

JOHN VINCENT PALATINE



THE LITTLE DRUMMER BOY

From Bismarck to the Beer Hall Putsch

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The Little Drummer Boy

*Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
brought death into the world, and all our woe
with loss of Eden.*

John Milton "Paradise Lost", Bk.1, L.1



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John Vincent Palatine

The Little Drummer Boy

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In Nazism, the historian faces a phenomenon that leaves him no way but rejection, whatever his individual position. There is literally no voice worth considering that disagrees on the matter. Does not such fundamental rejection imply a fundamental lack of understanding?

Wolfgang Sauer

"National Socialism: Totalitarianism or Fascism?"

[American Historical Review, 73 (1967-8), 404 - 24, 408]

It remains an irrefragable law of history that contemporaries are denied recognition of the great movements which determine their fate. So am I frankly unable to recall when I first heard the name of Adolf Hitler, that name which for years we have been forced to think of or to pronounce every day, almost every second, in one connection or another; the name of the man who has brought more evil to our world than any other through the ages.

Stefan Zweig

"The World of Yesterday"

(Autobiography)

THE LITTLE DRUMMER BOY

*High on a throne of royal state, which far
Outshone the wealth of Ormus and of Ind,
Or where the gorgeous East with richest hands
Showers on her kings barbaric pearl and gold,
Satan exalted sat, by merit raised,
To that bad eminence; and, from despair
Thus high uplifted without hope, aspires
Beyond thus high, insatiate to pursue
Vain war with Heaven; and, by success untaught,
His proud imaginations thus displayed, --*

*"Powers and Dominions, Deities of Heaven!
For, since no deep within her gulf can hold
Immortal vigour, though oppressed and fallen,
I give not Heaven for lost: from this descent
Celestial Virtues rising will appear
More glorious and more dread than from no fall,
And trust themselves to fear no second fate! -- "*

John Milton, "Paradise Lost", Bk.II, L. 1

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A FAIRER PERSON LOST NOT HEAVEN

I remember that he used to hold conversations with the windblown trees.

Professor Eduard Huemer on his student Adolf Hitler

Snow fell once again on this afternoon in December 1909, the coldest winter in recent memory. A bone-freezing chill blew through the streets of Vienna, capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and sixth-largest city in the world. It urged fur-clad pedestrians to hurry to the warmth and comfort of their homes or offices. They scarcely paid attention to the shivering prostitutes that lined the streets as they always did, or the huddled shadows of the homeless, who attempted to hide under trees and bridges. On the square opposite St. Stephen's Cathedral, municipal workers erected the stalls for the Christmas market that was to open in a day or two. Little bells on horses' bridles chimed thinly through the snowflakes.

Far from the entirety of the great city's residents was able to enjoy the blessings of a fur coat or a place by the fire - large numbers knew no such comfort. Those who had no place to go suffered most - it was estimated that perhaps twenty per cent of the city's two million inhabitants were consigned to everlasting poverty; most of them had neither shack nor shed to call their home. They infiltrated the warmth of the coffee-houses, attempting to evade the vigilance of waitresses or to invade railway stations, which, although unheated, at least provided shelter from the gales. They populated the warming rooms for itinerants operated by municipal and private charities, and bickered, came evening, over the benches in the Prater, Vienna's Coney-Island-style amusement park - which were by far the favoured resting places for the night.

An attentive observer of the drama that repeated itself every night might have spotted among the poor the gaunt figure of a pale, earnest young man, who, despite the easy sociability of Vienna's outcasts, wore his embitterment as if it were a precious decoration. His hairdo sported the characteristic forelock that a young Elvis Presley was to make famous forty-five years later. His drab brown summer suit was full of holes, some of which evidenced alarmingly expansionist intentions, and his thin overcoat was of the make to render aid on autumn evenings, not to withstand the grim of winter in Vienna. His hair was covered by a grey fedora that had seen better days.

The thin young man had seen better days himself. Twenty years earlier, he had been born as the second son of a petty bureaucrat who, nonetheless, in a bureaucratic country, had gained a measure of success in the Imperial Austrian Customs Service and had fathered nine children that we know of. His son, however, was not attracted to the bliss of public office or much interested in girls. He had left school early, for he planned to become a famous artist, a painter, or, perhaps, an architect. As of yet, however, these ambitions had failed to yield tangible fruit, and the young man was flat out broke. To the occupations he had felt unable to align with his personality he had recently added panhandling: he had neither the panache nor the recklessness of the successful beggar. Now the starving young man's last option was to call on the capital's charities, that is, to submit to the mercy of strangers.

Had the young man met a freezing death on some deserted lane or ditch in one of these long winter nights, we would be living in a different world: one, perhaps, without the threat of nuclear war or the tyranny of the internet but likewise - if we were lucky - without the ghosts of Auschwitz, Dresden, and Hiroshima. We might still be crossing the Atlantic Ocean on the sleek ships of Cunard or Hamburg-Amerika Lines, and buy spices in the "Colonial Store". There might still be, who knows, a Kaiser in Berlin or a Czar on the Romanov throne; the great British Empire might still exist, and Vienna and Budapest remain centres of world politics. But the young man survived this winter, and the next thirty-five. His name was Adolf Hitler, and he changed the world.

In some of these subsequent years, the fairies seemed to grant his every wish - the dreams, perhaps, he hedged in this cold winter - and hence the second quarter of the twentieth century was formed, to a degree no one thought possible, by a young Austrian mendicant - whom to get rid of cost over fifty million lives. And in the bargain, he left a vastly altered globe behind. Sebastian Haffner observed in the 1970's:

Today's world, whether we like it or not, is the work of Hitler. Without Hitler there would have been no partition of Germany or Europe; without Hitler there would be no Americans and Russians in Berlin; without Hitler there would be no Israel; without Hitler there would be no decolonization, at least not such a rapid one; there would be no Asian, Arab, or Black African emancipation and no diminution of European pre-eminence. Or, more accurately, there would be none of all this without Hitler's mistakes. He certainly did not want any of it. (1)

For almost fifty years following Hitler's death, Haffner's statement described the post-war world – essentially the post-Hitler world - accurately enough. The story of Hitler's life remains all too unlikely - a truant in his teens, a pauper in his twenties, in prison at age thirty-five, he was, only ten years later, the leader, "Führer" and Chancellor of a resurgent German nation. He was barely over fifty when he controlled most of the European continent, and dead, at the end of history's greatest conflagration, only ten days after his fifty-sixth birthday.

His adult life closely paralleled the age of the great European civil war - by some called the War of the Ottoman Succession - which raged, with peaceful intervals, from 1912 to 1945, and since he fought in the First and was responsible, undeniably, for much of the Second World War, his story necessarily coincides with the history of these wars. The first of them is thus a main subject of this investigation,¹ of which the present volume covers Hitler from 1889 to 1923, the years leading to his first attempt at gaining power. The catholicity of his impact on the world still makes him an almost unprecedented historical phenomenon. Joachim C. Fest – author of an eminent Hitler biography² – pointed out that:

In fact, to a virtually unprecedented degree, he created everything out of himself and was himself everything at once: his own teacher, organizer of a party and author of its ideology, tactician and demagogic saviour, leader, statesman, and for a decade the "axis" of the world. He refuted the dictum that all revolutions devour their children; for he was as has been said, "the Rousseau, the Mirabeau, the Robespierre and the Napoleon of his revolution; he was its Marx, its Lenin, its Trotsky and its Stalin. By character and nature he may have been far inferior to most of these, but he nevertheless managed what all of them could not: he dominated the revolution in every phase, even in the moment of defeat. That argues a considerable understanding of the forces he evoked." (2)

It goes without saying that historical biographies run the danger of overestimating the relevance of a single man's achievements, the risk to personalize history in the way that leads to what linguist Steven Pinker called the "bird's eye view" of the past - so far removed from the actual environment that only the most obvious characters are caught in the observer's gaze. (3) Hitler's career was, naturally, not entirely self-made - no man is an island - and many aided him along the road, consciously or not. Sometimes his opponents made things worse by trying to improve them - "appeasement" comes to mind, a clever strategy aiming at discouraging Hitler by granting his every demand.

Yet one may legitimately doubt how much a single man, try as he might, can or cannot decide the fate of man. Bertolt Brecht classically juxtaposed such personalization of history in "Questions from a Worker Who Reads":

"Who built Thebes of the seven gates? In the books you will find the names of kings.

Did the kings haul up the lumps of rock?

The young Alexander conquered India. Was he alone?

Caesar beat the Gauls. Did he not even have a cook with him?" (5)

¹ John Burrow on the word "historia": "It was, so far as we know, Herodotus who first used the term historia (inquiry) for what we call history. A "histor" in Homer was someone who passed judgement based on the facts as a result of an investigation, so the link between history and inquest is a very old one." (4)

² Joachim C. Fest "Hitler" (1974), Harcourt Books ISBN 978-0-15-602754-0 (pbk.)

Hitler, we may reveal here, did employ cooks; yet nonetheless, much of his true personality remains obscured. In the preface of his voluminous biography "Adolf Hitler" (London, 1976), John Toland states that "My book has no thesis, and any conclusions found in it were reached only during the writing, perhaps the most meaningful being that Hitler was far more complex and contradictory than I had imagined." (6) In his own grand Hitler biography, Ian Kershaw notes:

The combination of Hitler's innate secretiveness, the emptiness of his personal relations, his unbureaucratic style, the extreme of adulation and hatred which he stirred up, and the apologetics as well as distortions built upon post-war memoirs and gossipy anecdotes of those in his entourage, mean that, for all the surviving mountains of paper spewed out by the governmental apparatus of the Third Reich, the sources for reconstructing the life of the German Dictator are in many respects extraordinarily limited - far more so than in the case, say, of his main adversaries, Churchill and even Stalin. (7)

Hitler's personal impact, the fact that his sympathies and antipathies directly determined the fate of millions, may perhaps only be compared with that of Martin Luther, of whom Owen Chadwick noted that "the Reformation would have happened without Luther. But without Luther it would not have happened in the way it happened." (8) Likewise, Germany would have recovered, sooner or later, from the Great War, but certainly not in the shape of the Third Reich, and the Second World War might have been avoided. Other wars would have taken place: Japan vs. the USA over the Pacific Ocean, local conflicts in Eastern Europe, Indochina or the Middle East; but no second war over the same battlefields of 1914 to 1918.

Still, perhaps it is but a historic coincidence that in the wake of their doctrinal quantum leaps - the individualization of the Christian religion in the case of Luther and the transformation of nationalism in the case of Hitler³ - the two most vicious wars in European history arose, but then, perhaps, it is not - both occurred after paradigm shifts that transcended the previous arrangements of the world, rendered them obsolete.

This personal impetus Hitler enacted upon the body politic almost necessarily precipitates an author's inclination to discuss political or military affairs over the examination of the social, economical and psychological trends of the time.⁴ Yet it were in the first instant such factors, in particular of psychological and economic nature, which made Hitler's career an actual possibility: without the loss of the Great War, the hunger winters, reparation payments, the Treaty of Versailles and its disastrous war guilt clause, inflation, and in particular the global recession that began in 1929, it seems unlikely that he could have found the ready supply of protest voters who backed his electoral successes from 1930 onwards. There are numbers that back up the importance of these economic and psychological factors. In the Reichstag elections of May 20, 1928, in the heyday of the Weimar Republic, the NSDAP, Hitler's party, came in only a distant ninth, winning twelve seats with a paltry 2.6% of the vote. (9) Twenty-eight months later, in the wake of the Wall Street crash of October 1929, the Reichstag elections of September 14, 1930, awarded Hitler and the NSDAP a remarkable 18% of the vote, which translated to 107 seats. (10) The NSDAP suddenly was the second-biggest political party after the Social Democrats of the SPD.

Thus we can say with some confidence that the breakthrough of the NSDAP in 1930 was less a result of the movement's inherent qualities, which until then seemed to have been a tough sell, but an expression of protest against the minority governments of late Weimar, which ruled, without the endorsement of parliamentary majorities, by presidential

³ In John Lukacs's words: "What he had seen - and more or less accurately - was the formidable attraction of populist nationalism in the age of the masses [and mass media, without whom his success would not have been possible, ¶]. That nationalism proved to be the principal political reality in the twentieth century. He was its most extreme representative. He sensed that sometimes after 1870 nationalism and socialism came to supersede the older nineteenth-century categories of conservatism and liberalism, indeed perhaps even of Right and Left [giving both 'Hitlerism' and 'Stalinism' their odd Right/Left duality of character, ¶]; and that, of the two, nationalism was more influential than socialism. The categories of socialism and capitalism themselves began to be outdated, because strength was more powerful than wealth, because nationality was more powerful than class, because nationalism was more powerful than internationalism. When there was national unity, the formerly rigid categories of socialist and capitalist, public or private ownership began to leak; what mattered was not ownership but management; and ownership and management and labour would be ultimately obedient to the dictates of nationalism." (11)

⁴ On these, much information can be gathered in Paul Kennedy's "The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers", Vintage Books 1898, ISBN 0-679-72017-7 (pbk.)

emergency decrees and responded to the economic crisis with ill-advised austerity measures that did little to alleviate economic progress but were guaranteed to raise ill will. This aided Hitler, who, only a few months earlier, had seemed but a creator of random noise, a condottiere of street battles, a mixture between Don Quixote and Billy Graham on steroids. But by confusing Hitler's antics with his abilities, his enemies fatally underestimated him. After two further years of campaigning and manoeuvring Hitler gained the chancellorship - executive power. Twelve years later, many parts of the world lay in smoking embers.

Yet, as soon as the swords were laid down, the pens were drawn and produced, in fifty-odd years, more books about Hitler and the war he kindled than of any other man in history, if one excludes religious icons. The number of publications relating to Hitler and World War II was thought to exceed 50,000 in the 1980s, before Guido Knopp⁵ came up in 1995 with a then-current estimate of 120,000 titles, in and out of print, excluding fiction, websites, movies or television productions. Without a doubt, this number has risen since then - in the former Soviet Union alone, about 15,000 memoirs of the "Great Patriotic War" have found an interested and patient readership.

Such an extensive literature has produced many different interpretations of the Hitler matter by professionals and amateurs alike. The historians among the authors are naturally being held to the "professional standards", so to say, which has not kept all of them from arriving at surprising conclusions. Alan Bullock's early work of 1952, the first substantial post-war Hitler biography, was well characterized by its title and judged its subject nothing but "an entirely unprincipled opportunist." (12)⁶ This view is now generally believed too narrow. On the German side, Werner Maser⁷ evidenced an affinity for uncorroborated sources, among which he discovered entirely fictitious stories of a Jewish Grandfather and a son Hitler supposedly sired in WW I.⁸

Other theories held that Hitler, naturally, was a tyrant, but had not improvised, as Bullock suggested, but in his early days had conceived a devilishly clever plan to checkmate law and order, subjugate the German people and subsequently other nations and conquer the world. This approach overlooks that Hitler also had a considerable ability for exploiting tactical opportunities – cf. the pact with Russia in August 1939. Quite a few other authors have described him as a demon, a magician, a political thaumaturge.

No less a figure than Albert Speer, Hitler's architect, then Armaments Minister, for much of the Third Reich as close to the Dictator as anyone, described him soon after the end of the war as a "demonic figure", "one of those inexplicable historic phenomena which emerge at rare intervals among mankind," whose "person determined the fate of nations." Such a view runs the risk of mystifying what happened in Germany between 1933 and 1945, reducing the cause of Germany's and Europe's catastrophe to the arbitrary whim of a demonic personality. An absolutely contrary view – tenable only so long as it was part of a state ideology and consequently evaporating as soon as the Soviet bloc which had sustained it collapsed – rejected out of hand any significant role of personality, relegating Hitler to no more than the status of an agent of capitalism, a cipher for the interests of big business and its leaders who controlled him and pulled the strings of their marionette. Some accounts of Hitler have scarcely recognized any problem at all of understanding, or have promptly ruled one out.

Ridiculing Hitler has been one approach. Describing him simply as a "lunatic" or "raving maniac" obviates the need for an explanation – though it of course leaves open the key question: why a complex society would be prepared to follow someone who was mentally deranged, a "pathological" case, into the abyss. Far more sophisticated approaches have clashed on the extent to which Hitler was actually "master in the Third Reich," or could even be described as "a weak dictator." Did he in fact exercise total, unrestricted, and sole power? Or did his regime rest on a hydra-like "polycracy" of power-structures with Hitler, on account of his undeniable popularity and the cult that surrounded him, as its indispensable fulcrum but little else – remaining no more

⁵ Guido Knopp "Hitler - Eine Bilanz" ['Hitler - A Summary'], Berlin 1995.

⁶ Alan Bollock "Hitler: A Study in Tyranny", London 1952, revised 1962.

⁷ Werner Maser "Adolf Hitler: Legende, Mythos, Wirklichkeit" ['Adolf Hitler: Legend, Mythos, Reality'], München 1971.

⁸ Cf. Chapter V.

than the propagandist he had in essence always been, exploiting opportunities as they came along, though with program, plan and design? (13)

Hence theories are not in short supply - yet until recently very little was composed about the individual Adolf Hitler and the abilities that allowed him to rise to his subsequent status. Many biographies are content to lament the paucity of detail on his personal life and a few came to the conclusion that he was a sort of non-personality. This would seem a bit unsatisfactory indeed, but it depicts not only the understandable desire of historians to distance their integrity from the monster but also expresses their disdain for a personality that so little fits their expectations. In Joachim's Fest great work, the contempt of the author - a son of the conservative bourgeois German elite that helped Hitler to power and was subsequently subdued by him - for his subject is almost physically noticeable, and in Ian Kershaw's amazing structural analysis, the subject of his biography remains strangely lifeless. Especially German historians very carefully avoided to discuss the various abilities Hitler necessarily possessed with the laudable intention not to be accused of pro-Hitler sympathies. But history is inquiry and must not subordinate itself to political correctness. Only recently have a few authors dared to inspect the personal qualities without which Hitler could not have made his impact, although the writings were clearly on the wall. Many contemporary witnesses have pointed out Hitler's perhaps greatest talent - that of an actor - but his changeability has usually been depicted as a result of weakness instead of being understood as his main feature, the key to his character. Volker Ullrich noted in 2013:

The core problem of approaching Hitler – as Karl-Dietrich Bracher had previously formulated – is to explain “how a man of such a narrow, restricted personal existence could cause and sustain a historical development of such global dimensions that so directly depended on him.” This was also the basic quandary for Ian Kershaw: “How do we explain that a man with so little intellectual gifts and social abilities ... could compel such an enormous historical effect that made the whole world hold its breath?”

But what if this presupposition is wrong in itself, if Hitler's personal existence was far less restricted and his intellectual capabilities were all but underdeveloped? Like most Hitler biographers before him, Ian Kershaw recognizes only Hitler's ability “to perturb the lower emotions of the masses,” Yet that Hitler possessed an extraordinary rhetoric talent is undoubted, and it was of pivotal importance during his political rise in the twenties and early thirties of the last century. But the chairman of the NSDAP was far more than a first-class demagogue - he was a most gifted actor as well. He became a master in the art of wearing different masks and playing numerous roles. Nobody realized this and pointed it out more than Charlie Chaplin in “The Great Dictator” of 1940. After Albert Speer saw the movie in 1972, he confessed that Chaplin “has succeeded more than any other contemporary man in his attempt to penetrate Hitler's character.”

This “strange role character” of Hitler's existence - that Fest had noted as well - it shall thus be the leitmotif of this abstract. His uncanny abilities of sham and pretension, that allowed him time and again to deceive his followers as well as his adversaries, were undoubtedly a major ingredient - his secret weapon - that made his rise as a politician possible in the first place.

Minister of Finances Lutz Schwerin von Krosigk [in the Nazi government from 1933 to 1938, ¶] reminisced seventeen years after the end of the “Third Reich” Hitler's “downright truthlessness” as the major strain of Hitler's character. “He was entirely untruthful even to his closest right-hand men - he was, I believe, so entirely dishonest that he himself could make no more distinction between truth and falsehood.” This moralizing judgement only proves too well that Schwerin von Krosigk still did not get it - Hitler had used his double-dealings all too well and often to deceive his early conservative government partners. (14)

Role playing and deceit were instruments, not accidents, and we shall have the opportunity to witness them also in this inquiry, which ends in 1923, i.e. well before the “Third Reich”. Yet it is clear that there was certainly an interaction of many circumstances that put Hitler on the road to the chancellery and they are described in many biographies and especially in Volker Ullrich's new work.

That individuals at certain times come to represent their ages in a form inseparable of their presence is a well-known phenomenon, and we refer to it when we say that “in the times of Herod” or “in the days of Caesar” things were so-

and-so, but are different today. Perhaps unconsciously, in doing so we substantiate the deep-rooted interrelationship of our fate's thespians and theatre: in forming history, as it is implied, the protagonists are being formed themselves; becoming Janus-faced hermaphrodites of human destiny. There is this somewhat philosophical yet important angle to Hitler's success, for the political orator is nothing without his audience, and therefore he also depended, at least until 1940 or so, upon the relationship to his listeners, which he was able to intensify a thousand fold by the use of technology that had only recently become available.

It were key inventions of technological propaganda that made his performances possible: not only did public address systems allow him to be heard in halls and stadia, his sponsorship of the first commercially available radio receivers enabled him to preach to the nation as a whole. He also profited from the age of newspapers: in Berlin alone, the rotating presses churned out thirty dailies. Hitler was also the first politician to make use of the aeroplane; travelling by air in a rented Junkers allowed him to hold speeches in two or more German towns each day; the headlines of the Nazi press



screamed "HITLER OVER GERMANY!" Had he been born a generation earlier, none of these technologies would have been available to him.

His time and place then, joined inseparably, we shall investigate. The present volume focuses on the early part of his strange career, and a few words are necessary to its arrangement. It is confined, time-wise, to the years between his birth in 1889 and 1923, the year of the Beer Hall Putsch, but for reasons that will become all too obvious, a few digressions into a more general historical background seemed necessary and are included. Chapters I to IV contain a much-condensed abridgement of European history from the Roman Republic to the establishment of the Second German Empire in 1871. This is because, in the first approximation, much of the history of these two millennia represents attempts to inherit respectively to revitalise the Imperium Romanum, to rule the continent and, perhaps, the world. Until AD 1806, i.e., the end of the "Holy Roman Empire", the more successful of the European hegemonies invariably decorated themselves with the ancient Roman titles "Caesar" and "Augustus".

The imperial order they attempted to restore followed the Roman practice of uniting heterogeneous populations under a single political authority, but they complicated the matter by attempting to impose a religious superstructure upon the body politic. Unsurprisingly, conflicts persisted – in the age of the great migration between the third and eighth century AD it was Christian orthodoxy vs. assorted heresies that competed as vigorously, or lethally, as, in the eleventh century, Orthodoxy vs. Catholicism or, after Luther, Catholics and Protestants. Yet nobody really succeeded in picking up the pieces of the Roman inheritance, although some - Charles V or Napoleon come to mind - came close. In many respects, Hitler attempted a comparable unification of the continent - albeit as a German hegemony. The Roman Empire, as Anthony Padgen pointed out, "has constantly provided the inspiration, the imagery, and the vocabulary for all the European empires from early-modern Spanish to late nineteenth-century Britain. All the former imperial capitals of Europe - London, Vienna, Berlin - are filled with grandiose architectural remainders of their indebtedness to Rome." (15)

Rome's ascent, achievements, splendour and fall - the latter a curious mixture of leveraged buyout and hostile takeover by German tribes - are the topic of the first three chapters, which are most indebted to Edward Gibbon and Chris Wickham. Again, the breadth of the historic horizon limits the attention that may be paid to the social and economic developments of the epoch between AD 500 and 1500. Yet little progress could be reported - not until the second half of the nineteenth century were citizens of the better European towns able to enjoy amenities readily available in ancient Rome; (relatively) safe drinking water, for a start, or waste disposal systems.

From the fifth century AD on, Germanic tribes established short-lived kingdoms on former Roman soil in Italy, Spain, Gallia and Africa. So did the Huns, who came close to sack Rome in AD 450 but eventually retreated into the vast expense of the Asian hinterlands after Attila's death. Inroads from Asia, however, continued: Avars and Bulgars followed the Huns in the seventh century, Hungarians in the tenth, Mongols in the thirteenth century and the Ottoman Turks in the sixteenth and seventeenth.

Yet their conquests remained transient, and no serious contender for the Roman succession appeared until the Frankish Kingdom of Charlemagne briefly reunited most of Germany, France, Italy and Spain around the year AD 800. Alas, the realm quickly fell apart, and for the next 1,000 years the centre of the continent harboured a multiplicity of small to medium-sized feudal states which collectively became known as the "Holy Roman Empire". The subsequent European history, from the tenth to the nineteenth century, included few highlights - chiefly the Enlightenment and Renaissance, which brought, as the name implies, a rebirth of philosophy, the arts and the sciences - among many bloody chapters which include the Crusades, the religious wars in the wake of the Lutheran Reformation - notably the Thirty-Years-War - the global slaughter of indigenous populations in the name of slavery and colonialism, dynastic wars including the War of the Spanish Succession and the Seven-Years-War, also known as the French and Indian War, the French Revolution - including the reign of the guillotine, Jacobin terror and the Napoleonic Wars - and a number of smaller atrocities, ending with Napoleon III's ill-advised declaration of war on Prussia in 1870. The whole abattoir is inventoried in Chapter IV.

The direct narrative picks up in Chapter V with the life of Alois Schicklgruber, a man from the Austrian Waldviertel, who went to Vienna to become a Customs officer and one day changed his name to Alois Hitler. The revised name was

inherited by his second surviving son Adolfus, whom we shall follow in the Chapters VI to X until he leaves his native Austria for Germany, in 1913.

His time in München - where he arrived fifteen months before the outbreak of the Great War – gives us the last impressions of his adolescence before the great caesura of the war sets in. It is in München where he will develop - albeit after the war - the full gamut of anti-Semitism and then some. It does not seem that Hitler developed his personal - murderous - form of it in Vienna, as he claims in *MEIN KAMPF*, but rather in München, but after the war. John Lukacs remarks on the transformation one can observe when comparing Hitler's pre- and post-war writings:

There is a drastic change in both the content and the tone of these personal documents in 1919, but not before. The impression one receives of the younger Hitler is that of a loner, a dreamer, a German idealist – an impression that accords with the reminiscences of those who knew him during the war. In Hitler's extant notes, letters, and postcards to his friends, whether sent from the front or while on leave, the expressions are often childlike, showing a doglike loyalty and deference to his officers and his country. (16)

This, of course, would change. Yet the preponderance of the evidence, and modern historical consensus, indicates that Hitler learned his political trade, inclusive of anti-Semitism, in München. Indeed, the testimonies of his regimental comrades disaffirm claims that Hitler harboured specific anti-Semitic sentiments during the war.

The general narrative of his years in München is preceded, in Chapter XI, by a brief introduction to pre-war Germany as a political entity in general and its government - and Kaiser Wilhelm - in particular. Chapter XII follows Adolf Hitler in München to the eve of the Great War in August, 1914.

There has been - and remains - a discussion whether or not the war formed Hitler most, but there can be no doubt that without it, and the decorations he received in it and which gave him - the Austrian - as Joachim Fest remarked, a claim to front-line credibility, respect and authority in Bavaria, his political career, at least in Germany - a country whose citizenship he would not acquire until 1932 - was simply inconceivable. In this sense only the war made Hitler possible.

There can be little doubt that the Second War developed out of the receivership of the First, and because Hitler eventually usurped the governance of the delinquent nation, the Great War of 1914 - in Stefan Zweig's words the nexus between the world of yesterday and that of today - will occupy the centre of the present volume.

The road that led to its outbreak is followed in the Chapters XIII to XVII, which are most obliged to Luigi Albertini's classic *THE ORIGINS OF THE WAR OF 1914*. The synopsis of the catastrophe itself is preceded by a review of the changes in military paradigm which manifested themselves during the nineteenth century: improvements in weapon design, rendered a thousand times more effective by industrial mass-production, the speeding up of infantry operations by railways, of communications by telegraph, wireless and telephone, and the vast increase in the number of combatants by mandatory conscription laws. The refinement of the theory of war by General Staffs and military academies will be addressed and light shed upon the plans of the major combatants, the most famous - and misunderstood, it may seem - of which remains the elusive "SCHLIEFFEN PLAN", the spectre of which permeates every World War I summary. We shall also follow the war as PFC Hitler and his regimental comrades experienced it.

After the war Hitler returned to München where, on November 7, 1918, a sort of accidental revolution had swept an elderly drama critic, who was also the chairman of the Munich chapter of the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD), into the office of Bavarian Minister President and head of government. The king and his ministers had fled the town earlier this day because of revolutionary rumours. In the weeks and months to come, a series of counter-putsches and counter-counter-putsches provided material for newspaper headlines until one of them was successful in the sense that Bavaria returned to "order", that is - a military dictatorship.

PFC Hitler who, as some researchers argued, may have worked in the meantime for the Revolutionary Soldiers' Council (Soviet, i.e. Red Propaganda), now offered his services to the junta, and was sent to a crash course in nationalist and anti-Bolshevik propaganda. As far as we know, it was this course, and Hitler's subsequent appointment to political

instructor for enlisted men that opened the gates of his rhetoric talent and launched his political career, which we shall follow in the remaining chapters until the Beer-Hall-Putsch of 1923.

A personal remark:

The writing of history - modern history, at least - resembles a selection from an infinity of sources and opinions among which the author must attempt to separate wheat from chaff. Since this comes down to, essentially, a personal choice of belief and judgement, the inclusion of some and the omission of other material may readily support the suspicion of an author's individual agenda. Hence it shall be clarified that the present author is neither beholden to a political party or philosophical movement nor subjected to institutional orthodoxy, economic dogma or religion. No third party provided any financial or organisational assistance in the preparation, composition and gathering of material for this book. The author's father was an artillery officer in World War II, and an active liberal.

Yet in a time of the constant multiplication and resulting fragmentation of knowledge and opinion, fed by the industrious tyranny of television and internet, the pithy observations of the great historians and their comments on the human condition appear altogether too valuable to be jeopardized by the present author's paraphrases and thus have been preserved, where appropriate, by being quoted directly - at length, if warranted.

Although the present volume is not a biography per se, and most certainly not ad gloriam in excelsis deo, its composition resembles that of a biography in that the author is obliged to develop a moral relation with the protagonist - which, in Hitler's case, is an obvious problem, and not in the least because in this volume we are dealing with the young Adolf Hitler - before the commission of his greater crimes - and thus he often appears to be a somewhat vulgar yet still fathomable sort of politician, not much worse - prima facie - than his contemporaries.

If we thus had to pick a property, a characteristic of his early years that would aid us to visualize the "Führer" personality that was to evolve in later years, we would have to pick the power of his suggestive imagination. There was clearly a development to it: in his youth he was able to shape his own perceptions but could not or did not want to influence others - with the exception of his boyhood friend August Kubizek. But then, at some unknown day in the summer of 1919 during which he had visited courses in political education sponsored by the Bavarian Army, he found out that he could also shape the perception of strangers, often in spite of facts or logic. What may have been simply puerile fantasy - a famous line in MEIN KAMPF asserts that, while he froze in the streets of Vienna, "in my thoughts I lived in palaces," changed into the suggestive power that made his subsequent career possible. Since he had the knack to make men share his visions, with a bit of practice he became a master of persuasion - he had to, for in the early days he lacked the power of command. He did threaten, if necessary, but mostly he preferred the seduction of the mind. The mastery of this art never aided him more than in the mixture of charm and menace by which he convinced Germany's opponents, in particular the democracies of England and France, to grant Nazi Germany more support and leeway than they had given the democratic Weimar Republic. Great Britain and France allowed themselves to be taken in, politically divided and ridiculed until, to save the last vestiges of the honour they had profaned in München 1938, their sole alternative was war.

That persuasiveness is a gift of the devil could not surprise John Milton:

"Belial, in act more graceful and humane,

A fairer person lost not heaven; he seemed

For dignity composed and high exploit:

But all was false and hollow, though his tongue

Dropped manna, and could make the worse appear

For better reason."

"Paradise Lost", Bk.2, L.109⁹

⁹ A few minutiae ought to be observed throughout this volume:

(1) Russian dates before 1918 may appear in "Old Style", sometimes marked OS, as reckoned by the Julian calendar that was used in Tsarist Russia. In 1917, it was thirteen days behind the Gregorian calendar. The Second Russian Revolution - the "October Revolution" - which put Lenin's Bolsheviks into power thus actually occurred, by modern reckoning, in the night of November 7 to 8, 1917.

(2) A difficult problem remains with the spellings of Slavic, Turkish, Chinese or Japanese names, which are spelled differently in many sources – the reader is asked to keep this in mind.

(3) Since the Chapters XVI to XIX deal chiefly with European diplomacy, the following expressions will quickly become familiar: the term "Wilhelmstrasse", after its location in Berlin, denotes the German Foreign Office; the "Quai d'Orsay" stands for its French counterpart; "Whitehall" represents the British, "Ballhausplatz" or simply "Ballplatz" the Austro-Hungarian office in Vienna and "Chorister's Bridge" the Russian Foreign Ministry. The "Sublime Porte" or plainly "Porte" refers to the Turkish Office of the Grand Vizier, who managed the Ottoman Empire's international relations.

(4) Indented paragraphs, i.e. citations, are preceded and concluded by quotation marks in the case of primary sources; their absence marks quotes from secondary materials. Brackets concluded by the ¶ sign indicate the author's comment, e.g. [... see n. 344 on border fortifications, ¶]

(5) English translations have been adopted in primary sources – most prominently MEIN KAMPF - respectively from the English editions of readily available secondary materials. The translations from German or French sources are the author's. The proverbial translation problems in Albertini have resulted in a number of minor corrections that deviate from the text of the Enigma Books 2005 edition.

(6) A note on the usage of the term "race" in older sources, for example in Gibbon. The word "race" may denote a clan or tribe, an ethnic or social community or even the population of a whole province or state; it does not necessarily express or include a biological relationship – existent or not – and did not (yet) carry the dubious connotations presently associated with it. Cf. Cit. 115 in re Clovis: "... his ambitious reign was a perpetual violation of moral and Christian duties: his hands were stained with blood in peace as well as in war; and as soon as Clovis had dismissed a synod of the Gallic church, he calmly assassinated all the princes of the Merovingian race," that is, all male clan members. Yet one might keep Karl Deutsch in mind, and his observation that "a nation ... is a group of persons united by a common error about their ancestry and a common dislike of their neighbours." ["Nationality and Its Alternatives", 1969, p.21]

(7) The Bibliography provides the ISBN of all works cited if available. A few elder books are listed with their US Library of Congress Card number.

(8) NB: Until 1918 or so, the word "Austria" has been used synonymously with "Austria-Hungary" in both primary and secondary literature.

(9) The original forms – in use circa until 1919 – of the terms "Serb", "Serbia" and "Serbian" were "Serv", "Servia" and "Servian", and occur thus in some older works, e.g. in Albertini.

(10) All footnotes are indexed in the Appendices.

(11) In the context of "Celtic" vs. "Germanic", a French commentator remarked that "'Celtic' and 'Germanic' (as well as 'Latin', 'Slav' or 'Arab') are ethnic terms based on linguistic and cultural aspects, not genetic ones. Genetic science is a very new methodology - that being the reason why the people of the world (and Europe of course) have always been classified and defined not by their genes (which was impossible to do), but the fact that they form an ethnicity in the cultural sense - i.e. in the true meaning of what an ethnicity is: a group of people united under a same cultural pattern, customs, languages, etc. If they present a specific phenotype it is a mere consequence of living and mixing genes among together since a long time." See <http://www.city-data.com/forum/europe/1457341-celts-germanics-same-people.html>

(12) To ease confusion, Central Power armies are always labelled by numbers, e.g. 2nd Army, or 7th Army, while Allied armies are spelled out, i.e. First Army, or Fifth Army. Following German military tradition, the Roman numeral XL (=40) is replaced by XXXX, so the Forty-Second Corps would be written XXXXII, not XLII.

(13) The Maps of the War are from the West Point Atlas, copyright-exempted and freely available for viewing and/or download at <https://www.westpoint.edu/history/SitePages/WWI.aspx>

THE LAST CURTAIN CALL

*I walk my way,
directed by Providence,
with the assurance
of a sleepwalker.*

Adolf Hitler, March 1936

The subject of the present chronicle is Adolf Hitler and he requires hardly much preamble: his face is known to all of us, his sight disturbingly familiar. Yet a survey of the greater picture, the evaluation of his proper place and role in history, requires a few preliminary considerations. Historia, investigation, must strive to look behind the clichés - the abundance of preconceived notions which we are fed by servile television hosts and industrious news media. To some, Adolf Hitler is the black sheep of the family, to be ignored, if possible. To most he is anathema to the human ethos, antagonist to civilization, the devil, perhaps. And to some he still is some sort of hero.

For all we know and hope, he may have been the last of those men in whom, as it was put by Joachim Fest, "an individual once again demonstrated the stupendous power of a solitary person over the historical process." (1) His power was charismatic in nature, and although he commanded thousands of willing helpers and lorded over millions of minions, it was his uniquely destructive personality that acquainted the globe with new variations on the archaic theme of Cain and Abel. To some degree, Adolf Hitler is defined by the ghosts of his victims.

Since this chronicle aims to address not only the student of history, but, if possible, a generally interested readership as well, this introduction shall briefly reflect on a representative overview of the relevant topics. It goes without saying that the present author finds himself in complete agreement with A.C. Grayling, who summarizes for us the benefits of the study of history:

History is one of the indispensable studies. No person can be educated or civilized who does not make a study of history, and a habit of reading history. This is because it stands alongside literature and the arts as one of the richest and best sources of understanding human experience and the human condition, and it equips us to understand ourselves, to organize our lives and societies, and to meet the future as best we may. As the saying derived from Thucydides has it, history is philosophy teaching by examples. (2)¹

Ideally, the study of history would enable us to arrive at proper conclusions about human behaviour, in the process "discovering objective truths about what happened in the past." (3) Yet, many different stories are narrated by many men and many points of view from days of yore are related - and who can truly picture how the one or other "objective truth" has come to pass and why? Thus opinionated disagreement likely will result and this is why more than one history book has been written.

One fact, however, we may identify at once: in the grand theatre of European history, Adolf Hitler was, in a way, the last true protagonist, the last momentous ruler of the fair continent; for with him the power of European empires over the globe came to an end - the "Proud Tower"² collapsed. Hitler took the last curtain call: after 1945, a new world order emerged, divided between Asia and America.

¹ Hitler, by the way, completely agreed, remarking that: "Whoever has no sense of history is like a person without hearing or without a face; he can live this way, but what kind of a life is that?" (4)

² "The Proud Tower", written by Barbara Tuchman, was a best-seller about Europe before 1914.

Consequently, his is the last of the predominantly continental histories, the sort upon which most European societies have "attached immense importance" by adopting and circulating expedient "versions of their past", while digging for "notions of historical development, as well as plundering historical writings for legendary, heroic, tragic and pathetic motifs and topoi for poetry, drama and painting." (5)

The age in which these histories were important for the world's fate as a whole, however, has passed. Today's Europe is a place of business and culture; her dreams of dominance have dissipated, her cannons are silenced, her fortresses abandoned.

But in the last two thousand years, the interpretations of these important histories were thought significant enough to reflect the opinions, or, perhaps, the perjuries of each generation of their respective authors. History, "to name only the most prominent influences", was interpreted "republican, Christian, constitutionalist, sociological, Romantic, liberal, Marxist and nationalist." (6) With Georg Wilhelm Hegel's introduction of the world spirit and the idea of history being the mirror of human development into the pantheon of philosophy, the composition of its own history became the pursuit of every bona-fide political doctrine or desirous nation.

Once it comprises the report of war, the composition of history has the well-known tendency to reflect the interpretations of the winner. This is the worst of the transgressions Paul Valery observed as the evils of aetiological, that is, the causal interpretation of history, which "is the most dangerous product ever brewed by the chemistry of the human brain; it makes nations dream or suffer, impels them to become megalomaniacal, bitter, vain, insufferable. The hatreds and passions of the nations during the first half of this [twentieth] century have been stirred by false history far more than by all the racist ideologies or by envy or desire for expansion." (7)

Yet – how to tell "true" histories from "false"? Notoriously aetiological, the writing of histories is attracted to relations of cause-and-effect; B follows from A. In this respect, contemporaneity might help: the less distant the past, the larger, one would assume, the corpus of evidence. Yet in our case we find that more than seventy years after the war, a historical consensus is as far from establishment as it was in 1945. Apparently, "objective truth" remains elusive. Some historians have suggested that explaining Hitler is a frivolous or superfluous affair in itself. Indeed, even intellectual heavyweight A.C. Grayling remarked that "it is needless to offer criticism of Fascism as an ideology and as both an historical and a contemporary fact. It condemns itself out of its own mouth and record." (8)

But our task is not to condemn but to analyse, and especially in its German incarnation fascism was thoroughly shaped by its leader. Fascism and National Socialism - which are two somewhat different things³ - did not simply occur, out of the blue, in one or two countries before WW II; they were part of a greater political disease, and many nations in South America or Asia are still governed by what essentially amounts to Fascist rule. Clearly, there must have been something that attracted humans to it. Moreover, simple vilification of Fascism confronts us with Wolfgang Sauer's observation that universal condemnation of Hitler and National Socialism amounts to a non-explanation; as Karl Popper remarked, a theory that explains everything explains nothing, and the same mechanism can be employed for historical judgements. Perhaps there is indeed something indispensable missing in our attempts to explain Hitler.

The parable of the bridge under repair has been a popular analogy. One day, the railway company begins with the task of repairing a bridge. Since traffic cannot be interrupted, only a small piece is replaced every day: a tie here, a stone there. For the passengers, the ride remains the same; they cannot feel the small replacements. Yet one day they will travel over a completely new bridge, without realizing the process that has taken place.

The transition from Weimar Republic to Third Reich is supposed to have occurred in a similar manner: small changes, too small to arouse suspicion, yet consequential enough to change the picture completely by the time the process is finished. Such piecemeal tactics indeed played a part in the transition, particularly in the way Hitler handled his strongest weapon, political terror. Sebastian Haffner summarizes:

³ Fascism in general was nationalist and authoritative; it evoked the supremacy of the State and those who serve it. National Socialism echoed these principles but saw the world, and history, ultimately as a fight between races.

On the whole, the management and dosage of terror during the first years must be described as a masterly psychological achievement by Hitler. First came creation of fear by wild threats, then severe terror measures but nevertheless falling somewhat short of the threats, and finally gradual transition to near-normalcy, but without complete renunciation of a little background terror.

It ensured, among those who initially rejected him, or who wanted to wait and see - i.e. the majority - the right measure of intimidation without driving them into desperate opposition; and, more importantly, without diverting their attention too much from the more positive accomplishments of the regime. (9)

If we accept for the nonce a gradual nature of the transition from the Weimar Republic to the Third Reich, we will be faced with a most interesting question that Joachim Fest raised in the introduction of his Hitler biography: about his proper place in history, the issue of Hitler's historical "greatness" or the absence of it. If Hitler had died, he argued, in a traffic accident in the winter of 1938, and WW II had not occurred, would there be any doubt that Hitler would be glorified as the saviour of the nation, the greatest German, perhaps, in history?

He would be credited with the salvation of the nation from the economic disaster of the global depression and mass unemployment; he would be praised for the repatriation of the Saarland, the Rhineland, the Sudetenland, and elusive Austria. He would be remembered for Germany's liberation from the fetters of the Treaty of Versailles and revered for rearming the nation. He would be recognized for the insurmountable bulwark, the new German Reich, which he built against a further spread of the Communist menace, and commended for the Naval Treaty of 1935 that achieved détente with Great Britain. Finally, he would be admired for enhancing the international reputation of the new German state by his leadership in modern nation-building, from the gleaming double concrete strips of the autobahn to the "Volkswagen", the "People's Car", an affordable vehicle for everyone, and to the introduction of holidays and leisure travel for the less affluent members of the new German society.

The imaginary historian who, in this parallel universe broods over the assignment to compose the Führer's obituary for the morrow's papers, has never heard of a "Second World War", and is ignorant of its more obnoxious contretemps - genocide by poison gas or atomic bomb. To be fair, he would write, some Jews had spent time in concentration camps, some had seen their property confiscated, alas, it's true, a few had been murdered, but no other nation had volunteered to take them. Jewish immigration quotas, he would point out, were actually lowered in many countries.

Philip K. Dick composed a vision of an alternative universe, in which the Nazis and Japan have won the war, in "THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE". Robert Harris described a similar world in "FATHERLAND", and Harry Turtledove concocted a whole strange Science Fiction universe wherein aliens invade earth in the middle of WW II and have to deal with Nazis, Communists, and Americans.

Would anyone, is the question, be entitled to criticize our imaginary eulogist? Would his evaluation of the Adolf Hitler who died in 1938 strike us as "wrong", his judgement as "false"? Would there have been a "better" or "different" Hitler than the one we have known when all was finished? Was there a "good" Hitler, perhaps, until 1938, and an "evil" one later? One would naturally be inclined to answer in the negative, to assert that only because Hitler's rule had not caused catastrophe by 1938, the verdict of history does not change. But that is nothing but hindsight. Many of Hitler's decisions before the war were entirely questionable: was to kill his friend Ernst Röhm and purge the SA leadership in the summer of 1934 a crime or the deliverance of the nation from a criminal conspiracy? His military reoccupation of the Rhineland in 1936 and the "Anschluss" of Austria in 1938 were illegal: were they crimes? Who were the victims?

Based upon the actual succession of events between 1933 and 1945, the theory has been advanced that Hitler's evil genius performed worse over time, that his politics caused proportionally increasing harm the longer he was able to exert them. Such an element may clearly be observed, most obvious in the execution of the war and the persecution of the Jews; autocratic regimes have a tendency to worsen over time. Yet not only is this point of view another application of hindsight, the decay of the Third Reich happened due to military failures, many of which, but not all, were the result of the dictator's mismanagement. Would that mean that Hitler simply was "lucky" pre-1939 and "unfortunate" later? This is not any better than the aforementioned idea - pre-1938 "good", post-1938 "evil".

It has been pointed out that complex modern societies cannot be directly controlled by an individual, for the elaborate economical, social and political interdependencies of a modern state do not lend themselves easily to the domination of a single person, or even a few. The problem with this approach is that spreading responsibility from a single person to a group might invoke unwarranted clemency. It is true, however, that a dictator's problem is a self-fulfilling prophecy: precisely because he reserves the right of decision for himself, he soon finds himself required to decide everything. It was perhaps to remedy the limitations of a single-person-rule that Hitler developed his quite original style of personal tenacity in the issues he deemed important and clear unconcern in everything he thought insignificant. He could be a tough negotiator if his interests warranted it, but his trademark and preferred modus operandi was the *fait accompli*. He was, essentially, a stick-up artist. And he was a dreamer.

"All men dream - but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of the mind wake up in the day to find that it was vanity: but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they can act their dreams with open eyes, to make it possible." T. E. Lawrence (of Arabia) - The Seven Pillars of Wisdom

His dream was a Germany very much different from the sober Weimar Republic, and one of his habits was to pound on the importance of the dream vs. reality. He steadfastly refused to amend the party program of 1920, the much ridiculed "25 Points", and avoided to take a stand on many issues of the day. While other politicians presided over hunger and unemployment and delivered the standard sermons why things had to get worse before they could get better, Hitler interpreted the difficulties and the daily struggles as the necessary preconditions for the ascension of a new Germany, and the mystic voyage he promised made the day-to-day manoeuvring of the other parties appear drab and grey. When he spoke, many people felt as if the daily shortages they experienced were not nuisances or danger but the proper fasting before the day of rapture.

