor Alexios I, to present a world view closely linked to the throne of the Caesars. The work is not, however, a technical treatise like the *De administrando imperio*, but rather an openly literary piece designed to highlight the author's erudition as well as sing the praises of her imperial father.[139] 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 contemporary and traditional terms when describing the Pechenegs and Cumans living in the Danubian Basin, and the Scythian label features prominently within the mix.

Some sections must be read as intentionally 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."[140] This remarkable statement neither reflects contemporary

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135. Cos. Ind. 2.131.

136. *De admin.* 42.55ff.

137. *Alexiad* prologue 1.

138. *Alexiad* prologue 3.

139. *Alexiad* prologue 1.

140. *Alexiad* 3.8.6: ἐπεὶ γὰρ ἃς πάλαι εἶχον οἱ τῶν **Δακῶν** ἀρχηγέται μετὰ τῶν Ῥωμαίων σπονδὰς τηρεῖν εἰσέτι οὐκ ἤθελον, ἀλλὰ παρασπονδήσαντες διέλυσαν, τούτου δὲ δήλου τοῖς **Σαυρομάταις** γεγονότος, οἳ πρὸς τῶν πάλαι Μυσοὶ προσηγορεύοντο, οὐδὲ αὐτοὶ τοῖς ἰδίοις ὁρίοις ἐμμένοντες ἤθελον ἡσυχάζειν, νεμόμενοι πρότερον ὁπόσα ὁ Ἴστρος πρὸς τὴν τῶν Ῥωμαίων διορίζει ἡγεμονίαν, ἀλλὰ ἀθρόον ἀπαναστάντες πρὸς τὴν ἡμεδαπὴν γῆν μετῳκίσθησαν. **αἰτία δὲ τῆς τούτων μετοικήσεως ἡ τῶν Γετῶν κατ' αὐτῶν ἄσπονδος ἔχθρα ὁμορούντων μὲν ἐκείνοις, τούτους δὲ ληστευόντων.** trans. Sewter.

reality nor any normal Scythian topoi of this period and instead should be read as 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 the barbarian peoples in her history according to an archaizing code.[141] While surely correct in this instance, I would argue that such coded language 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 rather than reflections of an actual authorial world view, the ubiquity of the Scythian label—and to a lesser extent, related Sarmatian language—indicate the survival of the old ethnographic world view, particularly when the *Alexiad* is viewed in the context of the continuous literary tradition.[142]

There are further hints at the enduring Scythian mindset throughout the *Alexiad*. First, when attempting to explain the origins of Constantinople'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 certain group of Scythians, 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.[143]

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141. Komnene 2009, 493–94n31.

142. 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 (3.8, 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.

143. *Alexiad* 6.14: βουλομένη δὲ δεινοτέραν καὶ μείζονα τῆς προλαβούσης κατὰ τῆς τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς ἔφοδον διηγήσασθαι εἰς ἀρχὴν αὖθις καθιστῶ τὸν λόγον· ἄλλα γὰρ ἐπ' ἄλλοις διεκυμάνθησαν. γένος τί σκυθικὸν παρὰ τῶν Σαυρομάτων καθεκάστην σκυλευόμενοι ἀπάραντες τῶν οἴκοι κατῆλθον πρὸς τὸν Δάνουβιν. [. . .] σπεισάμενοι γοῦν μετ' αὐτῶν ἀδεῶς τοῦ λοιποῦ διαπερῶντες τὸν Δάνουβιν ἐληΐζοντο τὴν παρακειμένην χώραν, ὡς καὶ πολίχνιά τινα κατασχεῖν. trans. Sewter

Slightly earlier in the text, 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 Bosporus, with Alexios standing in the middle at Constantinople "fighting two-fisted against barbarians who attacked him on either flank."[144] 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 7 which recounts Alexios' successful campaign to drive the Pechenegs 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.[145]

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 forebears, appears just as unwilling to entertain new ideas about what counted 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 that of Marcus Aurelius and Cassius Dio. Amid all the religious, political, cultural, and territorial transformation, however, the basic Greco-Roman image of the world remained strong

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144. *Alexiad* 6.11: ἀλλ᾽ ὅ γε βασιλεὺς Ἀλέξιος ἀμφοτέραις ὥσπερ παίων χερσὶ τοὺς ἑκατέρωθεν ἐπιτιθεμένους βαρβάρους. trans. Sewter