In the saviour mode, Hitler's attraction did not depend on and could not be marred by the whims of a fickle constituency. He was the first German leader since Martin Luther to operate on sheer charisma, and like Martin Luther he was essentially a religious leader, not a politician. It is a standard precaution in the religious leader business that the promises of salvation will find their proper fulfilment in the afterlife: neither prophets nor holy books come with a money-back guarantee. Neither do political leaders. Political theories sometimes forgot this insurance policy: nothing was more embarrassing for the almighty Communist Party of the Soviet Union than to be compelled to publicly readjust the date when "true communism" would finally be achieved.

It is perhaps a sign of Hitler's aptitude that he was able, in a way, to have his cake and eat it, too. Rewards for his followers would be received in this world, and, in the event, were: in 1933, many old party hands were allowed to take over the local government posts and the sinecures of civil service positions, but in addition, there was Hitler's somewhat vague promise of a future perfect German race-state to come. The promise seemed not entirely inconceivable and was received with religious fervour.

Even a most cursory look at the old black-and-white newsreels, especially at those filmed at a PARTEITAG, the annual party convention in Nuremberg, makes us realize that we are not witnessing a simple political assembly. We behold the record of a passionate, messianic ritual, an orgy of veneration for the Führer, a medium-sized man in a brown party uniform. The exhibition uncannily resembles a religious service, down to the gigantic domes of light.

The NSDAP⁴ had never been a political party in the old-fashioned sense. Founded in Munich 1919 as the DAP⁵, she had been a discussion club of some fifty members who met in the back rooms of beer cellars and cheap restaurants to berate the cruelty of the world. In the fall of the year, they acquired a new member, a veteran corporal from Austria, who by some strange fate had fought the war in the Bavarian Army and had a few political ideas of his own. This Herr Hitler was soon made board member # 7 - executive officer for public relations - with the task of attracting new members. In 1920, the new propaganda officer aided the party founder, Anton Drexler, in the composition of twenty-five theses for a party program, which we shall meet *expressis verbis* in a later chapter. The ramshackle program was rather unspecific, a pathetic

⁴ National-Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter-Partei (National-Socialist German Labour Party, the Nazi Party)

⁵ Deutsche Arbeiter-Partei (German Workers' Party)

agglomeration of populist theses, an assortment of phrases which contained anything conceivably attractive to the disillusioned, desperate German electorate.

Yet, characteristically, and perhaps showing Hitler's early sense for effective propaganda, even these paltry points were a mixture of resentments and aggression: against the liberal democracy, against Versailles, against reason itself, against the world. From the beginning, Hitler thought in grand designs, much to the horror of the old party hands. His fascination with technology gave the party a modern face and attracted technophile activists. Albert Speer described the influence of technology on the regime in his final speech at the Nuremberg Trial of 1946:

"Hitler's dictatorship was the first dictatorship of an industrial state in this age of modern technology, a dictatorship which employed to perfection the instruments of technology to dominate its own people. By means of such instruments of technology as the radio and public-address systems, eighty million persons could be made subject to the will of one individual.

Telephone, teletype and radio made it possible to transmit the commands of the highest levels directly to the lowest organs where, because of their high authority, they were executed uncritically. Thus many officers and squads received their evil commands in this direct manner. The instruments of technology made it possible to maintain a close watch over all citizens and to keep criminal operations shrouded in a high degree of secrecy.

To the outsider this state apparatus may look like the seemingly wild tangle of cables in a telephone exchange; but like such an exchange it could be directed by a single will. Dictatorships of the past needed assistants of high quality in the lower ranks of the leadership also – men who could think and act independently. The authoritarian system in the age of technology can do without such men." (10)

The short cut through the old-fashioned channels of command that Speer describes above eerily resembles religious mysticism - the voice of the prophet comes through the ether; its power exercised, like magick, by remote control.

A side effect of the long-distance command was that whoever could claim the right to control it had usurped the highest power. A figure like Martin Bormann was able to develop such authority in the dying days of the Reich because nobody doubted that his word was the Führer's command - Holy Writ. As far as the enemy was concerned, the religious analogy proved most depictive: the word of the prophet brought death to apostates and unbelievers. At the Russian front, this took on the attributes of a jihad: commissars, the priests of Communism - the opposing religion - were to be eliminated without remorse.

Many witnesses have testified to the religiously ecstatic character that surrounded Hitler's public appearances. William Shirer, who spent the years between 1934 and 1941 as a foreign correspondent in Berlin, had little difficulty to recognize the role the Führer played. Shirer described what transpired one evening, in front of his hotel, during the Nuremberg party convention of 1934, as follows:

About ten o'clock tonight I got caught in a mob of ten thousand hysterics, who jammed the moat in front of Hitler's hotel, shouting: "We want our Führer!" I was a little shocked at the faces, especially those of the women, when Hitler finally appeared on the balcony for a moment.

They reminded me of the crazed expressions I saw once in the back country of Louisiana on the faces of some Holy Rollers who were about to hit the trail. They looked at him as if he were a Messiah, their faces transformed into something positively inhuman. If he had remained in sight for more than a few minutes, I think many of the women would have swooned from excitement. (11)

To organize a cheering crowd is a simple task for an authoritarian regime, but Shirer's observation stems from the early days of the Third Reich and what he watched was a spontaneous eruption, not a concerted performance like the subsequent congregations at the Nuremberg Zeppelin Field. The party convention of 1934 was a far cry from the perfection achieved in later years but the crowd's feelings at the hotel were real, in particular those of the ladies. It may be observed here that Hitler always compared the crowd to a woman that needs, in his opinion, to be conquered, and in due

time he became an expert in this form of seduction: a phantasmagorical Casanova for the previously abstemious - as far as politics were concerned - German Hausfrau.

It worked exactly the way his mentor Dietrich Eckart had foreseen in 1921, when he envisioned the future leader: "He must be a bachelor. Then we'll get the women." Every day now letters reached the Chancellery in which the Führer was asked to father the patriotic ladies' children. The majority of the letters left no doubt that holy matrimony was not considered a necessary prerequisite for the procedure.

How much Hitler's Germany was connected to the physical, and even more, the psychological presence of its leader may be observed by comparing the last days of the two great wars: in WW I, in which Hitler fought as a simple soldier, the German people threatened revolt as early as less than thirty months after the outbreak of hostilities [January 1917, strike of the munitions workers, ¶], and less than twenty months later, in November 1918, the war was over, the Kaiser gone, and the republic proclaimed. All the while no foreign soldier had set foot on German soil; German troops still stood in Flanders and the Alsace and had, less than a year earlier, defeated Russia. It was the home front that refused to continue the slaughter.

In the Second War, the Allied forces literally had to beat the country into physical submission: North Africa and France had to be invaded, armies defeated, the land itself had to be occupied. It took more than six years and the resources of two dozen nations to bring the war to an end; only when Hitler was dead the spell was broken.

To shed light on how the spell was cast is the intent of the present *historia*. This introduction will briefly comment upon the teleological aspect of history, its well-known purpose as warning or instruction, before we proceed to the general situation of Europe and Germany, and meet our protagonist at the dawn of the twentieth century. We will brush on the complicated Franco-German relations which laid the basis for the wars of 1870 and 1914, and introduce the real and imagined consequences of the Great War for Germany. We shall just as briefly address the foundations of Hitler's propaganda, anti-Semitism and anti-Socialism, and see how the Ancien Régime in Germany avoided responsibility for the war and subsequent catastrophe they had brought about. A few words will have to be said to Hitler's early achievements as they become part of this narrative, for they might try the patience of those who expect instant condemnation. In conclusion, a small quiz will give the reader an opportunity to test his or her knowledge related to some "objective truths" of history.

How could Hitler rise despite the frequent warnings and concerns that paved his way? The interpretation of past events as lessons for the future, as warnings or counsel, is the historian's as well as the gossip's stock in trade, yet the completely different question remains whether the product of his or her labour will find the required attention. To ignore warnings, at least, is an ancient human custom. It was called *hubris* in classic Greek drama: the hero's heedlessness of warnings instigates his downfall. And Hitler was warned by many – even more warned about him.

Homer's immortal verse tells us the story of Cassandra, daughter of Priam, the king of Troy. Apollo awarded her the gift, or burden, of prophecy, but with the bane that all her warnings will remain unheeded. After the fall of Troy, she is brought as a slave in the entourage of Agamemnon, the great captain of the Greek at Troy, to his palace at Mycenae. On arrival, she warns the king of a plot on his life by his wife, Clytemnestra, and her lover Aegisthus. Her prophecy meets disbelief.

Odysseus (Ulysses), long delayed on his way home to Ithaca, meets his former captain Agamemnon, whom he had seen last at Troy, in the netherworld of Hades.

*As soon as pure Perséphone had scattered
the women – weaker spirits – here and there,
the saddened soul of Agamemnon, son
of Atreus, came forward. And a crowd
surrounded him: within Aegisthus' halls
these men had died alongside Agamemnon.*

*As soon as he caught sight of me, he knew
just who I was. His moan was loud, his tears*

*were many; he stretched out his arms; he longed
to hold me fast, but all his force was gone;
the power of his agile limbs was lost.
I looked, I wept, and pity filled my heart.
And when I spoke, I offered these winged words:*

*"O Agamemnon, Atreus famed son,
how did your death defeat so great a captain?
Was it Poseidon, hurling his harsh storms
against your ships, who finally won out?
Or did you die on land, when fighting-men
destroyed you as you raided herds and flocks
or tried to win their women and their town?"
These were my words. This was his quick reply:*

*"Odysseus, man of many viles, divine
son of Laertes, I was not undone
by Lord Poseidon: none of his harsh storms
attacked my ships. Nor did I meet my end
on land, struck down by fighting-men. My fate
was readied by Aegisthus with the aid
of my conniving wife: inviting me
to feast within his halls, he butchered me
Just as one kills an ox within a stall.
And so the death I died was mean and small:
around me, without let, they killed us all
as, in the house of one with power and wealth,
for wedding feasts or banquets jointly set
or revels, servants slaughter white-tusked hogs.
You surely have set eyes on many men
destroyed in single combat or the clash
of frenzied ranks, but you'd have been still more
distraught if you had seen, in that great hall
our bodies round the wine bowl and the food
heaped high; our warm blood streamed across the floor.*

*I heard Cassandra - Priam's daughter, wail
even as - clinging to me - she was killed by
Clytemnestra, mistress of dark guile." (12)*

Indeed, Agamemnon should have paid heed to the warnings of his ghanima. But in Hitler's case, at least through 1938, the opposite seemed to be true. Tout le monde warned about the risks he took, yet the dreaded consequences failed to manifest themselves. He disproved the contemporary Cassandras who cautioned against rearmament, the reoccupations of the Rhineland and the Sudetenland, and the "Anschluss", the annexation of Austria in March 1938. "Who was right?" he asked at a rally in 1937. "The visionary or the others? - I was right." (13)

How long such apparent inviolability against the odds of fate could last was the question. In later years, we can observe in Hitler the deliberate beginnings and subsequent ripening of a desire to play va banque with perpetually rising stakes, an almost wanton drive into what became destruction; the sort of hara-kiri the great historian Leopold von Ranke had identified and described half a century earlier:

Neither blindness nor ignorance corrupts people and governments. They soon realize where the path they have taken is leading them. But there is an impulse within them, favoured by their natures and reinforced by their habits, which they do not resist; it continues to propel them forward as long as they have a remnant of

strength. He who over comes himself is divine. Most see their ruin before their eyes; but they go on into it.
(14)

Hitler's decision to declare war on the USA in the wake of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941 has been named a typical example of this phenomenon, for it made little geographic or strategic sense: except for U-boat attacks on American shipping, the USA remained out of reach of the German military. Yet this decision shines a light on Hitler's true priorities: no matter the outcome of the war, he had burned his bridges and could begin to murder the European Jews without being disturbed by American diplomats and other spoilsports. This, however, is a matter for a subsequent volume, beyond the pale of the present one which is concerned with Hitler's beginnings. To these we now return.

It is generally known that he was born and spent most of his childhood in rural and small-town Austria and his adolescence in Linz and Vienna; all of which were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire ruled over by the House of Habsburg for more than seven hundred years. These times, the early decades of the twentieth century, are labelled now in history books the era of the decline and fall of the Great Powers: none of them was to survive the coming fifty years. But in Hitler's youth, five realms divided the best parts of Europe and much of the globe among themselves: the British, French, German, Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires [France had become a republic again in 1871, ¶]. But if we gaze at modern maps, none of these entities remain; the realms are gone, or changed beyond belief or recognition. Sic transit gloria mundi.

Yet these empires existed and ruled the world when in 1889, eleven years before the dawn of the twentieth century, Adolf Hitler was born among the old-fashioned villagers of the Waldviertel, a remote area of Upper Austria. It may strike us as strange that the man who was to change our ideas of dignity and civilization like no other should come from such conservative stock of petty peasantry and farm hands. We know that Hitler hated his humble origins, for even when he courted the light of publicity in his later career he went to great lengths to obscure his roots.

He had to, perhaps, for he had to create his constituency top-down, not bottom-up, as it is the habit of the traditional politician, who begins his career by representing a small community, his friends and neighbours, perhaps, then maybe a town or county, and later a province or a state. As a foreigner, Hitler could not represent any political subdivision in Germany, and friends he had few. Thus he set out to give words to what he shared with a desperate people after the disaster of a lost war, the scars and resentments of the vanquished.

In this respect he was truly a self-made man and not a politician in the conventional sense of the word. If we accept the dictum that politics is the art of the possible, Hitler was not a politician at all - for his trade were promises, enticements, daydreams, castles in the air. The "politician" Adolf Hitler was, at best, a disguise, or, at worst, a deception, for he asked the citizens not for their vote but their souls. From the beginning, he understood the messianic character of his mission, although he was initially uncertain whether he had the makings of the successful leader - mostly he saw himself as the "little drummer", the Pied Piper of the German nationalist movement - a John the Baptist, perhaps, of future national greatness. In the autobiographical chapters of his book MEIN KAMPF ["My Struggle", ¶], he was not above certain, say, improvements of the realities of his earlier life, but in the formulation of his agenda he did not mince his words: he suggested to get rid of the Jews and to conquer "living space" for the German people on the Eastern European plains. Yet those who read the book - few enough - tended not to take his proposals at face value; after all, this was - presumably - the enlightened twentieth century.

In many respects Germany was the most modern nation in the world and in none more so than in her social legislation. In the land of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, the socialists, organized in the SPD (Social Democratic Party) and many labour unions, were successfully pursuing the improvement of the industrial workers' situation. The movement had succeeded in introducing mandatory insurance against workplace accidents, basic health care for workers and their families and pension plans for their retirement, financed by a system of co-payments by employer and employee that also provided death or disability benefits. The working week was slowly being reduced to forty-eight hours and paid holidays were introduced based on seniority. The unions also provided legal assistance in work-related claims and subsidized strikes.

Naturally, many of these programs were in development or toddler stages, but a beginning had been made, and, in the overall view, the industrial worker in Germany enjoyed rights and entitlements unheard of in other countries. The Social Democrats had been able, by skilful negotiation and the threat of strikes, to implement these reforms without ever having been a part of a German government before November 1918. All that Bismarck's anti-Socialist legislation and persecution, begun shortly after the unification of 1871 and in the one or other form extended until 1914, had achieved was the perpetual growth of the labour movement, and in the Reichstag [Federal Parliament, ¶] election of 1912, the SPD became the largest fraction in the house by far. The social legislation of the bourgeois German governments after 1890, the year of Bismarck's retirement, was in essence paying the price to keep the spectre of a socialist revolution at bay.

No one imagined that this enlightened if somewhat authoritatively governed country could fall prey to the abusive hands of an Austrian vagabond who had once actually pan-handled in the streets of Vienna. Yet, by dint of a succession of uncanny circumstances, the same gaunt figure in the mouldy overcoat that had drifted aimlessly through the Austrian capital ended up ruling over most of the European continent.

He was a little funny-looking, which made him a perennial favourite of the political cartoonists; his small black moustache inadvertently promoting a likeness to the "Tramp" played by Charlie Chaplin in the movies. Hitler's bizarre gesturing throughout his speeches created quite a lot of ridicule, which provoked many of his enemies to fatally underestimate him. To outside observers, he looked eccentric, to say the least, and many took the antics for the man.

The relative youth of the wayward Bohemian added to the belittlement. He was ten weeks shy of his forty-fourth birthday on January 30, 1933, when the German president Paul von Hindenburg appointed him chancellor of Germany, head of the Reich government. Many of Hitler's associates were younger still, and advancement was readily available: Heinrich Himmler, commander of the SS, was thirty-three that year, and in WW II, Adolf Galland was promoted to General of Aviation⁶ at the tender age of twenty-eight. National Socialism took its rigour and determination from the nation's youth.

This enthusiasm had to be pointed in the proper direction. After 1918, the old elitist Right naturally yearned for a restoration of their old privileges. This desire was, perhaps, understandable, yet proved short-sighted; if nostalgic. After a millennium of German particularism, which at times had split the country into hundreds of largely independent political entities within the transient frontiers of the Holy Roman Empire, the well-to-do patriots had feverishly but uncritically greeted the unification of 1871.

In the work of the so-called "Prussian School," which included Ranke's pupils Heinrich von Sybel and Heinrich von Treitschke, German history came to be seen teleologically⁷ (as English liberals saw the history of their Parliament), with the Prussian ruling dynasty, the Hohenzollerns, as the predestined instrument of unification.
(15)

While he was creating a nationalist movement for the new, twentieth century, Hitler understood that he had to entice the monarchist elite of the nineteenth century, integrate it, and keep it. To a significant degree, he realized, the Second Empire had failed because it had been a political anachronism: the rule of a Kaiser who believed in God-given absolutism and ruled through personal aides responsible to him but no-one else; a motley crew attempting to govern a modern industrial nation with complex international relations. Hitler never intended to resurrect the capricious monarchy, but was able, by creative manoeuvring, to keep the old-fashioned nationalist wing at his side while simultaneously steering the modern variation of German nationalism into the direction of the "Führer-state" he envisioned. Since the old monarchists had neither new ideas nor popular support, Hitler, who had both, could force their loyalty by default. Strangely enough, the potentates of the past believed they could take advantage of him. On the occasion of Hitler's appointment to chancellor, Franz von Papen, a former chancellor himself and a typical representative of the national-conservative nobility, answered to warnings about Hitler's doubtful intentions that there was "...no danger at all. We've hired him for our act." (16)

⁶ Three Stars, corresponding to a Lieutenant General in the USAF.

⁷ I.e. by the purpose the Hohenzollerns served in German history.

Hitler was aware that the challenge of rebuilding the nation after 1918 was far greater than it had been in 1871, for while then the problem had been merely to convince a few princes that the whole (the Reich) would be greater than the sum of its parts (a few prerogatives), by now, as a consequence of the lost war, enormous numbers of Germans lived in German-speaking provinces that now belonged to France, Romania, Poland or Czechoslovakia. There was no question in Hitler's mind that these sheep had to return to the fold, but how could such a miracle be achieved without resorting to force?

From 1935 to 1938, however, Hitler's roll-back of the Treaty of Versailles went surprisingly well. As it turned out, there was sympathy for the revision of some of the treaty's territorial clauses in London. As THE TIMES suggested on September 7, 1938, the British government might agree to a Czechoslovakian surrender of the Sudetenland, the German-speaking regions, back to Germany whence they had come. France, Czechoslovakia's protector, was hopelessly mired in fits of internal strife between the Right and the Left, which had taken over the government in a "People's Front", a coalition of socialists and communists, and was far too busy to oppose London. To find out what the people and the government of Czechoslovakia thought of the matter was not deemed a necessity, and the result of a subsequent quadrilateral conference⁸ in Munich, September 1938, made the TIMES proposal a reality. On October 3, a German army crossed the Czech frontier; abandoned by Great Britain and France, the small country had no recourse but to suffer.

Yet it was not only in foreign politics that Hitler made the headlines this autumn. On the night of November 9 to 10, he let loose the thugs of the SA against the German Jews. This government-sponsored terror called the "KRISTALLNACHT"⁹ was the first truly nationwide pogrom, in which thousands of Jewish shops were vandalized, dozens of synagogues burned and almost one hundred Jewish Germans murdered. Still, the editors of TIME magazine portrayed Hitler on the cover of their journal as the "Man of the Year 1938", a highly doubtful accolade given the events that preceded the honour. At the latest by the end of 1938 it should have become clear that Hitler did not intend to play nice. In the aftermath of the Munich conference, the prestige of Great Britain and France had sunk to an unprecedented nadir and it dawned on many a statesman that, would there be another crisis soon - war might perhaps not be averted. In the air hung portents of nightmares yet to be invented - the shadows of a war more destructive than the First.

Hitler's successful *fait accomplis* between 1935 and 1938, which earned Germany *de facto* the abolition of the Versailles Treaty, were, of course, the accomplishment that secured him the admiration of a grateful nation. In hindsight, the achievement seems less spectacular than it did then, for Hitler was able to play off his adversaries' psychological weaknesses. Britain's economic situation in the wake of the Great War was feeble and she would invariably support any diplomatic solution that was to promise "Peace in our Time". Much the same could be said of France, although the country's extraordinary polarization and Right/Left enmity complicated things even more from the 1930s on. Indeed, the almost complete failure of May 1940 to resist the weaker German army has been explained in part by the French Right's dilemma in deciding whether they abhorred the German invaders more than their own Left.

The true psychological mistake of the victors was, perhaps understandably, to believe that the marginal success in winning the Great War had indeed brought their empires a reprieve from the times that were, alas, a-changing. It would become conspicuous only after the Second War, but indeed, both Great Britain and France had overextended themselves in the First, and they never fully recovered. Especially in France, the reality of the situation was obscured by hagiographic accounts of how The West was saved from the Huns in 1918. For almost a century French history has argued, essentially unchallenged, that the country was but an innocent victim of German aggression in 1914; that she, indeed, only participated in the war to fulfil her treaty obligations to Russia. Moreover, while the myth or reality of the "Schlieffen Plan", the German war plan which dealt with the problem of facing a simultaneous attack on two fronts by France and Russia, has become a matter of the greatest publicity and instant proof of German wickedness, the existence of the Franco-Russian Military Convention, which laid out the aforementioned double attack on Germany, or the offensive French War Plans, which aimed to strike at the Rhine, have been left to the confidentiality of military historians.

⁸ Represented was Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy, but not Czechoslovakia.

⁹ The word "Kristallnacht", literally 'Crystal Night', referred to the copious amounts of glass from smashed store fronts, car doors and house windows that covered the sidewalks and streets of many towns.

Just as little discussion was waged over the fact that Napoleon III had declared a completely unnecessary war on Prussia in 1870, in anger over his injured vanity, and when this war was lost, France could not truly complain that the provinces of Lorraine and Alsace, still more than 85% German-speaking as late as 1920, reverted to Germany, whence they had come to France as booty in the aftermath of the Thirty-Years-War in the seventeenth century. (17)

Yet this was not how the French government saw the result of the 1870/71 war. Paris yearned for vengeance and when the opportunity seemed to have come in 1918, she could not resist the illusion that, following successful war, future disarmament and economic servitude of Germany would guarantee her eternal safety and prosperity. Since the Austro-Hungarian Empire had collapsed, and little of value could be looted from Germany's former allies Bulgaria and Turkey, Germany became the principal addressee of the Allied reparation demands. At the same time, whatever the truth behind the infamous war guilt clause, the reasoning behind Germany's territorial losses or the sanity of the reparation payments demanded, France could not be in doubt as to the hostility these conditions would provoke in Germany.

Indeed, while France's course post-1919 was unfortunate - at least - its effects on the other side of the Rhine were truly calamitous. The political pessimism that had been a characteristic of German romanticism in the nineteenth century returned and found a new impression in the rejection of the post-war status quo, i.e. the republic; kindling nationalist-authoritative sentiments: a great number of radical right-wing groups sprang into existence, whose only common element was that they despised democracy and parliamentarism, diversity and compromise; in short, the daily political horse-trading. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, nationalism, which had initially been a left-wing cause, had been appropriated by the Right, and by the early twentieth century it had become antidemocratic, illiberal and authoritative.

Although Romanticism expressed itself most strongly in literature and the arts, bequeathing much that we would not willingly be without, its other greatest expression was something far less happy: nationalism.

Nationalism arose from sources as disparate as celebration of vernacular languages, folklore, shared customs and religion, ideas about the racial and/or geographical integrity of peoples and their traditions (an idea propounded in the 1780s by Johann Gottfried von Herder), and the mixed reactions to the French Revolution and the wars that followed - with France first as a model for, then as an enemy of, national aspirations, in the latter case prompting Prussian ideas of Volkstum [folkish identity, ¶] in resistance to Napoleonic imperialism.

Johann Gottlieb Fichte was one of the architects of national consciousness, proclaiming in his 1806 invocation "to the German Nation" that those who share a language and are bound to each other "by many ties of nature long before human arts bind them" understand each other and constitute an inseparable whole; they are the natural vehicle of progress, and the medium in which "divinity" expresses itself.

As if Fichte's views needed support, there were Hegel's lucubrations on the Zeitgeist as inhabiting a particular people at a particular epoch and driving the dialectic of history towards the ultimate realization of Spirit. Coincidentally, the Zeitgeist then happened to have lighted upon the German people, whose historic destiny was thus assured. (18)

The suppression of liberal and nationalist movements in the wake of the Second French Revolution in 1848 prompted the bourgeoisie's retreat into the realm of privacy, the pursuit of apolitical pastimes. The Biedermeier era, as it was called, personified this political pessimism. Thus when top-down unification of Germany was achieved in 1871, it came at the price of a certain indifference to the nationalist cause, for, after a brief period of excitement, it became all too clear that nothing had truly changed: the princes remained in power. The aristocracy would not lament this apathy; they welcomed it until they began to fear the caustic potency of socialism.

The elitist Right - nobility, high clergy and military - believed that increased nationalism might serve as the proper antidote to socialism and/or liberalism and a protracted exercise in patriotic propaganda was implemented during the last two decades of the Wilhelmine Empire. Romantic notions of heroic, or, rather, charismatic leadership added an authoritarian and messianic spin to it.

Notions of "heroic" leadership had been part of the political culture of the nationalist Right in the years before the First World War. The Bismarck cult, exaggerated hopes invested in the Kaiser and then dashed, grandiose images of Imperial grandeur and military glory contrasting starkly with counter-images of weak and puny party-politicians squabbling in the Reichstag, helped ... to advance the idea of national salvation.

A rebirth of the nation was promised through the subordination to a "great leader" who would invoke the values of a "heroic" (and mythical) past. The nationalist associations, most prominently the Pan-German League, popularized and disseminated such notions. The Protestant "educated" middle classes were affected more than most by them. Germanic myths and romantic imagery in the bourgeois youth movement provided a base for their cultivation among the younger generation. (19)

Schoolbooks, the press, and public life engaged in Hohenzollern worship and the aforementioned Bismarck cults; history professors who popularized the theses of Fichte and Hegel were employed as schoolteachers to the nation, composing thick books in which they explained the destiny of the German people; veteran associations kept up the remembrance of victory in the war of 1870/71, and the nation, hurrah!, acquired colonies and thus emerged as a true empire on a par with Great Britain or France.

All these activities helped to convince the world of German designs on continental hegemony, a fact that almost automatically effectuated British enmity. Perhaps the most fatal feature of the nationalist campaign was that it associated itself with the spirit of Kaiser Wilhelm's unfortunate demand for a German "Place in the Sun" and hence seemed to affiliate itself with Prussian militarism. Within a decade or so, political pessimism was turned into nationalist megalomania, which Germany's enemies had no problem to denigrate as bellicose. This allowed France, effectively sidelined on the continent by Bismarck's foreign policy until 1890, to come to a rapprochement with Great Britain, which felt threatened by the German naval build-up, and to conclude an official military alliance with Tsarist Russia.

It was not hard for France to depict Wilhelmine Germany as a potential aggressor. Not only was the Kaiser reliably ill-fated in his words and actions regarding foreign affairs, naked militarism seemed to pervade the nation. This inauspicious appearance was made worse by academia's persistent lucubrations on Hegel and his disciples, which included a new, romantically misinterpreted, perspective on death in war.

For Hegel, in the last part of his Philosophy of Right (1821) (pp. 324, 325), it was crucial that the State, in war, could call on the citizen to sacrifice his life. War was no longer, as in the eighteenth century, an affair merely for mercenaries.

The State's right to the individual's life was, according to Hegel, the definitive demonstration that the State was not just an instrument for his protection (the contract theory), or for the production of welfare (Enlightened Despotism), but a higher spiritual entity than the individual. The requirement of his life was not tyranny but self-sacrifice, submission to one's own higher will and participation in the life of a higher entity. (20)

Since German nationalists approved Hegel's theorem that sacrifice for the state was the individual's highest duty, it followed that war could and indeed should be renewed and France and Russia attacked as soon as the national resources had recovered. If this new war was not exactly a "defence" of the state, nichevo; who cared? Because the armed forces of the Weimar Republic were limited, by the peace treaty, to 100,000 men, who were, in addition, prohibited to possess modern weapons like tanks, submarines or airplanes, it went without saying that the treaty and the republic had to be overcome and a nationalist-authoritative regime established that was able to implement national rearmament. The problem in 1919 was that, as the election results to the first national parliament showed, the lost war had cost the Right much of its lustre. For the moment they lacked broad support, nor had they any new ideas.

Yet the romantic allure of fighting and, perhaps, dying for the Fatherland did not coincide well with the drab republic that had arisen from the ashes of the Second Empire. The Right was unwilling to die for democracy and majority resolutions.

Here the vacuum was revealed which the disappearance of the monarchy had left behind and which the Weimar Republic was unable to fill since it was accepted neither by the revolutionaries of November 1918 nor by their opponents. It remained, as a well-known slogan put it, a "republic without republicans".

There emerged in the Germany of the early twenties a mood in which, in Jacob Burckhardt's words, "the yearning for something analogous to the former powers became irresistible" and which "was working towards the ONE MAN".

It was not only as a substitute for their lost Kaiser that a large part of the nation was longing for "THE ONE MAN", but also because of bitterness over the lost war and impotent anger against what was felt to be an insulting dictated peace treaty. [Emphases added] (21)

The new, sober, German republic suffered from an unsatisfactory "democratic" pedigree and could not fulfil these essentially romantic yearnings. Yet to a quite considerable degree, the longings for the resurrection of a spurious "greatness" were the result of a national inferiority complex that had emerged of a sudden from the unexpected loss of the war.

Unrelated to the true situation in the trenches, the press releases of OHL¹⁰ had assured the German people of impending victory until late in the summer of 1918. In September, when the military had to admit defeat, it was kept initially confidential, for the military camarilla sought how to get out of the situation with their reputations intact, which was the issue they cared most about. A capital mistake of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson came to their aid. The American president, a man who believed in the good nature of people and the nature of good in people, indicated in replying to a German peace inquiry via Switzerland that he felt unable to negotiate but with democratically elected German representatives, i.e., not with the Kaiser or the generals or anybody else in the present German government. For the politicians and officers accountable for the war it was a gift from heaven - within days the whole top executive branch disappeared like in quicksand and it was left to politicians from the Catholic Centre Party and the SPD to arrange an armistice and negotiate peace.

These men had not been a part of the pre-war government and they had zero responsibility for the war. Yet unlike the military leaders who disowned their liabilities once they saw a way out, these men from the SPD and Centre were noble men and true patriots, who readily obligated when the nation needed them. They arranged an armistice which came into effect on November 11, 1918, and subsequently founded a new German government and state. It happened by default: those truly responsible for the catastrophe had absconded themselves: the Kaiser abandoned his subjects and responsibilities in Dutch exile, and General Ludendorff, quasi-military dictator of Germany from 1916 to 1918, fled to Denmark wearing a false beard.

It were these November days that were to give Hitler his most poisonous future slogans: the proclamation of the republic became the "November Crime" and the responsible politicians of Centre and SPD accordingly the "November Criminals", who for their service to the Fatherland deserved to be hanged. The armistice and subsequent peace treaty were stigmatized as the "Stab in the Back", a catch phrase that expressed the notion that the German army had never been "beaten" in the field. "Unbeaten" meant that, since the Allies, technically, had not conquered any German soil; they had not really "won" the war. That the German forces had cleared those parts of Belgium and France that they still occupied after November 11 was not a consequence of their "losing" the war: it was a consequence of high treason committed by Catholic and socialist politicians. The war had not been lost, the defamation argued, the victorious German army had been, well, stabbed in the back. It was a simple denial of reality¹¹ and very effective at that.

¹⁰ OHL [Oberste Heeresleitung, Army Supreme Command], from 1916 to 1918 in actuality the team of Generals Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff, who exercised almost complete power over military and economic affairs.

¹¹ William Shirer summarized the birth of the myth as follows: General Ludendorff, the actual leader of the High Command, had insisted on September 28, 1918, on an armistice "at once," and his nominal superior, Field Marshal von Hindenburg, had supported him. At a meeting of the Crown Council in Berlin on October 2 presided over by Kaiser Wilhelm II, Hindenburg had reiterated the High Command's demand for an immediate truce.

Again, the fable of the "stab in the back" was essentially an argument tailored to appeal to the romantic side of the German citizen, who saw himself and the country besieged by dark forces at least since the fatal disappointment of 1848. The failure of their political hopes evoked an attitude in bourgeois circles that sought communication with the world spirit in terms other than political.

Over this hard-working country, seemingly so sure of its future, with rapidly growing metropolises and industrial areas, there arched a peculiarly romantic sky whose darkness was populated by mythic figures, antiquated giants, and ancient deities. Germany's backwardness was chiefly ideological in nature. ...

This tradition, too, went far back. Such pangs at the onslaughts of civilization could be traced back to Rousseau or to Goethe's WILHELM MEISTER, whose hero had already sensed the mighty force [of contempt for modern civilization, ¶] approaching "like a thunderstorm, slowly, slowly, but it will come and strike."

In Germany the spokesmen for this attitude despised progress. With no regards for logic but with flashes of considerable shrewdness, they opposed the stock exchange and urbanization, compulsory vaccination, the global economy and positivistic science, "communistic" movements and the first attempts at heavier-than-air flight. In brief, they were against the whole concept of modern improvement, and summed up all efforts in that direction as a disastrous "decline of the soul." (22)

The negation of the modern age went hand in hand with emphasizing the feelings of individuals, and in particular those of artists: as the personalization of creative theurgy, artists were to become the new leaders of men. The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche diagnosed a predominant "will to power" in those inspired by the Muses, and erected a comprehensive philosophical system upon the discovery. His "overman" [or "superman", ¶] is a passionate individual who sublimates the energy of his creaturely instincts to arrive at a higher class of creative expressions, which are superior [hence the "super"-man, ¶] to the doctrines of conventional philosophy or religion, and transcend their moral limitations.

Logic and reason tend to become the natural victims of these creative expressions. Nietzsche himself once remarked that "the cult of feeling was erected in the place of the cult of reason." (23) A side effect of this replacement was that the definition of a "hero" was interpreted more liberally, in the sense that romanticism emphasized the protagonist's liberty to reject the strictures of moral or political conventions. Thus it comes that the hero of romantic literature is frequently a rebel or an outlaw, like Lord Byron's "MANFRED" or Schiller's "RÄUBER".

Being a heroic outlaw suited Hitler's imagination: it was one part of his self-understanding. The other one was being an artist, a member of the highest caste of Homo sapiens, unbound by human conventions, responsible solely to his artistic impulses. Whatever it took, all means had to be at his command. What if they did not suffice?

"On this point, too, I am icily cold. If one day the German nation is no longer sufficiently strong or sufficiently ready for sacrifice to stake its blood for its existence, then let it perish and be annihilated by some other stronger power. ... I shall shed no tears for the German nation if the war is lost then the nation will be lost also." (24)

If he was a child of romanticism, so were his followers. The whole early NSDAP was more of an association of romantics, failed painters, architects and writers, than a true nationalist or socialist political organization. And these dreamers attracted more dreamers, who detested democracy, the sermonizing ways of parliament, the vulgarity of majority resolutions, all the "toilsome compromises of political reality." (25) In the heated atmosphere of Hitler's speeches they

"The Army," he said, "cannot wait forty-eight hours." In a letter written on the same day Hindenburg flatly stated that the military situation made it imperative "to stop the fighting." No mention was made of any "stab in the back."

Only later did Germany's Great War hero subscribe to the myth. In a hearing before the Committee of Inquiry of the National Assembly on November 18, 1919, a year after the war's end, Hindenburg declared, "As an English general has very truly said, the German Army was 'stabbed in the back.'"

[See Shirer, Rise and Fall, footnote pp. 31-32 (citing Wheeler-Bennett, 'The Wooden Titan'), for the development of the myth and the "English general", ¶] (26)

sought the intimate yet anonymous comfort of the human mass and not only celebrated their Führer but their own irrationality, their own fervent ability to deny reality and to defy the boundaries of reason. In this passionate, almost erotic experience, they felt as if they were directly participating in the shaping of the future. At length, such atavistic sensations of communal harmony, or, perhaps, hysteria, reeled in scores of intellectuals who, "isolated within their disciplines, longed for fraternizations with the masses, for sharing in the vitality of the common people, for mental torpor and historic effectiveness." (27) Some of the nation's doctors and professors now began to support Hitler, and provided the movement with a smidge of sorely needed respectability.

The bogeymen employed by Hitler were just as attractively romantic in character, that is, their villainy. They were the enemies of the human race - Jews and Bolsheviks – in cahoots to ruin the German nation. They had existed and indeed cooperated throughout the ages, whether or not Karl Marx had only been born in 1818. The tidings of the Russian October Revolution of 1917, which brought the Bolsheviks to power, horrified the world and caused the return of "la grande peur", the bourgeoisie's great fear of anarchy that had been born in the French Revolution of 1789. In particular the lower strata of the middle class, the petty artisans, merchants and accountants dreaded the collapse of their class and the decline into the anonymous multiplicity of the industrial proletariat.

There will be, in a subsequent volume, a discussion of the theory that regards the rise of fascism in post-war Europe a response to the threat of imminent, or at least imagined, Bolshevik takeover. The development of nationalist-authoritative regimes, as a "last ditch ideology for a bourgeoisie long on the defensive" (28) against the complexities of the modern age, blended romantic with anti-Socialist emotions, and the nationalist press engaged liberally in premonitions of imminent catastrophe. As early as October 4, 1919, less than a year after the war, the newspaper MÜNCHENER BEOACHTER¹² illuminated the approaching horrors for the citizens of the Bavarian capital:

"Dreadful times [are to come, ¶] in which Christian-hating, circumcised Asiatics everywhere are raising their bloodstained hands to strangle us in droves! The butcheries of Christians by the Jew Issachar Zederblum, alias Lenin, would have made even a Genghis Khan blush.

In Hungary, his pupil Cohn, alias Bela Kun, marched through the unhappy land with a band of Jewish terrorists schooled in murder and robbery, to set up, among brutal gallows, a mobile machine gallows and execute middle-class citizens and peasants on it. A splendidly equipped harem served him, in his stolen royal train, to rape and defile honourable Christian virgins by the dozen.

His lieutenant Samuely has had sixty priests cruelly butchered in a single underground room. Their bellies are ripped open, their corpses mutilated, after they have been plundered to their blood-drenched skin. In the case of eight murdered priests it has been established that they were first crucified on the doors of their own churches!

The very same atrocious scenes are now reported from Munich." (29)

A great majority of the townspeople agreed that rape and defilement of honourable Christian virgins was quite a disgrace, the more so if it occurred by the dozens, and frightened burghers inspected church portals to find out whether any priests were nailed upon them. Apparently, the Bolshevik takeover could occur any minute, and anxious citizens were ready to support anybody who might deliver the country from evil and bring back the good old times.

[But] Hitler was by no means interested in bringing back the good old days. The sentimental reactionaries who in persistent blindness supported him thought he would reinstitute the old feudal social structure. Hitler had no such ideas. What he proposed to overcome was THE SUM OF HUMAN ALIENATION CAUSED BY THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVILIZATION.

¹² The MÜNCHENER BEOACHTER ["Munich Spectator"] was Munich's folkish-nationalist newspaper, published twice a week. In 1921 it was bought by the NSDAP, changed its name to VÖLKISCHER BEOACHTER ["Folkish Spectator"], and was published daily from 1922 on.

He was not counting on doing so by economic or social means, which he despised. Like Marinetti, one of the spokesmen of Italian Fascism, he regarded European socialism as a "despicable fuss over the rights of the belly." Instead, he aimed at inner renewal out of the blood and the dark realms of the soul. What he wanted was not politics but the restoration of instinct.

In its aims and slogans Fascism was not a class revolution but a cultural revolution; it claimed TO SERVE NOT THE EMANCIPATION BUT THE REDEMPTION OF MANKIND. [Emphases added] (30)

It was this ambition that made Hitler's National Socialism, much more than the run-of-the-mill fascist-style dictatorships that existed elsewhere on the continent between the 1920s and the 1940s, such a literally pre-civilized, indeed atavistic affair: it promised atonement for the crime of civilization, the offenses of charity or mercy: without remorse, as we have seen in Hitler's remark about the fate of the German nation was it to prove weak.

Indeed, it is perhaps less the fact that the National Socialists killed millions of innocent human beings per se, that makes their legacy so nefarious, for other regimes have done the same. It was more their belief, in a characteristically "romantic" intensity, that human sensibility, yes, compassion itself, was wrong, an outdated concept, a cultural misapprehension, that makes their crimes so, literally, in-human. It was such an entirely unemotional state of mind, that, for example, made Heinrich Himmler boast of his SS committing the "most humanitarian" mass murder in history, as if this was merely a matter of an honourable placement in a sporting event. The accepted standards of civilization, even simple human kindness, had been completely upended.

Or were they? Were the Nazis a regression of human evolution, a throwback to primitive bestiality? It was true, Joachim Fest diagnosed, that the Third Reich seemed to be, at times, a state of and for murderers and torturers, and this view remains a popular depiction in works of art or commerce portraying the Nazi era.

But the regime had quite another picture of itself. No question about its making use of such people, especially in the initial phase; but it quickly realized that lasting rule cannot be founded upon the unleashing of criminal instincts. The radicalism that constituted the true nature of National Socialism does not really spring from the license it offered to instinctual gratification. The problem was not one of criminal impulses but of a perverted moral energy.

Those to whom Nazism chiefly appealed were people with a strong but directionless craving for morality. In the SS, National Socialism trained this type and organized it into an elite corps. The "inner values" that were perpetually being preached within this secular monastic order - the theme of many an evening meeting together with romantic torchlight - included, according to the prescript of Heinrich Himmler, the following virtues: loyalty, honesty, obedience, hardness, decency, poverty, and bravery. But all these virtues were detached from any comprehensive frame of reference and directed entirely toward the purposes of the regime.

Under the command of such imperatives a type of person was trained who demanded "cold, in fact, stony attitudes" of himself, as one of them wrote, and had "ceased to have human feelings." Out of this harshness toward himself he derived the justification for harshness toward others. The ability to walk over dead bodies was literally demanded of him; and before that could be developed, his own self had to be deadened. It is this impassive, mechanical quality that strikes the observer as far more extreme than sheer brutality...

The moral imperative was supplemented and crowned by the idea of a special mission: the sense of taking part in an apocalyptic confrontation, of obeying a "higher law," of being the agent of an ideal. Images and slogans alike were made to seem like metaphysical commandments, and a special consecration was conferred upon restlessness. That is how Hitler meant it when he denounced those who cast doubt on his mission as "enemies of the people." This fanaticism, this fixation upon his own deeper insight and his own loftier missionary aims, reflected the traditional German false relationship to politics, and beyond that the nation's peculiarly distorted relationship to reality in general. (31)

Much of German post-war anti-republicanism derived from this distorted relationship, which grew worse over time. While, in the first Reichstag elections of spring 1919, the parties which founded the so-called "Weimar Coalition", SPD, DDP,¹³ and Centre, won a parliamentary majority, this majority shrunk with each subsequent election. From the autumn of 1930 on, the country could be ruled only with presidential emergency decrees, issued by governments which did not command parliamentary majorities. This only intensified the widespread rejection of the parliamentary system.

On the Right, nobility and military lamented the loss of their ancient privileges. This was self-evident in the case of the aristocracy: not only the Kaiser but also the Kings of Bavaria, Württemberg and Saxony had resigned or were deposed, as were assorted dukes and grand dukes; no feudal rule survived the war. The officer corps saw itself degraded from being the most respected class in the Kaiserreich to an unemployed mob, for Versailles limited the number of active officers of all ranks to 4,000.

Their brothers-in-rejection on the Left were KPD and USPD, the two Marxist parties that rejected democracy and aimed at revolution. Following the Reichstag elections of 1930, KPD,¹⁴ NSDAP and DNVP¹⁵ commanded a negative majority of seats; no bourgeois or SPD government could obtain the support of a parliamentary majority.

It was the peculiar birth defect of the Weimar Republic that she was born in those few chaotic days of November 1918 when the German people, long assured that military success was imminent, fell of a sudden "from the fanfare of victory to the dirge of defeat." (32) There followed a brief period of confusion, which allowed the proclamation of the republic. But as soon as these few November days had passed, the Right vowed revenge. Yet because they remained elitist, unable to address the broad public, Hitler was able to wrest the leadership of the nationalist cause from their hands. Against the fervour of the Nazi movement the old elite stood no chance. The excerpt below stems from a thirty-year-old SA leader's letter to Gregor Strasser, who was the NSDAP's deputy chairman in 1931:

"In my work for the NSDAP I have faced a court more than thirty times and have been convicted eight times for assault and battery, resistance to a police officer, and other such misdemeanours that are natural for a Nazi.

To this day I am still paying instalments on my fines, and in addition have other trials coming up. Furthermore, I have been more or less severely wounded at least twenty times. I have knife scars on the back of my head, on my left shoulder, on my lower lip, on my right cheek, on the left side of my upper lip, and on my right arm.

Furthermore, I have never yet claimed or received a penny of party money, but have sacrificed my time to our movement at the expense of the good business I inherited from my father. Today I am facing financial ruin."
(33)

As Joachim Fest observed, against such fanaticism the republic had no means. Even more Hitler profited from soliciting the votes of the women and the youth. The women he promised gainful employment for their husbands and the youth a part of the future, and both an end to the dreariness of daily life.

Common people have a nose for the disdain they frequently encounter when dealing with aristocrats, authorities or academics, but, as far as they sensed, there was no such arrogance in Hitler. Invariably, he bowed to each woman he met socially, was able to exchange front-line banter with former soldiers, was known to abstain from alcohol, meat and tobacco, and was seldomly dressed in anything but a simple dark suit or a party uniform, adorned by the Iron Cross.¹⁶ He

¹³ Deutsche Demokratische Partei ["German Democratic Party"], the Liberals

¹⁴ By 1930, the KPD had absorbed the USPD.

¹⁵ The DNVP ["Deutsch-Nationale Volks-Partei"] was the second, much smaller nationalist party in the Reichstag.

¹⁶ The present author is aware of hazarding the ire of John Lukacs, who has explicitly criticized the following observation regarding Hitler's social skills by John Toland; "Many a hand-kiss insured lifelong devotion from women; men were reassured by his firm handshake, his down-to-earth, man-to-man approach." [John Lukacs, *The Hitler of History*, p. 232, on John Toland, *Adolf Hitler*, p. 226, details see bibliography, ¶].

was the antithesis to Hermann Göring, who was nonetheless the second-most popular Nazi on behalf of his baroque personality. Nobody was (yet) aware that a killer lurked beyond the jovial mask.