145. *Alexiad* 7.2: οὕτως δὲ τῶν κατὰ τὴν Μακεδονίαν καὶ Φιλιππούπολιν μερῶν ἀπελαθέντες περὶ τὸν Ἴστρον αὖθις ἐπαναστρέψαντες ηὐλίζοντο καὶ ὥσπερ ἰδίαν τὴν ἡμεδαπὴν ἀνέτως πάντῃ παροικοῦντες ἐληίζοντο. ταῦτα ὁ βασιλεὺς ἀκούων οὐκ ἠνείχετο τῶν ῥωμαϊκῶν ὁρίων εἴσω τοὺς Σκύθας παροικεῖν, ἅμα δὲ καὶ δεδιώς, μὴ διὰ τῶν στενωπῶν διελθόντες αὖθις χείρονα τῶν προτέρων ἀπεργάσωνται. modified from Sewter

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 firm 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. Regarding the Scythians, Cavafy's words ring true: "those people were a kind of solution."[146]

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146. C. P. Cavafy, trans. E. Keeley, "Waiting for the Barbarians," 35.

General Conclusions

I. Recapitulation

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 power and ethnographic ideology. At first perhaps unintentionally, 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 world view which had pictured the Danubian Basin—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 topoi 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 topoi that he morosely recorded in his missives 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 the Hippocratic school 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 farthest southern limit of Scythia, Roman authors

rhetorically relocated the Scythian core south to the plains and hills of the proximate Transdanubia.[1] 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 world view—as captured by Strabo—the northern half of the Danube Basin existed as a sort of 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 world view worked fine within the context of a Hellenistic society less concerned with exerting political control north of the Stara Planina Balkans, but such ambiguity could only serve to undermine Rome's political position once the empire came to the Danubian region to stay. For a state that ruled over cities and peoples, it was unacceptable to have half of the Thracians under provincial administration (i.e., Moesians, Bistonians, Odrysians, southern Getae, etc.) and half of them beyond Rome's political reach (northern Getae and Dacians). This problem was neatly solved—again, probably unintentionally—when Ovid's Scythian tundra was imagined to begin just over the horizon beyond the Danube rather than far north on the true Pontic Steppe. 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 Iazyges in the Hungarian Plain to the west ensured that the topoi could not be abandoned outright. Instead, as illustrated on Trajan's column, the official spin was to cast the 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 as unworthy of similar treatment. Thus, we begin to see an evolution of Rome's Scythian Logos in the period after Trajan's Dacian Wars. More and more, the Sarmatians of the Hungarian Plain were cast not only as fearsome nomadic lancers, but somehow also as impoverished raiders, too primitive, in Florus' words, even to know the meaning of peace (2.29). This rebranding of the Middle Danube Scythians continued during the Marcomannic Wars of the later sec-

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1. 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.

ond century, when more than a decade of brutal conflict designed, in part, 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 encouraged close relations with the region's agricultural majority. We find these dynamics subtly 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 the military power of the Iazyges firmly broken, but the client treaties that ended the war imposed strict controls over commerce between the transdanubians and the Roman army. The most important pillar of this economic system was the livestock trade, which had developed in the previous century as the main support for the Iazyges' position at the top of the Hungarian Plain's social pyramid. In the centuries following the Marcomannic Wars, the inhabitants of this Sarmatian *barbaricum* 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 dependency emerged the all-too-accurate ethnographic topos 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 postwar propaganda, and later reinforced by a num-

ber 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 Scythians were wreaking havoc south of the Lower Danube, the Iazyges, Quadi, and other peoples of the Hungarian Plain mainly stayed home, generally too cowed—or savvy—to take advantage of the chaotic political situation.

While the weak Sarmatian topos 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 Sarmatian 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 peoples 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 and their neighbors, the south/east division witnessed the fluorescence of the Sântana-de-Mureş/Černjachov Culture: a vibrant, polyethnic 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 communities of Goths described in third- and fourth-century sources. In 332, Constantine struck a treaty with the southernmost elements of the Černjachov 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

contemporaneous 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 *oikoumene*.