We now arrive at a point where the issue of Hitler's early achievements rearises, and a few words of caution are in order. His accomplishments cannot be overlooked on account of his later crimes, for historical truth must not be subordinated to political correctness. Moreover, since the present volume's time frame ends in 1923, the mass murders of war and genocides of minorities remain out of the picture. Our moral problem is, of course, that we feel embarrassed by the acknowledgement that Hitler, necessarily, had to possess a variety of skills in achieving his ends, for in their absence he could never have amounted to historical relevance. Yet that can't be helped. Sebastian Haffner described the problem as follows:

Today the "How could we?" of the old and the "How could you?" of the young trips easily off the tongue. At the time, however, it required a quite exceptional perception and farsightedness to recognize in Hitler's achievements and successes the hidden seeds of future disaster, and it required quite exceptional strength of character to resist the effect of those achievements and successes.

His speeches, with their barking and foaming at the mouth, which nowadays cause revulsion or laughter when listened to again, were delivered at the time against a background of facts which deprived the listener of the strength to contradict even internally. It was that background of facts which produced the effect, not the barking and foaming at the mouth. Here is an excerpt from Hitler's speech of 28 April 1939:

"I overcame chaos in Germany, restored order, enormously raised production in all fields of our national economy ... I succeeded in completely resettling in useful production those seven million unemployed who so touched all our hearts ... I have not only politically united the German nation but also rearmed it militarily, and I have further tried to liquidate that Treaty [of Versailles, ¶] sheet by sheet whose 448 Articles contain the vilest rape that nations and human beings have ever been expected to submit to.

I have restored to the Reich the provinces grabbed from us in 1919; I have led millions of deeply unhappy Germans, who had been snatched away from us, back into the Fatherland; I have restored the thousand-year-old historical unity of German living space; and I have ... attempted to accomplish all that without shedding blood and without inflicting the sufferings of war on my people or any other. I have accomplished all this ... as one who 21 years ago was still an unknown worker and soldier of my people, by my own efforts ..."

Sickening self-adulation. A ridiculous style ("those seven million unemployed who so touched all our hearts"). But, damn it, it was all true, or nearly all. Anyone clutching at those few points which were perhaps not quite true ("Overcame chaos" - without a constitution?¹⁷ - "Restored order" - with concentration camps?) was bound at times to feel just a petty nit-picking know-all. As for the rest, how could anyone challenge that in April 1939?

After all, the economy really was flourishing. The unemployed had again been given work (there had not been seven million but six – but who was counting?); rearmament was a fact; the Treaty of Versailles had really become a scrap of paper (and who, in 1933, would have thought that possible?); the Saarland and Memel

Lukacs does not clarify, however, whether he objects to the description because he believes that it is untrue or whether he judges it reflecting too positive on Hitler. Percy Schramm reports, from personal knowledge that "Hitler was always unfailingly gracious and correct with women." (34) Truth should prevail, and since the present author has received corroboration of this characterization from various women who have met Hitler, the testimony regarding Hitler's social skills stands.

¹⁷Technically, the constitution of the Weimar Republic remained in place, but was amended by the "Law for the Removal of the Distress of People and Reich", the so-called "Enabling Act", which gave the government, i.e. the chancellor, the power to pass legislation independently of the parliament.

territory really belonged to the Reich again, as did the Austrians and Sudeten Germans, and they were really happy about it – their jubilations still rang in peoples' ears.

Miraculously it had actually been brought about without war, and no one could dispute that twenty years earlier Hitler really had been an unknown person (not exactly a worker, but never mind). Had he created everything by his own efforts? Of course, he had had helpers and collaborators, but could one seriously maintain that everything would have turned out the same without him? Could one therefore still reject Hitler without rejecting all that he had accomplished, and, set against these achievements, were not his unpleasant traits and misdeeds merely blemishes? (35)

Aye, there's the rub: since the present volume necessarily reflects on Hitler's early period, it will present an altogether insufficiently "evil" Hitler – nasty but fathomable. Again, that can't be helped. In the Great War of 1914 which we now call the First World War, Hitler served as a simple soldier and bore no responsibility; in 1939, twenty-five-years later, the situation was, of course, different.

But although this volume will not reach into the years of the Third Reich and the Second War, concise statements about a few noteworthy topics may be useful. Three issues dominate the labour of the historians who examine the era: Hitler's empowerment in 1933; the prosecution of minorities, of which the most referenced is the "Final Solution" or "Holocaust", and, naturally, the outbreak and development of the war of 1939.

Hitler's ascent to power was the supreme issue not only for Eberhard Jäckel, who observed that: "For all those interested in German history, and perhaps not for them alone, the seminal question of the twentieth century is: How could Hitler have come to power? The question has been raised many times and has received many answers." (36)

It is, however, entirely possible to misperceive the question, for, as it is sometimes overlooked, all that technically happened on January 30, 1933, was a change in the office of chancellor: General Kurt von Schleicher left and Adolf Hitler was appointed. Shuffles of this kind had taken place almost regularly since the last German government supported by a parliamentary majority disintegrated in 1930, and chancellors were appointed directly by the Reich president, who then was Hindenburg, the old war hero.

He had appointed Heinrich Brüning from the Catholic Centre Party in 1930, who was followed, in the summer of 1932, by Franz von Papen, a Westphalian Junker and political amateur, well liked by Hindenburg yet completely lacking a political power base. On December 3 of the same year, Papen was replaced as chancellor by General Kurt von Schleicher, Minister of Defense, and éminence grise of the nationalist Right, who in turn was replaced by Hitler on January 30, 1933, less than two months later. None of these substitutions truly changed governmental procedure; the chancellors ruled by emergency decrees they obtained from Hindenburg, as did Hitler in the beginning. Perhaps the question Jäckel asked must be reformulated: How could Hitler claim dictatorial powers, transcending the legislative authority of the parliament and the rights of the Reich president? This was the difference to the preceding shuffles of chancellors.

The issue of Hitler's ordering the mass murder of ethnic and religious minorities, especially of European Jews, has periodically found apologists, who point out that no written order of Hitler regarding, for example, the "Holocaust" exists, and put the responsibility upon the shoulders of lesser figures like Himmler or Heydrich. It should not be necessary to give this view much space, and the few following lines by John Lukacs discussing Philippe Burrin must suffice:

On p. 172¹⁸ Burrin asks what to me is the most telling question: "Had Hitler died in the summer of 1942 [note this late dating], would the Final Solution have taken place?" Burrin says: most probably not. Yes, "the Jews would have gone on suffering in a Europe directed by Göring, Goebbels or Himmler." There would have been ghettos, camps, perhaps even mass killings. But the mass manufacture of millions of Jewish corpses, no. (37)

¹⁸ Philippe Burrin, "Hitler et les juifs. La Genèse d'une génocide", Paris, 1989

One must keep in mind that the "Final Solution" was conceived and executed during the war, when not only the (pseudo)legal framework but also practical considerations made the accomplishment of the crime easier. Perhaps one should ask: had the "Holocaust" happened without WW II? One would be inclined to say: probably not.

The two catastrophes are intimately related and must be treated as such, which challenges our moral judgements. For in war the sides of "good" and "evil" are at times much harder to differentiate than one would wish for - before the role of bad guy is properly assigned to the loser. But in war, orders are given and are supposed to be carried out in every country, and in all kinds of circumstances. Where does one establish the line that separates illegal orders from legal ones and immorality from necessity of war? This is a daring matter, and part of the difficulty we run into when we attempt to judge some events of the Second World War in moral terms. If somebody orders the invasion of Poland or the nuclear bombing of Nagasaki, which conditions decide whether the order is obeyed or not?

GLENDOWER: I can call spirits from the vasty deep.

HOTSPUR: Why, so can I and so can any man;

But will they come when you do call for them?¹⁹

Something other than mere collective evilness must have been present in the Third Reich. Evil is a full member, dues paid, of the moral duality: as not only Nietzsche observed, good and evil exist in mandatory company and mutual necessity. There have been other wars, other excessive massacres, and history is not in short supply of autocrats who walked over dead bodies. Tyrants existed at all times, but what made Hitler so condemnably successful? Is it perhaps true that, as Wolfgang Sauer put it, we have a critical lack of understanding, or do we shy from acknowledging the deepest dungeons of our souls?

The modus operandi Hitler employed to plant, grow, and finally harvest his powers was old-fashioned but tried and effective; invoking the fear of internal and external foes, Jews and communists. He was, however, far from being the only politician belabouring the Jewish-Bolshevik Conspiracy. On February 8, 1920, the readers of the ILLUSTRATED SUNDAY HERALD were treated to an article by Winston Churchill, who argued that...

"...this [communist] movement among the Jews is not new," Churchill said. It was a "world-wide conspiracy for the overthrow of civilization and for the reconstruction of society on the basis of arrested development, of envious malevolence, and impossible equality." He listed Marx, Trotsky, Bela Kun, Rosa Luxemburg, and Emma Goldman as some of the malefactors. The conspiracy has been, he said, the "mainspring of every subversive movement during the Nineteenth Century." (38)

Alertness regarding the machinations of the enemy, domestic or international, remains a cherished governmental tactic to produce the unifying effects of danger - real or imagined. The eventual success of Mussolini's and Hitler's copycats proved how easily the burghers of a nation found themselves being governed without their consent. The nations newly composed after 1918 from the former Austrian, Russian and Ottoman Empires evidenced a particular tendency to dictatorships of the Right, but were not alone in this regard. Between the wars, the one or other sort of fascism reigned in Italy, Spain, Portugal, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Austria, Greece, Turkey, Romania, and finally Germany.

Thus it was not the case of a single aggrieved and aggressive nation [Germany, ¶] trying to impose a totalitarian pattern on Europe. The liberal age was reaching its twilight in a widespread mood of disgust and the mood manifested itself under all kinds of auspices, reactionary and progressive, ambitious and altruistic. ... The ideas of liberalism had scarcely any advocates but many potential adversaries; they needed only an impetus, the stirring slogans of a leader. (39)

¹⁹ William Shakespeare, "Henry IV", Part I, Act 3, Sc. 1, L. 53

Enter Hitler. But carefully, for our view is subject to hindsight, the illegitimate child of our knowledge, too inviting, perhaps, to distribute guilt that is not clearly due. The Germans who voted for Hitler in 1930 or 1933 did not so because they wanted another war or to murder Jews, but because they longed for a change. They were tired of the economical crisis and would, as an American observer noted in early 1932, "accept anything that looks like an alternative." (40) They had no way of knowing that they freed the rails for a train wreck.

Neither could Hitler know in 1933 what the situation would be five or ten years later. One can only play the game as well as the opponent allows, and there was no way for Hitler in 1933 to foresee the follies of Great Britain and France which opened the ways for his revanchist designs. The influential military historian Basil Liddell Hart directed some clear words of admonishment to Allied pre-war politicians:

The last thing Hitler wanted to produce was another great war. His people, and particularly his generals, were profoundly fearful of any such risk - the experiences of World War I had scarred their minds.

To emphasize the basic facts is not to whitewash Hitler's inherent aggressiveness, nor that of many Germans who eagerly followed his lead. But Hitler, although utterly unscrupulous, was for long cautious in pursuing his aims. ...

How, then, did it come about that he became involved in a major war that he had been so anxious to avoid? The answer is to be found not merely, nor most, in Hitler's aggressiveness, but in the encouragement he had long received from the complaisant attitude of the Western Powers coupled with their sudden turn-about in the spring of 1939. That reversal was so abrupt and unexpected as to make war inevitable.

If you allow anyone to stoke up a boiler until the steam-pressure rises beyond danger-point, the real responsibility for any resultant explosion will lie with you. That truth of physical science allies equally to political science - especially to the conduct of international affairs. (41)

It goes without saying that this judgement was met with less than enthusiasm in Great Britain and France. More now than earlier, Britannia is also criticized for the opaque policies of her Foreign Ministry and especially Sir Edward Grey's, which allowed Germany's government to speculate whether Britain might remain neutral in a European war [cf. Chapters XVI - XVII].

Although not technically within the confines of this volume, the Second World War must be briefly addressed, for its portents overshadowed the globe as soon as it was clear, by 1923 or so, that the post-WWI order had little chance of delivering future political stability. Although almost seventy years have passed since the Second War's conclusion, misapprehensions and inaccuracies - intended or not - retain an eerie popularity. Norman Davies has written on the wilful misconceptions that are the consequences of political correctness and national myth-making. He notes that:

Over sixty years have passed since the end of the Second World War. And most people would assume that the broad outlines of that terrible conflict had been established long ago. Innumerable books have been published on the subject. Thousands of films have been screened, portraying every aspect of military events and civilian ordeals.

*Countless memoirs of participants' great and small have been collected. Hundreds of major monuments and scores of museums have been created to keep up the memory of the war alive. One might think that there is nothing new to add. At least one is tempted to think that way until one starts to examine what actually is said, and what is **not** said. [Emphases in original] (42)*

When Professor Davis set out to visit the various galas, celebrations and festivities that commemorated the Sixtieth Anniversary of the End of the War in 2005, he chanced upon mysterious perceptions...

... the new United States World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C., bore, as its main inscription: "World War II 1941 - 1945". The monument fails to inform the visitor that the United States did have allies, and seems to conclude that the United States fought and won the war alone, and in five years instead of seven ...

... the British celebrations somehow forgot to invite delegations from, among many other former colonial allies, Canada, South Africa, India, New Zealand or Australia, all of whom had participated in the war on the side of Great Britain...

... the Russian celebration on Red Square in Moscow forgot to mention, among other little sins, that the Soviet Union in the six years between 1940 and 1945 invaded and annexed the three Baltic republics Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania not only once but twice, in the process deporting and/or murdering land owners and intelligentsia. In addition, nobody thought it prudent to recall that the Soviet Union, allied with Germany in 1939, had invaded Poland and Finland only weeks later...

and that

... none of these celebrations recalled the sufferings of the non-Jewish victims of the Fascist, Nazi and Communist regimes, nor the fate of the millions who were misplaced by the war or forcibly ejected from their homelands: over ten million Germans, five millions Ukrainians and about the same number of Poles, and millions of Byelorussians and Caucasian minorities. The Soviet Union in particular

... relocated national groups, uprooting millions in the process. In the immediate pre-war period they had forcibly removed some 500,000 Poles from the western borders and resettled them in closed districts on the Chinese frontier in Kazakhstan.

In 1939-41 massive deportations took place from all the lands annexed by the USSR; and, once the Great Patriotic War started, strategic deportations began with an order to remove all Finns from the vicinity of Leningrad.

Later in 1941, a long-standing plan (first mooted in 1915) was activated to deport the entire population of the Autonomous German Republic of the Volga. Some 2.5 million Germans were either sent to the labour armies or to Kazakhstan to join the exiled Poles. Within a decade over half of them were dead. The forced deportation and resettlement of seven Muslim nations in 1943-4 was especially brutal. (43)

Mindful of the spectre of selective memory, Professor Davies subsequently felt the need to take a few precautions before discussing the war:

As a prelude to various talks and lectures on the Second World War, therefore, I have often chosen to raise some of these problems by presenting the audience with four or five simple questions:

- * *Can you name the five biggest battles of the war in Europe? Or, better still, the ten biggest battles?*
- * *Can you name the main political ideologies that were contending for supremacy during the war in Europe?*
- * *Can you name the largest concentration camp that was operating in Europe in the years 1939-1945?*
- * *Can you name the European nationality (or ethnic group) which lost the largest number of civilians during the war?*
- * *Can you name the vessel that was sunk with record loss of life in the war's largest maritime disaster?*

These have usually been followed by a deathly silence, and then a hubbub of guesses and queries. Quelling the hubbub, I then offer my audience an opinion:

"Until we have established the correct answer to basic factual matters," I say, "we are not properly equipped to pass judgement on the wider issues." (44)²⁰

That nations cling to the chimera of glory and disremember failure is altogether human in its fallibility. In the same league, perhaps, is man's perpetual underestimation of the amount of knowledge required before becoming able to judge on a subject. Perhaps ignorance may be bliss, as in Orwell's 1984. Paul Fussell, historian and veteran of WW II, who was wounded 1945 in France, found numerous reasons to mistrust the victors' polished platitudes and observed so many occasions of intentional misrepresentation in the treatment of the Second World War in American media that he felt compelled to conclude that "the allied part of the war of 1939-45 has been sanitized and romanticized beyond recognition by the sentimental, the loony patriotic, the ignorant and the bloodthirsty." (45)

Naturally, such groups derive their redactional liberty from the fact that their side won the war and hence is able to evade moral ambiguity. Nearly everybody agrees that the industrial killing of Jews, or Gypsies, with cyanide was a crime nearly without precedence in history, but so were other inventions of the twentieth century: area-bombing civilians with conventional explosives as in, say, Dresden or Tokyo, or with nuclear fire as in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. If the war had been lost, who could have explained the moral propriety of these undertakings? In regards to our subject Adolf Hitler, it may be of interest in this context to reflect on what Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote about the essence of the demonic, two hundred years ago:

"The most fearful manifestation of the demonic, however, is seen when it dominates an individual human being. In the course of my life, I have been able to observe several, some more closely, others from the distance. They are not always the finest persons, in terms of either mind or talent, nor do they commend themselves by goodness of heart, but they emanate a monstrous force and exercise incredible power over all creatures, and indeed even over the elements, and who can say how far such influence may extend? All moral powers combined are impotent against them. In vain do the more enlightened among men attempt to discredit them as deluded or deceptive - the masses will be drawn to them. Seldom or never will contemporaries find their equal, and they can be overcome only by the universe itself, against which they have taken up arms." (46)

It is a rule of classic Greek tragedy that hubris strikes the protagonist at the zenith of his achievements, and Hitler was no exception. In this volume we shall deal with the early development of our protagonist and his ascent from anonymity to the leadership of a political party, in the settings of pre-war Austria, Munich between 1913 and 1923 and, naturally, the Great War of 1914. The decisive question, as seen by Ian Kershaw, is:

How do we explain how someone with so few intellectual gifts and social attributes, someone no more than an empty vessel outside his political life, unapproachable and impenetrable even for those in his close company, incapable, it seems, of genuine friendship, without the background that bred high office, without even any experience of government before becoming Reich chancellor, could nevertheless have such an immense historic impact, could make the entire world hold its breath? (47)

The way Ian Kershaw poses the question, however, tips his hand: as an Englishman, he searches for the qualities of a Pitt or Disraeli when analyzing Hitler; politicians of breeding, as he calls them, essentially parliamentarians. The German voters of the early 1930's, however, were fed up with parliamentarians and longed for an alternative. This was when Hitler entered the picture. The almost traditional characterization of Hitler as a non-personality, however, seems questionable – his abilities were simply different than those that Kershaw or Fest were looking for. Undeniably, the Third Reich ["Third Empire", ¶] was much more of a personal creation than any other autocracy in continental history, in its fleetingness only comparable to the realm of Alexander. It cannot be imagined without Hitler; it was indeed his universe, his macrocosm;

²⁰ Answers are found at this chapter's conclusion.

it lived and died with him. But what, exactly, was the "Third Empire"? (What had happened to the First? Or the Second?), and in which respects was it different from its predecessors, the empires which had ruled over the heart of the continent before?

ANSWERS TO P. 39 - FIVE BATTLES, FATALITIES IN PARENTHESES: [1] OPERATION TYPHOON, THE BATTLE FOR MOSCOW 1941/1942 (1,582,000) [2] CASE BLUE, THE BATTLE FOR STALINGRAD 1942-1943 (973,000) [3] THE SIEGE OF Leningrad 1941-1944 (900,000) (4) OPERATION BARBAROSSA, THE BATTLE FOR KIEV 1941 (657,000) [5] OPERATION BAGRATION, SOVIET OFFENSIVE 1944 (450,000) - IDEOLOGIES: FASCISM, NATIONAL SOCIALISM, COMMUNISM, LIBERAL DEMOCRACY - BIGGEST CONCENTRATION CAMP: VORKUTA, USSR - LOSSES BY NATION/ETHNICITY: SEE DIAGRAM BELOW - MARITIME CATASTROPHE: GERMAN OCEAN LINER 'WILHELM GUSTLOFF', TORPEDOED BY RUSSIAN SUBMARINE IN MARCH 1945, APPROXIMATELY 8000 FATALITIES [SOURCES: DAVIES, ID., P.25 FF, DIAGRAM P.366] - SOME INTERESTING FACTS: BIGGEST EUROPEAN ARMY IN 1932 AFTER FRANCE: BELGIUM, 26 DIVISIONS - MOST TANKS IN 1940: FRANCE, OVER 3,000.

WARTIME FATALITIES IN EUROPE 1939-1945

THE DIAGRAM UNVEILS THE PROBLEMATIC ISSUES WHICH ARISE WHEN WAR LOSSES APPLY TO MORE THAN ONE NATIONAL OR ETHNIC CATEGORY. THE SOVIET UNION LOST ABOUT 27 MILLION PEOPLE, DIVIDED INTO ABOUT 13 MILLION MILITARY CASUALTIES, FROM THE WAR AGAINST GERMANY, AND ABOUT 14 MILLION CIVILIAN DEATHS, OF WHICH THE FAR GREATER PERCENTAGE WERE VICTIMS OF SOVIET TERROR AND WHAT WAS CALLED 'ADMINISTRATIVE RELOCATION', I.E. FORCED TO DIE IN THE SIBERIAN CONCENTRATION CAMPS, OR IN INNER-SOVIET MASSACRES, WHICH HURT THE UKRAINIANS HARDEST, WHOSE LOSSES WERE TO A GREAT PART CIVIL. LIKewise, THE JEWISH POPULATION LOSSES SUFFERED IN THE HOLOCAUST INCLUDE, AS FAR AS NATIONALITY WENT, GERMAN, POLISH, UKRAINIANS AND RUSSIAN JEWS - NUMBERS THUS GET EASILY CONFUSED. THE LEAST KNOWN AND/OR MENTIONED CATEGORY OF MILLION-PLUS LOSSES ARE THE GERMANS HAVING, BEFORE 1945, LIVED IN EASTERN EUROPE; THEIR FORCEFUL EXPULSION FROM THEIR LANDS RESULTED IN BETWEEN TWO AND THREE MILLION FATALITIES.

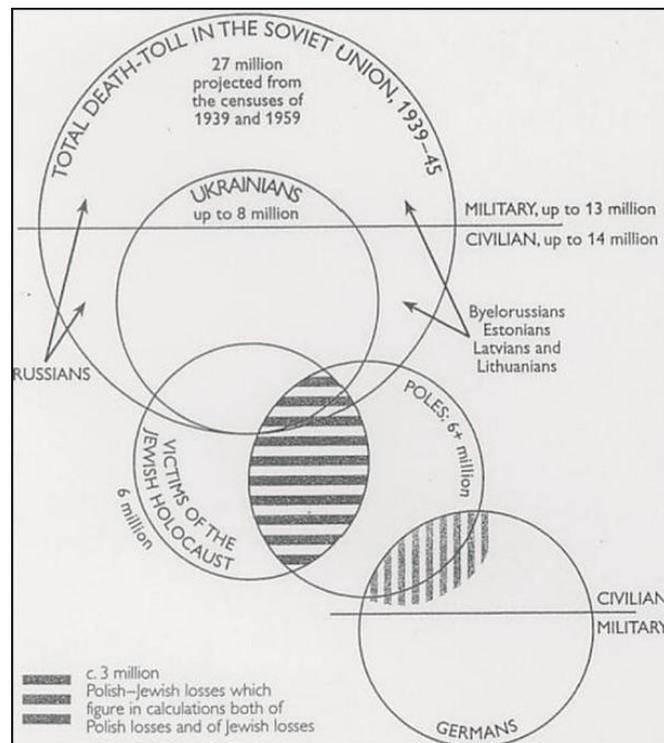


DIAGRAM I: DEATH TOLL WWII IN GERMANY AND EASTERN EUROPE

Book One

EMPIRE

THE CONTINENTAL FACTOR

*Tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento
(Hae tibi erunt artes), pacique imponere morem,
Parcere subiectis et debellare superbos.*

*You, Roman, make your task
to rule the nations by your government
(these shall be your skills),
impose upon them peace and order,
spare those who have submitted
and pacify the arrogant.*

Virgil "Aeneid", Bk. 6, L. 847

Until the third century BC, the people living in the north and middle of the European continent - Celts and Germans - appeared on the political map of the known world only by proxy: by virtue of the trade undertaken by seafaring people, whose commercial and military interests then centred upon the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Of pivotal importance to this age were the great ports, for they not only provided safe havens from the volatility of the sea but served as commercial hubs or, should the need arise, as gathering points for the men-of-war.

The principal harbours of the Eastern Mediterranean Sea were then among the greatest and most busy towns of the age: Athens and its harbour Piraeus, Ephesos and Milet in western Anatolia, the ports of Rhodos, Cyprus and Crete, Sidon and Tyrus in Palestine, Trapezos and Chersonesos in the Black Sea, and always Alexandria Egypta, with her famous lighthouse and the greatest library of the world: these were the naval and thus political heavyweights of the period. At this time, the Levant and Northern Africa were far more fertile than they are today: the fabulous wheat harvests along the Mediterranean Africa coast and Sicily provided for many centuries most of the grain to feed southern and western Europe, her coastal cities and hinterlands.

From the sixth to the fourth century BC, the Greek and Phoenician town states around the Eastern Mediterranean Sea engaged in rapid colonial expansion westward. Among many smaller settlements and ports, towns as famous as Massilia, today's Marseille, Neapolis, i.e. the "New Town", today's Naples, and Gades, today's Cadiz, were founded at this time. One Phoenician community settled near today's town of Tunis at the African coast, vis-a-vis from Sicily, and from this promontory began the economic exploration of the West, of Spain, Italy and southern France. In these lesser known parts of the Mediterranean Sea, large profits beckoned.

From the fifth century BC onward, Carthage, as the new settlement became known, established herself as the dominant trading force in the western parts of the Mediterranean Sea by founding new colonies that extended as far as the Atlantic coast, and the Iberian Peninsula was thus linked with the consumers of Greece, Syria and Egypt. In the third century BC, however, her ongoing expansion into the Italian markets was checked by an indigenous opponent, the young Republic of Rome. We know little of Rome's actual, as opposed to legendary, origins, although archaeological work recently begun on Palatine Hill may soon deliver clues. The saga of Rome's establishment, however, is a well-known tale which draws on various popular elements of foundation myths. The twins Romulus and Remus, sons of the war god Mars

and the Vestal Virgin Rhea Silvia, were abandoned after birth but found, floating down the Tiber river in a basket, by a she-wolf that nursed them to boyhood. They were subsequently adopted by a shepherd and his family, and, in the year 753 BC founded a small settlement on the Palatine Hill, overlooking the Tiber River, and in the distance, perhaps five leagues away, the blue waves of the Tyrrhenian Sea.

The peace in the hamlet, however, foundered soon, by virtue of some unexplained family business which led to the murder of Remus by Romulus, as in Cain and Abel. Soon after the ordeal, Romulus was able to welcome the hero Aeneas of Troy on the shores of the Tiber, who arrived after a somewhat complicated journey from the cinders of his hometown and a stopover in the arms of Dido (at Carthage) in middle Italy and bestowed a claim of noble ancestry to the fledging village.¹ To improve the population count, Romulus declared a zone between the two summits of near-by Capitol Hill a habitat for fugitives; and it may tell us something about law and order in early Roman history that Romulus could soon greet a large number of prospective citizens; men ejected from their tribes for various offenses.

While it seemed that crime was as popular and profitable then as it is today, and Romulus experienced few problems in attracting new associates, it was female company that proved a rare occurrence on the settlement's campfires. Given the criminal backgrounds of many of the new citizens, it was no surprise that the solution of the problems was found beyond the limits of the law: a raid on the neighbouring tribe of the Sabines yielded, by way of abduction of their young women, a much improved ratio of the sexes. Together with the poaching of any girl they chanced upon in the woods or the coastline, adult entertainment was finally provided and the procreative challenge solved; at the cost of less-than-stellar foreign relations.

Around 500 BC, the town state began to change her political organization from a run-of-the-mill monarchy to a republican oligarchy. This was due, it seems, to the influence of the Etruscans, a peculiar people whose pale of settlement reached from Rome north-westward to the vicinity of Pisa, and whose culture displayed no similarity to any of their neighbours, except, perhaps, for the fact that they used an alphabet traceable to the Greek.

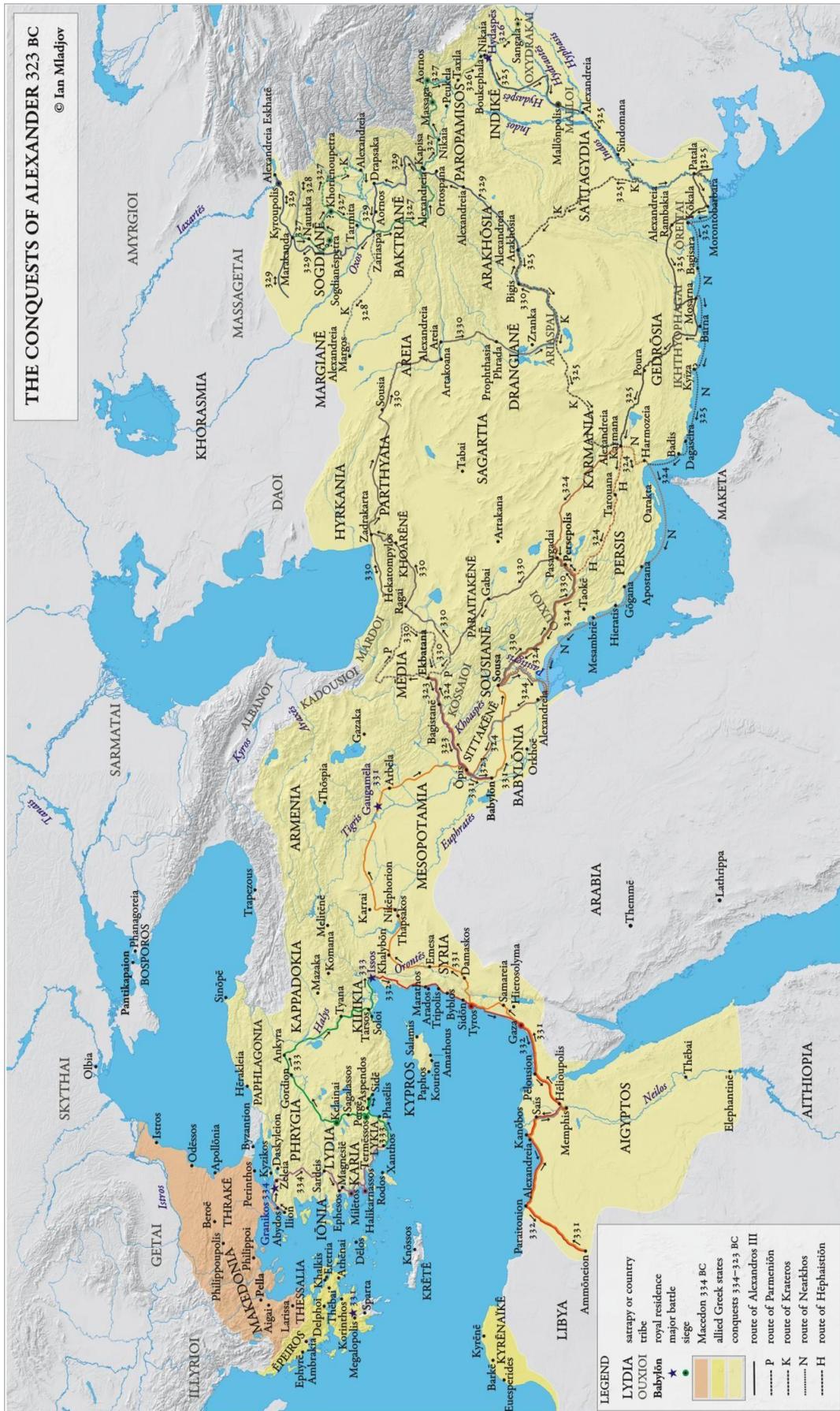
They were either destroyed or assimilated by the Romans in the third century BC, yet it appears that their laws were an early influence on the first Roman laws, which were written, the legend goes, on twelve clay tables sometime around 450 BC. With the Roman conquest of the principal Etruscan town of Veii in 396 BC, the Etruscan culture vanished, and the same year is commonly accepted as the beginning of Roman expansion.

The following years generated fair amounts of local hostilities, which were somewhat amplified in 387 BC by a roving Celtic tribe, the Senones, led by King Brennus² southbound from Gallia. At that time, the population of the wide valley of the Po River was Celtic as well, and forays along the coasts were not uncommon. King Brennus's men plundered their way southward to Rome, which they sacked: with the exception of the top of Capitol Hill, whose sleeping sentries were alerted, in the nick of time, by the chatter of a handful of geese. The attack on Capitol Hill and its gold cache could thus be deflected, although the Senones took everything movable and left for further adventures. The geese, since then, enjoyed a protected habitat on Rome's principal hill, fed well by grateful citizens.

After the Senones had vanished, local warfare was speedily reinstated and concentrated upon the Samnites, Rome's south-eastern neighbours. It took three campaigns to subdue them [343 - 290 BC, ¶], and with the subsequent success against Tarentum [282 -272 BC, ¶], the victorious republic extended her tenure over the whole Italian boot: from Ariminum, today's Rimini, in the northeast, where the northern piedmont of the Apennines mountains meets the Adriatic Sea, to Regium, at the tip of the boot. These conquests more than tripled the size of the Roman territory, and the increasing trade volume on the coast of the Tyrrhenian Sea brought the republic at length into contact, and soon into conflict, with the established naval superpower of the time - Carthage.

¹ Given that legend puts the founding date of Rome at 753 BC, Aeneas must have been over four hundred years on the road - if we accept that the Trojan War described by Homer took place sometime in the 12th century BC.

² King Brennus's name is immortalized in the famous Alpine pass, the "Brenner Pass", between Innsbruck and Bolzano.



MAP I: THE NEAR EAST AT ALEXANDER'S DEATH IN 323 BC

↑ EMANATING FROM THEIR ORIGINAL HOME IN MACEDONIA - SHOWN IN BROWN - THE ARMIES OF ALEXANDER CONQUERED MOST OF THE KNOWN WORLD IN THE EAST OF EUROPE AND ASIA, IN LITTLE OVER A DECADE; IN THE PROCESS DESTROYING THE PERSIAN EMPIRE. THE TRANSIENT NATURE OF CONQUESTS, HOWEVER, DIVIDED, AFTER THE DEATH OF ALEXANDER IN 323 BC, THE HUGE REALM QUICKLY INTO FOUR SMALLER ENTITIES, GOVERNED BY FORMER GENERALS WHO ESTABLISHED LOCAL RULING HOUSES. THE MOST FAMOUS OF THESE FAMILIES BECAME THE PTOLEMIES OF EGYPT, WHO NOT ONLY ESTABLISHED ALEXANDRIA AS THE CENTRE OF WESTERN EDUCATION, BUT ALSO REIGNED, WITH SOMEWHAT SHAKY AUTHORITY OVER EGYPT FOR THE NEXT THREE HUNDRED YEARS.

Around the year 250 BC, the Punic³ sphere of dominance comprised the African coast from the Great Syrte of Lybia all the way to today's Moroccan coast; the islands of Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica and the Balears and Spain from the Ebro River in the northeast to the Rock of Gibraltar, and even a few colonies on the Atlantic Ocean, Gades, today's Cadiz, being the most important of them [see Map I, p.39, above].

Conflict between Rome and Carthage centred on the island of Sicily, fabulously wealthy then, and in the long run scattered skirmishes turned into open warfare. For the first time in her history, Rome had to fight a naval war, and it took a few attempts to get things right. It helped that around 260 BC an unknown Roman engineer conceived a mechanism that enabled Roman infantry, the pride of the nation, to participate in sea battles (in which the Phoenicians were reported to be masters). A plank (called "corvus", 'raven') that could be lowered onto an enemy ship allowed Roman legionaries to enter the opposing vessel and fight the way they were used to, on foot, with spear and sword. In 260 BC, the Battle of Mylae, northwest of Messina, brought Rome her first naval victory.

A second victory, at the Ecnomos promontory in 256 BC, allowed a Roman expeditionary force in the strength of four legions to set foot on the African continent. Their advance on Carthage was checked, however, by a hastily collected force of Punic mercenaries in an action near today's Tunis, and the mauled Roman legions, which suffered from logistic problems to boot, did not have the strength to continue the campaign and were quickly forced to return. This tactical success, however, could not save the island of Sicily for Carthage, which became the first Roman "provincia" in 241 BC.

An uneasy truce ensued but a lasting peace was out of the question, given the awareness of both sides that only the winner would continue to harvest the fruits of trade. In 227 BC Rome acquired the islands of Sardinia and Corsica from weakened Carthage; at this time the Romans began to call the Mediterranean Sea "mare nostrum", our sea.

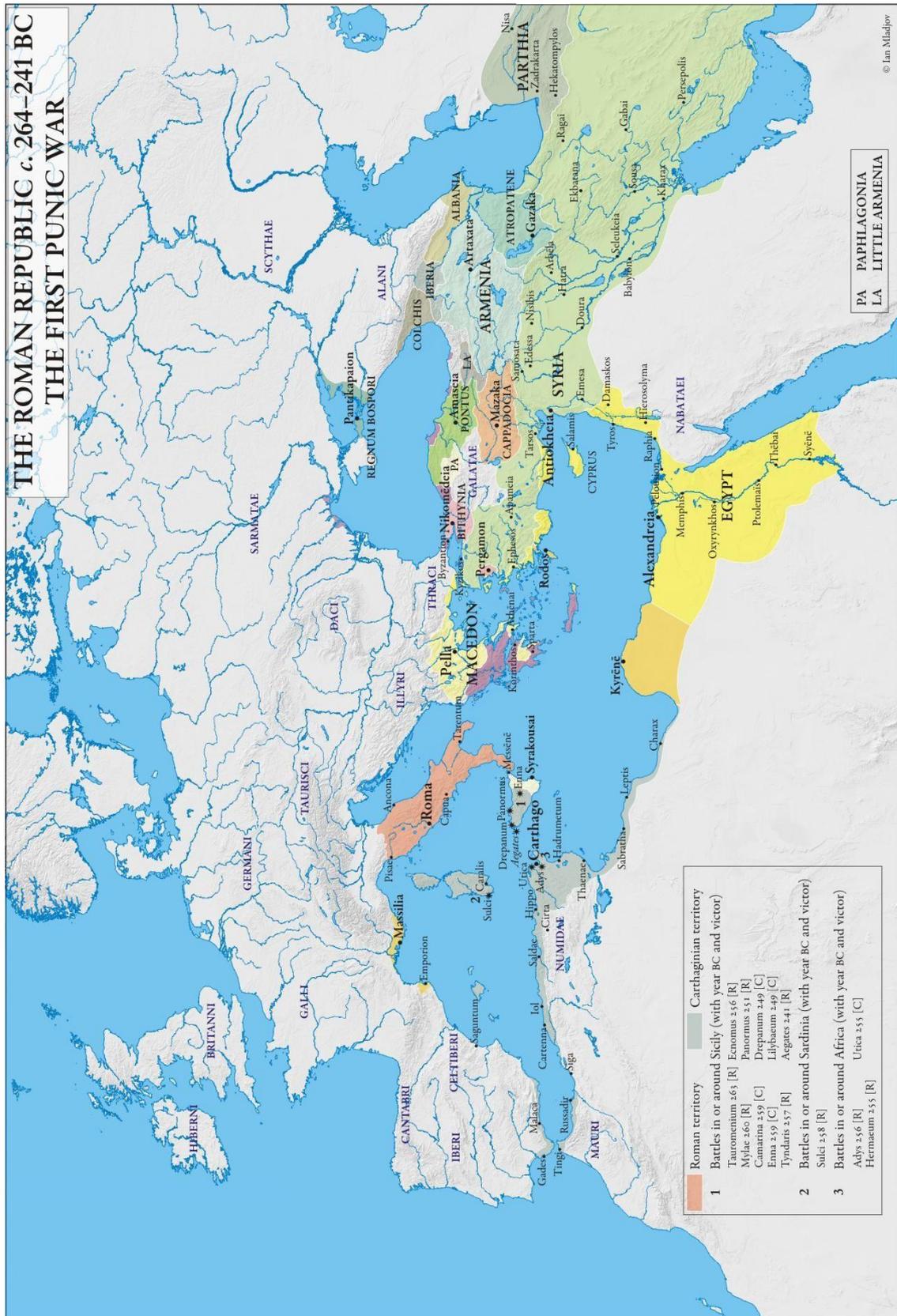
By 219 BC a new generation of Punic soldiers, more familiar with land warfare than their fathers had been, was ready to renew hostilities. One specific young officer showed great promise in all things military and was entrusted with the command over the whole Punic army in the twenty-fifth year of his life. As the qualities of a man are often best judged by his enemies, we shall contemplate what Titus Livius, his Roman adversary, wrote about Hannibal:

The old soldiers fancied they saw Hamilcar [his father, ¶] in his youth given back to them; the same bright look, the same fire in his eye, the same trick of countenance and features. But soon he proved that to be his father's son was not his highest recommendation. Never was one and the same spirit more skilful to meet opposition, to obey or to command. ...

He entered danger with the greatest mettle, he comported himself in danger with the greatest unconcern. By no difficulties could his body be tired, his ardour dampened. Heat and cold he suffered with equal endurance; the amount of his food and drink was gauged by natural needs and not by pleasure. The time of waking and sleeping depended not on the distinction of day and night.

What time was left from business he devoted to rest, and this was not brought on by either a soft couch or by quiet. Many have often seen him, covered by a short field cloak, lying on the ground betwixt the outposts and sentinels of the soldiers. His clothing in no wise distinguished him from his fellows; his weapons and horses attracted every one's eye. He was by long odds the best rider, the best marcher. He went into battle the first; he came out of it the last He served three years under Hasdrubal's supreme command, and left nothing unobserved which he who desires to become a great captain ought to see and do. (1)

³"Punic" - from "Phoenician" - is the adjective for Carthage, hence the "Punic Wars".



MAP II: THE WEST, BEFORE THE PUNIC WARS, AROUND 270 BC

CARTHAGE'S POWER RESTED UPON COLONIZING THE WESTERN AFRICAN COAST, SOUTHERN SPAIN, THE BALEARES, CORSICA, SARDINIA, AND MOST OF SICILY. THE RISING POWER OF ITALY, ROME, HAS ESTABLISHED DE FACTO POLITICAL CONTROL OVER THE ENTIRE ITALIAN PENINSULA SOUTH OF THE ARNO RIVER. THE TOWN OF ALEXANDRIA EGYPTA, NEAR THE ESTUARY OF THE NILE RIVER, REMAINS THE MOST IMPORTANT CENTRE OF LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE FOR THE NEXT FIVE HUNDRED YEARS.

Legend has it that Hannibal's father Hamilcar had obliged the son to swear by oath to remain at all times an enemy of Rome. Under the son's command, Carthage decided to carry the war to the opponent's own turf, and the gold of the state was liberally spent on the equipment of a fresh army. Carthage opened the second round of hostilities by attacking and seizing Saguntum, a Spanish town that was an ally of Rome, and the Roman senate consequently declared war [Second Punic War, 218 - 201 BC, ¶]. Hannibal now faced the strategic choice whether to attack Rome by land or by sea.

The invasion of a defended coast from the sea is one of the most difficult military manoeuvres, and since Hannibal could not ignore how quickly and efficiently the Romans had adapted to naval warfare, he judged the invasion of Italy from the sea an enterprise doomed to fail. The only other way to reach the enemy on his own turf was by land, through Spain and France; a route fraught with the obstacles of the Pyrenees and the Alps. The advantage of the strenuous approach, however, was of tactical nature: it promised surprise, the most cherished of military commodities.

The newly assembled Punic army, including not only the standard infantry and cavalry units but a corps of thirty-seven elephants as well, set out for Italy in 219 BC. The first part of the exercise was the easiest and most comfortable, with the exception of a little mal de mer it brought on for the landlubbers: by ship from Carthage to Mastia [later called "Carthago Nova", today's Cartagena, ¶]. There the land campaign began. For the greater part following the coast lines, Hannibal's forces marched over 1,000 miles, or 1,600 kilometres, to their destination. Having hugged the seashore as far as Narbonne in southern France, they changed direction at the Rhone River, which they followed northwards. When they reached the confluence of Rhone and Isere, they branched out eastwards and passed today's Grenoble and Frejus in traversing the French Alps, touching Italian soil when they descended into the valley of the Po near today's Torino.

Alas - the exercise proved costly: of the 60,000 troops that had left Mastia, only 26,000 were left to greet Italia; more than half of the horses and sixteen of the precious elephants had perished in the journey. Nevertheless, Fortuna was on Hannibal's side: when he descended the Alps with his damaged force, he encountered a congregation of Celtic tribes who had their own bill to square with Rome and Hannibal was able to add about fifteen thousand Gauls to the common cause. Surprise was fully achieved. The Roman legions were protecting the beaches of Sicily from Punic invasion, not the rocks of the Alps, and had to be rushed north at best speed. Their hectic advance led them straight into an ambush Hannibal had laid at the Trebia River, northeast of Genova, and the Romans were soundly beaten. This victory, and the advance of the winter season in which campaigning was impossible, permitted the Punic army and their allies to rest, reequip themselves and stock up supplies, and allowed their commander a thorough planning of the next engagement.

In the spring of 217 BC, a well-replenished Punic/Gallic force began its drive towards Rome. Around the halfway mark of the march, near Lake Trasimene, they encountered another hastily approaching Roman army, and a second ambush drove the legions into disarray and retreat. The second defeat in a row astonished the Senate and People of Rome, who had been too long accustomed to hear good news only from the battlefields. Recognizing the qualities of their opponent, caution was urged and obeyed. A reorganization of the available forces resulted in the establishment of a new army in the strength of fourteen legions; altogether over 70,000 men, the largest armed body Rome had ever sent into the field. The command over the forces of the republic was entrusted to the patrician senator Quintus Fabius Maximus Verrucosus, who was in addition appointed to the office of "dictator", which gave him not only unlimited "imperium", the power of command, for six months, but also indemnified him, a priori, from any legal consequences of his actions or omissions.

Fabius advanced cautiously, being informed by his spies of his opponent's every move, up to a point where his vanguard could barely see the Punic outposts yet he was sure that their advancement would be reported to Hannibal. At this point he ordered the legions to stop for the day and erect the standard fortified overnight camp, almost in sight of the enemy. Fabius's lieutenants, aware that they outnumbered the opposition, recommended various plans of attack for the coming day, which were all denied.

Since it had been the habit of Roman armies for centuries to attack the enemy once contact was established, and Hannibal was aware of this fact, Fabius's unorthodox behaviour baffled the Punic captain. He decided to break up his own position and move a few miles away, there to reorganize his army for the battle he expected for the next day. But the battle never materialized: Fabius shadowed Hannibal's every move, but anytime the Punic army proceeded to leave camp

and close ranks in anticipation of battle, the Roman legions moved a few miles away and built another goddamn camp. It was very frustrating. The same thing happened the next day, and the day after. For weeks and months the game proceeded, and Fabius acquired the not so glorious nickname of "Cunctator", the "Hesitater". While his "Fabian" tactics, as they are still called today, did not earn him a victory, he did not suffer a loss, either.

Consequently, nothing much happened in the next six months, and when his imperium ran out, Fabius handed the control of the legions to his successors, the consuls of the year 216 BC. These men and their lieutenants, aware of the fact that they commanded the finest army Rome had ever fielded and that they vastly outnumbered the invaders, were only too cognizant of the glory that the successful delivery of the country from Punic evil would entail. Subsequently, they set out to chase Hannibal down and to compel him to battle. Rumour had it that the Punic army was somewhere near the southern Adriatic coast, and the legions began their approach. Hannibal was indeed discovered in Apulia, about fifty miles north of the "spur" of the Italian boot, in the vicinity of a small town called Cannae.

A few days after his spies had informed him about the strength and commanders of the Romans, Hannibal ordered his troops to deploy and the day of confrontation dawned. He arranged his outnumbered force in a slight crescent, but placing his cavalry, a few lightly armed but swift foot-soldiers and the few remaining elephants at the flanks of the arc. When the Roman infantry, perhaps amused over this silly arrangement, formed a wedge and struck right into the heart of Hannibal's position, the Phoenician centre retreated, which further inspired the attackers' confidence. When the full weight of the Roman attack was poised upon the midst of the Punic line, Hannibal ordered his centre to retreat a bit more, which drew the Romans further in. When the legions were thus fixed in the midst of his infantry, he ordered the flanks to proceed forward-inward and trapped the whole Roman army in a double encirclement.

In the subsequent slaughter, tens of thousands of legionaries expired on the field of Cannae and only a very modest fraction of the great army, less than ten thousand souls, made it back to Rome to report. As a result of these losses, Rome could not deploy forces big enough to challenge Hannibal for years to come, simply because there were not enough men of the required age and possessions left. At this time only propertied Roman citizens, who had to pay for their own weapons, armour and supplies, served in the legions. Most of these men were now buried at Cannae.

Thus Rome could not afford to go back to the offensive for more than a decade, and was restricted to employ defensive measures, denying Hannibal reinforcements and supplies from Carthage. This worked to a degree, and for the next thirteen years, 216 to 203 BC, the Punic army meandered around the Italian countryside, without any opportunity to strike a decisive blow at the enemy. Rome's defensive policy bore its first tender fruit when an expeditionary corps was able to reconquer Sicily, the important grain source, and a second detail wiped out Punic towns in Spain. The latter force was commanded by the young Publius Cornelius Scipio.

A scion of the noble Cornelius family, Scipio had joined the military at an early age and soon distinguished himself in battle. At the scandalous age of only twenty-six years,⁴ in 210 BC, he was given command in Spain, which he conquered and turned into a Roman province. He was elected consul in 205 BC, at the age of thirty-one, and developed a plan to circumvent Hannibal by attacking Carthage directly. He invaded Africa successfully via Sicily and was able to beat a small Punic corps in the Second Battle of Tunis, 203 BC. As a consequence of the Roman threat to Carthage, Hannibal was recalled in the same year with the remnants of his force and ordered to prepare for a showdown with the Roman wunderkind.

The subsequent Battle of Zama, about a hundred miles southwest of Carthage, decided the Second Punic War. The Roman prodigy revealed that he had learned from his predecessors' mistakes at Cannae, and used an enveloping manoeuvre of his own design to defeat the enemy. Hannibal had to flee Africa and spent the rest of his life in Grecian exile. Carthage capitulated and was forced to accept a choking peace in which they had to cede Spain and lost all ships, merchantmen as well as men-of-war, to confiscation. Reparations were fixed at 10,000 gold talents, over 200,000 kilograms, or seventy times the amount of the world's annual gold production.

⁴ Military command in the early Roman republic was a prerogative of the consuls, who were mostly in their forties or older and had already collected military and political experience in other public offices.

The protracted Iberian war had also changed the economy, and hence the whole society, of the winner. Scipio's success had added two provinces to the realm, Nearer and Further Spain, which proved particularly valuable for the copious amounts of metals yielded by its mines; copper and silver in particular. The two new provinces were to be governed by praetors, magistrates ranked just below the consuls, of which an additional two had to be elected each year just for this purpose.

The extended war had also necessitated the establishment of a proper arms industry, something Rome had not possessed at a time when every legionary's equipment was custom-made. The new weapons industry largely depended upon slave labour, which for the first time amounted to a majority of the Roman workforce. Slave labour was also the economic foundation of the newly evolving *latifundiae*, huge farms which, in theory, belonged to the Roman people as a whole but were in fact let to patrician families for negligible rents under an absentee ownership system. Although Carthage's days as a competition for Rome were over, its spectre provided a useful bane for fear mongering Roman politicians. A case in point was Cato the Censor, one of the most obnoxious men Rome ever saw, if we believe the historians.

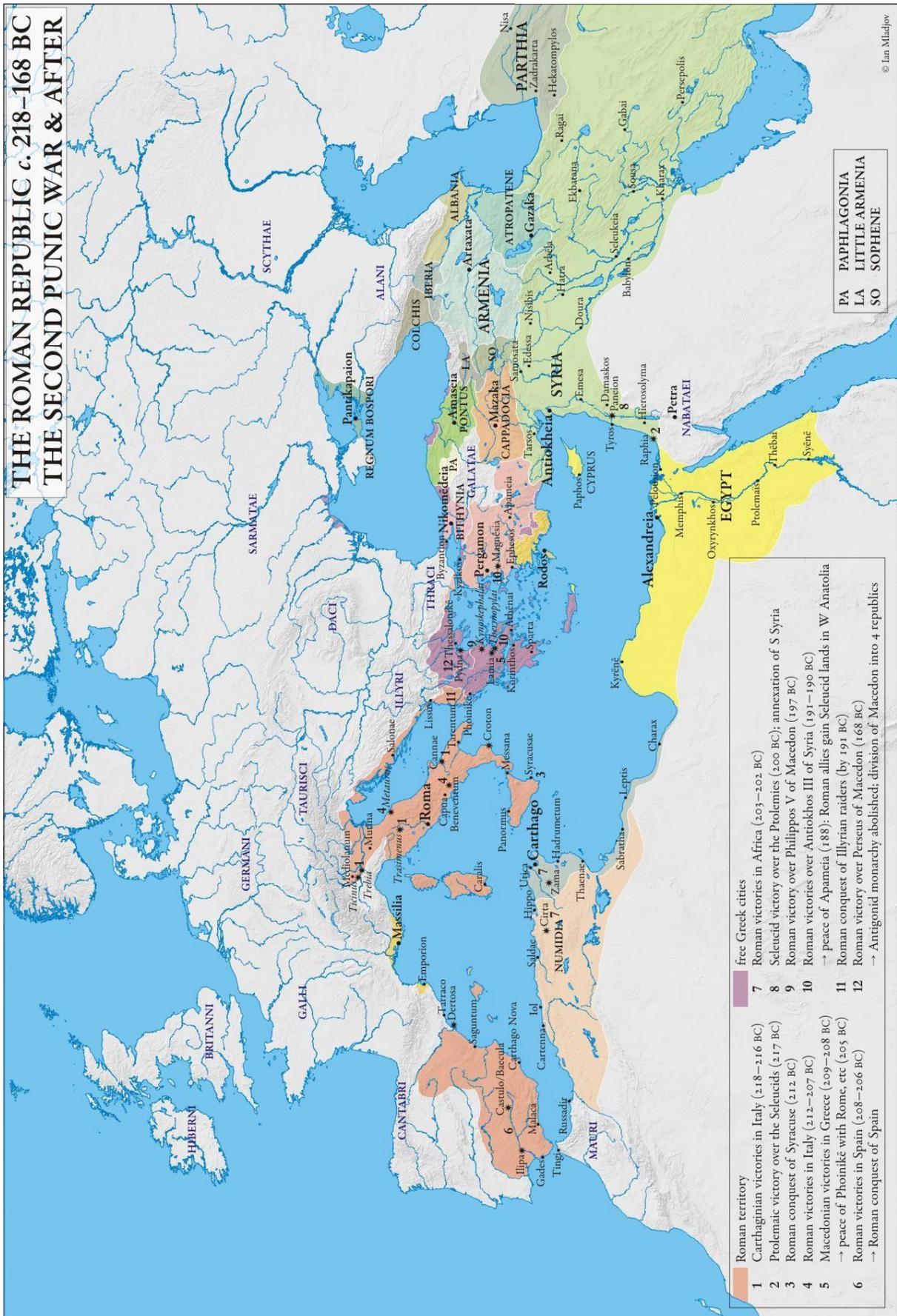
Marcus Porcius Cato [234-149 BC], known as the "Elder Cato" or "Cato the Censor", became a prominent Roman politician against all odds. He had served in the Second Punic War under Scipio, and, by marrying a rich and noble if ugly daughter of good family, qualified for the Senate despite his inferior pedigree. During his youth and adolescence, he had been dreadfully lampooned by the status- and ancestry-conscious sons of Roman nobles because of his rural origins: his family were farmers at Arpinum, a small town southeast of Rome known for its cheese but not much else.

He made up for these frustrations by dedicating much of his later career as censor to retaliation against his former tormentors. The office of censor invested the holder with the authority to let state contracts for building or tax farming, a duty in which corruption was hard to avoid. But it was the second duty of the censor on which Cato had cast a longing eye: the censor controlled access to and membership in the Senate. There was a means test which required every senatorial candidate to show a minimum fortune of a million sesterces or an equitable area of farmland, and a senator who once fell short of the minimum for any reason could be evicted from the august body - although senators gravitated to fiscal, if not political, solidarity and it rarely occurred that they allowed one of their own to be disqualified. But the censor could also dismiss a senator upon a showing of unacceptable moral conduct, and nobody was truly surprised when Cato declared practically all conduct ethically unbecoming. He hounded the arch-aristocratic Cornelius family relentlessly, and when he was able to ruin Scipio's brother Asiagenus, the hero was said to have died of a broken heart.

Except for his terrorizing the nobility, Cato's main contribution to the political debates was an undying hatred of Carthage, which he promoted by invariably ending his senatorial sermons with the phrase "Ceterum censeo Carthaginem esse delendam" ["In addition, I think that Carthage should be destroyed", ¶]. He trampled on everybody's nerves like an ancient hybrid of Rush Limbaugh and Ralph Nader until the Senate in 147 BC resolved to destroy Carthage.

The subsequent "Third Punic War" was little more than a completely unnecessary slaughter of a defenceless people. Carthage had never recovered from the Second War, and was no threat to anybody save for Cato's hysterics and the jealousy of another member of the Cornelius family, a grandnephew of the hero of Zama, who saw in a third campaign a risk-free opportunity to crown himself with military glory.

His full adult name was Publius Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus Africanus Numantinus, and his name told much of his biography. He was born in 185 BC as a son of Lucius Aemilianus Paullus, a famous general and statesman, and adopted into the Scipio branch of the Cornelius clan. Like his granduncle, he was elected consul while technically being underage, in 147 BC, and was entrusted with the command against Carthage, whose defenceless people he massacred and buildings he razed in 146 BC. For this heroic act he received the additional cognomen of "Africanus", i.e. conqueror of Africa. He was re-elected to the consulship in 134 BC, and convinced the Senate to send him to one more campaign. The adversary, or perhaps the victim, was the Spanish town of Numantia, the last former ally of Carthage. The town had resisted Roman attacks for over fifty years, but after a siege of eight months, Scipio's army breached the walls, and the disgraceful spectacle of Carthage was repeated. Scipio had the males killed without exception and the females sold into slavery, and subsequently received another cognomen, that of Numantinus, destroyer of Numantia.



MAP III: ROME AND CARTHAGE - THE 2ND PUNIC WAR AND ITS AFTERMATH. IN THE 2ND PUNIC WAR, CARTHAGE LOSES MOST OF ITS TERRITORY, AND IS TORN DOWN AFTER THE 3RD. ROME BEGINS ITS EXPANSION TO THE EAST, I.E. GREECE.

Such a man could not avoid making enemies, even in his family. When his brother-in-law, the famous tribune Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus attempted to introduce a land bill in the senate, which would give impoverished veterans a small piece of land to own at the end of their service, Scipio turned out his most bitter opponent. When Gracchus was found dead soon thereafter, Scipio could not dispel suspicion, and when he suddenly died in 129 BC, aged only forty-six, his wife, Tiberius Gracchus's sister, was believed to have poisoned him.

While the political and social structures of the republic had been relatively stable in the centuries between 500 and 130 BC, the following hundred years, until 30 BC, brought great social change amid geographical expansion and, in the end, beheld the replacement of senatorial rule by the principate of Augustus and his successors. Because many institutions, designations and customs of the Roman Republic and early Empire were to exercise influence on political models of the next two thousand years, they shall be briefly reviewed.

In the first two hundred years or so, Rome was a monarchy: the names of seven kings are known, of whom the last, Tarquinius, possibly of Etruscan origin, was deposed in 510 BC and the republic proclaimed.⁵ From then on, Rome was socially divided in two "classes", ninety-one "centuries" and thirty-five "tribes", each of these classifications counting for a different political purpose. The two "classes" were, for one, the common men or "plebs" [short 'e', rhymes with 'pets', adjective 'plebeian', ¶], and, second, the "patricians" [from Latin 'pater', i.e. father, ¶], the nobility. These ancient aristocrats professed to rule the plebs much like a stern but benevolent father rules his children - for their own benefit.

These two classes worked together, or, rather, against each other, in four different legislative and executive congregations: one senate", which comprised only patricians (in the first centuries), and three "assemblies of the people", which had different legislative authorities. Since the origins of all these bodies reached back into the mythical days when Rome had been a monarchy, these bodies had been created without the benefit of written laws: legislative competition was therefore furious, and it took three centuries to iron things out.

Due to its seniority as the oldest political institution, the Senate did not limit itself with technical jurisdictional issues; its members viewed themselves as the natural leaders of the commonwealth due to their former status as the king's advisors. Membership was for life unless a senator was expelled for pauperism, immorality or treason. Technically, the senators were limited to income from agrarian possessions, for they were legally forbidden to entertain plebeian businesses; but they knew everything about silent partnerships and employing straw men.

In ancient times, the Senate had been a purely patrician affair, consisting of one hundred members. Around 500 BC, plebeians gained access, and during the days of the republic the membership swelled to 300, and in imperial times to 600 and eventually 1,000 members. As it may be assumed, it took the plebs decades and sometimes centuries to effect changes in the elitist club. In the early days, the Senate could not pass laws binding all Romans, for its exclusive patrician membership, but this technicality was easily circumvented. A decision of the Senate was called a "consultum", a decree, and was technically a request to one of the assemblies of the people to enact a law in the form suggested by the Senate. Despite vigorous plebeian opposition, the house succeeded in retaining sole jurisdiction in matters of the treasury or fiscus, foreign affairs, including war, and the appointment of provincial governors.

The three assemblies of the people dealt, each in its own distinctive way and composition, with elections and the enactment of lesser laws. The COMITIA CENTURIATA, the Centuriate Assembly, included both plebeians and patricians and was organized in "CENTURIAE", i.e. "centuries" of one hundred men each, classified by wealth. The system of centuries hinted at the congregation's original military character: a centuria of one hundred men was, of course, the basic unit of the legion. In the Comitia Centuriata, ninety-one centuries were represented, and each centuria had one vote.

This small number of votes reflects on the character of Roman voting rights, which were timocratic in nature, not democratic: based on wealth or status, not "one man -one vote". Each centuria had one vote, which was decided by the relative majority of votes within it; the swindle in favour of the nobility lay in the fact that a centuria of patricians was indeed composed of one hundred men, while each centuria of the plebs was comprised of many thousand men. Since

⁵ The following description of the political system of the Republic is much indebted to Colleen McCullough.

forty-six votes were needed for an absolute majority of 46 to 45, the 4,600 wealthiest men, all nobles, organized in 46 centuries, were automatically assured of a majority.

The business of the Centuriate Assembly was to elect consuls and praetors annually, and two censors every five years. In theory, the assembly could also pass laws, which happened seldom, and was the proper court to charge and try PERDUELLIO, high treason. Such trials, however, became increasingly rare when the plebs realized that it was impossible to convict a nobleman against the votes of his fellow aristocrats.

The COMITIA POPULI TRIBUTA, the Tribal Assembly or Assembly of the People, was also composed of both plebs and patricians but rigged in a different way. The "tribes" were based upon the ancient rural origins of Rome and centred on the old families: a "tribe" was the equivalent of a former territory, a village, perhaps, that had belonged to one of the old clans. Thirty-one of the total thirty-five tribes were made up from people whose ancestry related back to these ancient rural communities, and it made no difference if only three or five living members were left: they had one vote. The multitudes of the plebs, however, were assigned to two of the four "city" tribes, Esquilina and Subura, and these tens of thousands of men thus had only two votes. The business of the Tribal Assembly was to elect lower magistrates, the curule aedile, the quaestors and the military tribunes, the apprentices for future generalships. It could pass laws and hear criminal and civil trials.

The principal political instrument of the plebs was the COMITIA PLEBIS TRIBUTA or CONCILIUM PLEBIS, the Assembly or Council of the People. It was the youngest of the legislative bodies, excluded patricians, and had earned its power by sheer and determined opposition against Senate and nobility. It could only be convoked by the peoples' own elected officers, the TRIBUNI PLEBIS, Tribunes of the People, and could pass any law [which were called "plebiscites", an appellation still in use today, ¶]. The three assemblies, as mentioned, but not the Senate, elected public officials, some of which wielded "imperium" while others did not.

The word "imperium" is best translated as the "power of command" and is obviously the root for the words "emperor" or "empire". It prescribed the degree of legal authority vested in the office, the execution of power that bound every Roman citizen, plebe and patrician alike. It was conferred by legal act of the respective comitia and lasted for one year. Every holder of "imperium" was preceded in public by lictors, bodyguards, who shouldered fasces. Fasces were bundles of birch rods tied together crisscross wise with red leather thongs; an ancient design, probably of Etruscan origin. The number of lictors preceding the magistrate depended on the office: an aedile was preceded by two lictors, a praetor, propraetor or master of the horse by six, a consul by twelve, and a dictator by twenty-four.

Outside of Rome, axes were inserted in the birch bundles to indicate that the magistrate wielded power over life and death. Only a dictator was allowed to show axes inserted in his fasces within the pomerium,⁶ a reminder of his unconditional power that could not be gainsaid. The words *fascism* and *fascist* derive, of course, from fasces; after his takeover of Italy, Benito Mussolini reintroduced them as symbols of his power. The number of legislative bodies and magistrates makes the Roman government a complicated affair; the graphic on p. 65 may be of assistance. In order of ascending authority, the following were Roman public offices:

The TRIBUNES OF THE SOLDIERS were two dozen aspiring men, more often than not from noble families, between the ages of twenty-five and twenty-nine, which were elected by the Tribal Assembly and were basically cadets, officer trainees: six of them were allotted to each of the four Roman legions that, together with four legions of allies, made up the standing army in the days of the republic. They should not be confused with the centurions, which were essentially Roman NCO's, company commanders. These tribunes could have authority in the field, if the general so decided, but carried no imperium.

⁶ The "pomerium" were the sacred borders of the city, which ran essentially around the Capitol, Palatine and Aventine hills. To cross these borders from the outside meant to lose any imperium one possessed. This was essentially a precaution against military putsches, for the legions always assembled outside of the town and a general leading them in with designs on usurpation automatically lost his power of command. Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon, which was the border from his province Gallia Cisalpina to Italia proper was the crossing of a similar legal border and thus amounted to a declaration of civil war against the Roman Republic.

The lowest rank of civil public servant was the *QUAESTOR*. They were also elected by the Tribal Assembly, usually six per year. This office was also considered the lowest rung of the "*cursus honorum*", the acknowledged stations in the career of a full-time Roman politician. The quaestor's duties were of financial nature: he was either seconded to a praetor or propraetor who governed a province, detailed to duty in the treasury, or consigned to one of the great ports. They did not carry imperium.

The next rank in the system was the *AEDILE*, of which two varieties existed: two *PLEBEIAN AEDILES*, elected by the Assembly of the Plebs and hence not possessing imperium, and two *CURULE AEDILES*, which were elected by the Tribal Assembly and did wield imperium. Originally, the curule aediles had to be of patrician descent but this proviso was abandoned in the fourth century BC. The aediles governed the town itself: supervising construction and enforcing (or not) the building code, securing the supply of clean water flowing from the great aqueducts, and keeping roads, markets and other facilities in order.

The most important political part of the office was the aediles' responsibility to arrange the *ludi*, the games, Rome's favourite pastime. They provided the principal opportunity for a young politician to build a reputation; the more splendid the games, the higher the aedile's prestige in the peoples' esteem and his chances to be elected to more prestigious offices later.

There was a drawback: the state did not allocate funds for the games. The aediles were counted on to pay the expenses, which ran into the millions of sesterces, from their own purses. Not surprisingly, some aediles ruined their family fortunes in pursuit of sensational games and ended in exile, fugitives from their creditors. In most cases, however, the loan sharks were willing to wait until their candidate reached the rank of *PRAETOR* and was dispatched to govern a province. At such time, the recovery of the mostly modest principal plus interest, compounded, up to fifty per cent annually, took place, on the backs of the provincials. Exploitation was the normal and accepted course of business in the governance of a province: the governor could, for example, levy his own taxes, sell the Roman citizenship, forgive tax debts or issue exceptions, for a consideration, or create criminal indictments and then peddle their dismissal; treason was the favourite charge. He could also take advantage of the tax-farming system Rome implemented upon the provinces: contracts were let to businesses that paid the whole amount of taxes of, say, a town, an estate, or a whole province, in advance to the treasury and obtained, as compensation, the right to collect the imperial taxes on their own cognizance from the unhappy people. The tax rates they assigned were, alas, mysteriously high; higher than the amounts legally prescribed on some scroll in the treasury in Rome. The company, which belonged to the governor or his creditors, kept the difference. It was an excellent business, and for many politicians the only way to get rid of the debts they had incurred during their quaestorship.

The second-highest rank in the hierarchy of Roman magistrates was the *Praetor*. Initially entrusted with legal duties, the administration of justice and oversight of the courts, the number and duties of praetors varied in later years, when the government of provinces was added to their curriculum. Of the two praetors elected in ancient times, one, the *Praetor Urbanus*, as the word indicates, was responsible for lawsuits between Roman citizens or parties within the pomerium, while the second one, the *Praetor Peregrinus*, was deputized to litigate cases involving foreign entities. If both consuls were absent, chiefly during times of war, the praetor urbanus assumed the command over town and people. In the later days of the Republic, when more and more provinces were added to the Roman fold, additional praetors were elected as regents. They ruled either during their standard one-year term of office or in a subsequent year, in the case of which they were officiating as *Propraetor* ["in the stead of a praetor", ¶]. In the last century of the Republic, between six and eight praetors were elected annually. They did, of course, possess imperium.

The most senior regular officer owning imperium was the *Consul*, the executive head, or heads, of the Roman administration. It was one of Rome's peculiarities to elect two persons to fill the highest office, so as to publicly and expressively deny any resemblance to a monarchy. The position of consul was also the zenith of the "*cursus honorum*", but a popular or exemplary meritorious consul could be re-elected to a second term, provided that ten years lay between the first and second consulship.

As mentioned with Fabius Maximus, the office of dictator was reserved for emergencies, most of which were of military nature. The office absolved the holder from any legal consequence of his actions or omissions, but was limited to six months. A dictator was appointed by the Senate, more often than not on the recommendation of the PRINCEPS SENATUS, the unofficial president of the Senate, or the consuls. Technically, the dictator's title was MAGISTER POPULI, master of the people; in this context "people" referred to the infantry he would presumably lead into the field. The first decision he had to undertake on the assumption of office was the appointment of a lieutenant called the MAGISTER EQUITUM or MASTER OF THE HORSE, that is, the cavalry. Dictators were appointed very infrequently.

The most senior of all Roman magistrates were the CENSORS, although they did not possess imperium. A candidate for censor must have absolved the complete "cursus honorum", hence must have been a consul, and preferably one of the better ones. A team of two censors was elected by the Centuriate Assembly for a term of five years, which they, however, were at liberty not to complete. In general, they busied themselves with their tasks for a year or perhaps two, and then semi-retired. In addition to the duties mentioned above in the context of the elder Cato, they also administered the general economic classification which determined every citizen's place in the proper centuria. On the outside of Rome, their duty was to perform a full census of all Roman citizens every five years, as mentioned in Luke 2:1.

The complete antithesis to all the offices and governmental functions enumerated above were the TRIBUNI PLEBIS, or TRIBUNI POPULI, the tribunes of the plebs respectively the people (both terms were used). Their origin lies in the town's early history, when political decision-making was more of a physical than verbal matter.

They were ten, elected annually by the Assembly of the People, and their task was the defence of the rights, the property and the lives of the common man against the machinations of the patricians, who in the days of yore had enjoyed a political monopoly. Since the tribunes of the plebs were elected by the plebs alone, they had no preconceived place within the fabric of Roman governance and thus carried no imperium. Their safety and authority lay in the oath the assembly took after election, to defend the inviolability of their representatives with their own lives.

The tribunal power was chiefly negative; although they could bring in and pass laws in the assembly of the people, the main authority lay in their what since has been called the "veto power" against the actions of any magistrate, officer or even fellow tribune; he could stop not only the passing of laws but even their discussion in the Senate or the assemblies with the magic word "intercessio" ["I step in", ¶].

Such an ability to frustrate political action was not overlooked by the movers and shakers of the last century BC: it became common practice for Marius, Sulla, Pompey and Caesar to have at least one or two tame tribunes whose election they had financed on the payroll, to counteract any designs their enemies came up with.

Many parts of the Roman administrative machine became, often in only slightly different form, stock features of European political organization in the next two thousand years. The word "senator" comes to mind, as does "dictator" as a generic term for autocrats who, alas, only very seldom retire after six months. Consuls, albeit with different functions, work in every nation, and the word "patrician" still denotes a revered elder statesman. But it was the great concept of the "Imperium" that exerted the loftiest influence on the political designs of the next two thousand years: hegemony over the European continent became the treacherous ideal of many a ruler's political daydreams. Adolf Hitler was a case in point.

Another application of the Roman sense of organization could be observed in the realm of the military. A large part of Alexander's temporary military superiority had resulted from his innovative use and the tactical flexibility of the Macedonian "phalanx", an originally Greek form of infantry deployment. The fighters of a phalanx formed a compact body with overlapping shields, from which long spears protruded. The regulative genius of the Romans invented a similar formation but went a step further; they created a unit, the legion, which included all the men, instruments, and supplies to fight a war on its own, and became the predecessor of the modern "division".

A legion was composed, as far as active soldiers were concerned, of ten "cohorts", each cohort consisting of six "centuries", which numbered, confusingly, eighty men, not a hundred. One cohort thus accounted for 480 men (6 x 80), and a legion of ten cohorts hence totalled 4,800 combatants. It employed, however, also non-combatants: artisans, smiths,

engineers, cooks, medics and the like in a strength of about 1,200 heads as well as an artillery unit but not, surprisingly, any cavalry. Rome never deployed as much cavalry as other nations did, mindful of the supply problem; Caesar, for example, in his conquest of Gallia, used German cavalry, not Roman riders. If there was a cavalry unit attached to a legion, it was fielded by allies and had its own tactical command

The decisive geostrategic factors which counted for much of Rome's military superiority, however, were the roads, which had been built with military necessities in mind. They ran as straight as possible over bridges, passes and tunnels. Roman infantry was used to a daily march of about sixteen miles or twenty-five kilometres, but could make forty kilometres a day in a pinch. The legions hence enjoyed the advantage of the "inner lines" more often than not; they could move troops and thus project force in a province or at a border faster than the enemy could.

Last not least, education mattered. While Rome was never given to invent much philosophy and scholarship, it appropriated Greek culture and spread it over the western parts of the known world, which had never experienced the Grecification of the East that Alexander's empire had provided. The sons of the better Roman families were schooled by Greek pedagogues who delivered a two-step education: the first part was called the *trivium* ["the three ways", ¶], and taught the foundations of what Rome considered civilized human intercourse: grammar, rhetoric and logic, and the successful candidate would be awarded the character of a *bacchalaureatus*, a bachelor's degree. The trivium exists until today in the sense that basic knowledge is held to be "trivial"; it should be known to everybody who claims an education.

The second part of the curriculum was composed of the *quadrivium* ["the four ways", ¶] and consisted of the study and mastery of arithmetic, music, geometry and astronomy and astrology, which were a single field of study then. Upon completion of the studies, the pupil would be awarded a degree of *magister artium*, master of the arts. The teachings of Plato, Socrates and Aristotle were studied in Rome, Athens and Alexandria for centuries, until the Eastern Roman Emperor Justinian I decreed the closing of all academies in AD 529. The advent of a new religion, Christianity, caused the replacement of education with dogma, and Edward Gibbon angrily noted that "in the revolution of ten centuries [AD 500 — 1500, ¶], not a single discovery was made to exalt the dignity or promote the happiness of mankind. Not a single idea has been added to the speculative systems of antiquity, and a succession of patient disciples became in their turn the dogmatic teachers of the next servile generation." (2)

Indeed, not only intellectual stimulation decreased with the eventual triumph of Christian doctrine, so did progress in general. With the exception of Alexandria, Rome was unsurpassed in her infrastructure and remained for centuries the best organized community on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Her houses were built, two thousand years ago, with concrete as their principal material, and apartment blocks called "insulae", islands, reached heights of up to a hundred feet. Aqueducts carried fresh water from the mountains into the city, which had an underground sewer system and offered dozens of communal bathhouses and public latrines on major street corners.

The markets of Rome offered goods as varied as spices from Taprobane, today's Sri Lanka, rugs from Persia, amber from Germania or sheep wool from Britannia. Roman banks used cheques and money transfers, sold communal obligations, and leased or financed goods on credit very much like today. It was said that Julius Caesar's good friend Marcus Licinius Crassus, immortalized in the English language as the godfather of the word "crass", employed fifty scribes alone to tally his possessions. In many respects, the achievements of Imperial Roman civilization would not be surpassed until the second half of the nineteenth century.

As briefly mentioned above, civil strife began to plague Rome from 130 BC on, concentrating on the relations between rich and poor. The trouble had begun with the Gracchi brothers, relatives of the Cornelius clan. Their ancestry was as patriotic and famous as it could be: their mother Cornelia was the daughter of Scipio Africanus, the hero of Zama, and Aemilia Paulla, sister of the conqueror of Greece; their father was Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus, consul in 177 and 163 BC and censor in 169 BC. Their sons, however, displayed shockingly plebeian tendencies. The elder, Tiberius, stood for and was elected a tribune of the plebs in 133 BC; he brought in a law to change the way Rome handled the *ager publicus*, the lands taken from enemies after defeat, which were legally the property of all Roman citizens. In contravention of the law, affluent senators had established a hold on these areas, which they rented for little money from the censor and added to their latifundiae, the great farms that operated on slave labour. Tiberius Gracchus brought a law in the Comitia Plebis

that would parcel out these lands to veterans or even the poor. The aristocrats were convinced that he had gone mad, communist, or both, and when he tried, against the custom, to run for a second term of tribuneship, a gang of senators behaving badly clubbed him to death on the steps of the senate house.

His brother Gaius, ten years younger, successfully ran for the tribuneship ten years later, in 123 BC. He was not only willing to give his brother's land law another try; he had his mind set on a comprehensive reform of the Roman commonwealth. His proposals envisioned free grain for the poor, a reform of military service, public works, a new judicial system, Roman citizenship for the allies and tax reform. It was a challenging program, and the patricians, who felt their power threatened, pulled out all the stops they had, legal or illegal, to ward off the reforms. Gaius, like his brother, had to run for the tribuneship again, in 122 BC, but unlike Tiberius, he did get re-elected and continued the reform package. The senators had figured him out by then, and in his third campaign defeated him by handing out unprecedented bribes. As soon as they began to dismantle his laws, Gracchus tried to putsch, was defeated, and committed suicide. All his reforms were then recalled.

Yet it proved impossible to push the toothpaste back in the tube. Twenty years later, Lucius Appuleius Saturninus, another three-time tribune elected in 103, 100 and 99 BC, reintroduced Gracchian ideas to the legislative debate, and associated himself early with Gaius Marius over the question of securing land for Marius's veteran legionaries. At the end of 100 BC, insufficient grain harvests in Sicily and Africa caused widespread famine around the Mediterranean coasts and public uproar in Rome. Saturninus used the riotous assemblies to run for tribune yet again and was elected. He swiftly passed a grain law in the *COMITIA PLEBIS*, which entitled the plebeians to receive free grain from the state.

The problem with the law was that absolutely no grain was to be had, free or not free, and the treasury refused to pay for no grain. Saturninus blamed the situation, as one would expect, on a senatorial conspiracy; the Senate struck back and accused him of treason. Saturninus' demise was similar to the death of Tiberius Gracchus, delivered by another gang of young patricians led by one Lucius Cornelius Sulla: they lured Saturninus and his sycophants into the senate house, locked them in, climbed on top of it and killed their opponents with a rain of tiles from the roof. This stopped the land law for a while.

Yet the issue refused to die, and because war was to occur too frequently in the next decades, the problem of rewarding the legions only gained in importance. Soon it centred on the person of Gaius Marius.

Gaius Marius [157-68 BC] was a hayseed from Arpinum, which we have encountered above as the town of good cheese and birthplace of the Elder Cato. His status as *homo novo*, a "new man", in ancestry-worshipping Rome initially relegated him, despite his wealth, to a place in the legions, where he had a career solid enough to carry him to one year's service as a praetor. His further ambitions were, however, checked by his most undignified pedigree until he, most probably in return for a financial consideration, was allowed to marry a patrician Julia of the Caesares branch. The Julii Caesares were one of the oldest families in town: they traced their ancestry back to the kings of Alba Longa, a town even older than Rome, ten miles to the south. They had that streak of stubborn dignity that does not bid well for financial success: relying on the income of their small agricultural possessions, they could not compete in the bribing race for political offices. The patriarch of the family with the beautiful blond hair⁷ was thus assured of a seat in the Senate, but the family had not produced a consul since the fourth century BC; offices were simply too expensive.

That changed when Marius, rich from the spoils of many wars, joined the family by marrying a Julia; it was the same whose brother Gaius fathered the famous Gaius Julius Caesar. She was Caesar's great-aunt, and Marius the young man's great-uncle.

During his childhood and adolescence Julius Caesar had another powerful relative: none other than the same Lucius Cornelius Sulla who had freed the aristocracy of Saturninus' socialist designs. A scion of the Cornelius clan, which was as old and famous as the Julii Caesares, Sulla had no problem with his status: his problem was money, too. His branch was hopelessly impoverished, and Plutarch relates that until his thirtieth year he lived as a gigolo for wealthy Roman

⁷The cognomen "Caesar" probably meant "fair-haired".

widows. It was said that he killed one or two of his lovers to inherit their fortunes; at any rate, his financial condition suddenly but mysteriously improved. He took a post as legate in the military, and married another Julia. We do not know exactly in which relation she stood to Marius's wife, perhaps she was a niece or even a sister.⁸ Sulla learned the art of war under Marius, who was then regarded as the greatest Roman general since Scipio Africanus.

Another member in the *dramatis personae* of the next decades was a good friend of Caesar, the aforementioned Marcus Licinius Crassus. He was known as the richest man in Rome, but also as her most cruel military commander: when he was sent in 71 BC to end the slave revolt of Spartacus, he crucified the slaves that had not died in battle, one every two hundred yards on the street from Sicily to Rome. At another occasion, he had a mutinous legion "decimated" by executing every tenth man. He was not exactly known as a temperate man.

Yet neither was his great opponent Gnaeus Pompeius, known as "Pompey", who was as much a hayseed as Marius but from the north, the Po valley. These people were of Celtic origin, which the Romans called "Gauls", not even Italians. The Po valley was called "Gallia Cisalpina" ["Gaul on this side of the Alps", ¶] and hence Pompey held cards even worse than Marius in the hayseed competition.

Luckily, Pompey's father had become rich in trade and, at the height of the civil war in 88 BC, had been able to come to the aid of Sulla, who was in a momentary pinch for troops. Two legions were drafted and supplied from the multitudes of the older Pompey's dependents, retainers, clients, sharecroppers and domestics and were entrusted to the command of seventeen-year-old Gnaeus Pompeius junior. The stripling killed whomever Sulla pointed at and quickly became known, from the want of a beard on his youthful face, as the "baby-faced killer". A few years later, to remind everybody of his military achievements, the young man, whose family, due to their Celtic origin, possessed no clearly established cognomen, afforded himself the humble appellation of "Magnus", that is, "the Great", as in Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus. His father had been called "Strabo", for his crossed eyes, but the unmerciful town gossip swiftly reacted to the youth's pretensions and began to call him "great baby-faced killer".

In supporting roles, the drama that saw civil war and the transition from the Republic to the Principate and subsequently the Empire featured Marcus Porcius Cato the Younger, great-grandson of Cato the Censor, being a plague upon Rome's nerves in the best family tradition, Marc Anthony, Caesar's nephew, and Gaius Octavius, Caesar's grandnephew, later adopted by the great man and known to history as "Augustus". Other characters in the farce and the tragedy were, naturally, Brutus and Cassius, the heads of the assassination conspiracy, Marcus Tullius Cicero, famous orator and obnoxious fame-seeker, and, of course, Cleopatra, who perhaps looked just like Liz Taylor and was discreetly delivered to her lovers in a rug.

All these men, and the lady, were contemporaries, friends or enemies of Gaius Julius Caesar, whose life and times remain the most popular subject in Roman history. Of interest in this account is the geopolitical impact of the period between the beginning of Pompey's conquests in 68 BC and the end of Roman expansion after the death of Emperor Trajan in AD 117, during which the empire reached its greatest expanse. Growth, however, necessitated the employment of a successively growing number of legions for conquests and subsequent defence of the new frontiers. The recruitment of a sufficient number of men was made possible by the military reforms introduced by Gaius Marius, and from the third century AD on by the admission of non-Romans, chiefly Germans, into the legions.

In the fall of 105 BC, a truly gigantic crowd of migrating German tribes arrived on Roman soil in southern France after they had wandered for ten years through the greater part of the continent. The multitudes were composed of the two large tribes of the Cimbri and Teutones and two smaller clans called the Tigurini and Ambrones. Forming a centipede perhaps a quarter million strong, they marched down the valley of the Rhone southward, until they touched Roman ground near Lugudunum, today's Lyon. News of their presence was hastily delivered to Rome.

The sheer size of the throng persuaded the Senate to employ more than the usual precautions. The standing army of four Roman and four allied legions under the command of the plebeian consul Gnaeus Mallius Maximus was ordered to

⁸ Sulla's Julia may have been a sister of Marius's wife, which would mean that Sulla was a great-uncle to Caesar as well.

find and shadow the enemy but not to risk battle until a second newly established corps under the patrician proconsul Quintus Servilius Caepio was able to meet and reinforce them. In September, the Germans rested near the village of Arausio, on the Rhone River, about fifty miles north of Marseille; perhaps they did not know where to turn. Mallius' legions had arrived in the meantime and built their standard camp about three miles downriver. As ordered, Mallius kept contact with the barbarians who did not move, while awaiting Servilius Caepio.

Who arrived a bit later, in early October, yet declined to comply with the Senate's instructions and submit his corps and his command to Mallius: nobody could expect him to defer to the authority of a plebeian, whether he was a consul or not. He refused to cooperate with Mallius at all, and erected a camp of his own at a distance of about five miles from the enemy. The Germans, incredulously following the Roman manoeuvres, discussed for a few days what the queer strategy could possibly mean; reaching no conclusions, it seemed, they gave up their divinations on the morning of October 6, 105 BC, and attacked and annihilated first Mallius' camp and then Caepio's.

The loss exceeded that of Cannae: almost 80,000 legionaries expired on the fields of Arausio; Servilius Caepio escaped, Gnaeus Mallius did not. Even in a time famous for colourful characters like Julius Caesar and Pompey, Quintus Servilius Caepio was one cool customer. One year before Arausio, during his own consulship, he had set out to clean up the vicinity of Tolosa, today's Toulouse, from the inroads of a few minor Germanic tribes who supposedly had annoyed the Volcae Tectosages, the local Gallic inhabitants who were friends and allies of Rome. But when Caepio and his four legions arrived, he found the alleged Germans nonexistent and his army out of a job. Yet, being in Tolosa anyway, he began to think of the famous riddle of the town that had commanded the imaginations not only of the locals for two centuries.

It was common knowledge that the Volcae Tectosages had been a part of the great Celtic migration that had brought them as far southeast as Macedonia about 170 years ago. From there, a part of the tribe had returned to Aquitania and their old capital, Tolosa, around 275 BC, carrying the accumulated spoils of hundreds of sacked towns and temples. What nobody remembered, however, was where the loot had been stored, although generations of treasure hunters had combed the hills around Tolosa for caves. Caepio, with lots of free time at his hands and after protracted divination, hatched the idea to investigate the lakes in Tolosa's temple district, and struck gold.

The Volcae Tectosages, it turned out, had melted down all the gold into handy bricks, and deposited them on the bottom of their temples' lakes. The silver they had shaped into immense millstones, painted over, and sunk as well; they pulled them up each year at harvest time for milling, and then submerged them again. Having solved the riddle, a happy Servilius Caepio created a plan how to deliver the treasure into his personal property. The silver he was prepared to give up, but not the gold. When it was lifted from the waters, weighed and measured, the loot amounted to 10,000 talents or about 250 tons of silver and 15,000 talents, or 375 tons, of gold. The silver was taken to the nearest big port, Narbo, and shipped to Rome, with Caepio's greetings.

With the ships went a message to the treasury, in which Caepio explained that, due to security concerns, gold could not be transported in such a risky way: ships may sink, he cautioned. When the wagons returned from the Narbo job to Tolosa, they were reloaded with gold and safely escorted, by a cohort of Caepio's own legions, on the slow but secure way to Rome by road. The trek was sent on its way south, but when it passed by the vicinity of the fortress of Carcasso, the cavalcade was attacked by a large band of robbers. The hoodlums attacked and slaughtered the escorts and took off with the wagons; the gold was never seen again.

Initially, the attack was regarded as a local affair, until a few people computed the probability that a group of criminals big and armed well enough to annihilate a whole cohort of experienced legionaries would meet the wagon train exactly at the moment in time when it passed through Carcasso, and did not like the numbers. Servilius Caepio, visibly saddened, blamed the raid on the enemies of Rome.

But when he came out of the massacre at Arausio with nary a hair missing, rumour control began to assert that not only had he lost the whole Roman army for his patrician arrogance but also had organized the raid on his own soldiers and wagons. He had shipped the booty in small portions, the story went, around the Mediterranean Sea: from France to Spain to Africa to Syria to Smyrna, today's Izmir on the Anatolian coast of Turkey, where it was deposited with local bankers who had a reputation of being discreet.

His guilt could never be proven, but the effect of nonstop gossip finally eroded Caepio's position in Rome. It was true that he could not be tried, for lack of evidence, for the heist of more gold than Rome had in her treasury, but he could be and at length was tried for the disaster of Arausio, found guilty, and sentenced to exile. For the place of his exile, Caepio chose Smyrna, to nobody's surprise.

His greed being a prominent attribute of his character, second only to his arrogance, his guilt was considered a foregone conclusion. The theory of his guilt also explained why, a few years after the disappearance of the loot, the fortunes of the Servilii Caepiones skyrocketed from extensive to gigantic: the family literally bought a part of Gallia Cisalpina, lower Italy, complete towns and villages; imported the best iron ore from Noricum, today's Austria, and invested in the foundation of a complete weapon and armour industry; a novelty for Rome which had until then custom-made each legionary's gear. Their wealth soon eclipsed that of Crassus and secured the dominance of the patrician Servilii Caepiones in Rome's financial industry, particularly in usurious lending, up to and including the last heir, Marcus Junius Brutus, of the Ides of March.

The losses of Arausio, however, necessitated changes in the social composition of the legions. As H.L. Havell explains, after the triumph of Arausio, the German tribes scattered and left Roman territory:

The Romans thus gained time to breathe and rally their strength before these dreaded enemies should reunite their forces and make a fresh assault on the barriers of the empire. It was generally felt that there was one man only who could save the State, and that man was Caius Marius.

Before he left Africa [where he was engaged in fighting the Numidian king Jugurtha, ¶] he was elected a second time to the consulship, and on his return to Rome he applied himself to the task of forming a new army. In the enlistment of troops for the war against Jugurtha he had already introduced a change, which led to the most momentous consequences in the later history of the Republic.

Hitherto the legions had been recruited from the five classes of the Servian constitution, while the great Unclassed, or Proletariat, were exempt from military service, except in extraordinary emergencies; for it was thought dangerous to place arms in the hands of those who, having no share in the national wealth, might be supposed to harbour a standing grudge against their more fortunate fellow-citizens. But in the long foreign wars the number of those qualified for service in the legions had steadily diminished, and there was a growing disinclination among the propertied classes to face the perils and hardships of war.

Marius now threw open the military career to the penniless multitude, thus creating a new precedent for his successors, and a new peril to the State. The gulf which separated citizen from soldier henceforth grew wider and wider, and, conversely, the tie between general and soldier was drawn ever closer. Needy and desperate men looked to their commander as a patron, from whose hand they might obtain the means of license and a provision for their old age. When he made this innovation Marius was unconsciously [that may be doubted, ¶] following the lead of Caius Gracchus and taking a long step in the direction of a military despotism. (3)

In the good old time, a part of the attraction of military service was the share of booty that was every legionary's right [the loot of the Third Macedonian War, 171-168 BC, had been so immense that Rome temporarily abandoned the income tax, ¶], but this remunerative avenue less and less interested the richer strata of Roman society. Although Marius's draft of paupers was hotly debated, at length the bill was passed, and from this day the legions were filled with the *capite censi*, the "head count"; the part of the populace that, for its indigence, was not listed with property in the census rolls: the censors simply counted heads.

It is impossible to say whether the Republic had lasted longer if the legions had remained a forum of the propertied citizen who had an active interest in the politics of his commonwealth; but the well-to-do were bled dry due to

Servilius Caepio's awesome stupidity at Arausio⁹ and there was really no alternative. To make it worse, panicked Gauls brought news that more barbarians were on their way south. Who exactly were they?

⁹ In the early Republic, the military was composed solely of the five richest classes of the population. But they were not big enough to provide an army for all requirements, and so, as John Keegan describes it, "by the time of the Punic Wars, the militia obligation, though theoretically still in force, had lapsed, and the legions were manned by a selection process, the *dilectus*, by which the best of the willing citizens who presented themselves were enrolled for a six-year term of service (which might be extended to as many as eighteen years). The adoption of the *dilectus* reflected a worsening of the small farmers' circumstances, and indeed the expanding estates of the rich were extinguishing the basis of smallholding; nevertheless, paid voluntary service seems to have been a popular enough alternative to farming for there to have been no need for laws reducing the term of service until the late second century BC." (4)

THE CHANGING OF THE GUARDS

*And from your city do not
Wholly banish fear,
For what man living, free from fear,
Will still be just?*

Aeschylus "The Eumenides", L. 698

*Deos fortioribus adesse.
The Gods are on the side
of the stronger.*

Tacitus "Histories", Bk. 4, Ch. 17

Peoples do not, and neither do nations, come into being in a year or two, much less on a single day. Neither do languages or cultures. Consequently, one cannot point to a definitive date on which the natives living north and east of the great rivers of the Danube, Elbe and Rhine became "Germans". The word "German" itself was not commonly used until, at around AD 100, the Roman historian Tacitus employed the term in a book and thus became godfather to the eventual nation.

The first peoples relevant to this account, who were populating the western and northern reaches of the continent while Rome was still a city state, were the *Celts*, or *Gauls*. Leaving their indigenous settlements in the western heart of Europe around today's Belgium and central France in the fourth century BC, they migrated for the better part of the next two hundred years over great parts of the continent, the neighbouring isles, and in particular to the south and east: following the Danube river into what are today Austria, Hungary, Serbia and Romania.

Others went north and over the sea. The Celtic colonization of the British Isles and the petty kingdoms they subsequently established are best known to us by the literary influence they extended on the legend, and perhaps the deeds, of King Arthur, the sword Excalibur and the Knights of the Round Table. Written down by Sir Thomas Malory in the fourteenth century and titled "LE MORT D'ARTHUR", the tale has become a part of Western culture. T.E. White's "THE ONCE AND FUTURE KING" is perhaps the most charming rendering of the epos.