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-Mureș/Černjachov Culture, as had happened earlier with the Iazyges of the Hungarian Plain. Thus, access to Roman goods came to be associated with high status, a social dynamic—once again echoing the example of the Hungarian Plain—revealed clearly in the burial evidence from the region. This connection made the holders of those elite positions in Černjachov 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 tool for 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 Černjachov 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, Valens' policy failed to bring the barbarians under Roman control. Instead, imperial meddling created a power vacuum along the Scythian Corridor which encouraged exploitative raiding by Alani and Huns dwelling farther 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 accommodate 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 one barbarian group to shrug off the burden of outdated topoi and stereotypes, the world view behind the topoi 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 Goths now ensconced south of the Danube, Scythian topoi slowly began to appear less appropriate for the Tervingi and their various allies as they became more and more of an endemic population. The Scythian Logos, however, did not disappear. The underlying world view remained as strong as ever, and so the Huns smoothly stepped into their role as the next Scythians, to be followed by Avars, Bulgars, Magyars, 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.[2] They play their scripted role one last time and then all but vanish from the pages of history. In the following centuries, they reappear textually from time to time, but

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2. For the Quadic-Sarmatian raids, A.M. 29.6.1–15; for the settlement with the Sarmatians, A.M. 29.6.16, 30.5.1–3; for the following revenge campaign against the Quadi, A.M. 30.5.13–14; for the eventual negotiations with the Quadi, and Valentinian's death by stroke, A.M. 30.6.1–5.

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. 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 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 peoples—the Sarmatian Iazyges splintered and disappeared, their group identity, such as they had, overpowered by newer, more attractive options.

II. Roman Ethnography and the Imperial Borderlands

The edges of Rome's empire existed as vibrant zones of interaction shaped profoundly by Roman power and ideologies, but crucially also spaces where ideas from beyond the empire mixed with those from inside to create new, borderland societies. Approaching the Roman borderlands from such a perspective is not something new to this study. Whittaker pushed a borderlands model into the limelight of Roman studies, even if he did not employ the term itself. Others have come since. Past studies have recognized the importance of political, economic, and environmental forces as "borderland processes," to return to Parker's term, shaping the particular development of societies on the edges of the Roman state. The ideological turn of scholars like Mattern, meanwhile, has reintroduced the notion that economically and politically "irrational" concerns, such as elite competition and obsession with personal and imperial *dignitas* were also key forces shaping Roman actions in the borderlands.

This study contributes to this ongoing conversation by focusing particularly on a frequently underappreciated ideological force: Greco-Roman ethnographic thought. Emerging from a world view that put great stock in the power of the natural environment to shape the physical and mental nature of human societies, Roman ethnographic stereotypes functioned as a ubiquitous lens through which the ancients viewed themselves and others. In this book, we have charted how one particular set of topoi—our Scyth-

ian Logos—helped Romans to make sense of their place within the Danubian ecoregion. There is much more to do. In this study, we have revealed just how ingrained ethnographic stereotypes were in the Greek and Roman imagination. Again and again, topoi originally pioneered by Greek writers like Herodotus and Aristotle are repeated—often nearly verbatim—many centuries later. We have also clearly seen that ethnographic thinking was not limited to any particular genre of ancient literature. Rather, it emerges with equal facility in prose, poetry, and oratory—in both languages—because it bubbled up so naturally from popular Greco-Roman perceptions of the world. Perhaps this fact should come as no surprise. After all, we navigate through a sea of stereotypes and ethnic cliches every day in our own lives. What this study has attempted to show, however, is that ethnographic topoi were much more than mere rhetorical flourishes. Instead, as we have seen, their power to shape Roman perceptions of barbarians at a basic level encouraged certain actions and policies in the Danubian sphere, and frequently led Roman actors to make disastrous decisions.

The model proposed in this book cries out for further application. How did the ethnographic eye influence Roman actions in other peripheral regions? How did ideas of environmental determinism shape the way Romans viewed barbarian peoples resettled inside the empire? The Scythian Logos long outlived the military frontier it originally served to support, and the impacts of such ancient ideas about environment and human culture have been well established as informing early modern ideas about race during the age of global colonization. I would venture, however, that these ideas never really stopped playing their silent role during the intervening period, as Roman hegemony waned and new states attempted to carve out ideological spaces for themselves in the post-Roman, medieval world. Our exploration in this book of the Scythian Logos has revealed, time and again, the remarkable stability of ancient ethnographic topoi. While most of us today may not fear Scythians lurking just beyond the river, on some basic level we in the global west continue to view the world through—and remain under—the eye of Rome.

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, Bistonus*
Tristia: [*none*]
Ex Ponto: 2.9.54; 4.5.5; 4.5.35
Total: 3

B) Adj: *Threïcius, 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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Index