The farthest branches of the Celtic migration expanded as far as Spain, northern Italy and Greece; a few fragments made it as far as Anatolia, then called "Asia Minor". There they founded the Kingdom of Galatia, with Ankyra [Latin "Ancyra", today's Ankara, ¶] as its capital, which eventually became a client kingdom of Rome. After frequent clashes between Romans and Celts in the third and second centuries BC, the recurrences of conflict diminished, and a subsequent

improvement of neighbourly relations eventually gave rise to the spread of Roman civilization into Gallia Transalpina, Gaul on the further side of the Alps. Today's Provence became the province of Gallia Narbonensis and its great ports of Massilia and Narbo, today's Marseille and Narbonne, traded goods from near and far. Over a period of roughly a century, a number of adjacent Celtic tribes were introduced to the Roman fold, initially awarded the status of allies, and later that of citizens of Rome.

In 58 BC, Gaius Julius Caesar arrived in "Gallia Comata", Long-haired Gaul, the northern and western unromanized parts of the land, with ten legions, and within seven years transformed all of today's France, Belgium and the Upper Netherlands into Roman provinces. While he did have temporary problems with the particularly wild tribes of the Belgians, he was aware that the real danger for Rome lurked on the eastern, the far bank of the Rhine; a land where a wholly different and far more ferocious congregation of barbarians skulked in the forests, longing for the riches of civilization. Caution was advisable.

Caesar knew as much about these wild tribes as it was possible to know at this time, told by his great-uncle Gaius Marius. Not since the days of Hannibal had the Roman Republic faced an adversary able to threaten her very existence; the "German" danger, however, commanded vigilance and preparedness. This was particularly true after the debacle of Arausio, in which Servilius Caepio had managed to lose the complete army; that the German throng had not proceeded straight into Italy had been pure luck. For reasons unknown, the victorious German tribes had undertaken various detours, first into Spain, then back to northern Gallia, reaching the beaches of Normandy in the summer of 103 BC, but were back, in the fall of the next year, less than fifty miles from Arausio, at Aquae Sextae, today's Aix-en-Provence.

This time, however, a welcoming committee was ready, commanded by the former hayseed Gaius Marius and his newly formed army of "head count" soldiers. That these impoverished fellows would primarily depend on their general for their retirement was a foregone conclusion Marius did not forget for a second and planned his long-term goals accordingly: upon leaving service, his veterans would receive a bit of real estate and a small pension; the veteran might farm a bit, have sons, enjoy the sun, and, if need be, visit Rome and vote for his good friend, the general.

At Aquae Sextae, Marius found out that he was confronted with the Teutones only, who had split from the other tribes and were on their way along the Tyrrhenian coast to Genova. Marius did not hesitate, and led the legions to a complete victory over the disorganized enemy, and the about 30,000 women and children who survived their men and fathers were sold on the slave markets of Massilia, the proceeds going, by tradition, to the general alone.

A year later and with the help, or, as some said, despite the hindrance of his co-consul Quintus Lutatius Catulus Caesar, Marius repeated the success of Aquae Sextiae against the second half of the original German horde, the Cimbri. They were coming down from the slopes of the Alps, which they had crossed by way of the Brenner pass and were on the descent into the riches of the Po valley when they were checked by Marius's legions before they could rest or gather supplies. At Vercellae, near today's Rovigo, the legions won another victory and Marius's purse pocketed the proceeds from the sale of another 20,000 women and children to the slave markets of Rome [101 BC, ¶].

Yet victory did not always smile upon the legions. Less luck than Marius had had fell upon Proconsul Gaius Varius and his three legions a little over a century later (AD 9). He had been dispatched to Germany by Emperor Augustus in return for a few border violations and a couple of plundered villages. The expedition crossed the Rhine and pursued the malefactors into the lands of the Cherusci, around the Weser River, somewhere in the vicinity of today's town of Bielefeld.

The Cherusci were commanded by Arminius, a man who had served in the legions and was familiar with their tactics. He laid an ambush in a particularly dense forest which the legions had to traverse, thereby creating a scenario in which he hoped the biggest advantage of the legions, mutual support in a tight formation, would be nullified. The forest split the legions into small groups: not a single man survived. Varius and his men disappeared without a trace, an occurrence unprecedented in the annals of the legions. Rome concluded that the German danger merited unprecedented attention and the eventual fortification of the border. Jared Diamond comments on the relations of Romans and barbarians as follows:

All but a few historical societies have been geographically close enough to some other societies to have at least some contact with them. Relations with neighbouring societies may be intermittently or chronically hostile. A society may be able to hold off its enemies as long as it is strong, only to succumb when it becomes weakened for any reason, including environmental damage.

The proximate cause of the collapse will then be military conquest, but the ultimate cause - the factor whose change led to the collapse - will have been the factor that caused the weakening. Hence collapses for ecological or other reasons often masquerade as military defeats.

The most familiar debate about such possible masquerading involves the fall of the Western Roman Empire. Rome became increasingly beset by barbarian invasions, with the conventional date for the Empire's fall being taken somewhat arbitrarily as A.D. 476, the year in which the last emperor of the West was deposed.

However, even before the rise of the Roman Empire, there had been "barbarian" tribes who lived in northern Europe or central Asia beyond the borders of "civilized" Mediterranean Europe, and who periodically attacked civilized Europe (as well as civilized China and India). For over a thousand years, Rome successfully held off the barbarians, for instance slaughtering a large invading force of Cimbri and Teutones bent on conquering northern Italy at the Battle of Campi Raudii [i.e. Vercellae, ¶] in 101 B.C.

Eventually, it was the barbarians rather than the Romans who won the battles: what was the fundamental reason for that shift in fortune? Was it because of changes in the barbarians themselves, such that they became more numerous or better organized, acquired better weapons or more horses, or profited from the climate change in the central Asian steppes? In that case, we would say that barbarians really could be identified as the fundamental cause of Rome's fall.

Or was it instead that the same old unchanged barbarians were always waiting on the Roman Empire's frontiers, and that they couldn't prevail until Rome became weakened by some combination of economic, political, environmental, and other problems? In that case we would blame Rome's fall on its own problems, with the barbarians just providing the coup de grace. This question continues to be debated. (1)

The rise of a threat beyond the banks of Rhine and Danube persuaded the Roman historian Tacitus to investigate the barbarians. Soon he found himself in need of a general classification of the tribes who lived north and east of the rivers, in a land that was covered to ninety percent by swamps and forests. He christened them "Germani, after a tribe who lived close to the Rhine near Bonna, today's Bonn, the former capital of West Germany, in his book "De Origine et Situ Germanorum" ["About the Origins and Places of the Germans", ¶], published in AD 98.

Tacitus never saw the land and the people he described: he relied on the word of mouth, perhaps of soldiers who had served there or perhaps on talking to the one or other Latin-speaking German he could find in Rome. Yet by virtue of his one being the only book on the subject, it received attention for centuries to come. He compared, not unfriendly, the simple virtues of the Germani, their sense of family, braveness and honour, but also their impressive vices, a certain predilection for rape, pillage and slaughter, with the decadence prevailing in Imperial Rome.

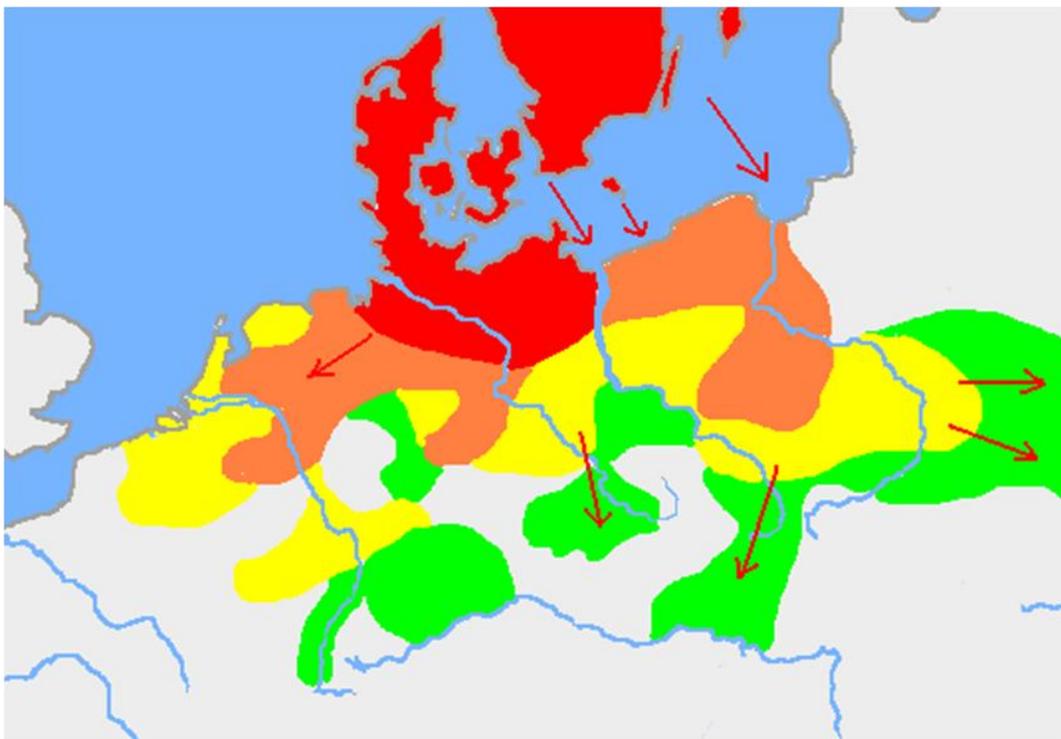
He was the first author to describe the customs of the Germani extensively; earlier contact reports had been restricted to a syllabus of the battle and a count of limbs and bodies. As we have seen, the military results were mixed: Marius won, Varius lost, and the protracted campaigns of Drusus, Tiberius and Germanicus during the principate of Augustus [ca. 12 BC - AD 16, ¶] ended indeterminate.

After a few invasive campaigns, the Romans confined themselves to defensive measures along the Limes, a fortified line of earthworks, moats and watch towers that protected the area between the Danube, Rhine and Moenus [the Main, ¶] rivers. The final offensives into German territory were undertaken by Emperor Marcus Antonius Aurelius [AD 161-180]. The Germani, however, turned out a rather undistinguished tribe; after they crossed the Rhine in the direction of central France they disappeared in the mists of the past; no one knows what happened to the original Germani. Tacitus was intrigued by the strange political customs of the Germani as outlined by Edward Gibbon:



MAP VII: THE CELTS AROUND 250 BC

MAP VIII: GERMANIC MOVEMENTS 750 BC - 1 AD



Some tribes, however, on the coast of the Baltic, acknowledged the authority of kings, though without relinquishing the rights of man, but in the far greater part of Germany, the form of government was a democracy, tempered, indeed, and controlled, not so much by general and positive laws as by the occasional ascendant of birth or valour, of eloquence or superstition.

Civil governments, in their first institution, are voluntary associations for mutual defence. To obtain the desired end, it is absolutely necessary that each individual should conceive himself obligated to submit his private opinions and actions to the judgement of the greater number of his associates. The German tribes were contented with this rude but liberal outline of political society. ...

The assembly of the warriors of the tribe was convened at stated seasons, or on sudden emergencies. The trial of public offenses, the election of magistrates, and the great business of peace and war were determined by its independent voice. ... For the Germans always met in arms, and it was constantly to be dreaded lest an irregular multitude, inflamed with faction and strong liquor, should use those arms to enforce as well as to declare their furious resolves. (2)

Rome faced the problem that these tribes accepted no higher authority, knew no superior body that could arrange a truce or binding peace, nor declare general war, for that matter, and thus Emperor Domitian at around AD 80 came up with the idea to erect a wall between civilization and wilderness along those borders that were not naturally defended by a river. The line of what would become the Limes originated near the Danube's northernmost point at Castra Regina, today's Regensburg in Bavaria, then zigzagged through southwestern Germany until it met the Main river, then zigzagged a bit more, over the heights of the Taunus, and ultimately reached the Rhine at Bonna. A few miles ahead, down the river, another extensive Roman settlement was founded, Colonia Claudia, today's Cologne.

The most decisive change of Roman organization relevant to the fate of the German tribes occurred when, as a reaction to the great migration beginning in the fourth century AD, Emperor Diocletian restructured the administration of the Empire. From now on, the state was not to be ruled by a single man but four.

He had associated three colleagues in the exercise of the supreme power; and as he was convinced that the abilities of a single man were inadequate to the public defence, he considered the joint administration of four princes not as a temporary expedient but as a fundamental law of the constitution.

It was his intention that the two elder princes should be distinguished by the use of the diadem [the Greek equivalent to a crown, ¶] and the title of Augusti, that, as affection or esteem might direct their choice, they should regularly call to their assistance two subordinate colleagues; and that the Caesars, rising in their turn to the first rank, should supply an uninterrupted succession of emperors.

The empire was divided into four parts. The East and Italy were the most honourable, the Danube and the Rhine the most laborious stations. The former claimed the presence of the Augusti; the latter were entrusted to the administration of the Caesars.

The strength of the legions was in the hand of the four partners of sovereignty, and the despair of successfully vanquishing four formidable rivals might intimidate the ambition of an aspiring general. In their civil government, the emperors were supposed to exercise the undivided power of the monarch, and their edicts, inscribed with their joint names, were received in all the provinces as promulgated by their mutual councils and authority.

Notwithstanding these precautions, the political union of the Roman world was gradually dissolved, and a principle of division was introduced which, in the course of a few years, occasioned the perpetual separation of the Eastern and the Western Empires. (3)

MAP IX: GERMANS AT THE ROMAN BORDER AROUND AD 100, ACCORDING TO TACITUS - AS IT IS EASY TO SEE, THE MAIN BORDER RUNS ALONG THE RHINE AND DANUBE RIVERS.



As far as the German tribes were concerned, the most direct result of the reform was that, from now on, Roman policies affecting them were not formulated in distant Rome anymore but in the new residence of the Western Caesar in Augusta Treverorum, today's Trier at the Moselle River, only fifty miles west of the Rhine, or in Constantinople or Antiochia.

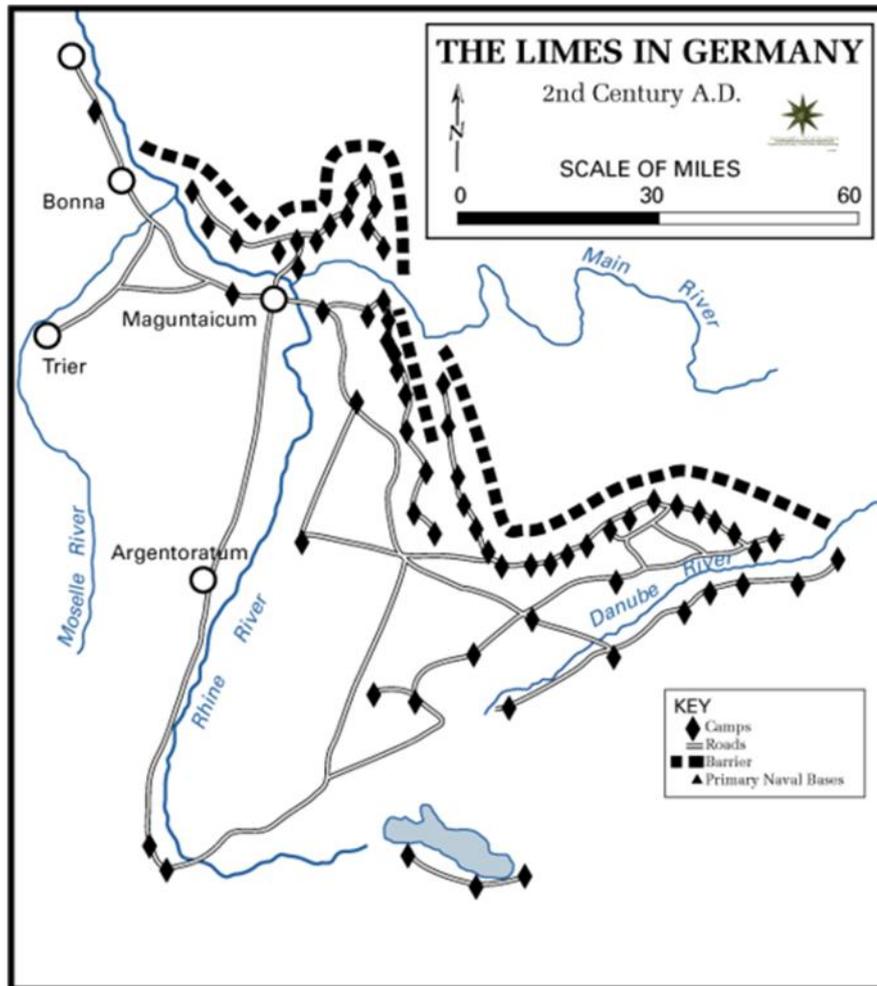
This fostered particularism and diminished the already weakened unity of Roman executive coordination. The preponderance of military power went to the two most threatened borders along the Rhine and Danube and the Asian border in the provinces of Syria and Cappadocia facing the Parthians.

This in turn gave the local commanders power that increased with the number of the legions under their personal control. Many of the usurpers of the Imperial purple in the second to fourth century AD were generals from border provinces who claimed their imperial purple through the strength of their legions.

More than once contemporaneous revolts broke out, most memorable in the years after the death of Diocletian which saw the epic struggle between Maximus and Constantine. After Emperor Caracalla had granted in 212 AD full Roman citizenship to all freeborn men and women within the confines of the empire, the unfortunate habit developed that the emperor's reigns were routinely cut short by assassination and the dearth of constructive and provident policy played a decisive role in the Imperial crisis of the third century, which was plagued by external and internal wars, barbaric invasions, economic collapse and multiple outbreaks of epidemics, in particular of the bubonic plague.

Religious strife - the growth and subsequent takeover of Christianity - was another factor to gnaw on Imperial unity.

MAP X: THE LIMES - A ROMAN BORDER FORTIFICATION



THE LIMES WAS THE PRINCIPAL DETERRENT AGAINST INVADING GERMAN TRIBES IN THESE PARTS OF THE BORDER WHICH WERE NOT COVERED BY THE DANUVIUS (DANUBE) AND RHENUS (RHINE) RIVERS. IT WAS TOO BIG A PROJECT TO EVER OBTAIN A UNIFORM DESIGN OR PERMANENT STRUCTURE, EACH SEGMENT WAS OF DIFFERENT CONSTRUCTION, DEPENDING ON THE LOCAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND THE FINANCIAL RESERVES AVAILABLE AT THE TIME OF BUILDING.

THE EARLIEST CONSTRUCTIONS, BEGUN UNDER EMPEROR DOMITIAN AROUND AD 80 WERE OFTEN ONLY FORTIFIED FENCES, GUARDED BY SIMPLE WOODEN WATCH TOWERS EVERY FEW MILES, WHILE SUBSEQUENT STRUCTURES ERECTED UNDER THE EMPERORS HADRIAN OR CARACALLA OFTEN EMPLOYED PALISADES, INTERSPERSED WITH STONE TOWERS AND WALLS, TRENCHES AND MOATS.

EVERY DOZEN MILES OR SO, THE LEGIONS BUILT AUXILIARY CAMPS IN THE IMMEDIATE VICINITY OF THE ORDER, WHICH HELD A COHORT OR TWO ON GUARD DUTY. MAIN LEGION CAMPS WERE STATIONED AT KEY POINTS, SUCH AS: CASTRA REGINA (TODAY'S REGENSBURG) AT THE NORTHERNMOST POINT OF THE DANUBE RIVER, ARGENTORATE (TODAY'S STRASBOURG), MAGUNTIACUM (TODAY'S MAINZ), AND BONNA (TODAY'S BONN, FORMER CAPITAL OF WEST GERMANY), ALL OF THEM ALONG THE RHINE.

AFTER DIOCLETIAN'S DIVISION OF THE EMPIRE, THE DOMICILE AND CAPITAL OF THE WESTERN CAESAR WAS LOCATED, LESS THAN A HUNDRED MILES FROM THE BORDER, AT AUGUSTA TREVERORUM (TODAY'S TRIER) ON THE MOSELLE RIVER. MOST FAMOUS OF ALL THESE TOWNS ALONG THE BORDER WAS TO BECOME A SETTLEMENT FOUNDED FOR VETERANS, COLONIA CLAUDIA ARA AGRIPPINENSIVM, TODAY'S COLOGNE.

As mentioned above, the overhaul of the Roman chain of command was in part an adjustment to the great migration of German tribes from the north and Huns and other tribes from the central Asian steppes migrating west that began in the late fourth century AD. The frontiers of the Empire were crossed frequently, and sometimes with impunity, and barbarian throngs became a familiar sight from the walls of Roman towns.

The Vandals, for instance, who had originally lived around Moravia and Galicia northeast of the Danube, visited Belgium, France, Spain, Portugal, Mauretania and Morocco before eventually resettling along the coasts of the Roman province of Africa, today's Algeria, Tunisia and Libya. The journey took less than forty years.

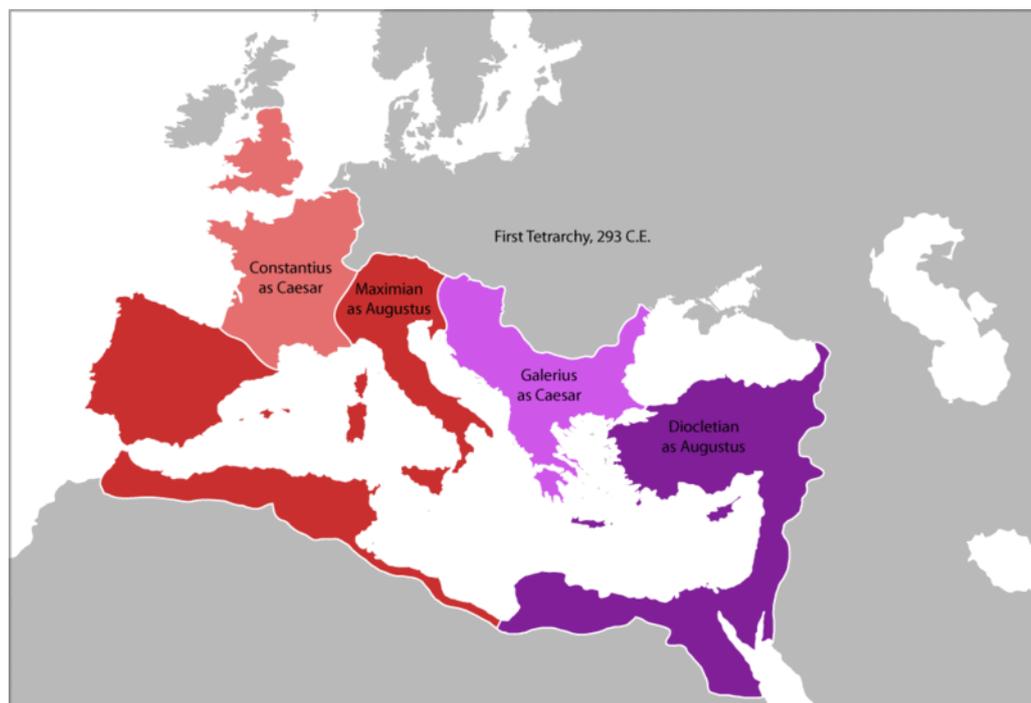
But the constant population pressure a number of German tribes exerted upon the imperial borders was not primarily motivated by the beckoning of the southern climate; they fled a more savage menace approaching from the East. It was the invasion of the Huns, which, as its first effect "precipitated on the provinces of the West the Gothic nation, which advanced in less than forty years from the Danube to the Atlantic, and opened a way, by the success of their arms, to the inroads of so many hostile tribes more savage than themselves." (4)

The most feral threat to the Empire were indeed not the Goths, who were bad enough, but the Huns, a people originating from the plains of Scythia, or, as it was called then, "Tartary". They had left their earlier settlements, which appear to have lain along the lower Volga, around AD 375 and had followed the Danube westward into the heart of Europe. Their presence soon attracted the attention of the Empire and caused alarm in the camps of the legions.

Emperor Diocletian's reform had split the Empire in half, and each half into two quarters, which were basically military partitions, called Prefectures. The Prefecture of Gaul, which included Spain and Britannia, was the domain of the Western Caesar, whose capital was Augusta Treverorum, today's Trier, in Germany. The Prefecture of Italy and Africa was the realm of the Western Augustus, who had moved his capital from Rome to Milan, to be closer to the border.

The Eastern Caesar was in charge of the most endangered part of the empire, the Prefecture of Illyria, the eastern and southern Balkans, then as now a problematic area. Its capital was usually in Sirmium, close to modern Belgrade. The Prefecture of the East was the domain of the Eastern Augustus, who, due to the decay of the Empire's western parts, soon found himself in the role of sole emperor [AD 476, abdication of Romulus Augustulus, last emperor of the West]. The capital remained in Constantinople [= Byzantium], for most of the time, although a few emperors preferred Nicomedia, and Valens moved the court to Antioch, the capital of Syria.

MAP XI: DIVISION OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE UNDER DIOCLETIAN [AD 284-305]



The barbarians' appearance surprised the imperial troops in their ongoing reorganization. Diocletian's adjustments also reflected on the changes the legions had undergone in the last two centuries. As we have observed, the Romans had never been enthusiasts of cavalry: except for one very small regiment of 1,800 equestrians, Rome had left the procurement of cavalry to her *socii*, her allies, or to mercenaries. Caesar, as mentioned, had hired German cavalry for his campaigns in Gaul, and this soon became standard operating procedure; over time talented and disciplined Germans were also allowed to serve in the legions on foot. German tribes that lived close to the imperial borders thus often underwent a prodigious Romanization, first in the military, but soon in civil intercourse as well.

Since no good deed goes unpunished, the imperial reality soon brought out the negative temptations that Diocletian's reforms exerted on the higher ranks of the bureaucracy: many of his successors were to spend a great deal of their time in internecine quarrels or open civil war. The ugly conflict between the sons of Constantine in AD 340 and the subsequent war between Constantius II and the usurper Magnentius convinced many that the Empire fell apart, slowly: into a western, Latinized part, and an eastern part of increasingly Hellenistic orientation.

The weakening of imperial power resulted in the final abandonment of the limes and the borders of Rhine and Danube: in AD 352 the Alemanni traversed the Upper Rhine, and in AD 355 the Saxons and Franks pierced the frontier of the lower Rhine and crossed it unhindered, and in large numbers. After a temporary setback due to a few successes of Emperor Julian between AD 357 and 359, these tribes eventually received imperial permission to settle on Roman territory, which they did mostly in what is today the Netherlands around the town of Nijmegen. The Franks eventually spread all over former Roman Gallia, which soon became known as the terrain of the Franks, or simply "France".

The threat on the imperial frontiers reached an apex when, soon after Julian's death in Persia in AD 364, the brothers Valentinian in the West and Valens in the East inherited the imperial purple. Unfortunately, the brothers were unevenly talented, and Valentinian, aware of his brother's hesitance and timidity, assigned the problematic border prefectures to his own supervision, while entrusting Valens with the more tranquil and far richer provinces of the East. Yet for all of Valentinian's measures, peace remained elusive: the frontier along the Danube was simply too long to be guarded effectively.

Unluckily for Valens, the critical border along the Lower Danube in today's Romania and Bulgaria was exposed to a double threat, first of the Goths and then by the Huns, who followed in their steps. In the last decade of his reign, Emperor Constantine had been able to improve the security of the imperial borders by concluding a peace with the Goths. The treaty allowed them to live along the banks of the Danube, provided that "they respected the public peace; and if a hostile band sometimes presumed to pass the Roman limit, their irregular conduct was candidly ascribed to the ungovernable spirit of the Barbarian youth." (5)

Yet the Goths who had respected Constantine's arms did not fear the young princes Valentinian and Valens. It would not seem that they had any ready plans: perhaps they oscillated between designs on a leveraged buyout of the Empire and dreams of its hostile takeover: it must have occurred to them that a state that combined the civilisation of Rome with Gothic vitality and power might be able to withstand the Huns. An embassy was sent to Constantinople, to assure the emperor that, for the provision of a tiny slice of land here or there, the Gothic people would perpetually protect the emperor and defend his subjects.

The contact with the Empire had by itself changed the perceptions of the former barbarians. Anthony Padgen describes the effect in his introduction to "Peoples and Empires":

In "The Story of the Warrior and the Captive," the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges tells two stories. In the first a Lombard [Langobard, ¶] "barbarian" named Droctulf reaches the gates of the Byzantine city of Ravenna, the last outpost of the crumbling empire of Constantine the Great. He has come there as a conqueror.

Until that moment, which will change his life in ways over which he will have no further control; his only concern has been war and its spoils. His is a world of movement, of horses and tents, transhumance and conflict. He knows nothing of cities, or of the arts or the sciences, or of the measurement of time. His world is

his people. His loyalty, as Borges says, is to his chief, his tribe, "not to the universe." Space is infinite only because he knows nothing of his limits. He fights against men whose languages he does not understand and whose ways of life he cannot comprehend. He senses that these others who live in cities have goods that he desires, and that his people cannot create for themselves.

The day on which he enters the city he becomes another, a stranger to what he was. He becomes aware of desires he has never known before, is seized with wonder at the palaces and squares, the domes and the cupolas of the great city. This was what he had come to plunder. Overwhelmed by it all, he now realizes that he has no choice but to change allegiances and to fight in order to preserve what he had once thought only to destroy.

By doing so, he acquires what he never knew he wanted: a place. There he will always be an outsider, a "barbarian". Because of that he will be compelled, as Borges says, to be little more than a child or a dog. But he and his descendants will have begun the long journey on the road toward the condition that Europeans have for centuries called "civilization." (6)

When Valens declined the Gothic offer, things went haywire. The Goths had not planned for the contingency of a rejection and, inflamed over the emperor's ingratitude, progressed more hostile than they had, perhaps, prepared for. The resulting clash in AD 369, however, showed that sheer bodily strength without proper organization was not yet able to overcome the legions. The Goths were defeated and had to accept a treaty that made them subjects instead of the guardians of the emperor, while Valens gloated in the receipt of Gothic hostages and returned triumphantly to the capital, unaware that behind the Goths an enemy far worse closed in.

The Goths held still for about half a dozen years, until unrelenting pressure from the northeast caught them in a vise between the immovable Romans and the unstoppable Huns. Valens received the reports of the Huns' progress at Antiochia, his new residence. He was informed that the Goths had crossed the border in flight, and now beseeched the emperor to grant them permission to settle in Roman Thrace, today's Bulgaria. They repeated their solemn promise that, if the small favour were granted, they would submit themselves to the defence of the Empire.

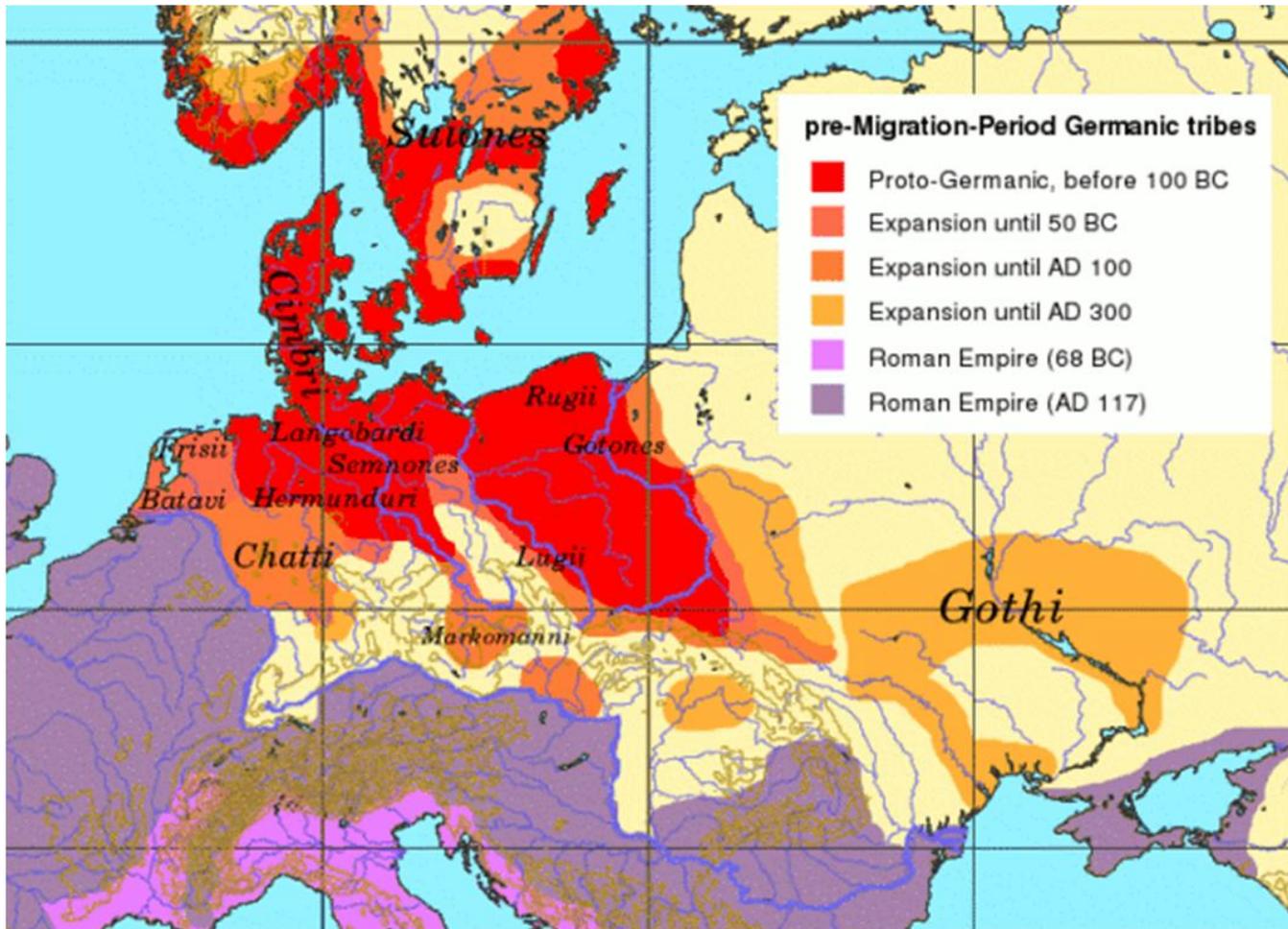
While "the prayers of the Goths were granted, and their service was accepted by the Imperial court" (7), that by itself did not serve to dispel the Huns, who were rapidly approaching. By virtue of sheer numbers and savageness, their cavalry had not only inflicted a complete defeat upon the Goths, who had, until then, acknowledged no nation as their equal in war, but had destroyed the meadows and pastures of all tribes who had the misfortune to be in their way from the Volga to the Danube. Practically every tribe that lived along this trek was dislodged, and the number of migrants experienced an ample augmentation.

The defeat of the Goths was of such epic proportions that the tribe split in two: the Visigoths, who settled, with the Emperor's permission and subsidies from his treasury in Roman Thrace, and the Ostrogoths, who continued to meander westward, eventually crossed the Danube as well and settled in the plains of Pannonia, today's Hungary and Serbia.

The honeymoon between Valens and his new Gothic subjects was over quick and the emperor received a stream of embassies from Thrace who complained about various crimes the Gothic cohabitants were allegedly committing. The burghers uttered their complaints freely in public places, and Valens was "urged by the licentious clamours of the Hippodrome to march against the Barbarians whom he had invited into his dominions; and the citizens, who are always brave at a distance from real danger, declared with confidence that if they were supplied with arms, they alone would undertake to deliver the province from the ravages of an insulting foe." (8)

It is in general a thankless business to sort out the liabilities for a war, but it appears that no particular offenses could be blamed upon the barbarians. The public opinion of Antiochia, however, was informed by reliable rumours that the Goths feasted on their neighbours' babes and cavorted with the devil.

MAP XII: EXPANSION OF THE GERMANIC PEOPLE UNTIL AD 300 IT HAPPENS IN MOSTLY SOUTH-EASTERN DIRECTION, THE RHINE AND DANUBE RIVERS ARE NOT YET CROSSED IN STRENGTH.



There was something to be said to the latter charge - at least in the eyes of the Empire's orthodox believers. As it was the habit of most Christianized Germanic tribes of the age, the Goths followed the teachings of Bishop Arius of Alexandria [ca. AD 250 - 336, ¶], and were consequently guilty of the heresy of Arianism and damned to spend eternity in hell.

The theory of Arius concerned the most delicate attributes of the Holy Trinity. Since the exact metaphysical properties of the Divine matter and personage are a proper subject of theology rather than history, it may suffice for the moment that the damnable theory held that the God-Father, in the first instant of the beginning of time, for a fleeting moment, perhaps, had existed *before* the God-Son, and hence the God-Son could neither be *coeternal* nor *consubstantial* with the God-Father. Such error, if not timely recanted, allowed, nay, necessitated heavenly punishment, the removal of the infidel from the orthodox community.

At length, Valens agreed to the exhortations of his subjects and took to the field against the Gothic menace. In high spirits, due to the success of a few preliminary raids against unarmed Gothic villages, he led his troops in the direction of the main Gothic pale of settlement near Adrianopolis, today's Edirne in the European part of Turkey, northwest of Istanbul. He left the royal baggage and war chest in town and set out, his army fortified by volunteers, to meet the Goths on an open plain, about twelve miles from Adrianopolis.

Hardly anyone made it back. The Goths were inflamed over what they perceived as Imperial treason and massacred the legions, volunteers and all: Roman losses in the Battle of Adrianopolis [AD 378, ¶] were enormous, the biggest in imperial history and exceeding by far the loss of Varius and his three legions in AD 9. The Romans lost six legions and change plus their Emperor on the plains of Thrace; all in all over 40,000 men. Most of the experienced centurions, legates and non-combatants shared the Emperor's fate.

The Goths immediately set out to besiege Adrianopolis, which they duly seized shortly thereafter, complete with the Imperial baggage and treasury. Yet soon they set their eyes on greater spoils and moved to besiege Constantinople next. The walls of the capital, however, easily withstood the Gothic endeavours for their lack of siege artillery and the enterprise failed. Having spent their fury and too impatient to subdue the town by starvation, they packed in whatever was not nailed down and moved westward, to the foot of the Balkan Mountains.

The loss of Adrianopolis was to have further ramifications. The young Gothic hostages Valens had collected in AD 369 had been spread over the Imperial cities, where they had founded small Gothic settlements, a few families each. On account of their robust fertility, their numbers had swiftly increased, and the empire faced, legions and emperor vanquished, a potential internal enemy who might threaten the most delicate inner workings of the realm as soon as the news of the Gothic victory spread.

A deception was invented by the industrious general Julius: a message was promulgated throughout the offices of the empire that a peace had been signed with the Goths; that an indemnity was to be paid by the empire; that this payment was to be extracted from all the towns of the realm; and that the young Goths were to collect the tribute and convey it, safely, to the new pastures of their people.

Our age, which knows as much about governments as to, almost reflexively, assume the opposite of whatever is brought to the public attention, will not feel surprise but only familiar disgust at the news that there was, in fact, nothing to be received by the young hostages but their death, which was effected at the same hour in every city of the empire where the hostages had assembled on the market square.

To come to the aid of Valens, the new western emperor and successor of Valentinian, Gratian, had collected his own legions and was on his way to Thrace when he was informed of his colleague's fate. He was only nineteen years of age at that time and concluded that his youth was in need of administrative and military experience. For the post of his equal and Augustus of the East, he chose a pious general by the name of Theodosius, who became particularly "dear to the Catholic church" (9) when he instituted its faith as the exclusive religion of the realm.

A reorganization of jurisdiction allowed, or compelled, Theodosius to administrate, in addition to Asia and Egypt, the frontiers along the Danube. Accordingly, as he thus found himself "specially entrusted with the conduct of the Gothic war, the Illyrian prefecture was dismembered; and the two great dioceses of Dacia and Macedonia were added to the dominions of the Eastern Empire" (10), that is, to his responsibility. In actuality, he turned out the last emperor to rule over both the eastern and western parts of the empire, abrogating Diocletian's concept for the time being.

Initially, Theodosius's position was precarious, for so soon after the catastrophe of Adrianopolis the Empire could not risk another battle. In retrospect, the battle was less important for the loss of so-and-so-many legions but because it bestowed an aura of invincibility on the barbarians, which caused the legions enormous psychological disadvantages in subsequent campaigns. Theodosius borrowed a page or two from Fabius Maximus' playbook: as the first and most urgent measure he created a new regional headquarter in Thessalonica, the capital of Macedonia.

From this retreat, he engaged in the rebuilding of the eastern legions; the training of soldiers, production of armaments and erection of fortifications; while simultaneously directing the operations of two lieutenants who were sent out to harass the Goths with small but lethal strikes from Constantinople and Sirmium, near today's Belgrade.

Eventually, cooler heads prevailed in both courts, and in AD 382 Theodosius signed a formal treaty, called a *foederatio*, in which the Visigoths pledged to return to their former possessions in Thrace and the Ostrogoths were allowed to remain in Pannonia. The tribes were permitted to practice limited self-governance, but the royal dignity of the tribal chiefs was abolished and the supreme authority over war and peace transferred to the Emperor. In addition, the Goths promised to contribute 40,000 warriors to the defence of the realm.

There is no doubt that the reconciliation between the Goths and the Empire might have required a much longer courtship and bargaining had not the long shadow of the Huns loomed on the horizon. Their progress westward dislocated many Celtic, Germanic and Slavic tribes, who in turn exerted pressure along the Danube frontier and pushed waves upon waves of refugees over the Imperial border. Theodosius adopted the old trick of paying the enemy, i.e. the Huns, to go somewhere else; with monetary expedients he intended to direct them to rather follow the Danube westward and clash with whatever Germans they were to meet than to strike south into Imperial territory. In essence, Theodosius decided to dislocate the threat of the Huns from the East to the West, but the salvation of the East was to come at the price of the demise of the West.

The Huns indeed oriented themselves chiefly westward; their farthest advances reached Lutetia, today's Paris, and the Upper Rhine, where their encounter with the Burgundians, poetically improved, gave rise to one of the oldest medieval sagas, the Song of the Nibelungs. To the south, they never proceeded beyond the piedmont of the Alps near Verona in northern Italy. The military impact of the Hunnish invasions, however, was somewhat alleviated by the perpetual discord between their independent-minded chieftains, whose interest was chiefly awakened by avarice and might lead at any time to wholly uncoordinated adventures in the pursuit of spoils. Their active interest in gold and valuables could be exploited by pointing out richer targets than oneself or, if barter could be provided, by their enlistment under one's own banner.

The strikes of the Huns thus frequently resembled raids and their aim pillage more than official battles, and while the Imperial borders along the Danube were pricked often they were seldom crossed by large bands. That was true, at least, until one leader rose to pre-eminence and temporarily united the meandering hordes under his directives. His Gothic nickname of "Attila" [diminutive of Gothic "atta", father, i.e. daddy, AD 406-453, ¶] became an epitome of terror. Edward Gibbon describes him for us:

Attila, the son of Mundzuk, deduced his noble, perhaps his regal, descent from the ancient Huns who had formerly contended with the monarchs of China. His features, according to the observation of a Gothic historian, bore the stamp of his natural origin; and the portrait of Attila exhibits the genuine deformity of a modern Calmuk; a large head, a swarthy complexion, small, deep-seated eyes, a flat nose, a few hairs in the place of a beard, broad shoulders, and a short square body, of nervous strength, though of a disproportionate form. ...

The Scythian conquerors, Attila and Zingis, surpassed their rude countrymen in art rather than in courage; and it may be observed that the monarchies both of the Huns and the Moguls were erected by their founders on the basis of popular superstition. The miraculous conception which fraud and credulity ascribed to the virgin-mother of Zingis raised him above the level of human nature; and the naked prophet who in the name of the Deity invested him with the empire of the earth pointed at the valour of the Moguls with irresistible enthusiasm. The religious arts of Attila were not less skilfully adapted to the character of his age and country.

It was natural enough that the Scythians should adore with peculiar devotion the god of war; but as they were incapable of forming either an abstract idea or a corporeal representation, they worshipped their titular deity under the symbol of an iron cimeter.

One of the shepherds of the Huns perceived that a heifer who was grazing had wounded herself in the foot, and curiously followed the track of the blood till he discovered, among the long grass, the point of an ancient sword, which he dug out of the ground and presented to Attila.

That magnanimous, or rather that artful, prince accepted, with pious gratitude, this celestial favour; and as the rightful possessor of the sword of Mars asserted his divine and indefeasible claim to the dominion of the earth. ... His brother Bleda, who reigned over a considerable part of the nation, was compelled to resign his sceptre and his life [AD 445].

In time of peace, the dependent princes, with their national troops, attended the royal camp in regular succession; but when Attila collected his military force, he was able to bring into the field an army of five, or, according to another account, of seven hundred thousand Barbarians. (11)

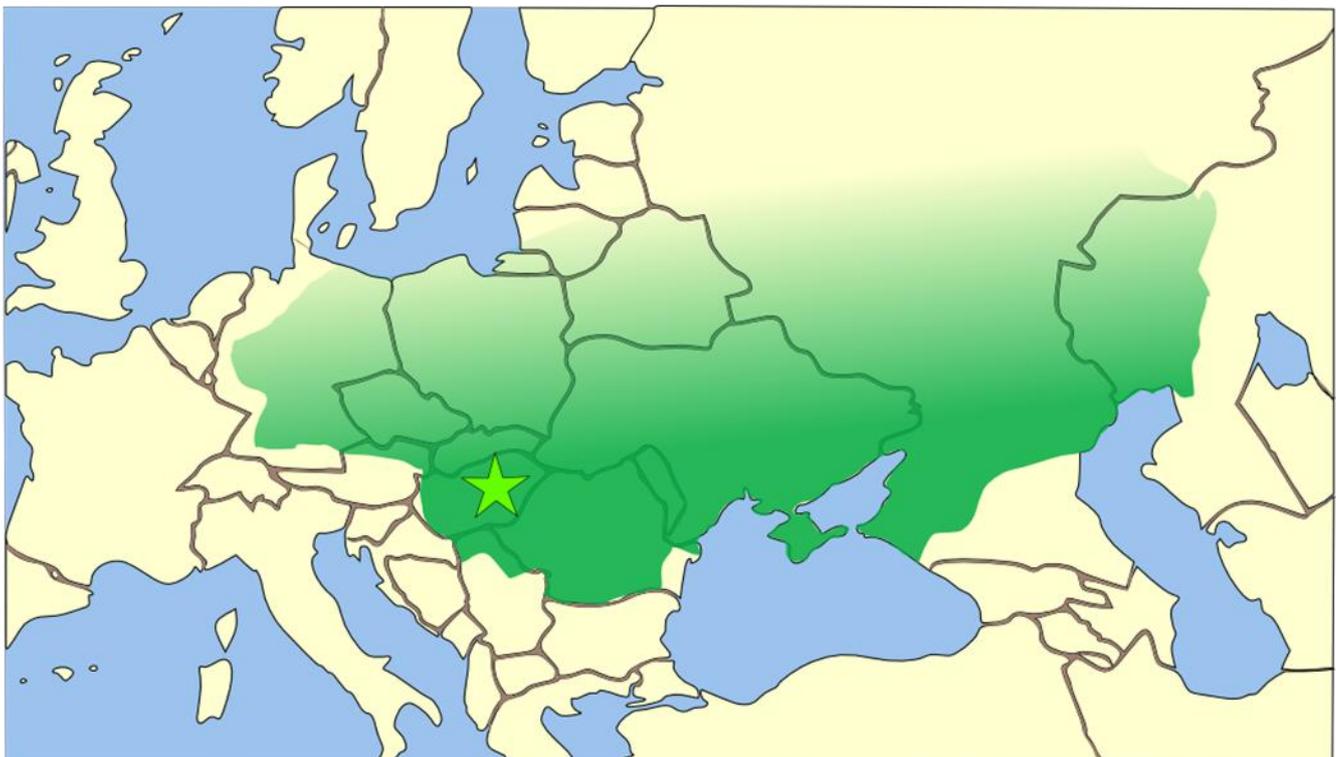
The Huns were on the migration westward and believed their principal enemy the Roman Empire. The German tribes they met in the process were subdued or fled, and hence Attila never contemplated complications that might arise should an independent Germanic power establish itself on the way west. As we know in hindsight - and is more explicitly addressed in Chapter III, this is exactly what happened by the expansion of the territory and power of the Franks.

As visible in Map XIV a below, the realm of Hunnish domination - or at least influence - before the attempted expansion westward reached from Caspian Sea in westerly direction roughly to the boundaries of the Danube and the Rhine, which still were the principal defensive lines of the Empire. In the north, the Huns controlled the southern Baltic Sea coast yet as a self-contained people took little advantage of the sea trade established in these ports.

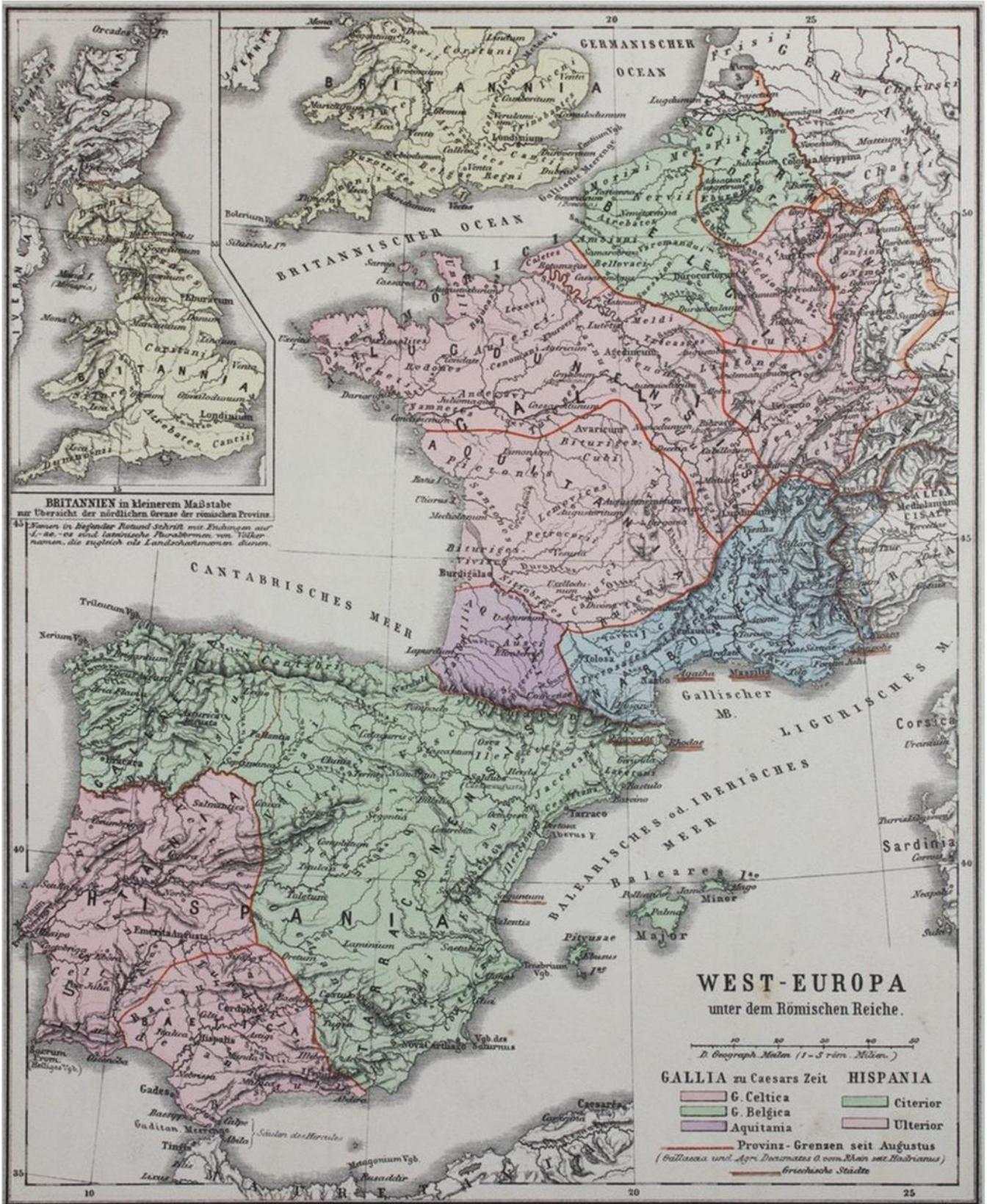
Marked by the star, Attila ruled from his wooden palace in the Pannonian plain in direct neighbourhood of the Goths, Alanes and Avars, who were routinely pressed into Hunnish military service in auxiliary roles until they decided to flee the Hunnish suzerainty by moving west - retreating to the Carpathian mountains - a decisive factor in the great age of migration.

As Edward Gibbon asserts, in n.11 above, the Huns were a psychological factor of highest order, a strange, alien society and the occident trembled at the numbers of Hunnish horsemen they would eventually have to face on the field of battle.

MAP XIV A: THE HUNNISH EMPIRE BEFORE THE EUROPEAN CAMPAIGNS



MAP XIV B: THE ROMAN EMPIRE IN WESTERN EUROPE (CA. 44 BC - AD 367)



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THE RED LINES DEPICT THE OFFICIAL BOUNDARIES BETWEEN THE PROVINCES AS ESTABLISHED BY AUGUSTUS.

Their real numbers may be estimated perhaps at a fifth or tenth of those mentioned in the old sources, since, as John Keegan has pointed out, the Hungarian plain at this time could not graze much more than perhaps 150.000 horses, and the necessity of remounts must have further limited the number of riders. (12) Yet for a time they were sufficiently superior to whatever military force was available to the Empire in the wake of Adrianopolis.

Imperial generals now instituted a more liberal policy of permitting Germans into the newly established legions, for their calculus was that the realm stood to profit from every wound barbarians inflicted upon themselves. But soon they had to profess astonishment at the speed by which the Goths proved themselves able to comprehend Roman organization, strategy, and tactics, and their acute perceptions elevated the former barbarians quickly to the highest military offices, and, before long, to the civil government as well. German officers reached the ranks of *MAGISTER MILITUM*, general for a whole region, and soon married into patrician and even Imperial families.

Yet the dreaded attack of the Huns failed to materialize: instead, the populace was perplexed by the news of a new Gothic war. Theodosius had been able to keep the lid on the boiling kettle of barbarians for a decade; to a large extent by his personality, his knowledge of battle, moderation in judgement and practical hand in the administration of the state.

These were qualities that impressed the Goths much more than being literate or educated in Christian hypocrisy, and as long as Theodosius lived the Goths refrained from major transgressions. It should, however, not have come as too big a surprise that, after Theodosius's sudden demise in January 395, it took the Visigoths less than three months to take up arms and reclaim their independence. The pretext was some complaint about annual subsidies that had arrived too late or not at all, and the Goths stormed into the renewed campaign led by their duke Alaric.

Alaric [ca. AD 370-410, ¶] had served in the legions and risen to command, but had, uncommonly for an officer, sought education in politics and statecraft as well. He was aware that his people had exploited the meagre lands of Thrace for all it was worth, but that the remaining morsel in the vicinity, Constantinople, was too cumbersome to be swallowed - due to its fortifications. He resolved to seek fame and riches in southern Greece, which, as Edward Gibbon remarked, had hitherto escaped the ravages of war. (13)

The nation consequently packed its belongings and set foot upon a trek that was to last more than a hundred years. The first victims of their plunderlust were the famous towns of Mycenae, Corinth, Thebes and Argos, whence Ajax and Agamemnon, Menelaus and Achilles had sailed for Troy. The West sent philadelphial support, if too late to save the towns: in AD 397 the master-general of the West, Stilicho, arrived with the greater part of the western legions. Of Vandal origin, he was, perhaps, a military match for Alaric, but not, as it turned out, in his league as a diplomat. But when he arrived in Arcadia, the mythical home of Pan, he was able to force the Goths to retreat into a fortified camp, which he promptly besieged.

Sieges are vexatious affairs, and after a few weeks Stilicho left for some well-deserved rest and recreation. He had barely spent a month on the beach when he was informed of the fact that the war was over - Alaric had succeeded in concluding a treaty with Arcadius, son of Theodosius and new emperor of the East. The contract not only reinstated the most amicably relations between Goths and Romans but also promoted Alaric to the rank of master-general for the Illyrian provinces. Thus the memorable and profane event occurred in a few Greek cities that the barbarian chieftain who had only weeks earlier besieged them was greeted as the new and legitimate general of the commonwealth, and among his new subjects were "the fathers whose sons he had massacred [and] the husbands whose wives he had violated." (14) He already had a plan to secure the armed superiority of his people. Edward Gibbon relates what followed:

The use to which Alaric applied his new command distinguishes the firm and judicious character of his policy. He issued his orders to the four magazines and manufacturers of offensive and defensive arms, Margus, Rataria, Naissus, and Thessalonica, to provide his troops with an extraordinary supply of shields, helmets, swords and spears; the unhappy provincials were compelled to forge the instruments of their own destruction; and the Barbarians removed the only defect which had sometimes disappointed the efforts of their courage.

The birth of Alaric, the glory of his past exploits, and the confidence in his future designs insensibly united the body of the nation under his victorious standard; and with the unanimous consent of the Barbarian chieftains, the master-general of Illyricum was elevated, according to ancient custom, on a shield and solemnly proclaimed king of the Visigoths. Armed with this double power, seated on the verge of two empires, he alternately sold his deceitful promises to the courts of Arcadius and Honorius; till he declared and executed his resolution of invading the dominions of the West. (15)

In the first years of Alaric's western campaign [AD 401-402, ¶], the geographical distance of his arms caused no immediate alarm at the court of Honorius, brother of Arcadius. But when the Goths finally arrived in Italy, the Emperor absented himself to the safety of Gallia, on the yonder side of the Alps.

Stilicho, who had returned to his ordinary station in the West, collected the available intelligence and calculated numbers. He decided that he needed the support of the legions deployed on the border to Germany as reinforcement and also recalled the two African legions. The dubious value of some of these troops reflects even stronger on the quality of Stilicho's generalship when he, with the assorted leftovers of the formerly proud Roman legions, obtained the better end of Alaric at the Battle of Polentia in March 403. The initial success enabled Stilicho to follow Alaric's subsequent retreat and to defeat him twice again: in Verona and in the mountains of Illyria whither the Goths had withdrawn.

The Gothic danger apparently averted, Emperor Honorius declared to celebrate his victory over the barbarians and the delivery of the realm with a triumph unprecedented in the history of the capital. It was to last for several months: for the last time cruel games were presented in the Flavian amphitheatre, known as Coliseum, and the populace fed on free grain from Africa.

That the Emperor's dear life should not be threatened again in the future, the administrative capital of the West was moved a second time in AD 402, from Trier to Ravenna, an ancient Roman colony south of the estuary of the Po. The town was formidably fortified, and a secure port facility established at a distance of three miles from the citadel. The stronghold was surrounded by morass and swamps at all sides which prevented the employment of heavy siege engines and rendered military conquest of the fortress high impossible. The person of the Emperor was now reliably protected.

The defence of the western provinces, however, became a perpetually bleeding wound upon the Imperial resources, for continuous migration pushed German tribes without end over the frontiers. An especially large troop of Goths, with an admixture of Burgundians, Suevians, Alans and Vandals, under the leadership of one Radagaisus [also known as Rhodogast, ¶] crossed the Alps and appeared in the Po valley in AD 405. The throng consisted of perhaps half a million warriors, families and slaves.

It was too big to be handled by the Italian legions alone, and Stilicho had to recall troops from the German frontier a second time,¹ which was to have negative consequences later. This time, Stilicho borrowed a page from Julius Caesar's famous siege of Alesia, the strategy of circumvallation.

Like Fabius Maximus, Stilicho closed in on the Germanic throng cautiously, shadowing, but avoiding battle. Once Radagaisus' undisciplined mass of freebooters and adventurers had to settle down near Florence, tired from the quest, the legions began to construct ramparts, surrounding the enemy camp with a double wall: an inner wall to keep the adversary immobile and inflicting, sooner or later, the horrors of famine and thirst upon them, and a second, outer ring that frustrated any hope of relief from the outside. The method had worked for Caesar and it did not fail against the multitude of Radagaisus' barbarians.

Famine at length reduced them to ignominious surrender: their capitulation was solemnly accepted but their dignity was violated: Radagaisus was ignobly beheaded and those of his community who had survived hunger sold into slavery. Their health was so poor that each head fetched no more than a single gold piece; yet the numbers made it up for Stilicho, who was praised as the deliverer of the Fatherland [AD 406].

¹ Chris Wickham reflects: "This was probably a mistake, for it was followed by an invasion of central European tribes led by the Vandals, over the Rhine on New Year's Eve 406, an eruption into western Gaul and then (in 409) into Spain which was almost unresisted; and also in 407 another invasion of Gaul, this time by a usurper, Constantine III (406-11), at the head of the army of Roman Britain." (16)

But before the news of Stilicho's success arrived at Ravenna, Emperor Honorius had already contacted Alaric with a financially attractive proposition to aid the Empire against Radagaisus' hordes. By Stilicho's miraculous removal of the menace, however, the basis of Honorius's proposal had suddenly evaporated, and Stilicho's and Alaric's armies eyed each other nervously in Lower Italy: Honorius had discovered that jinni is easier summoned than disposed of.

A sort of three-man chess game developed around AD 407: two armies and their respective generals were vying for the legitimacy that could be conferred on only one of them. Honorius, safely hiding in the fortress of Ravenna, bewailed his fate, but avoided a decision as to whom of the two formidable generals to support, while maintaining, by evenly distributing his pecuniary assistances, his interest in coming out, whichever the end might be, on the side of the winner.

At length Stilicho was ordered to deliver to the king of the Goths a subsidy in the amount of four thousand pounds of gold, with Honorius's best regards, perhaps, for the Gothic king's moderation in squeezing out Italy. But in Stilicho's absence Ravenna's court politics entered into a cascade of envy and suspicion of the successful general. Honorius, twenty-five years of age and ignorant of the virtues of a statesman or general, was impressed by the flatteries and suspicions conveyed by his two principal ministers Olympius and Heraclian, and at length convinced of Stilicho's guilt. The Imperial ire awoke and a warrant for the present and immediate execution of the hero was issued, which Heraclian personally effected, on August 23, AD 408. The last great Roman general fell victim to the whims of a knave on the throne of the Occident.

Four months after the deed, Honorius presented his subjects with a proclamation that explained the imminent dangers to the Empire that were luckily averted by the timely execution of the traitor: Stilicho, the document divulged, had planned to sell Italy to the Goths [whom he had defeated three times, at Pollentia, Verona and Florence, ¶], or, perhaps, to the Ostrogoths [who had not moved an inch from their Pannonian pastures, ¶], or to some other folks. In addition, he had schemed to invest his son Eucherius with the royal regalia. As soon as the conspiracy had conferred the Imperial purple on his juvenile shoulders, the obedient son had intended to restore idolatry and paganism to the Empire and effect a renewed prosecution of Christianity as a whole and the Catholic Church in particular. By his interception of the unholy design and the fiend's timely demise, Honorius had not only saved the lives and properties of his subjects but their eternal souls as well.

It is not known what his subjects thought of the story, but the military aspects were soon obvious enough, for the murder of Stilicho had cleared the last obstacle in Alaric's way. Following Stilicho's execution, it seems that Honorius instigated a conspiracy to slaughter the families of the barbarian legionaries, and to kill any Gothic hostages remaining from earlier occasions, that is, chiefly children of the Gothic nobility. How exactly the intended massacre should have endeared the Goths to the Imperial cause was unclear. The homicidal mob, however, that took upon the encouragement of their monarch appeared surprised when the about 30,000 legionaries of Germanic origin immediately transferred their allegiance to Alaric and the Goths. The Goths' renewed offensive passed the Alps, marched with little difficulty through Gallia Cisalpina, crossed the Po and descended, upon the Via Salaria, the ancient road traversing the Apennines, in the direction of Rome. The town had not been threatened by foreign military forces since Hannibal, 690 years ago, and it would seem that diplomacy could have halted the Gothic king in his progression, but "the Romans would not consistently make peace with him, even though he blockaded Rome three times." (17) By the fourth time, the patience of the king had worn out, and the Goths laid siege upon the former capital of the Empire.

By a skilful disposition of his numerous forces, who impatiently watched the moment of the assault, Alaric encompassed the walls, commanded the twelve principal gates, intercepted all communication with the adjacent country, and vigilantly guarded the navigation of the Tiber, from which the Romans derived the surest and most plentiful supply of provisions [AD 408].

The first emotions of the nobles and of the people were those of surprise and indignation that a vile Barbarian should dare to insult the capital of the world: but their arrogance was soon humbled by misfortune; and their unmanly rage, instead of being directed against an enemy in arms, was meanly exercised on a defenceless and innocent victim.

Perhaps in the person of Serena, the Romans might have respected the niece of Theodosius, the aunt, nay, even the adoptive mother, of the reigning emperor: but they abhorred the widow of Stilicho; and they listened with credulous passion to the tale of calumny which accused her of maintaining a secret and criminal correspondence with the Gothic invader. Actuated or overawed by the same popular frenzy, the senate, without requiring any evidence of her guilt, pronounced the sentence of her death.

Serena was ignominiously strangled; and the infatuated multitudes were astonished to find that this cruel act of injustice did not immediately procure the retreat of the Barbarians and the deliverance of the city.

That unfortunate city gradually experienced the distress of scarcity and at length the horrid calamities of famine. (18)

The fighting abilities of the Goths and the strategic abilities of their king and general were little challenged during the siege. After the terrified town had received notice from Ravenna that the Emperor had abandoned their cause, the defenders despaired and the town was eventually sacked, 797 years after King Brennus and his Celts, and 1163 years after her mythical foundation.

The quills of the contemporary observers composed divergent tales regarding the exact frightfulness of the subsequent events. It appears that Alaric had ordered churches exempted from the general pillage, but while this command may have had some effect on the Christian Goths, it was an outlandish directive to the Hunnish mercenaries who formed the greater part of his cavalry, and widely disobeyed. In general, the historical observations report par for the course of a successful siege, that the men were slaughtered, the women raped and gold and glitter stolen. Yet it has been found that only one (1) Roman senator lost his life in the melee, and that the Goths, thank God, left the town within seven days while, for example, the pious Catholic troops of the French King Charles V, in the sixteenth century, stayed for nine months and left smouldering ruins in their wake.

Yet the sack of Rome was something of an accident, in part a result of Honorius's refusal to work on any reasonable solution, and, as Chris Wickham points out, the sack was "without other repercussions, and was only one step in the long Visigoth road to settlement." (19) The Goths now headed for Sicily, but a tempest sunk the ships they had procured to take them to Africa and a sudden, rapidly progressing illness struck down the king himself [AD 410]. He was buried, the story goes, in the bed of a temporarily diverted river, a place where no man could disturb his perpetual rest.

Alaric was followed in the royal dignity by Athaulf, or Adolphus, whom history, perhaps unjustly, treats much as an afterthought to Alaric. He was an educated man, and his credo was reported to the historian Orosius as it follows here:

"In the full confidence of valour and victory, I once aspired (said Adolphus) to change the face of the universe; to obliterate the name of Rome; to erect on its ruins the domination of the Goths; and to acquire, like Augustus, the immortal fame of the founder of a new empire.

By repeated experiments, I was gradually convinced that laws are essentially necessary to maintain and regulate a well-constituted state; and that the fierce, intractable humour of the Goths was incapable of bearing the salutary yoke of laws and civil government.

From that moment I proposed to myself a different object of glory and ambition; and it is now my sincere wish that the gratitude of future ages should acknowledge the merit of a stranger who employed the sword of the Goths not to subvert but to restore and maintain the prosperity of the Roman Empire." (20)

Athaulf eventually found a way to bargain with Honorius, and, after marrying his daughter Galla Placidia, and in possession of the Emperor's license, led the Visigoths to Gaul. That did not work, for the province was mired in the civil wars of up to four different usurpers in AD 411, and after a detour to Spain, fighting the Vandals in the name of Rome, they settled in Gallia Narbonensis, today's Languedoc and Provence in AD 418. The *magister militum* of Gaul, Constantius, was able to unite Gaul in this decade and, by marrying Athaulf's widow Galla Placidia, became a short-lived emperor in his own right, before his and Placidia's son Valentinian III enjoyed a relatively long, if passive, reign [AD 425-455], with his mother as regent. (21)

For the moment not only the East, ignored for half a century by barbarian invaders, but the West "had achieved, after a decade of turmoil, a substantial stability as well. Most of the frontier was still manned by Roman troops. There were 'barbarian' groups settled in the empire, it is true, separate from the Roman military hierarchy, the Visigoths between Bordeaux and Toulouse and the remnants of the Vandal confederacy in western Spain, Suevi in the north and Hasting Vandals in the south; but all these had been defeated, and the Visigoths at least were in formal federate alliance with Rome." (22) Yet before long, fresh trouble approached from the East.

For a good fifty years, the Huns had remained in their temporary settlements in what is today eastern Hungary, just over the Danube, except for small raids, perhaps their adult entertainment. But their unification under Attila and Bleda resulted in Hunnish predominance over the neighbouring Ostrogoths and Gepids, and in the beginning of the fifth decade of the fifth century AD, the sovereign Huns and their allies, as opposed to the many mercenaries in Roman service, began to reappear in the empire.

At that time, the "men" behind Emperor Valentinian III, who was six years of age in the year of his installation, AD 425, were his mother Placidia and the generals Aetius and Boniface. These two officers might have been able to protect the West had they cooperated; as they intrigued against each other, they largely failed, with one glorious exception, to keep the sinking ship afloat. As Edward Gibbon delineates, the designs of Aetius precipitated at length the loss of Africa:

The abilities of Aetius and Boniface might have been usefully employed against the public enemies, in separate and important commands. ... But Aetius possessed an advantage of singular moment in a female reign; he was present; he besieged, with artful and assiduous flattery, the palace of Ravenna; disguised his dark designs with the mask of loyalty and friendship; and at length deceived both his mistress and his absent rival by a subtle conspiracy which a weak woman and a brave man could not easily suspect.

He had secretly persuaded Placidia to recall Boniface from the government of Africa; he secretly advised Boniface to disobey the Imperial summons: to the one he represented the order as a sentence of death; to the other he stated the refusal as a sign of revolt; and when the credulous and unsuspectful count [Boniface, ¶] had armed the province in his defence, Aetius applauded his sagacity in foreseeing the rebellion which his own perfidy had excited [AD 427].

A temperate inquiry into the real motives of Boniface would have restored a faithful servant to his duty and to the republic; but the arts of Aetius still continued to betray and to inflame, and the count was urged by persecution to embrace the most desperate counsels.

The success with which he eluded or repelled the first attacks could not inspire a vain confidence that at the head of some loose, disorderly Africans he should be able to withstand the regular forces of the West, commanded by a rival whose military character was impossible for him to despise. After some hesitation, the last struggles of prudence and loyalty, Boniface despatched a trusty friend to the court, or rather to the camp, of Gonderic, king of the Vandals, with the proposal of a strict alliance and the offer of an advantageous and perpetual settlement. (23)

Boniface played a Spanish Gambit, so to say, based upon the momentary situation in Spain. The north-eastern parts of the land were controlled by the Visigoths; technically in the name of Honorius respectively Valentinian III, but as a matter of fact, control over the important parts lay in the hands of Athaulf's successors. The north-western parts of the Iberian Chersonnese, however, known as Galicia, had been the stage of a protracted tug-of-war between the two German tribes of the Suebi and the Vandals, who for an ancient feud were perpetual enemies.

The Vandals had only recently defeated a large band of Suebi when Boniface's solicitation arrived. The missive invited them to turn their desires of settlement on the far richer provinces of Africa, which Boniface offered to share. There were, as he explained, no further Roman forces to be concerned with than the two legions routinely stationed in Numidia, which however, were of low quality, and whose marginally better cohorts were in the process to be redeployed to Germania.

The offer seemed to promise the Vandals² a chance for permanent settlement, and a fortuitous occasion improved the chances of its acceptance: King Gonderic had had the decency to expire at the proper moment, and had been succeeded by his half-brother Genseric [r.AD 428-477, ¶], who, with Alaric and Attila, was to become the third member of the barbarian troika which scourged the Empire in the fifth century AD. The native Celtiberians felt so elated by the Vandals' intention to leave their soil that they assisted the Germans, who were not a seafaring nation, in the construction of the vessels necessary to get across the Pillars of Hercules, as Gibraltar and its opposite African promontory were called at that time.

The size of the journeying multitude was augmented by the Alani, who had been faithful companions of the Vandals on the long trek from the eastern bank of the Danube to the Atlantic Ocean. Apparently omnipresent, a band of Goths joined as well. Yet the number of travellers, which is usually given at about 50,000 warriors plus families and slaves, seems lower than it could reasonably be expected from the gathering of two complete tribes plus some Goths. Apparently, more than a few Vandals and Alans liked what they had found in Spain and detested further adventures.

The journey succeeded, and two lucky circumstances soon increased the number of Genseric's followers in Africa. The indigenous and indigent inhabitants of Mauretania and Numidia had never been assigned a different role by the Romans than that of a feeder race for the slave markets, but when the Moors carefully approached the recent invaders, they could see at first glance that the new arrivées were different from their former oppressors. It took little diplomacy to convince the Moors that the enemy of their enemies was their friend, and "a crowd of naked savages rushed from the woods and valleys of Mount Atlas to satiate their revenge on the polished tyrants who had injuriously expelled them from the native sovereignty of the land." (24)

The second beneficial opportunity Genseric was able to exploit was the support of the Donatists, a Christian congregation that had settled in Africa provincia just after AD 300. They found themselves objecting to the authority of the local metropolitan, Bishop Caecilian of Carthage, whom they labelled improperly consecrated and after Emperor Constantine judged in favour of Caecilian, a schism occurred, for the Donatists did not give in. (26) Enmity ruled the next century until, after a formal debate in Carthage AD 411, the Catholic Church demanded their persecution, and seventeen years before the Vandals' arrival, Emperor Honorius authorized the extinction of Donatism and supported the orthodox belief with the strongest of incentives. Edward Gibbon could barely hide his disgust:

Three hundred bishops, with many thousands of the inferior clergy, were torn from their churches, stripped of their ecclesiastical possessions, banished to the islands, and proscribed by the laws if they presumed to conceal themselves in the provinces of Africa. Their numerous congregations, both in cities and in the country, were deprived of the rights of citizens and of the exercise of religious worship. ...

By these severities, which obtained the warmest approbation of St. Augustine, great numbers of the Donatists were reconciled to the Catholic church, but the fanatics who still persevered in their opposition were provoked to madness and despair; the distracted country was filled with tumult and bloodshed; the armed troops of CIRCUMCELLIONS alternately pointed their rage against themselves or against their adversaries; and the calendar of martyrs received on both sides a considerable augmentation.

Under these circumstances, Genseric, a Christian but an enemy of the Orthodox communion [being an Arian, ¶], showed himself to the Donatists as a powerful deliverer, from whom they might reasonably expect the repeal of the odious and oppressive edicts of the Roman emperors. The conquest of Africa was facilitated by the active zeal, or the secret favour, of a domestic faction; the wanton outrages against the churches and the clergy of which the Vandals are accused may be fairly imputed to the fanaticism of their allies; and the intolerable spirit which disgraced the triumph of Christianity contributed to the loss of the most important province of the West. (27)

² The bad reputation of the Vandals results from the entirety of their history having been written by their enemies. The Vandals were Arians, thus, in the eyes of the Catholic Church, heretics. But other Germanic tribes that were Arians, like the Goths, did not attempt to convert Catholics to Arianism, but the Vandals did. Chris Wickham observed: "Only the Vandals assumed that their version of Christianity should be the universal one, and that others should be uprooted, as the Romans themselves did: hence also the negative tone of contemporary accounts, which are all written by Catholics." (25)

The news of Genseric's invasion and its success astonished the Emperor, the Senate, the bishop and the people of Rome. The opinion was pronounced by a number of Count Boniface's supporters that it was hard to believe that a tried and trusted servant of the realm had indeed handed the pearl of the Empire to the uncouth chieftain of a barbarian mob and left the province he was supposed to protect to the doubtful benefactions of vengeful heretics or the savage tribes of the desert. An embassy was dispatched to Carthage post-haste, to investigate and report.

In Ravenna, meanwhile, the correspondence between Boniface, Aetius and Placidia was inspected, compared, and Aetius' deception easily discovered: but the hastily enacted new resolutions turned out to change too little, and too late, to prevent the loss or to enable the recapture of the key province. Boniface was hastily reinstated to the graces of the court and the command of the African legions: he was able to hold, for a while, the important cities of Carthage, Cirta and Hippo Regius, but the vast domain of Africa and her fertile pastures were lost. Worse, perhaps, it also made the Vandals perpetual enemies of the Empire, as it happened with the Visigoths twenty years later, and Chris Wickham points out that "the conquest of the grain heartland of Africa by the Vandals in 439, which the Romans mistakenly did not anticipate and resist, seems to me the turning point, the moment after which these potential [Germanic] supports might turn into dangers." (28)

But for the moment, Boniface, who had returned from Hippo Regius to Ravenna, faced civil war when Aetius led a force of German mercenaries from Gaul into the field in Gallia Cisalpina in an effort to overthrow him. Aetius lost the ensuing battle which, however, claimed Boniface's life and left the Empire vulnerable. But in the following years it was Aetius who showed the military knack that perhaps saved Italy from both Huns and Goths, by playing them against each other.

In AD 451, the principal Hunnish invasion of Gaul by the united tribes under Attila began. It would appear that Attila had received an embassy from Genseric just earlier, which described the mutual benefits that could be achieved by a strategic coordination against the Empire: if, say, the Huns were to invade the northeast while the Vandals attacked Sicily and then Italy proper, the Empire, its protector Boniface dead, would be caught in a vise.³ Attila may have pondered a similar scenario and his cavalry was in place at the eastern border at the right time: within days of the signal to attack the East was overwhelmed by his rapacious hordes and Theodosius II, successor of Arcadius and last of his line, had to accept a harsh peace treaty which made him, the Augustus of the East, a subaltern of the King of the Huns, and the debtor of an annual payment of twelve thousand pieces of gold.

He was not more of a military man than his uncles Honorius and Arcadius had been, and for all practical purposes the state of the realm was only improved when his horse, on the Lycus River, threw off its rider who broke his spine and promptly expired. His sister Pulcheria was proclaimed Empress of the East by the courtiers, officers and plebs, and, aware of the sensible position a female reign might be exposed to in the time of war, she married, only a few days later, the senator Mercian, who, at the festive occasion, was invested with the Imperial title, purple and regalia.

The former senator was of solemn nature and an experienced administrator but unused and hostile to the arts of flattery and duplicity which are second nature to courtiers in the palaces of the East, then and now. He dared to send a reply more independent than servile in nature to the envoys of the King of the Huns, who³ arrived in Constantinople to demand the delivery of the annual tribute [AD 450]. Yet as much as Attila was enraged by the rebuke, his recent designs had centred on the West, on Gaul and Italy, and the attention of civilization soon centred on Aetius, who seemed to vacillate between being the hope or the dread of the Empire.

³ Chris Wickham explains the military and geostrategic factors that much differentiated the fate of the two parts of the Empire as follows:

"It probably did derive in part from the greater exposure of heartland areas in the West, Italy and especially central and southern Gaul, to frontier invasion; attacks on the Balkans in the East rarely got past Constantinople into the rest of the empire, but attacks on the western military regions, northern Gaul and the Danube provinces, could get further much more easily.

Accepting invading groups into the western empire and settling them as federates was a perfectly sensible response to this, as long as those federate areas did not become so unruly that Roman armies had to be held back to fight them, or so large that they threatened the tax base of the empire, and thus the resources for the regular armies themselves. Unfortunately for the West, however, this did happen." (29)

After Boniface's death, Aetius had undertaken a trip to Attila, to borrow a horde of Hunnish cavalry for aiding him to return to Rome with impunity, and "he solicited his pardon at the head of sixty thousand barbarians." (30) Aetius was also promoted to generalissimo of the Western Empire: it speaks for his caution that he allowed Valentinian to wear the purple and his mother Placidia to sign the documents he supplied. But at AD 450, the balance of powers in the west had changed to the detriment of the Romans: most of Spain now belonged to the Suebi, the rest to the Visigoths, who also filled the south of Gaul. The northern and central parts of the region were held by the Franks, and Africa, alas, had been lost to the Vandals.

Notwithstanding his volatile loyalties, Aetius was well aware that a Hunnish conquest of Gaul and Italy would result in the collapse of the West: the Huns, being nomads, did not know any forms of positive laws or continuous government but the license of their chieftains, whose tyranny, caprice and ignorance could not support the complicated economical interdependencies of the Mediterranean nations nor sustain the regularities of commerce. That a decision, at length, had to be sought with military means became a foregone conclusion for both Huns and Romans, and both sides began to court Gothic mercenaries.

Attila was able to exploit yet another occasion of internal strife among the dukes of the Franks as a pretext for the invasion of Gaul he launched in AD 451, where he was met in the field by his former ally Aetius. The new commander-general of the West had collected a conglomerate of regular legions, mercenaries, and Gaul and German volunteers who had settled in Gallia and were esteemed to fight for their possessions with zeal perhaps superior to that of a common mercenary. In addition to this motivational advantage, Aetius was intimately familiar with Hunnish cavalry tactics and hence able to prepare his troops on what to expect. The typical moments of surprise and confusion, which accompanied Hunnish attacks and often resulted in their breaking the enemy's lines, failed to materialize at the Battle of Chalons [AD 451]. Aetius' troops were able to maintain their cohesion and inflicted on the Huns the first defeat they suffered in generations.

The loss at Chalons confused but did not diminish the Huns' lust for conquest, or, rather, pillage and plunder, for notwithstanding their many military victories, the thought of becoming a settled people never entered their heads. In the spring of the following year, a substantial Hunnish army was discovered marching into lower Italy, but the Gauls and Germans who had defended their possessions in Gallia provincia had no interest to spill their blood in the preservation of their titular Roman overlords, and no aid against Attila issued from Gaul.

The Huns' eventual appearance in the Po valley, hardly threescore leagues from Ravenna [AD 452], finally alerted the Imperial persona. Valentinian's life would have been safe in the fortress, but his timidity found expression in an urgent embassy to Rome, where he hoped to confiscate sufficiently luxurious and expensive items as might be suitable to deflect Attila's attention from the conquest of the Italian heartland. In the old capital, he collected not only such valuable things as the owners would freely contribute to the Imperial cause, but resorted to expropriation as well, in alleviation of his own generosity.

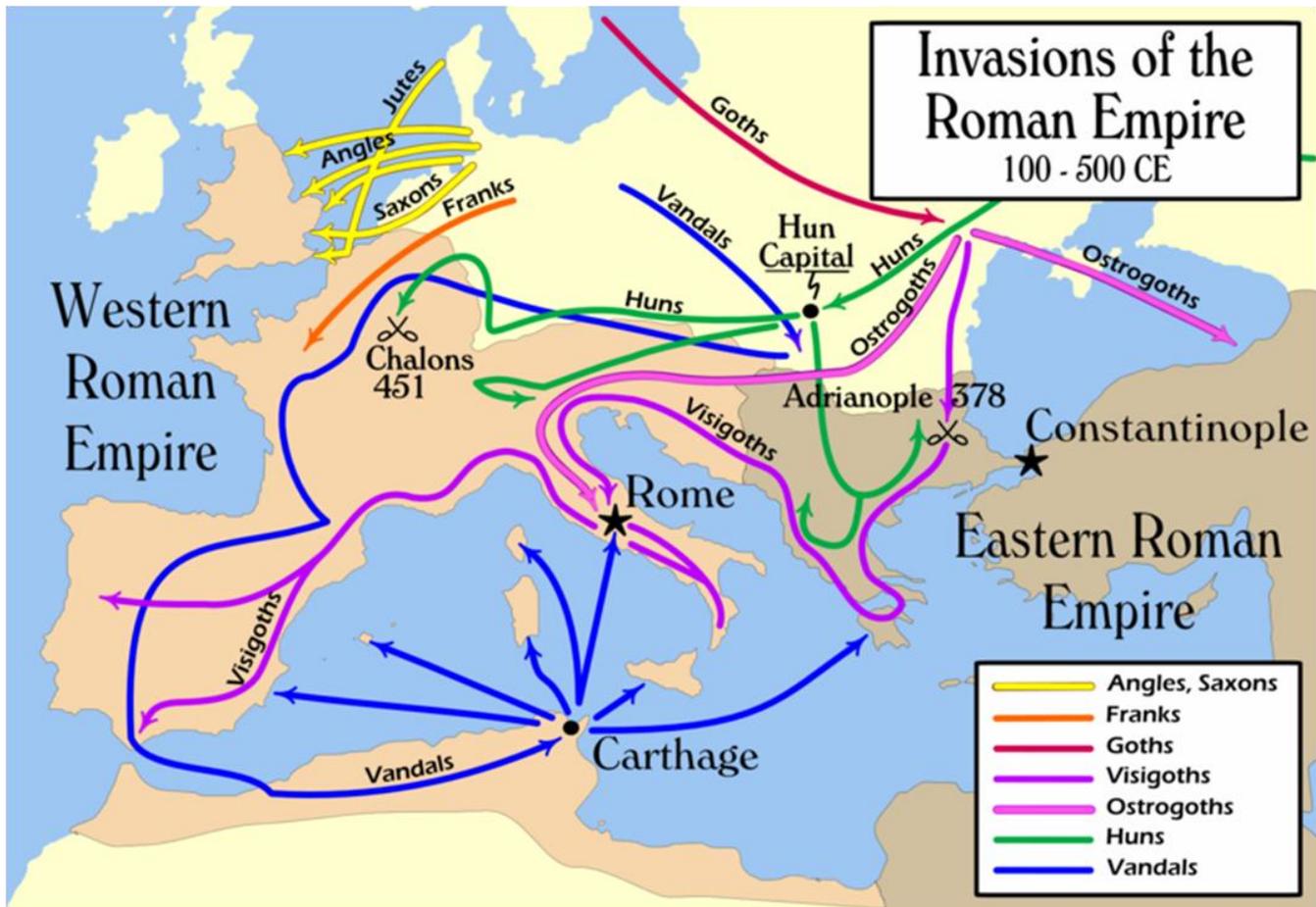
The senator Avienus was chosen, with his colleague Trigetus and Leo, bishop of Rome, to undertake an expedition to the King of the Huns, who reposed at the famous Lago di Garda, the Garda Lake in the Southern Alps, only a few miles west of Verona, the town made immortal by Dietrich von Bern and Romeo and Julia. The deputation was not only carrying goods of secular value: with a huge dowry, a painting of the princess Honoria was delivered, whose hand was promised to the King of the Huns for his moderation. While those financial and amorous offerings may have belonged to diplomacy as usual, it was the keen mind of Leo who had thought of a different approach.

The respect that the Huns extended to matters of superstition and divination was well known in the Empire, and Leo recognized their potential usefulness: he guided the attention of the king and his nobles to the recognition of the horrible fates that destiny had imposed on the enemies of the eternal city.

Romulus's bane lay over the town, the priest explained: no conqueror would live to reign over her but for a year. King Brennus, Leo pointed out, after seizing Rome in 387 BC, had died soon later [nobody had an idea when], and had not Alaric, the great king of the Visigoths, failed to survive the end of the year that saw his entry into Rome? Hannibal, Leo further elucidated, the greatest general Rome ever faced, had never even tried to actually take the city, well aware of the

course. Even Gaius Marius had not survived his own conquest of the city in the civil war more than a few weeks; if history punished Rome's own sons so harshly, what could a stranger expect?

MAP XV: THE AGE OF THE GREAT MIGRATIONS



The priest's arguments were well chosen, but there was an additional factor which mitigated the Huns' resolves to destroy the Empire; the fact that the barbarians had begun to cherish the temptations of civilization. The rough sons of the steppe, whose diet had been, for centuries, raw flesh and, perhaps, some fermented goat's milk, were introduced to the Imperial Roman cuisine; to the taste of condiments and spices; the tender meat of suckling pigs and calves; the multitudes of vegetables and the sweet sensation of honey: they could not resist.

Their tents did not favourably compare to Roman buildings, whose heated floors and concrete foundations were able to withstand the winter's frost or the whims of floods. But it was wine in particular that tended to undermine their earlier resolves and replaced thoughts of the chances of war with the contemplation of a sunset drink with friends on the terrace of a villa, perhaps in the company of a few light-skirted nymphs.

Attila eventually granted peace, but reminded the Roman delegation that the delivery of the annual financial contribution and the royal bride Honoria was to occur the very same year, to prevent his army's return to Italy in a more adversarial mood. Thus spoken, the king retired to his eastern possessions and prepared for the royal encounter with Honoria.

Yet, in the meanwhile, Attila relieved his tender anxiety by adding a beautiful maid, whose name was Ildico, to the list of his innumerable wives. Their marriage was celebrated with Barbaric pomp and festivity at his wooden palace beyond the Danube; and the monarch, oppressed with wine and sleep, retired at a late hour from the banquet to the nuptial bed.

His attendants continued to respect his pleasures, or his repose, the greatest part of the ensuing day, till the unusual silence alarmed their fears and suspicions; and after attempting to awaken Attila by loud and repeated cries, they at length broke into the royal apartment.

They found the trembling bride sitting by the bedside, hiding her face with her veil and lamenting her own danger as well as the death of the king, who had expired during the night [AD 453]. An artery had suddenly burst; and as Attila lay in a supine posture, he was suffocated by a torrent of blood which, instead of finding a passage through the nostrils, regurgitated into the lungs and stomach. (31)

The simple social order of the Huns ensured that Attila's realm fell apart the very minute that the news of the king's death reached the various hordes. The aspirations of a dozen subaltern leaders and the hopes of numerous bastard sons converged in one great conflagration, which removed the traces of the realm of the Huns from the continent, and history in general, in a matter of days. The tribes returned to their homelands in the Asian steppe, and neighbouring tribes found the fields north and east of the Danube empty. The Avars were the first people to inundate the former Hunnish plains and mountains, whence they soon came into contact with the Empire.

The disappearance of the Huns, however, also undermined Aetius' design to provoke enmity between them and the Goths in Gaul, by which he hoped to have the menaces destroy each other. But now little military power remained available to him in the case of a Gothic invasion, and if the situation had not been bad enough to start with, the emperor himself partook in the acceleration of the realm's demise by the murder of his general. "From the instinct of a base and jealous mind, he [Valentinian] hated the man who was universally celebrated as the terror of the Barbarians and the support of the republic." (32)

Constant insinuations of eunuchs and courtiers urged the emperor to be aware of the danger a virtuous man might pose to the throne. The general's presence was requested for some court business in Ravenna, and in perhaps the sole action history can reliably ascribe to the emperor's person, the monarch drew his sword and buried it in Aetius' breast; the breast that had, whatever the general's moral shortcomings, at various occasions preserved the Empire and the West. The elite of the court assisted the emperor with their own daggers, and as soon as the general had expired, counselled the monarch that the victim's friends must share his fate, for the good of the realm and to deter revenge. The cabal attracted Aetius' friends, foremost Boethius, the praetorian prefect, to visit the Imperial palace on the fabrication of some urgent business, where they were murdered wholesale [AD 454].

The court issued an edict that a conspiracy against the Empire and the monarch had been unveiled and, luckily, averted. Not a single of the emperor's subjects, who were well aware of Aetius' mistakes but also his merits, believed the gospel, and what had been public contempt for the feeble emperor was replaced, in Edward Gibbon's phrase, by "universal abhorrence". (33)

Consequently, the people were not surprised when Valentinian, after adding to the number and quality of his misdeeds a variety of illicit erotic affairs, which peaked at his rape of the wife of senator Maximus, was assassinated by two officers on the occasion of a military parade on the Field of Mars, outside of the city [March 16, AD 455]. Valentinian had barely expired when Maximus, having observed his revenge fulfilled, was hailed as the new emperor by the express consent and salutations of the attending officers and domestics.

The murders of Aetius and Valentinian mark the beginning of the final disintegration of the Western Empire. What might have transpired had Maximus managed to exert any effective governance over his titular possessions no one can say: the sudden appearance of a Vandal war fleet under Geiseric's command at the port of Ostia, only a dozen miles from Rome, swiftly concluded the reign of Maximus: when he appeared in public, flight on his mind, a furious multitude stoned him to death.

Three days after the emperor's demise, Genseric led his troops upon the former capital of the known world, and the patience, wisdom and diplomacy of Bishop Leo became the instruments of a second negotiation. At length, Genseric promised to direct certain limitations upon the enthusiasm and the liberties of his army, but the rapacious reality of the second sack of the town within forty-five years broke the city's vitality, and the catastrophe inflicted upon the eternal city a millennium of political insignificance and economic pauperism.

It took over 1,200 years until the mayor of Rome could again tally the same number of inhabitants as had dwelled there in the early fifth century AD. The Vandals' vessels not only transported away everything of material value, copper and bronze being pilfered just as silver and gold: the empress Eudonia and her two daughters were compelled to share the ride, accompanied by thousands of Romans that were designated to the slave markets of Africa.

The decline of the geostrategic importance of Italy had long since become obvious by the labours of the generals and legions from Gaul, for this was where the action was: the Franks and Alemanni that had crossed the Rhine a century earlier had by now advanced deeply into Gaul, until they encountered the dominions of the Visigoths, who, for the moment, blocked further expansion south- and westward. The south-eastern corner of Gaul was settled by Burgundians, who had been placed there by Aetius himself, but it was the Franks and the Goths that played the main roles in the wake of Maximus' death. Before his ignominious demise, the emperor had promoted a local Gallic nobleman named Avitus to the post of master-general of Gaul. The good man considered himself, unlike his military colleagues, an educated man; the embassy sent by the emperor reached him while he was reposing in a precious villa near Clermont.

Accepting the lofty rank, Avitus assumed the command of the local troops, which consisted mainly of Visigoths, with a sprinkle of other Germans thrown in. In deference to the factual holder of power, Avitus embarked on a journey to Theodoric II, the king of the Visigoths [r.AD 453-466]. He had barely reached his host when the sudden news of Genseric's assault on Rome and Maximus' death were delivered.

Whatever his original designs may have been, on the occasion of the unexpected message Theodoric convinced him to "claim the imperial office" [AD 455]. (34) The new emperor soon appeared in Rome, where, for the sincerity of his motives, he accepted the consulship; yet in a time where the office of the Augustus meant predominantly "toil and danger, [Avitus] indulged himself in the pleasantries of Italian luxury: age had not extinguished his amorous inclinations; and he is accused of insulting, with indiscreet and ungenerous raillery, the husbands whose wives he had seduced or violated." (35)

The new emperor's principal armoured support, the Visigoths, was temporarily unable to stabilise Avitus' tenuous regency, because of their urgent business of fighting the Suebi, the former adversaries of the Vandals, for the dominion of northern Spain. When Count Ricimer, one of the captains of Rome's few remaining battle-worthy corps, succeeded in annihilating a Vandal war fleet of sixty ships that had felt too secure in its harbour, he was applauded as the deliverer of the nation, and was able to convince Avitus to abdicate after a reign of fourteen months and many seductions of cooks and chambermaids.

After an interregnum of half a year, Ricimer installed his own favourite, Majorian, in the highest office of the West, who arrived in the capital with the news of a great victory he had inflicted upon the Alemanni, and was subsequently installed as Augustus in Ravenna [AD 457]. The Alemanni had never heard of him. But it appeared that Majorian showed too much independence for Ricimer's taste, for the *MAGISTER MILITUM* had the emperor quickly assassinated, and then ruled "until his death in 472, through a succession of mostly puppet emperors" (36) The successor of Majorian was one Livius Severus, of whom history has recorded no worthwhile activities; Ricimer managed the government: declining the purple and the diadem, he organized the treasury, trained the military and performed diplomacy.

Now Genseric reappeared on the radar. The Vandals had been busy rebuilding the fleet they had lost to Ricimer, and southern Italy quickly suffered the renewed and repeated visitations of his hordes. Of an advanced age, the king still commanded the raids. His rapines he explained with the failure of the Imperial court to respectfully entrust him with those parts of the realm that he was entitled to by the rights of inheritance and possession. This right the king claimed on behalf of the recent marriage of his elder son Hunneric to Eudocia, the dowager empress Eudonia's daughter. The proud father-in-law accordingly considered himself qualified to pre-inherit a substantial portion of the Empire, for his family now represented the last bough of Theodosius's family tree.

Before long, the Eastern Emperor Leo condescended to bestow an annual financial donation upon the Vandal's treasury, to ensure the inviolability of his shores. As a consequence of Leo's liberality, Genseric and his men concentrated their efforts upon the Italian coastline. Confronted with the easy manoeuvrability the enemy enjoyed by its ships, Ricimer, having none, was at a loss how to counter the raids, and saw no other remedy than to apply to Constantinople in a quest for naval assistance.

He addressed the Eastern Augustus Leo with the request to install a person of the emperor's choice upon the throne of the West, which, luckily, was vacant, for Libius Severus had had the decency to expire at the most appropriate moment. The successful candidate should then be supported with men and ships and sent against the Vandals. Leo selected Anthemius, a court favourite, to fill the vacancy, and announced in a message to the world that after the destruction of the Vandal plague and the recovery of Africa provincia, he and Anthemius were to govern the realm in philadelphian dedication. An earnest attempt was made to raise and train a new army, and, more important, a new navy: the treasury was considerably depleted and two corps of troops, on two separate fleets, were dispatched to invade Africa in a two-pronged invasion, in the hope to catch the enemy between the pincers and thus end the barbarian affront and Genseric's hubris [AD 468].

Alas, the operation "was not only a failure but an extremely expensive one." (37) A good part of the Roman fleet was attacked while still on the open sea, before they could unload their precious cargo, the legions, on the beaches: with the sinking ships much of the infantry found a watery grave. The rest of the force was blown by the winds all over the Syrtis and lost contact. The Vandals had no big problem to eliminate the survivors piecemeal wherever they made landfall. The sorry outcome of the campaign resulted in a fall-out between Anthemius and Ricimer; the latter left Africa, gave up Rome and Ravenna, and re-established himself in Milan. He had devised a plan to invest another puppet on the Imperial throne, that is, as soon as Anthemius was gone, and to this end, he collected an army of chiefly Burgundian and Suebian mercenaries, which he subsequently led upon Rome. He camped on the Field of Mars outside of the town and waited for the arrival of his new Imperial candidate, a fellow named Olybrius.

Nobody had ever accused Olybrius of valour or other virtues, but what he did possess, and represent, in a way, was a most impressive pedigree: he had married Placidia, the younger daughter of Eudonia, the dowager empress still detained in Africa, and thus was able to present, as his qualification for the office of Augustus of the West, an "illustrious name and a royal alliance." (38) With the exception of a year's service as (honorary) consul, the candidate did not profess to possess any education or experience in the business of administering an empire, but, with Leo's consent, accepted the honours and set out to Italy to enjoy his new possessions.

A protracted siege followed Olybrius' arrival near the eternal town, which was defended by a troop of Gothic mercenaries in Anthemius' employment. In due time an assault on the Castle and Bridge of Hadrian found a weak spot in the defence, whose exploitation resulted in the subsequent slaughter of the defenders, including their leader Gilimer [July 11, AD 472]. The town was sacked; Anthemius summarily executed and whatever the Vandals might have overlooked seventeen years ago was now picked up by Ricimer's acquisitive mercenaries.

Before long, however, the mysterious curse of Romulus struck again: the year AD 472, which had observed the town's third sack in sixty-two years also beheld the demise of the main creators of the present calamity: Ricimer died only forty days after his success, and his Imperial marionette Olybrius followed him in October of the same year. Any semblance of order in Italy disintegrated.

In Constantinople, Leo needed to find a successor to the husband of Placidia, and after a few extended name-dropping sessions it was remembered, fortunately, that the empress Verina had recently given the hand of one of her nieces to one Julius Nepos, who was, at the moment, the administrator of Dalmatia. This man, the court divined, might be persuaded to accept the glorious promotion.

The wheels of the court, alas, moved so ponderously that before a proper embassy, with a military guard, could be sent to Dalmatia, the Burgundian prince Gundobald, who had inherited the command of Ricimer's mercenaries in Rome, had already elevated a minor official named Glycerius to the Imperial dignity. Advised of the error, Gundobald

corrected his prematurity swiftly and Glycerius found himself demoted to the bishopric of Salona, on the Dalmatian coast. Italy saluted Julius Nepos.

Nepos was quite unaware of the condition of his empire, and, as Edward Gibbon observed, "the treaty of peace which ceded Auvergne to the Visigoths is the only event of his short and inglorious reign." (39) It did not take very long until the new emperor was confronted by a mutiny of the legions of Gaul under a general Orestes, and thought it safest to return to Dalmatia, where, five years later, he was "assassinated at Salona by the ungrateful Glycerius, who was translated, perhaps as the reward of his crime, to the archbishopric of Milan." (40) It was a post apparently suited to Glycerius' modest talents.

The new strong man was aforementioned Orestes, who had been born in Pannonia and learned the trade of a soldier in the service of Attila. His faculties had propelled him to the lofty position of secretary to the great king, and Attila had not only sought his military opinions but also entrusted him with diplomatic missions to Constantinople and Ravenna. His oath of fealty expired with his master's death, and he translated himself to Imperial service in Italy. He advanced rapidly through the ranks until, at the occasion of Julius Nepos's investiture, he was promoted to master-general of the Western Empire, that is, of whatever was left of it.

Orestes was a bona fide hero, a soldiers' soldier, in contrast to the Imperial domestics and retainers, who were acquainted with the use of daggers solely from banquets. It is reported that he was able to confer, or at least to make himself understood, with the Goths, Suebis and Burgundians who constituted the main part of his troops, but also with those tribes that had only recently presented themselves at the Imperial frontiers: the Heruli, Seyri, Alani, Rugi and Turcilinghi.

After Nepos's retreat to Dalmatia, Orestes found himself essentially the only figure left in the game and wondered why he not might as well govern himself. In remembrance of his predecessor Ricimer's modus operandi, he chose to remain the power behind the throne, and presented to the gathering of his subalterns as his choice of emperor his son Romulus, who was called "Augustulus" [diminutive of Augustus, i.e. "little Augustus", ¶]. The young man was installed on the throne of the occident and supplied with a number of concubines and a monthly allowance to occupy his time, while his father conducted the business of the Empire of the West.

Orestes had barely reigned a year when he faced another sedition of the legions. It seems that the Italian units demanded benefits equal to those their colleagues in Gaul and Spain enjoyed, that is, the provision of land on the conclusion of their service. They felt defrauded of this reasonable reward, and petitioned Orestes with the proposition to immediately reserve, and swiftly allocate, one third of Italy's fertile soil to the use of his supporters.

Sometimes a man is allowed but a single mistake, and so it came to pass in the case of Orestes. His refusal of the modest suggestion immediately effected the ascension of a new favourite of the legions, who promised that, should the men unite under his banner, the delivery of their desires was to occur immediately.

Odovacar,⁴ which was the officer's name, had been a military tribune and perceived clearly that the demands of the mob could not be gainsaid without provoking an instant mutiny. What he privately thought of the land deal is not known, but word of his affirmative message spread like the wind and from all duty stations prospective heroes flocked to his standard. The expanse and speed of the insurrection surprised Orestes outside of Ravenna and forced him to retreat to the closest fortified town, Pavia, which was, unfortunately, neither equipped for a war nor for a siege. The town was besieged at once and duly taken; Orestes executed for treason; and Romulus taken POW [AD 476]. But then Odovacar deviated from the examples of Aetius and Ricimer, as Chris Wickham relates:

Odovacar, the next effective military supremo in Italy (476-93), did not bother to appoint any emperor of the West, but instead got the Roman senate to petition the eastern emperor Zeno that only one emperor was by now needed; Odovacar then governed Italy in Zeno's name, as PATRICIUS, patrician, a title used by both Aetius and Ricimer, although inside Italy Odovacar called himself REX, king. (41)

⁴ In elder texts, see Gibbon's note # 108 above, also spelled "Odoacer".

After some hesitation, Zeno granted the supplication and Odoacar, now invested with legal authority, could afford to show leniency toward Romulus. Edward Gibbon applauds:

The life of this inoffensive youth was spared by the generous clemency of Odoacer; who dismissed him, with his whole family, from the Imperial palace, fixed his annual allowance at six thousand pieces of gold, and assigned the castle of Lucullus, in Campania, for the place of his exile or retirement. (42)

It is this year AD 476, which is commonly cited as the "end" of the Roman Empire, a custom which seems to overlook the fact that the eastern part of it survived for another thousand years. But one could take any of the neighbouring decades and claim an "end" all the same; indeed, it is a mistake to see Roman and Barbarians as either/or, when in reality the cultures mingled; in the words of Chris Wickham, "Crisis and Continuity" were both present between AD 400 and 550. (43) The perhaps most significant change was the end of the centralization of politics, economy and culture that the great empire had provided; particularism set in.

The end of political unity was not a trivial shift; the whole structure of politics had to change as a result. The ruling classes of the provinces were all still (mostly) Roman, but they were diverging fast. The East was moving away from the West, too.

It was becoming much more Greek in its official culture, for a start. Leo I was the first emperor to legislate in Greek; under a century later, Justinian (527-565) may have been the last emperor to speak Latin as a first language. But it is above all in the West that we find a growing provincialization in the late fifth century, both a consequence and a cause of the breakdown of central government. ...

Building became far less ambitious, artisanal production became less professionalized, exchange became more localized. The fiscal system, the judicial system, and the density of Roman administrative activity in general, all began to simplify as well. (44)

The decisive challenge, and indeed the most "taxing" matter, for any community that would endeavour to follow the Roman example, was how to pay for a standing army, which had been the instrument of Rome's expansion and maintenance. It is true that in ancient Rome the farmer was expected to perform military service if the need arose, quite like in ancient Gaul or beyond the Rhine. But that had changed at the latest with Marius's army reform around 100 BC. The Imperial decline and the decrease in political stability six hundred years later resulted in a corresponding shrinking of manufacture and commerce, which, at length, destroyed the Imperial tax base. It seems that the change from a paid to a landed army occurred in the West at the same time as Emperor Justinian I in the East embarked on his Imperial reconquista (which depleted his treasury, too), that is, at the time of Theoderic's Ostrogoths reign in Italy.

Beginning in the fifth century, there was a steady trend away from supporting armies by public taxation and towards supporting them by the rents deriving from private landowning, which was essentially the product of this desire for land of conquering elites. In 476, according to Procopius, even the Roman army of Italy wanted to be given lands, and got it by supporting Odoacar. Procopius may well have exaggerated; the Ostrogoths state in Italy certainly still used taxation to pay the army, at least in part, probably more than any other post-Roman polity did by the early sixth century.

Overall, however, the shift to land was permanent. After the end of Ostrogothic Italy, there are no references in the West to army pay, except rations for garrisons, until the Arabs reintroduced it in Spain from the mid-eight century onwards; in the other western kingdoms, only occasional mercenary detachments were paid

The major post-Roman kingdoms still taxed, into the seventh century. But if the army was landed, the major item of expense in the Roman budget had gone. The city of Rome, another important item, was only supplied from Italy after 439, and lost population fast, as we have seen. The central and local administration of the post-Roman states was perhaps paid for longer, but in most of them the administration quickly became smaller and cheaper. Tax still made kings rich, and their generosity increased the attractive power of royal courts. But this was all it was for, by 550 or so.

Tax is always unpopular, and takes work to exact; if it is not essential, this work tends to be neglected. It is thus not surprising that there are increasing signs that it was not assiduously collected. In ex-Vandal Africa after 534, the Roman re-conquerors had to reorganize the tax administration to make it effective again, to great local unpopularity; in Frankish Gaul in the 580s, assessment registers were no longer being systematically updated, and tax rates may only have been around a third of those normal under the empire. Tax was, that is to say, no longer the basis of the state. For kings as well as armies, landowning was the major source of wealth from now on. (45)

The differentiated Roman structures of administration and command could no longer be maintained. For centuries Rome had continued to grow by her arms while providing reasonable security and the general advantage of being a province of the Imperium Romanum was explained once to a Gaul by a lieutenant of Emperor Vespasian, around AD 70, and preserved by Tacitus:

"The protection of the [Roman] republic has delivered Gaul from internal discord and foreign invasions. By the loss of national independence, you have acquired the name and privileges of Roman citizens. You enjoy, in common with ourselves, the permanent benefits of civil government; and your remote situation is less exposed to the accidental mischief of tyranny.

Instead of exercising the rights of conquest, we have been contented to impose such tributes as are requisite for your own preservation. Peace cannot be secured without armies; and armies must be supported at the expense of the people. It is for your sake, not for ours, that we guard the barrier of the Rhine against the ferocious Germans, who have so often attempted, and who will always desire, to exchange the solitude of their woods and morasses for the wealth and fertility of Gaul.

The fall of Rome would be fatal to the provinces; and you would be buried in the ruins of that mighty fabric which has been raised by the valour and wisdom of eight hundred years. Your imaginary freedom would be insulted and oppressed by a savage master; and the expulsion of the Romans would be succeeded by the eternal hostilities of the Barbarian conquerors." (46)

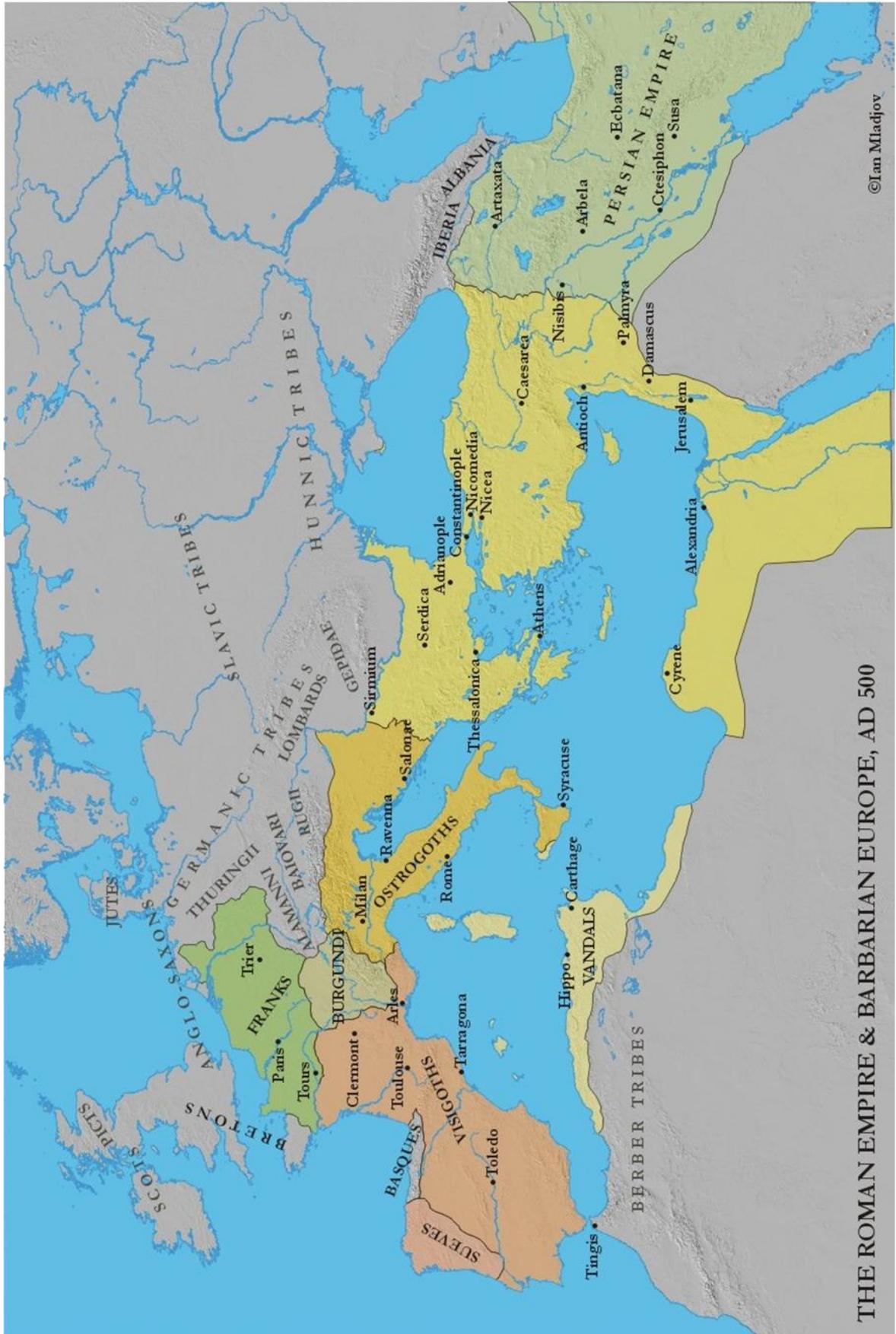
The tax base that had provided for the maintenance of the legions was evaporating, and consequently no large standing armies could be maintained for the next thousand years.

The unthinkable had happened: Rome had fallen, at least in the West, 1229 years after her mythical creation by Romulus, and for the moment no organized power would defend the western parts of the European continent from the inscrutable advances of Barbarian intruders. Yet nature abhors a vacuum, at least in politics, and before long the competition for the inheritance of Rome was in full progress. It centred on the former provinces of Gaul and eventually led to the "Middle Ages", which were characterized by a sudden fall and only very slow reintroduction of systems based on centralized administration.

Principally what happened is that the centre broke away - the north-western Germanic states and the Byzantine Empire were to become the pillars of European power, while impoverished Italy lost its political importance.

A side effect of this change was that the "Pax Romana", which had held most of the citizenry harmless from war for a few centuries - unless they lived in border sections - disappeared and was followed by more than a millennium of slaughter.

MAP XVI: GERMAN KINGDOMS OF THE WEST, CA. AD 500



©Ian Mladjov

THE ROMAN EMPIRE & BARBARIAN EUROPE, AD 500

THE SINS OF THE FATHERS

*Caesar's spirit, raging for revenge,
With Ate by his side, come hot from hell,
Shall in these confines, with a monarch's voice,
Cry 'Havoc!' and let slip the dogs of war.*

William Shakespeare "Julius Caesar", Act 3, Sc. 1, L. 1270

It was a sign of the increasing military faculties of the Franks that the victory over the Huns at Chalons had been achieved with the aid of a substantial corps of their warriors. The Franks were not one of the early tribes enumerated in Tacitus's "Germania", they were, it appears, part of a secondary conglomerate of smaller tribes, perhaps survivors of intra-German conflicts who banded together around AD 250 and crossed the Rhine westward. They followed the trail of an earlier tribal coalition which had included the original "Germani", who crossed the Rhine in the same direction in the first century BC but seem to have been assimilated fast: Julius Caesar does not mention them in "De Bello Gallico", his report on the campaigns in Gaul.

The early Franks were allowed to settle in the areas west of the lower Rhine: the Salian tribe settled in today's Flanders, in the vicinity of Tournai and Arras, while the Riparian Franks, under the leadership of the Merovingian dukes, took up residence slightly further southeast, around the banks of the Meuse and Moselle rivers.

Smaller communities initially settled in the two main tribes' vicinity. Yet these original settlements of the Franks had multiplied and spread swiftly, and resulted, in the late fifth century AD, in Frankish domination of great parts of northern and eastern Gaul. Because the possessions of the Visigoths in Gaul were concentrated south and west of the Loire and Rhone rivers, and their acquisitive impetus, under King Euric [rex.AD 466-484], was directed upon the conquest of Spain, the Franks found ample opportunities to enlarge their domains.

Clovis, or Chlodwig, a duke of the Franks in the last decades of the fifth century AD, was descended in paternal line from Childeric I, a former "Roman warlord and Frankish king based at Tournai", (1) who, in the lesser days of his luck, had been exiled to Thuringia. That was where he met Clovis's future mother Basina, queen of the Thuringians, who accommodated the exile in ways he could not have expected; she had a child with him and left her husband to join Childeric when the latter was restored to his authority. The son succeeded the father, at the tender age of fifteen years, to the leadership of the nation, which amounted, in the estimate of contemporary observers, to approximately 5,000 warriors [Clovis, or Chlodwig, rex.AD 481-511].

The young nobleman was instructed in the business of arms, for which he showed a considerable talent: to the extent that many of the mercenary corps meandering through and marauding the country were attracted to assemble under his banner. In addition to his military abilities, he was praised for applying justice when required and employing passion when permitted. Edward Gibbon wrote that "in all his transactions with mankind, he calculated the weight of interest, of passion, and of opinion: and his measures were sometimes adapted to the sanguinary manners of the Germans and sometimes moderated by the milder genius of Rome and Christianity." (2) In today's words, he was a killer and a fraud as well.

But his great chess move, and the most important benefit Clovis was able to secure for the eternal felicity of his people were not his military achievements but his uncanny decision to support that species of Christianity which would wind up the winner of the heresy wars between the fourth and seventh century: the Catholic Church of the Athanasian Creed.¹ This accomplishment perpetually improved the relations of the Franks with the Eastern Empire, in particular so because, at the time being, all the other Germanic kingdoms followed Arianism. The Franks thus became natural allies to Byzantium.²

The conversion of the Franks to the religion which institutes, as its most ethical and noble achievement, the love of mankind for each other, did not, however, impede Clovis's acknowledgement of necessary political prudence; "his ambitious reign was a perpetual violation of moral and Christian duties: his hands were stained with blood in peace as well as in war; and as soon as Clovis had dismissed a synod of the Gallican Church, he calmly assassinated all the princes of the Merovingian race." (3)

A Frankish victory over a corps of Visigoth at Tolmiac had been followed by an extensive border dispute between Clovis and Alaric II, the young king of the Goths. At length a meeting was arranged between the two, and the rendezvous proceeded with mutual proclamations of brotherly love and assertions of eternal peace but yielded no written truce or covenant.

Thus, when the indigenous population of the great and fecund province of Aquitaine asserted, in a confidential embassy, their inclination towards a change from Gothic to Frankish overlordship, Clovis did not hesitate for long; "in 507 he attacked the Visigoths, defeating and killing Alaric II at the battle of Vouillé, and virtually drove them out of Gaul (they only kept the province of Languedoc, on the Mediterranean coast). The Burgundians held on for a time, but in the 520's Clovis's sons attacked them too, and took over their kingdom in 534." (4) Before long, Clovis accepted from Emperor Anastasius the honour of the Roman consulship, as a sign of Imperial support for his Catholic associates. But Clovis died soon, only four years after Vouillé [AD 511] and Italy remained beyond Frankish reach.

That particular trophy went to an initially obscure warlord, who governed the Ostrogoths, a people who numbered perhaps less than one hundred thousand heads and still lived along the middle Danube. This duke, Theodoric, one day received an embassy from the eastern Emperor Zeno, Anastasius' successor, who, at length, *did* want to punish the rebellious upstart Odovacar in Italy. In the missive, Zeno invited the Ostrogoths to subjugate Italy in his name and to destroy Odovacar's regime of mercenaries. Theodoric accepted, and the greatest part of the nation set forth from their Pannonian pastures and Illyrian meadows in the direction of fabled Italia.

Zeno, however, got more than he had bargained for; belatedly he realized that the precious Italian provinces were now in hands much more capable than these of the comparatively simple soldier Odovacar. Theodoric's gifts did not include literacy, but a keen sense of political feasibility, of justice and fairness, honour and honesty, and in the murderous centuries of the age of migration, his name is one of the very few for whom the appellation of "the Great" was perhaps justified. His Goths swiftly closed in on Odovacar, who had no choice but to gain the security of Ravenna, where he resisted the Gothic siege for almost three years.

Yet in the commission of his duty, Theodoric committed, with his own hand (it is said), the only crime of his life. When, in March of AD 493, the situation became unbearable for both besiegers and besieged, a diplomatic mission succeeded with the proposal that Odovacar and Theodoric were to govern Italy and some neighbouring provinces [Sicily, Dalmatia, Noricum and Bavaria] together, like the original consuls had ruled the early Imperium Romanum. Edward Gibbon reports on the outcome of the deal:

A treaty of peace was negotiated by the bishop of Ravenna; the Ostrogoths were admitted to the city, and the hostile kings consented, under the sanction of an oath, to rule with equal and undivided authority over the provinces of Italy.

¹ Athanasius, Patriarch of Alexandria, AD 295(?)–373.

² The old name of Constantinople, which resurfaced as a negative epithet for the town and the Eastern Empire from the sixth century on.

The event of such an agreement may be easily foreseen. After some days had been devoted to the semblance of joy and friendship, Odoacer, in the midst of a solemn banquet, was stabbed by the hand, or at least by the command, of his rival.

Secret and effectual orders had been previously despatched; the faithless and rapacious mercenaries, at the same moment and without resistance, were universally massacred; and the royalty of Theodoric was proclaimed by the Goths, with the tardy, reluctant, ambiguous consent of the emperor of the East.

The reputation of Theodoric may repose with more confidence on the visible peace and prosperity of a reign of thirty-three years, the unanimous esteem of his own times, and the memory of his wisdom and courage, his justice and humanity, which was deeply impressed on the minds of the Goths and Italians. [March 5, AD 493 - August 30, AD 526]. (5)

Zeno's mounting anxieties were completely justified when, after the death of Alaric II at Vouillé, Theodoric was invested with the regency over the kingdom of the Visigoths in Spain, as the warden of Euric, Alaric's eldest son. Should Theodoric succeed to reunite the Goths and lead them against Constantinople, the continued existence of the Eastern Empire might well be in peril. Yet Theodoric did not strive at further conquests, which, he believed, could not be gainfully controlled with the limited number of troops available to him. Instead he emphasized in embassies who he directed to his German neighbours, the necessity of unity against their enemies; that is, against Byzantium.

Theodoric had diagnosed this enmity correctly, and it eventually resulted in unintended consequences for the Eastern Empire. Therefore we shall have a more detailed look at the events of the second quarter of the sixth century. Significant changes on the political map around the Mediterranean Sea in the generation after Zeno and Theodoric were provoked, in these decades, by Emperor Justinian and his Imperial reconquista, which, one might argue, ran against the Empire's best interests. Theodoric had brought stability to the remaining core provinces of the West; stability that Justinian could have utilized instead of hazarding it. Chris Wickham explains:

Theodoric ruled Italy from Ravenna, the western Roman capital, with a traditional Roman administration, a mixture of senatorial leaders from the city of Rome and career bureaucrats; he was (as Odovacar had also been) respectful of the Roman senate, and he made a ceremonial visit to the city in 500, with formal visits to St. Peter's, to the senate building, and then to the imperial palace on the Palatine, where he presided over games, like any emperor. ...

The administrative and fiscal system had changed little; the same traditional landowners dominated politics, beside a new (but partly Romanizing) Gothic or Ostrogothic military elite. (6)

Ostrogothic Italy was the most "Roman" of all Germanic kingdoms in the West, and might have remained so. Tom Holland summarizes the effect of Theodoric's long reign in that

"...whether addressing crowds in the Forum, slaughtering armies of savages beyond the Alps, or building palaces, aqueducts and baths, he demonstrated to glorious effect just how Roman a king of foederati might truly be. By the time of his death in 526, he had ruled as the master of Italy for longer than any Caesar, with the exception of Augustus himself. As a result, it seems barely to have crossed the minds of most Italians that they might not still belong to a Roman empire." (7)

Yet the emergence of new characters on the stage of Byzantium changed the political picture completely within a single year: in 527, one year after Theodoric's death, the powers of the Empire were invested upon the new emperor Justinian, nephew of the previous emperor Justin, whose reign was long assisted by the famously wicked (says Procopius) Empress Theodora, the general Belisarius and the talented eunuch Narses.

Justinian, whom the dutiful laudations of his courtiers soon labelled "the Great", was the son of a Bulgarian shepherd who nourished his flock on grazing grounds somewhere near today's Sofia. The youth eventually headed to Constantinople, under the tutelage of his uncle Justin and two fellow villagers, the three of whom enlisted in the legions upon their arrival. The uncle proved an industrious if not exceedingly gifted soldier: but in an age when average

performance, by the old standards, stood out as heroism had in days of yore, he was promoted steadily: to tribune, count, general, senator; finally to the command of the palace guard. He did not only retain his life and fortune at the delicate occasion of Anastasius' death in AD 518, but emerged from the momentary confusion in possession of the diadem and purple that Anastasius had to relinquish the previous night.

Justin's age, at this most important promotion of his life, was already sixty-eight, and since he was a brave but not an educated man and governed the realm without the benefit of literacy, he had to rely on the counsel of his quaestor Proclus in affairs of the empire, and groomed his nephew Justinian as heir apparent.

A few years passed without remarkable advents, and an old wound which persistently festered despite the mobilization of all the doctors of the capital at length deprived Justin of his life. His last act of state was to affix, in the presence of the senators and Excellencies of the realm, the diadem of the Imperial dignity upon his nephew's head, who was forty-five years of age at the beneficial occasion. The subsequent reign of the emperor Justinian has been accounted for in copious detail by the quill of the historian Procopius of Caesarea, who lived in Constantinople as a patrician and senator during Justinian's government. He has provided us with comprehensive descriptions of his sovereign's activities as legislator, builder, especially of churches, warlord - relating to the campaigns of his generals - and bane of mankind.

The latter particularity, described in his *SECRET HISTORY*, Procopius attributes to a large degree to the nefarious influence of the famous Theodora, whom Justinian promoted from most popular ecdysiast of the theatre and most expensive strumpet of the capital to the ranks of First Lady, Empress, and, post-mortem, Saint. The story is simply too juicy to be disregarded, and here is Tom Holland's take on it:

Even her bitterest critics - of whom there were many - grudgingly acknowledged that Theodora, consort and beloved of the emperor, was a woman of exceptional abilities. Shrewd, far-sighted and bold, she ranked, in the opinion of Justinian's cattier critics, as more of a man than her husband ever did.

Rumour had it that at the height of the deadly riots of 532, Constantinople ablaze and Justinian twitchily contemplating flight, she stiffened the imperial backbone by declaring, with a magnificent show of haughtiness, that "purple makes for an excellent shroud."

Steel of this order, in a woman, was unsettling enough to the Roman elite; but even more so were the origins of the empress. Theodora, like an exotic bloom sustained by dung, had her roots, so it was darkly whispered, deep in filth. Dancer, actress and stand-up comic, she had also - long before puberty - been honing on slaves and the destitute a career even more scandalous.

Her vagina, it was said, might just as well have been in her face; and, indeed, such was the use to which she put all three of her orifices that "she would often complain that she did not have orifices in her nipples as well." The gang-bang had never been held that could wear her out. Most notorious of all had been her trademark floor-show, which had seen her lie on her back, have her genitals sprinkled with grain, and then wait for geese to pick the seeds off one by one with their beaks. Such were the talents, so her critics sneered, that had won for her the besotted devotion of the master of the world.

Yet, this sorely underestimated both husband and wife. (8)

In our context, the foreign policies and advantages and deficiencies of Justinian's warlordship are of greater interest than his private pleasures. He had the fortune, yet, in hindsight, the empire perhaps the liability, to have at his command the military genius as well as the civil cowardice of the great general Belisarius.

It was Justinian's desire to restore the lost provinces of the West to the imperial fold: Britannia, Gallia and Hispania, perhaps, later, but as soon as possible Africa, for its grain, and Italy, the original imperial treasure. But other business, that is, the Persian wars, had to be dealt with first. The eastern border of the Empire had been fixed for centuries at the upper Euphrates, but the boundless approaches through the Arabian Desert could not possibly be guarded effectively.

Parthian and Persian kings and their armies had overstepped the borders regularly, and sometimes with impunity. From the fourth century on, a time of military decay, the Romans had frequently replaced counterattacks with financial considerations for the peace-loving Persian kings; in the year AD 553, for example, following five years of borderline rapine, Justinian's contribution to the Royal Persian Exchequer amounted to 11,000 pounds of gold; this quantity was to secure, as the treaty document specified, nothing less than a *perpetual* peace between the two empires.

As it turned out, perpetuity had to be reinforced every decade or so by additional remunerations. But a somewhat more stable Persian peace secured in AD 533 allowed Justinian his first move in the West. He was assured of the services of a general whose military deeds were to rank him with Caesar and Alexander, but whose civil timidity placed him among the meek and mendicant of this earth.

The soldier Belisarius was born, not far from where the emperor's father had kept his sheep, on the plains of Thrace. His military career proceeded timely and peaked in the command of the private guards of prince Justinian. When the prince was elevated to the royal dignity, the soldier was promoted to general.

When Justinian sought a commander whom he could entrust with the first step in rebuilding the glory of the Empire, he was unable to find a suitable candidate. At length, perhaps for the intimate counsel Belisar's wife Antonia retained with the empress Theodora, her husband was chosen to lead the glorious enterprise. Due to his sovereign's unwillingness to spend substantial sums upon the renovation of the Empire, Belisar was given only a small fleet and a few legions, yet, nonetheless, commanded to wrest Africa from the Vandals.

Against the odds, the mission succeeded: it was the first occasion in which Belisarius proved exceptional generalship. But to replace the money in the imperial treasury that had been spent on Belisar's army, a "rapacious minister of the finances closely pursued the footsteps of Belisarius" (9) and the unhappy province not only had to pay the regular taxes but a special liberation tax.

As mentioned above, the Vandals had destroyed the old tax registers, and when new ones were created, the quaestors did not forget to add another tax, to secure a just compensation for their own labours. Financial ruin was followed by depopulation, and Edward Gibbon cites Procopius, who, upon his first landing in Africa with Belisar in AD 534 "admired the populousness of the cities and country, strenuously exercised in the labours of commerce and agriculture. In less than twenty years, that busy scene was converted into a silent solitude; the wealthy citizens escaped to Sicily and Constantinople; and the secret historian [Procopius, ¶] has confidently affirmed that five millions of Africans were consumed by the wars and government of the emperor Justinian." (10)

Although Procopius indeed had a tendency of exaggerating his numbers, the fact remains that the wealth of Africa provincia from then on constantly declined and the area lost its former status as the empire's grain chamber. Belisar was not a politician, and it may be doubted whether he was even aware of the dangerous side effects of his conquest. He had to contemplate a different distraction.

That a victory afar, in particular if not necessarily expected, may induce a measure of suspicion at the court of a doubting monarch is, perhaps, a quite common occurrence. Hardly had the news of the triumph over the Vandals reached Byzantium when the subaltern officers who had preferred to remain in the safety of the capital instead of courting the danger or the glory of the battlefield, informed the emperor that the reliable rumour had arrived that Belisarius was about to declare himself King of Africa.

When the distrustful monarch inquired of his general whether he was to return to Constantinople soon or whether urgent business would keep him in Africa, the general understood his master's voice and recognized the portents of Justinian's vindictiveness. He appeared in Constantinople tout de suite, where a grateful and elated Justinian sponsored a triumph for Belisar, the first for a non-emperor since the days of Tiberius. (11)

An optimistic Justinian then planned his next stroke, and a somewhat bigger fleet and army were prepared for Belisar's subsequent task: to deliver Italia and Dalmatia from the hands of the Arian, that is, heretic, Ostrogoths. That his predecessor Zeno had personally invited the Goths to Italy, well aware of their beliefs, Justinian resolved to overlook.

Indeed, it is hard to say, and the opinions of historians have clashed on the question whether the restoration of the Western Empire *per se* was Justinian's aim or the destruction of the heretics, or whether both points of view happened to coincide. He had theological problems in his own house, for Theodora was a fervent Monophysite, and the emperor was driven to allow her, and hence her community, the license that his strong Catholic convictions would not have granted otherwise. A glimpse into the complications of Christian doctrine is here provided by Tom Holland:

In 451, a year after the death of Theodosius II, the largest ecumenical council that the Church had ever seen, attended by a full six hundred bishops, was held at Chalcedon, directly across the straits from the imperial palace, in a conscious effort to rein in this tendency [of Christian communities' theological independence, ¶]. The new regime's aim - just as Constantine's had been at Nicaea - was to muzzle a taste for bickering that had come to threaten, in the opinion of the authorities, not only the unity of the Church but the very security of the Roman people.

*At stake for the delegates, however, was no longer the relationship of the Son to the Father, an issue long since triumphantly resolved, but a no less awesome mystery: the identity of the Son Himself. How, Christians wanted to know, had His divine and human natures coexisted? Had they been wholly intermingled, like water and wine in a goblet, to constitute a *MONOPHYSIS* - a "single nature"? Or had the two natures of Christ in fact coexisted within His earthly body as quite distinct entities, like water and oil? Had both His human and His divine essence experienced birth, suffering and death, or was it the most repugnant blasphemy to declare, as some bishops did, that God Himself "was crucified for us"?*

Knotty questions - nor easily unpicked. The Council of Chalcedon, nevertheless, did its level best. A determinedly middle road was steered. Due weight was given to both the divine and the human elements of Christ: "the same truly God and truly man." This formula, devised by a bishop of Rome and graced with the approval of the emperor himself, struck the Christians of both the West and Constantinople as eminently reasonable - so much so that never again would they attempt to revise or reverse it. (12)

In practice, the result of the council worked against the Monophysites and in favour of a Catholic Church that, with the emperor's support, intensified the prosecution of apostates. While the privacy of his palace allowed Justinian religious tolerance and urged him moderation in the matter of the Monophysite error, the public Arianism of the Goths and Vandals challenged not only his Catholic beliefs but, indirectly, his profane authority as well. Belisar was summoned and given a second command: not only to regain Italia, the glory of the Empire, and Rome, its seed, but to liberate millions of souls from religious oppression by their errant masters.

The target of the renewed offensive, Ostrogothic Italy plus its appendices, had suffered from dynastic complications since the great king's death, and "infighting between Theoderic's heirs in 526 - 36 led to a more serious alienation of some of the aristocratic elite from the Ostrogothic regime, many of whom ended up in Constantinople." (13) Belisar's second western campaign, begun in AD 536, was another success, it would appear: the Gothic arms were defeated at three different occasions and their authority diminished quickly, although they remained in possession of a few strongholds.

The news of Belisarius' recapture of Italy spread swiftly through the realm, and fed Justinian's suspicions again. The hero was recalled a second time but brought with him, as his captives or guests, the royal pair of the Ostrogoths, who proceeded to sign a comprehensive treaty. The agreement emphasized the Goths' future and unconditional obedience to the emperor and introduced a great number of their youth to service in the legions. A delivery of Gothic hostages substantiated, as usual, the validity of the compact.

But since "the jealousy of the Byzantine Court had not permitted Belisarius to achieve the [complete] conquest of Italy ... his abrupt departure revived the courage of the Goths [AD 540]." (14) What happened next was much to Justinian's chagrin. One thousand or so Gothic warriors, who had held the town of Pavia, received word from another small garrison, that still held Verona, and from another one that still controlled Teriolis. The Byzantine army had been left, at the departure of Belisar, to the command of eleven equal-ranked generals, and the disaster this policy caused may easily be imagined.

Messengers from the Gothic garrisons remaining in Italy meanwhile had met, undisturbed, with their comrades that still guarded the northern borders of the Danube and the Alps, and before long the war the empire believed won was rekindled. The banner of the Gothic monarchy was resurrected by the young Baduila, called Totila, and the cause of the Goths profited greatly from the avarice and the appalling methods of Justinian's fiscus. Edward Gibbon compares valour and corruption, in the tradition of Tacitus:

The rapid success of Totila may be partly ascribed to the revolution which three years' experience had produced in the sentiments of the Italians. At the command, or at least in the name, of a Catholic emperor, the pope [Silverius], their spiritual father, had been torn from the Roman church and either starved or murdered on a desolate island.

The virtues of Belisarius were replaced by the various or uniform vices of eleven chiefs, at Rome, Ravenna, Florence, Perugia, Spoleto, etc., who abused their authority for the indulgence of lust and avarice. The improvement of the revenue was committed to Alexander, a subtle scribe long practiced in the fraud and oppression of the Byzantine schools, and whose name of PSALLITION, the Scissors, was drawn from the dexterous artifice with which he reduced the size without defacing the figure of the gold coin. Instead of expecting the restoration of peace and industry, he imposed a heavy assessment on the fortunes of the Italians.

The subjects of Justinian who escaped these partial vexations were oppressed by the irregular maintenance of the soldiers, whom Alexander defrauded and despised; and their hasty sallies in quest of wealth or subsistence provoked the inhabitants of the country to await or implore their deliverance from the virtues of a Barbarian.

Totila was chaste and temperate; and none were deceived, either friends or enemies, who depended on his faith and clemency. To the husbandmen of Italy the Gothic king issued a welcome proclamation, enjoining them to pursue their important labours and to rest assured that, on the payment of the ordinary taxes, they should be defended by his valour and discipline from the injuries of war. ...

The Roman captives and deserters were tempted to enlist in the service of a liberal and courteous adversary; the slaves were attracted to the firm and faithful promise that they should never be delivered to their masters; and from the thousand warriors of Pavia, a new people, under the same appellation of Goths, was insensibly formed in the camp of Totila. (15)

It is obvious where Gibbon's sympathies lay, but indeed, "most of the non-Gothic Italians were at best neutral about Justinian's armies." (16) The emperor now faced the pro-Belisar faction of the court, who argued that only the recall of the hero had made the renewed Gothic insurrection possible. There was not really a way to counter the postulation, and at length Justinian had no choice but to send Belisar back to Italy. The imperial frugality, however, restricted the general to such troops as he could support by his own means. Thus Belisar arrived at Ravenna with his personal guards, but little else. Procopius relates a letter the fettered hero wrote to his master:

"Most excellent prince, we are arrived in Italy, destitute of all the necessary implements of war, men, horses, arms, and money. In our late circuit through the villages of Thrace and Illyricum, we have collected with extreme difficulty about four thousand recruits, naked and unskilled in the use of weapons and the exercises of the camp.

The soldiers already stationed in the province are discontented, fearful, and dismayed; at the sound of an enemy, they dismiss their horses and cast their arms on the ground. No taxes can be raised since Italy is in the hands of the Barbarians; the failure of payment has deprived us of the right to command, or even of admonition. Be assured, dread Sir, that the greater part of your troops have already deserted to the Goths.

If the war could be achieved by the presence of Belisarius alone, your wishes are satisfied; Belisarius is in the midst of Italy. But if you desire to conquer, far other preparations are requisite: without a military force, the title of general is an empty name.

It would be expedient to restore to my service my own veteran and domestic guards. Before I can take the field, I must receive an adequate supply of light and heavy armed troops; and it is only with ready money you can procure the indispensable aid of a powerful body of the cavalry of the Huns." (17)

Belisar's own words reveal that, almost ninety years after the general retreat of the Huns following Attila's death in AD 453, large bodies of their mercenaries still infested the continent. At length, the hero gathered some troops and supplies on the opposite coast of the Adriatic Sea, in Dalmatia, and launched an expedition to deliver Rome from the Goths. Rome and Ravenna were the last two places in Italy still held by Justinian's troops and had consequently been blockaded and beleaguered for years. The Byzantine fleet landed at the port of Ostia, five leagues from Rome, but the news of Belisar's reappearance reached the town too late to prevent the famished garrison's release of Rome to the charity of the king of the Goths [December 17, AD 546].

Totila's soldiers requested permission to raze the walls and houses of the sinful city to the ground, but, swayed by a message from Belisar, who appealed, on Procopius's counsel, to the king's mercy for the eternal town, Totila spared Rome from devastation, on the condition of her future neutrality in the war and obedience to his and his successors' directives, as a part of the new Romano-Gothic kingdom. The clemency of Totila forewent the institution of a garrison within the city: a single regiment of guards was stationed in a camp, perhaps five leagues away, epitomizing a protection of the town against pirates or meandering mercenaries rather than against a regular army.

The king's leniency was ill rewarded, and Totila's generosity became the cause of his downfall. The Gothic army had barely left Latium when Belisar assaulted and annihilated the Gothic sentinels and moved into Rome for the second time [February, AD 547]. Totila returned post-haste, but three successive attempts to take the city by storm failed and the newly formed Gothic and Italian army lost the flower of their men. Eventually, exhaustion paralyzed both sides, until Belisar was, once again, recalled to Byzantium and Totila, once again, conquered Rome in AD 549. During the Gothic wars, the town changed hands five times.

It had been Justinian's policy to deny the Goths a formal peace, but not to burden the treasury with the expenses of war either, and for years the Gothic war boiled on a small flame. But his resolve was injured when Gothic raids invaded the provinces of Epirus and Macedonia, in the Balkans, and Constantinople itself seemed in the reach of the Barbarians. Justinian realized the urgency of the situation, and, belatedly, the treasury was opened, but not to Belisar's support.

The emperor was not a father, but he had a niece, who had married the young prince Germanus, a nobleman of whom public opinion held that this marriage was his sole accomplishment. The young man was swiftly promoted to the post of general-in-chief of the Gothic war, and put on a ship to Sicily, where he was to muster the troops assembling for the glorious enterprise of subduing Italy again. The solemn inspection, however, had to be postponed when the youth suddenly expired.

The empire awaited, naturally, the return of the Gothic command to Belisar, when "the nations were provoked to a smile by the strange intelligence that the command of the Roman armies was given to a eunuch," the domestic Narses, who "is probably the sole representative of his peculiar sex in the annals of military history." (18) Narses was the complete opposite of Belisarius: weak of body and unfamiliar with the use of weapons, he was probably the only man, so to say, at the court of Constantinople, who dared to speak his mind.

He declined to accept a command without the means to enforce it, and "Justinian granted the favourite what he might have denied to the hero: the Gothic war was rekindled from its ashes, and the preparations were not unworthy of the ancient majesty of the empire. The key of the public treasure was put into his hand, to collect magazines, to levy soldiers, to purchase arms and horses, to discharge the arrears of pay, and to tempt the fidelity of the fugitives and deserters." (19)

The expedition of Narses [AD 552-554] was the last military effort of the Empire that stood up in comparison with the distinguished past. It is said that the Romans numbered 80,000 or more, mostly mercenaries, against which Totila, after the bloody losses at Rome between AD 546 and 549, could field probably less than twenty thousand.

At length, the Gothic arms were defeated: Totila died on the battlefield of Taginae in July 552, and the remainder of the Goths retired northward past the Alps, where they reorganized and, with the assistance of a few mercenaries, attempted a return to Italy [AD 553]. They were defeated a second time by Narses, who, after a timely visit to Constantinople, was dispatched back to Italy to govern her, as Exarch, or lieutenant of the emperor, for the next about fifteen years [AD 554-568].

Yet something worse than the Vandal and Gothic wars was inflicted on the people around the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. A horrific attack of bubonic plague was reported in Alexandria in the fall of AD 541, and the grain ships that emerged from its harbours in the spring of AD 542 spread the disease over the world. Constantinople was ravaged by the epidemic through which, as Procopius wrote, "the whole of humanity came close to annihilation." (20)

The emperor, too, was caught by *YERSINIA PESTIS* but recovered. The disease travelled from Constantinople, over the Bosphorus, to Asia Minor, and from there to Syria and Palestine. There it reversed direction westward, and by AD 543 it had spread over the provinces of the West, Africa, Italy, Gaul and Spain. Two years later, it struck the Far East, and devastated the Persian Empire: large parts of Mesopotamia, Media and Persia were depopulated.³

Overall, the results of Justinian's anachronistic efforts to rebuild the empire were not only short-lived, but, for the worse, a financial catastrophe.

The destruction of Africa's and Italy's tax base in the wake of the military occupations meant that the monarchy never even recovered its expenses. And since the Eastern Empire could not make the step to replace an army paid for by taxes to that paid by a landed gentry, losses of revenue implied losses of military power. Justinian's escapades had almost bankrupted the realm and the net result of Emperor Heraclius' [r.AD 610-641] war against the Persians between AD 610 and 628 was that, a decade later, he lost everything he had gained and more to the assault of the recent Islamic Caliphate, which, ironically enough, "was itself built on Roman foundations (as also Sassanian Persian foundations)," and "it arguably preserved the parameters of imperial Roman society more completely than any other part of the post-Roman world, at least in the period up to 750." (21)

Soon after Narses' death Italy was taken over by the Lombards, who had, under their original name of Langobards, dwelt around the lower Elbe, near today's Hamburg, before they joined the southward migration of the Germanic tribes. They had been employed, among other mercenaries, by Narses against the Goths, but in the aftermath of the Gothic war conquered most of rural Italy between AD 568 and 570, without encountering much resistance from the exhausted locals.

On the eastern border of the empire, the Persians had resumed their inroads as soon as Justinian [March 13, AD 565] and Narses [November 14, AD 568] had expired. From this time on, with rare exceptions, the Eastern Empire underwent a process of shrinking. The Islamic, neo-Persian Caliphate exercised constant pressure on the Roman frontiers before and after the crusades; from ca. AD 1400 on in the guise of the Turkish or "Ottoman" Empire.

In the late sixth and seventh centuries, Italy remained divided between the rural and small town possessions of the Lombards and the remains of the Exarchate of Ravenna, which hung onto a few parts of the land as titular possessions of the Eastern Emperor. The Exarchate's borders coincided much with those of the state that became known as the "Patrimonium Petri", the Papal State, which the Catholic Church was able to create in one of the great real-estate swindles in history. The Lombards owned most of the north and south of the Italian peninsula; their northern borders, around the

³ It was the effect of the plague of the 540s and its reoccurrence in much of Syria, Palestine, and Upper Mesopotamia from AD 600 on, and the eternal Romano-Persian border wars, that reduced the populations around the Eastern Mediterranean and the Fertile Crescent (and hence the availability of soldiers) to a degree which permitted the eventual expansion of the Arabian Caliphate in the seventh century.

Alps, touched on the lands of the neighbouring Franks, Alemanni and Bavarians, who from the fifth century on appear as an independent people.

The Gothic attempt to master the imperial challenge had failed. The legacy of Rome, the domination of the Occident, could not be established by a single tribe or people, although the Franks, as we will see in the next chapter, undertook a credible effort. Although Alaric and Theodoric had followed different policies, it was clear that Germanic enthusiasm alone could not achieve the restoration of the Western Empire.

The great migration had not ended yet: Hungarians and Mongolians would continue to invade the heartlands of Europe via the eastern approaches. Even the might of the Romans had been unable to resist a constant flux of Barbarian inroads, and, while the torch of nation-building had ultimately passed to the German tribes, their disunity obstructed the restoration of the empire. The sins of the Germanic chieftains who, in the service of the Eastern Empire had assisted in the downfall of Theodoric's Gothic association, were visited on their children: German concord was to remain elusive.

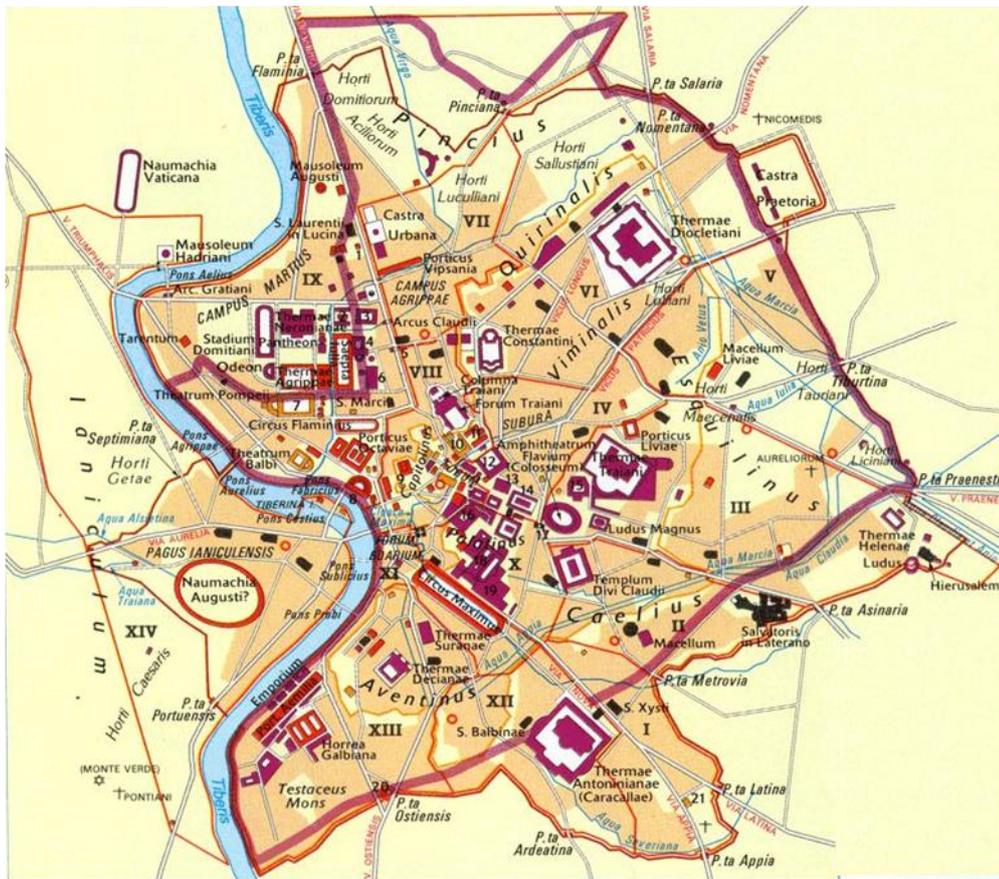
As far as Italy was concerned, three centuries of civil, religious and secular wars had maimed and mutilated the land of Virgil, Pliny and Seneca, and Edward Gibbon's gloomy description of the condition of the eternal town and former capital of the world around AD 700 hints at the state of much of the continent:

Amidst the arms of the Lombards and under the despotism of the Greek [i.e. Byzantium, ¶], we again inquire into the fate of Rome, which had reached, about the close of the sixth century, the lowest period of her depression.

By the removal of the seat of the empire and the successive loss of the provinces, the sources of public and private opulence were exhausted: the lofty tree under whose shade the nations of the earth had reposed was deprived of its leaves and branches, and the sapless trunk was left to wither on the ground. The ministers of command and the messengers of victory no longer met on the Appian or Flaminian Way; and the hostile approach of the Lombards was often felt and continually feared.

The inhabitants of a potent and peaceful capital who visit without an anxious thought the garden of the adjacent country will faintly picture in their fancy the distress of the Romans: they shut or opened their gates with a trembling hand, beheld from the walls the flames of their houses, and heard the lamentations of their brethren, who were coupled together like dogs and dragged away into distant slavery beyond the sea and the mountains. ... Curiosity and ambition no longer attracted the nations to the capital of the world: but if chance or necessity directed the steps of a wandering stranger, he contemplated with horror the vacancy and solitude of the city, and might be tempted to ask, Where is the senate, and where are the people. (22)⁴

⁴ The official name of the Empire had been "SENATUS POPULUSQUE ROMANUS" ('The Senate and the People of Rome'), often abbreviated as SPQR, which is what Gibbon alludes to in the closing phrase.



MAP XVI B: ROME IN THE 3RD CENTURY AD, A COMPACT AND POPULOUS TOWN

MAP XVI C: ROME IN 1627, RESEMBLING AN AGRONOMICAL COMPOUND



THE FONTENOY MATERNITY WARD

*Ce corps qui s'appellait et qui s'appelle encore
le saint empire romain n'était en aucune manière
saint, ni romain, ni empire.*

*The body that called itself and still calls itself the Holy
Roman Empire, was in no way Holy, neither Roman,
nor an Empire.*

François-Marie Arouet (Voltaire) "Essay sur l'histoire générale et
sur les moeurs at l'esprit des nations", 1756, Ch. 70

Some three hundred years after Tacitus's literary introduction of the "Germans" to the world, the Roman empire began to abandon, mile by mile, its villages, towns and fortifications along the Rhine and Upper Danube frontiers, and thus gave a few Germanic tribes excellent opportunities to cross the wet border and push into the vacated territories, exploiting the absence of armed response.

Among the early contenders for a westward expansion were the Franks, whom we have met in the preceding chapter. They had an epic history of border transgressions, dating back to AD 180 or so, but about seventy years later had been allowed to settle west of the Rhine, between the North Sea and the Moselle and Seine rivers.

We have encountered the shrewd statesmanship and considerable cruelty of Clovis, whose adjustment of his own and his compatriots' religion from Arianism to Catholicism had so favourably blessed relations with Byzantium. During Justinian's Gothic wars, the constant threat of a Frankish attack into Raetia, today's Switzerland, and the Upper Rhine, or lower Italy, had obligated a quarter of the Ostrogothic army to man defensive stations between the Alps and the Danube. Until the desperate attempt of AD 553, after Totila's death, these troops had been unable to aid their comrades in Italy against Belisar's Huns or Narses' Langobards.

The geographic location of the Frankish settlements west of the Rhine defined the core of their political power then as well as today: the centre of Frankish, and later French power, remained in a triangle formed by, say, Orleans, Metz and Cologne; and the "Merovingian Franks were thus both the people who created the political centrality of the Paris to Cologne region for the first time, a centrality it has never lost since, and the first people to rule on both sides of the Rhine frontier of the Roman empire Clovis put his own family, called by 640 at the latest the Merovingians, after his shadowy grandfather Merovech, firmly into the centre of politics: after 530 or so no one is documented claiming the Frankish kingship who did not also claim Merovingian parentage, until the Carolingian coup in 751." (1)

In the generations that followed Chlodwig, the Franks established safeholds on the Danube¹ and the northern rims of the Alps, incorporated the former kingdom of the Burgundians as well as Aquitaine, taken from the Visigoths, and territories in central and southern Germany.² Infighting between the Merovingians was legendary: territories were divided, reassembled and separated again, and the independent-mindedness of the Frankish dukes led to the simultaneous

¹ Chris Wickham notes that Theudebert I [r.AD 533-548] probably "set up the powerful Franco-Burgundian Agilolfing family as dukes of Bavaria, to act ... as the core of a developing Bavarian identity....."(2)

² Of course, no Germany existed yet; these terms only indicate geographic locations as they would appear on a modern map.

existence of three courts; the kingdom of Neustria, in the northwest, Austrasia, northeast, and Burgundy, although smaller courts existed from time to time, in Aquitaine for example. There is a temptation to see in the three courts enumerated above the precursors of the divisions of the ninth century, i.e. that Neustria became France, Austrasia became Germany and Burgundy changed into Lotharingia [named for Emperor Lothar I, rex. AD 824-855, "Lorraine" or "New Burgundy", later divided into Higher and Lower Burgundy, ¶], but this is hindsight. Reunifications of the Frankish provinces were achieved, though of transient nature, by Chlodwig's son Chlotar and much later by Chlotar II in AD 613, but "fain in all, there were only twenty-two years of Frankish unity between 511 and 679." (3)

The perpetual instability of the Frankish court, which continued even in the few years of theoretical unity, at length prompted the development of an office for a ministerial advisor and executive secretary that was called *MAIOR DOMUS*, the leader of the house, i.e. the palace. Our knowledge of human nature will prevent surprise at the intrigues spun to achieve this position and the treasonous abuse with which it was often effected. At length it became the true position of power, and by an Austrasian defeat of the Neustrians at the battle of Tertry in AD 687, the Austrasian maior Pippin II, nephew of Grimoald, an earlier maior of Austrasia, became maior of all Frankish territories. (4) His, perhaps illegitimate (5), son Charles, called Martel [the "Hammer", ¶], became, and what is more, remained sole maior from AD 717 to 741, by defeating all other contenders. He abolished the court of Neustria and aimed at a consolidation of the realm, at the price of almost eternal war.

Between 720 and 804 there were only, probably, eight years without a campaign and in some years there were two or three. Charles fought on all his borders, reabsorbing Provence and blocking Arab advances from Spain as he did so, taking over Frisia, and re-establishing Frankish hegemony in Alsace and Aquitaine.

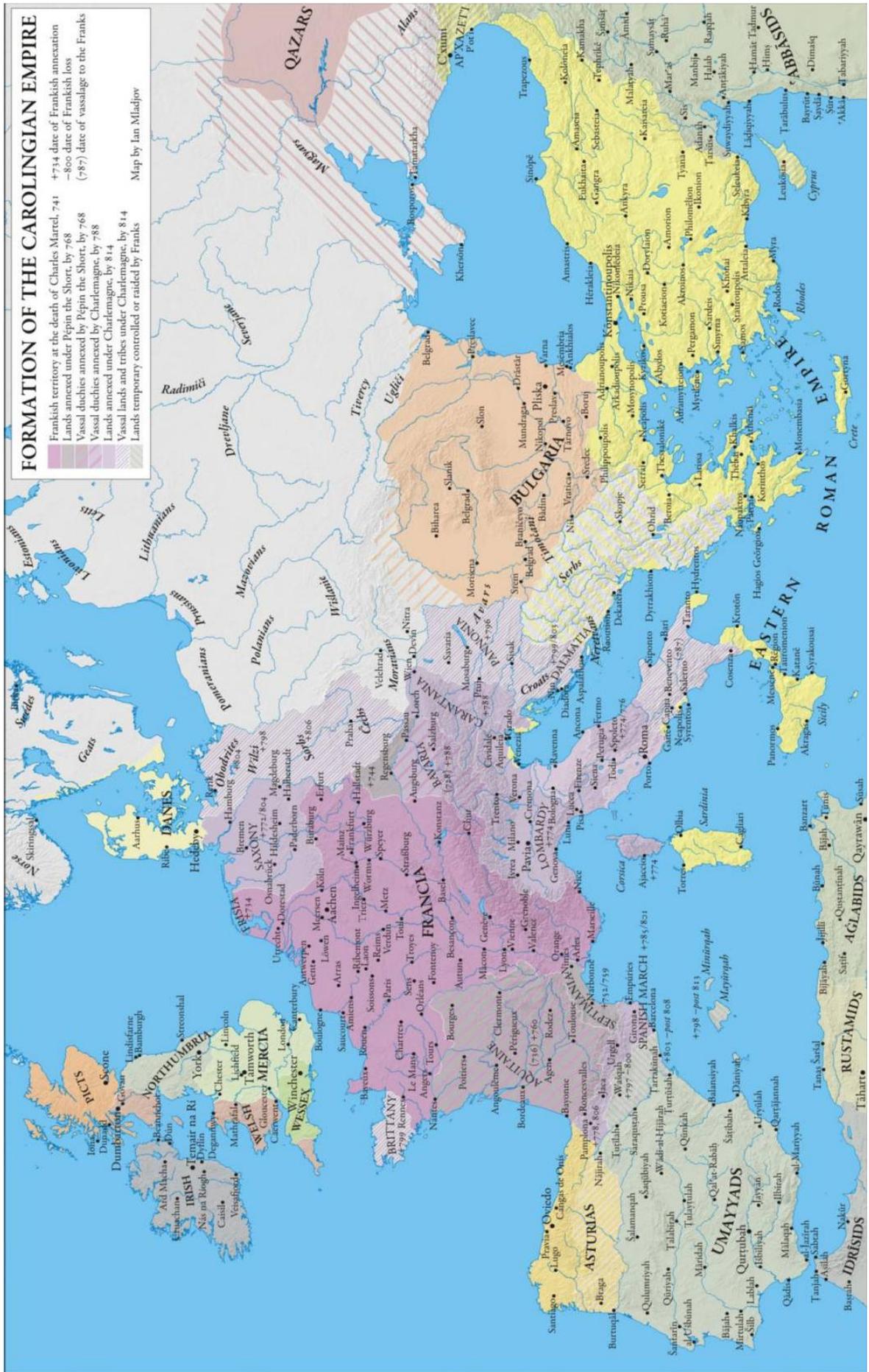
Most important, however, was the total authority he established in the Frankish heartland, thanks to this military aggregation, and to its success -Charles never lost a war. The Merovingian kings were only puppets by now and the lay aristocracy and the episcopate both followed Charles; he overthrew any potential rivals without qualms or (apparently) difficulties. (6)

The centralization of power in his hands allowed his sons and heirs Pippin and Carloman³ in later years to divide the office of valour between them just as earlier descendants of Chlodwig had divided the Frankish territories among themselves. In his last years, Charles had ruled without a king, but his sons at length had to restore the monarchy to quell internal discord, and elevated one more puppet, Childeric III, last of the Merovingians, to the dignity of being king of the Franks [AD 743]. In the best tradition of Frankish family feuds, Charles's sons proceeded to quarrel, bicker and brawl against each other until, in 747, Carloman retired, "apparently willingly" (7) to the famous Benedictine monastery at Monte Cassino, and Pippin governed the *REGNUM FRANCORUM*, the realm of the Franks, all by himself.

It was not truly a surprise when, a few years later, Pippin obtained the assent of the nobility, the clergy and finally of Pope Zachary for a proposition he had hedged for some time: would it not be better for the realm to commit poor Childeric to a friary, to prevent the feeble monarch from jeopardizing the public welfare, and to have Pippin succeed to the throne whose power he already wielded? Zachary readily agreed, and Pippin was crowned king of the Franks by St. Boniface, apostle to Germany and archbishop of Mainz [AD 751]. The pope's support had a price: his consent was granted on the unspoken condition that the king would aid the successor of St. Peter against the Lombards, who presently threatened the Holy See. By saving the sacred but mortal ministers of the Vatican and their more profane effects, King Pippin and the Franks earned the appreciation of the clergy and the appellation of the deliverers of the faith.

The whole procedure had to be repeated in AD 754, when the new pope Stephen II visited the Frankish court with the news that he was in need of protection from the Lombards as well. A deal was struck: Pippin was crowned a second time, this time by the pope himself, and, as the quid-pro-quo, led another corps of Franks over the Alps and rescued the Church of St. Peter a second time from the rapacious hands of the Lombards. It was in this time that the basis was laid for future agreements between the monarchy and the Holy See, for fact was "that king and pope needed each other, the pope to gain protection against attack, the king to gain legitimate authority; for the Carolingians, although the strongest

³ Pippin III [r. AD 741-768] and Carloman I [r. AD 741-747].



MAP XVII: CHARLEMAGNE'S FRANCONIAN EMPIRE [AD 768-814]

aristocratic family in Francis by far since the 680s, were not royal until two successive popes - importantly, an external, non-Frankish, moral power - said they were." (8)

At the occasion of Pippin's death in AD 768, the Carolingian monarchy proved secure enough to allow the succession of Pippin's heirs, the brothers Charles [technically the Second, following his grandfather Charles Martel, ¶] and Carloman II. Again, no one must be surprised that Carloman died, mysteriously, in AD 771, after a co-reign of only three years, but now the name of the second Charles, the most famous of the Carolingians, has entered our annals; the man who was afforded the honour and, perhaps, the affection of his subjects, who saw him, it is said, as the legitimate successor to the throne of the *AUGUSTUS* of the West.

Edward Gibbon notes in the context of his name that the "appellation of *great* has often been bestowed, and sometimes deserved, but *CHARLEMAGNE* [who reigned AD 768-814] is the only prince in whose favour the title has been indissolubly blended with the name" (9) Interestingly, Gibbon declines to state whether the epithet was deserved or not; perhaps a synopsis of Charlemagne's undertakings can illuminate the matter.

His main occupation was war, of the bloody and vindictive sort. He conquered the lands of the pagan Saxons in today's north Germany (it took him forty years and by the end netted very little), subdued Lombard Italy (a far easier campaign that brought in a fortune), restored Frankish authority over Bavaria by removing the dukes of the Agilolfing family, who had flirted with independence too much and too often, and decisively beat the Avars, the latest Mongolian people having invaded Europe along the Danube. Like the Huns earlier or the Mongols later, nomadic peoples could not be conquered per se, but after a few lost battles the Avars retired to the infinities of the Asian steppe. He also took a slice of northern Spanish territory off the Muslim Arabs, although a greater Spanish campaign, an attack on Zaragoza in AD 778 was one of his few military fizzles. (10) Yet he was not a great general; all his campaigns were planned with the advantage of the greater number.

Yet in an age that measured the king's influence in the first degree by the wealth he may spend on his favourites, Charles indeed was a mighty sovereign; he had "conquered new territories, and seized, not only extensive booty, but the royal treasure of two peoples, the Lombards and the Avars: essential resources for royal generosity in gift-giving, to aristocrats and to foreign rulers, which the Carolingians needed as much as their predecessors. He also now controlled the royal land of Italy and the ducal land of Aquitaine and Bavaria, and the confiscated land of rebels across the whole of Saxony and (to a lesser extent) elsewhere; and also a network of new offices, counties, abbacies and bishoprics, to add to those in the Frankish heartland." (11)

He was a clever customer and did not, as a rule, gift lands to his followers but rather apportioned them as temporary *beneficia*, benefits, that is, revocable titles. The immeasurable wealth, at least by early medieval standards, of Charles's court made it the greatest magnet for talent on the continent by far.

From 794 on, Charles built his own capital, Aachen [Aix-la-Chapelle, the former Roman spa of Aquae Grani, ¶], on the left side of the Rhine, and this place became the model of later courts in the sense that, although kings still moved around the country to meet lieges and/or to dispense justice, Charles and his successors would return to Aachen in regularity, which thus "became a stable political and administrative focus for the first time in Frankish history." (12)

But Charles did not only believe in the material trappings of political authority, he had a sense for propaganda, too. Thus on Christmas Day, December 25, AD 800, he had himself crowned and anointed *Augustus*, i.e. emperor, by the pope at St. Peter in Rome. Although the title was strictly honorary, it was not only great news and spread through the known world in a flash, it was also the expression of a claim and, partly, of a fact: as Edward Gibbon admitted, Charles's empire "was not unworthy of its title; and some of the fairest kingdoms in Europe were the patrimony or the conquest of a prince who reigned at the same time in France, Spain, Italy, Germany, and Hungary." (13) A few of the monarch's more personal conquests and warlike predilections, however, did not meet with the historian's applause, as Edward Gibbon feels necessary to point out:

Without injustice to his fame, I may discern [writes Gibbon, ¶] some blemishes in the sanctity and greatness of the restorer of the Western empire. Of his moral virtues, chastity is not the most conspicuous; but the public

happiness could not be materially injured by his nine wives and concubines, the various indulgence of meaner or more transient amours, the multitude of his bastards, whom he bestowed to the church, and the long celibacy and licentious manner of his daughters, whom the father was suspected of loving with too fond a passion.

I shall be scarcely permitted to accuse the ambition of a conqueror; but in a day of equal retribution, the sons of his brother Carloman, the Merovingian princes of Aquitaine, and the four thousand five hundred Saxons who were beheaded on the same spot would have something to allege against the justice and humanity of Charlemagne. (14)

The relation between Charles and the Roman church was so intimate that the misdeeds enumerated above were forgiven, perhaps, as the lesser sins of a great and useful king. Yet Pippin's two Italian campaigns against enemies of the Holy See were not the only favours that the Carolingian monarchy was allowed to pay the Catholic Church; the clergy repaid the favours with steady support of the Carolingian secular government.

In the same way as the Roman emperors had acted since Theodosius, Charles liked to appear as the defender of the faith, although the growing authority of the pope began to complicate matters. Yet by an auspicious twist of fate, the Holy See itself became the beneficiary of Charles's pious gratitude. Edward Gibbon relates the story of another real-estate deal:

Fraud is the resource of weakness and cunning; and the strong though ignorant Barbarian was often entangled in the net of sacerdotal policy. The Vatican and Lateran were an arsenal and manufacture which, according to the occasion, have produced or concealed a various collection of false and genuine, of corrupt and suspicious acts as they tended to promote the interest of the Roman church.

Before the end of the eight century, some apostolic scribe, perhaps the notorious Isidore, composed the decretals, and the Donation of Constantine, the two magic pillars of the spiritual and temporal monarchy of the popes.⁴ This memorable donation was introduced to the world by an epistle of [Pope] Hadrian the First, who exhorts Charlemagne to imitate the liberality and revive the name of the great Constantine. (15)

And indeed, if we survey the map of Carolingian Europe around AD 800, the evidence of Charles's magnificence will be plain to see. The empire of the Franks extends from the Spanish Mark, north of the Ebro river, to the Channel at Calais, although the Bretagne could never be truly claimed; from the Gasconne and Aquitaine at the Atlantic Ocean eastward, to the lands of the Saxons and the Bavarians and even to Pannonia, the plains of today's Hungary; and from the Frisian islands in the North Sea south through Thuringia, Alemannia and today's Austria, the Alps and Lower Italy. But, behold, from Ferrara in the delta of the Po to Ancona on the western piedmont of the Apennines, and on the eastern side of the mountains, between the duchies of Tuscia in the north and Spoleto and Beneventum in the south, embracing Rome, a new entity presents itself, the result of Charles's pious donation: the Patrimonium Petri, the Papal State, by which the bishop of Rome became a prince in his own profane right.

Yet some designs do not survive the architect for long, and such was the case with Charlemagne's pride: on June 25, AD 841, twenty-seven years after the emperor's death, his three grandsons and their respective armies met at a battlefield near Fontenoy, one hundred fifty miles southeast of Paris. One may argue, with caution, that the day of this battle may serve as the beginning of a history of the future "Germans", although neither the name nor the country were to appear for centuries to come.

The day of Fontenoy saw Emperor Lothar, the eldest of the siblings, fight his brothers Ludwig, King of Bavaria, and Karl, King of what used to be called Neustria, western Franconia. Myth has it that 100,000 men perished on the field,

⁴The "Donation of Constantine" was a forged document, allegedly composed on behalf of Emperor Constantine, awarding Latium in the east and the Emilia in the west, plus neighbouring areas, to the pope as eternal secular possessions. The problem was to explain why the document had been found only five hundred years later. Pope Hadrian I came up with some good excuses, and then petitioned Charlemagne to effect the donation, which the grateful emperor did. The Patrimonium Petri, the Papal State, existed well into the nineteenth century.

MAP XVIII: PARTITION OF THE FRANCONIAN EMPIRE AT VERDUN AD 843



MAP XIX:

MAP XIX: PARTITION OF THE FRANCONIAN EMPIRE AT MEERSEN AD 870



although a figure of some 20,000 to 30,000 appears more realistic. The outcome of the melee was a strategic stalemate; no clear winner could be established. Yet its consequences were enormous, a few years down the line. Charles's empire broke apart, irreparably, the grandsons proceeding to divide the realm among themselves (which was not truly a surprise, for their fathers had done so as well). Ludwig held on the eastern parts of the Franks' dominions, which soon became known as the kingdom of Eastern Franconia, the precursor of what much later would be called "Germany". Technically, one might argue that the establishment of the kingdom was the first step in the direction of a "German" state, little though its people were aware of it. In this respect, the German ethnogenesis followed an inverted path. On most occasions, people form communities which slowly widen in scope, from the village of the clan to the town of the tribe to the capital of the nation; from counties to duchies to kingdoms. In the case of "Germany", however, the political entity, the Kingdom of Eastern Franconia, existed first, while the notion of belonging to it as a fixed body politic evolved much later. Ludwig's subjects would have been perplexed, or might have strongly objected, if one were to call them "Germans": they thought of themselves as Franks ["Free Men", ¶], Alemans ["All Men", ¶], or Bavarians ["Bohemian Men", ¶].

The word "*DEUTSCH*" for "German", as in "*DEUTSCHLAND*", did only slowly emerge as a linguistic classification, in a process that required centuries. Its root, "*theodiscus*", latinized from the Frankish "*theoda*", for "volk", i.e. "people", was used to refer to any other language than Latin, the language of the church, the court and of diplomacy. "Theodiscus" was used to denote any vernacular language, Frankish, Thuringian, Bavarian, or even Normannic.

After a few decades of reposing in the bosom of the Eastern Franconian polity, the various tribes began to notice that they had, at least, one thing in common: the royal court, which was initially, as mentioned above, a moving affair. The court not only served as the primary legal institution, creating and employing, in due time, an Imperial, as opposed to Frankish or Saxonian, bureaucracy, it also was the centre of society and the arts; factors in creating the consciousness of belonging to a common culture. The second barrier-permeating institution of medieval life, in particular under Frankish hegemony, was the Catholic Church, which acted beyond the confines of tribal identities.

These first steps into the direction of a tentative communality were humbled, for a long time, by the absence of a common tongue. Many people had to learn a few words of Frankish to get by, which is the reason why we still call a trade language like, for example English in non-Anglophone countries, or Swahili in Eastern Africa, a "lingua franca". The beginnings of what would one day become the "German" language, and its dialects (Dutch, English, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian), were chaotic. It was only when basic communication was secured that the Germanic people realized that they had some things in common which differentiated them from, say, the Slavs in the East or the far more Romanized people of the lands west of the Rhine, and from a common tongue a common cultural identity developed, albeit slowly.

Shortly after the Battle of Fontenoy, in the year AD 850 or so, about 3,5 million souls lived in the assortment of territories which was commonly referred to as the kingdom of Eastern Franconia; between and around the three great German rivers Elbe, Danube, and Father Rhine. Three quarters of the land were still forest or swamp, or swampy forest, and only a single road, a leftover from Roman times, led from the mid-Rhine to northern Germany only to lose itself after a few dozen miles. Life was short and brutish; improved by the civilizing influence of agriculture only in the former Roman areas of Bavaria and Swabia and along the western bank of the Rhine. These were the only places where roads, chapels, shops or schools existed.

King Ludwig found himself the head of a state, but not of a nation; "Germany" did not yet exist. In geographic terms, his realm was an artificial construct without any natural borders, home to a variety of tribes who could not really understand each other's language. Leftovers of the great battles that had raged between the legions and the natives in the first and second centuries AD, the tribes who had fought Germanicus and emperor Marcus Aurelius, had migrated through the woods and swamps for decades and at length coalesced into new tribal entities: Franks, Frisians, Saxons, Alemans, Hessians, Thuringians, and Bavarians.

It was, without doubt, Ludwig's greatest achievement that the newborn state, a strange concoction of fiercely independent clans, did not disintegrate at the first opportunity. The lands east respectively west of the Rhine developed differently: in the West, Roman customs and language at length overpowered the Germanic element, while in the East, where the Roman leverage had always been moderate, the Germanic element dominated and survived.

The two basic tools of statecraft for Ludwig and his successors were war and marriage, and both influenced the royal exchequer. If the annual campaign was successful, the lion's share of the newly acquired territories was the king's to bestow upon a faithful liege, perhaps with some cash as well. If a war was lost, the hand of a royal daughter might mitigate the conditions of peace. At length the more or less classical feudal system developed, wherein liege lord and vassal were bound to mutual assistance by the bilateral oath of fealty; yet in reality an often incessant series of battles, marriages, exchange, barter and trade obscured the lines and enhanced the volatility of the political landscape. War was ubiquitous and unremitting, miring states in feuds that lasted, sometimes, for centuries: England and France fought three hundred years, with intermissions, over the erstwhile Normannic possessions in western and northern France.

Hardly had the Franco-British war ended when the German-Dutch-Austrian House of Habsburg (later owning Spain, too) and the French royal house of Valois entered into a spirited conflict over continental supremacy, followed (on the French side) by the substitution of the Bourbons for the Valois and then of Napoleon for all of the above; it has been suggested, with more than a quantum of truth, that one may arrive at a reasonable first approximation of middle European history between the fifteenth and nineteenth century by tracing the conflict between France and the Habsburgs.

By the end of the ninth century AD, the centre of political gravity in the East moved to Bavaria, where Arnulf of Carinthia [r.AD 887-899] and his, rather ineffective, son Louis the Child [r.AD 900-911] represented the last of the Carolingians. Between AD 896, when Arnulf fell seriously ill, and AD 911, there was "a power vacuum in the eastern kingdom. It was filled by new regional rulers, called "dukes" - "of Bavaria ... of Alemannia (now increasingly called Swabia ... of Saxony ... of Lotharingia ... and even of the East Frankish heartland, which seems to have crystallized as a duchy under Gebhard's nephew Conrad around 906." (16)

There is a temptation to see the emergence of these regional princes as the beginning of German particularism, but for the time being they were only transient structures, albeit developing their own political consciousness. They could be relatively mature, as in Bavaria, or chaotic, as in Saxonia, but it "is a sign of the power of the duchy as a political concept that they too had more or less hegemonic dukes by Louis the Child's death. The Frank Conrad, ruler of the most 'royal' duchy, was a natural successor to Louis, as Conrad I (911-18), but he failed to gain the respect from his ducal ex-peers that he hoped for," and "when he died, the magnates of *FRANCIA ET SAXONIA* chose Henry of Saxony as the new king (Henry I, 919-36)." (17)

It was a momentous occasion, and a risk, too: for the first time since Chlodwig, a man was king of the Franks who was not a Frank himself. It was perhaps an accidental bout of wisdom that had influenced the decision, for the Saxonian dukes and their armies were the leading edge in the border wars in the East, against the Slavs and in particular against the Magyars or Hungarians, the latest semi-nomadic issue from the Asian steppe. Henry defeated them in 933, to his credit and popularity. (18) The basis for the wealth of Henry's family, the Liudolfingians, later called the Ottonians, was slave trade, a most profitable business which benefitted from the Saxons' proximity to the border. They sent grab commandos on kidnapping sprees into the East, to abduct the children of the Slavs [the name "Slav" indeed comes from this business, ¶], and to sell them, especially young boys, blonds at a premium, into the Turkish and Arabian brothels of the Levant.

The hazard of Henry's election for the Franks was that the Saxons well remembered Charlemagne's slaughter of 4,500 of their kin, and no one would have been surprised had they sought revenge. But Henry publicly announced to forego retribution, and this message gave rise to the hope that the vicious circle of intertribal crime and retribution might be broken. At the occasion of the succession of his father and his formal coronation and anointment as emperor in Aachen, Charlemagne's capital, Henry's son Otto [Otto I, r.AD 936-973] promoted equality between the tribes, by inviting all the eastern dukes and being publicly supported by them, in an attempt to strengthen the governmental consensus he hoped to establish. In some respects it was easier for the aristocracy to entertain notions of collegiality than it was for the peasants; for the Aleman farmer or Saxonian shepherd, fancies of being a "German" were still part of a distant future. The annals kept in churches describe fiendish prejudices: chronicles portray the Swabians as stupid, the Hessians as overbold, and call the Saxons simply "wild". Particularly bad was the reputation of the Bavarians; rapists and robbers, gluttons and drunkards.

Such mutual compliments also caused difficulties in cooperative warfare, for in the meetings of the presumed allies, it could happen too easily that jokes were told, catcalls flew, one word gave the other, and in a minute the hypothetical confederates went at each others' throats. Only when the kingdom was confronted with a true danger, the wild hordes of the Hungarians, did the amalgamated troops display a semblance of orderly conduct. When the intruders were beaten by Henry in AD 933, and later, decisively, by Otto in AD 955, and thus ceased to remain a threat to the lives and possessions of the tribes, it was probably the first time that a collective "German" sigh of relief swept through the land.⁵

Yet the instruments of civil governance, as opposed to war, remained few and crude, hampered by the sluggishness of communications. For the most part, Otto and his successors still governed ambulatory: they moved, with a long trek of wagons and horses, counsellors and courtiers, bodyguards and jesters, ladies chaste and not so chaste, through the country. Wherever the trek halted, royal duties were performed as long as circumstances permitted it: when the local host ran out of victuals, the wagons moved on. Many parts of the realm would not behold the king ever; the royal visits concentrated upon the old Roman settlements and the newer Imperial towns, mostly sees of bishops: Mainz, Speyer, Cologne, Trier, Worms, Nuremberg and Regensburg, the former "Castrum Regina", i.e. "Fortress by the Regen River".

All in all it was a somewhat haphazard affair Otto found himself the head of, when, by a stroke of luck or fate, in AD 951, the opportunity arose to marry the widow of the king of the Lombardy, and thus to secure the Lombardian succession, which included most of northern Italy, for his family, their successors, and the *REGNUM TEUTONICUM*. In the pursuit of this lucky break Otto happened to set his eyes on Rome as well. The former capital of the world had sunken deeply; the times of her grandeur were a fading memory. Economically and militarily without importance, the city, at perhaps a tenth of her former one million inhabitants, managed a meagre subsistence on a diminished flow of pilgrims visiting the seat of St. Peter. One possibility, however, attracted Otto's attention, regarding the city's most venerable resident, Pope John XII. In compensation for a contribution to the bishop's stressed finances, the king as well as his successors would like to propose their ideas on the future bearers of the greatest Catholic dignity to the people of Rome, and would expect the wisdom of their choice to be honoured in perpetuity. Edward Gibbon reports on another shady deal:

Otho [Otto] the First imposed a treaty on the senate and the people [of Rome], who engaged to prefer the candidate most acceptable to his majesty: his successors anticipated or prevented their choice: they bestowed the Roman benefice, like the bishoprics of Cologne or Bamberg, on their chancellors or preceptors; and whatever might be the merit of a Frank or Saxon, his name sufficiently attests the interposition of foreign power.

These acts of prerogative were most speciously excused by the vices of a popular election. The competitor who had been excluded by the cardinals appealed to the passions or avarice of the multitude; the Vatican and the Lateran were stained with blood; and the most powerful senators, the marquises of Tuscany and the counts of Tusculum, held the apostolic see in a long and disgraceful servitude. The Roman pontiffs of the ninth and tenth centuries were insulted, imprisoned, and murdered by their tyrants; and such was their indigence, after the loss and usurpation of the ecclesiastical patrimonies, that they could neither support the state of a prince nor exercise the charity of a priest.

The influence of two sister prostitutes, Marozia and Theodora, was founded on their wealth and beauty, their political and amorous intrigues: the most strenuous of their lovers were rewarded with the Roman mitre, and their reign may have suggested to the darker ages the fable of a female pope. The bastard son, the grandson,

⁵ The terminology of the age was volatile; the summary below is provided by Chris Wickham:

"The separate concepts "France" and "Germany" did not yet exist; nor even, except occasionally, did "West" and "East" Francia, the terminology historians currently use; both were normally just Francia, or Francia et Saxonia in the case of the eastern kingdom, to reflect the Saxon origins and political base of the Ottonians. ("France" is of course simply the French for Francia; by contrast in the German lands, the Frankish heartland was only one region among the old ethnic territories of Saxony, Alemannia, Bavaria, and so a new inclusive name eventually appeared, the regnum Teutonicum, though not until the eleventh century.)

But the lack of interest by the historians reflects a slow cultural separation. For Flodoard and Richer, Francia was „really“ (northern) France; the East Franks were Transrhenenses, from over the Rhine, or else the inhabitants of Germania, the old Roman geographic term. For Widukind, similarly, West Francia was Gallia, proto-French the Gallic lingua, and Francis was seen as "really" being in the East." (19)

and the great-grandson of Marozia, a rare genealogy, were seated in the chair of St. Peter, and it was at the age of nineteen years that the second of these became the head of the Latin Church. ...

[But] we read with some surprise that the worthy grandson of Marozia lived in public adultery with the matrons of Rome; that the Lateran palace was turned into a school for prostitution, and that his rapes of virgins and widows had deterred the female pilgrims from visiting the tomb of St. Peter lest in the devout act they should be violated by his successor.

The Protestants have dwelt with malicious pleasure on these characters of Antichrist; but to a philosophical eye, the vices of the clergy are far less dangerous than their virtues. (20)

Otto's Italian job had not only secured him the possession of the Lombardy and the connubial attentions of the widow, but his financial aid, and a number of prosecutions for treason which notably reduced the number of John's creditors, had removed much of the pope's secular distress, and, in a solemn ceremony, the grateful bishop decorated Otto with the crown and the royal insignia of Charlemagne; since this day Otto referred to himself as AUGUSTUS, CAESAR, and EMPEROR. The good-neighbourly relations, once established, persuaded John and Otto to adjudicate two future principles of Imperial ballots: that the candidate who was elected emperor by the German princes would thereby obtain, instantly, the kingdom of Italy as his personal domain, but he was not to assume the Imperial titles until he was crowned in Rome, by the pope himself. The vacant Roman titles were resurrected by the sword of the Barbarians and the authority of a religion; and it was the claim of the new dignity that it bestowed superiority over all the other monarchs of the West.

With so many labours of love and duty on his hands, Otto did not find much time to tend to his "German" affairs. He could have returned over the Alps and collected affirmations of his new rank from the dukes, but the new possessions, and perhaps the widow's attentions, required his continued presence in the newly acquired territories. It was the Italians, who now had the frequent opportunity to host the new emperor's court, who were the first to come up with a single appellation covering all the pale folks from the north: they called them "*Teutonici*", in remembrance of Gaius Marius's victory over the Teutones a millennium ago. The Italians thought that all these tribes whose tongues they could not understand, could understand each other, which was, unfortunately, not the case. But since one Germanic dialect sounded just as unintelligible to them as the next one, they were all called "*Teutonic*", 'German'.

Now that the *REGNUM TEUTONICUM* also included Italy and a new Imperial dignity, the question was what would happen at the founder's death. Yet, surprisingly enough, the Ottonians were able to form a relatively stable dynasty, despite some smaller emergencies, and after the deaths of Otto II [r.AD 973-983] and Otto III [r.AD 983-1002], the German dukes elected "Henry IV of Bavaria (Henry II, 1002-24), who was Otto I's brother's grandson and Otto III's male line heir. There was no doubt at any of these royal accessions that East Francia was a single political system, which by now included Italy as well." (21)

When trouble arose, it came from an unanticipated direction. It had been early recognized by Otto and his successors that the princes of the Church were relatively more eager to support Imperial business than the secular nobility, whose interests were dominated by dynastic issues. Ever since the harmonious understanding between Pope John and Otto I, the bishops and cardinals of the Catholic Church could be counted on to be found on the side of the emperor, until the cosy relations suffered a setback over the right of investiture.

Conflicts over the authority to appoint bishops were as old as the Church, dating back to AD 337, when Emperor Constantine (on his deathbed, not a minute earlier) made Christianity the new state religion of the Imperium Romanum. Six centuries later, Otto and his successors claimed the right of investiture as an Imperial prerogative, and for a hundred years or so the popes were too weak to challenge the emperor's license. Under the auspices of Pope Gregor VII, however, a reform movement usurped the clerical hierarchy and reclaimed the privilege for the Holy See. After prolonged arguments and a few rounds of cross-excommunications, the Church won, and the current emperor Heinrich IV had to undertake a journey to Canossa and beg forgiveness from the pope.

The crown was thus forced to abandon the former Imperial privileges in clerical affairs, but the triumph of the Church had consequences that far outreached the rather limited issue of investiture. Since Canossa, the Holy Roman

Emperor was a lay Christian like any of his subjects, and this transition of power the Church promptly used to claim the secular authority, that is, the political control, over her properties. The number of administrative entities in the *REGNUM TEUTONICUM* was much augmented by the addition of clerical domains; three hundred years later approximately ninety German bishops and cardinals, with all the rights of secular lords, joined the thirty or forty leaders of the nobility in the actual governance of the realm.

The main consequence of the tug-of-war between clergy and nobility was that it further hampered the emergence of a "German" consciousness, compared with, say, France. The French ethnogenesis developed more rapidly not only because central governance was instituted earlier, it was also centred on an all-important capital. In a perfect antithesis, the possessions of secular and clerical princes in the Holy Roman Empire, as it was called from the fourteenth century on, were divided and subdivided again, and a quilt of dozens of tiny-to-medium-sized dominions alongside the great duchies emerged, and existed until the early nineteenth century. The absence of a great capital contributed to the maturative sluggishness; great towns reflect culture and culture reflects identity.

Without the benefits of a unified language or political centre, the German national birth pangs continued, for attractors of social cohesiveness, a "national" consciousness, were disfavoured by the princes, who saw them as threats to their sovereignty. Otto's Imperial claim of superiority over the rest of the continental princes, whether they called themselves kings or not, remained a theoretical exercise; de facto, the medieval emperor was not more than *primus inter pares*. Not that the Imperial designs ever were too modest: one of Otto's eventual successors from the House of Hohenstaufen [flor. AD 1138-1254], Heinrich IV, allowed his modesty to claim all the lands in Africa and the Levant, between Gibraltar and the Hellespont, as his personal domain, on the argument that they, as former provinces of the Imperium Romanum, be restored to his authority as the universal heir of Romulus and Hadrian. He also proclaimed his desire to conquer Baghdad and the Caliphate.

It probably saved the *REGNUM TEUTONICUM* respectively Holy Roman Empire a lot of needless slaughter, when the good man died in AD 1197, at only thirty-three, and his extensive plans remained stillborn. Perhaps it was a family trait: his father, Friedrich I, called "Barbarossa" for his prodigious red facial hairdo, had not allowed the pages of the family book to remain unturned, either: to combine the useful with the sacred, he partook in the Third Crusade but had the misfortune to fall off his horse into a Turkish river and, for his armour, drowned on the road to glory [AD 1190]. At least he did not need to witness the subsequent slaughter of his army by the heathen Saracens. Crusades were much in fashion at the time, and in the family, and Barbarossa's grandson Friedrich II experienced a good amount of the Holy Quest when he became, successively, the pupil, an enemy, and a victim of the Church. (22)

In his minority, Friedrich had been a ward of Pope Innocent III and had been married, as quickly as it might appear proper, to the heiress of the short-lived Kingdom of Jerusalem, thereby to instil in the young emperor a desire for the reacquisition of the Holy City. Friedrich dutifully delivered the town once again from Arab occupation [AD 1229] but soon tired of the essential stupidity of religious fanaticism. Being a man of religious tolerance, he began to negotiate with the sultan, to establish actual freedom of worship. The scandalous undertaking did not meet with the pope's applause, as Edward Gibbon assures us:

The enemy of the church [Friedrich] is accused of maintaining with the miscreants an intercourse of hospitality and friendship unworthy of a Christian; of despising the barrenness of the land, and of indulging a profane thought, that if Jehovah had seen the kingdom of Naples he never would have selected Palestine for the inheritance of his chosen people.

Yet Friedrich obtained from the sultan the restitution of Jerusalem, of Bethlehem and Nazareth, of Tyre and Sidon; the Latins [Europeans, ¶] were allowed to inhabit and fortify the city; an equal code of civil and religious freedom was ratified for the sectaries of Jesus and those of Mohammed; and while the former worshipped at the holy sepulchre, the latter might pray and preach in the mosque of the temple from whence the prophet undertook his nocturnal journey to Heaven.

The clergy deplored this scandalous toleration; and the weaker Moslems were gradually expelled; but every rational object of the crusades was accomplished without bloodshed; the churches were restored, the

monasteries were replenished; and in the space of fifteen years, the Latins of Jerusalem exceeded the number of six thousand. (23)

Peaceful coexistence was not a fashion of life the Catholic Church was prepared to tolerate, and in a short time the natural passions of hatred and ferocity were restored to the treasure of Christian virtues. Friedrich was excommunicated not only once but twice, and at length retired to his beloved refuge of Sicily. The island had inherited, over the last two millennia, a veritable melting pot of Mediterranean cultures: Greek, Phoenician and Roman influences had existed in fruitful competition for centuries, and the results pleased the emperor's eyes. Sicily became Friedrich's pet project of a "modern state", and on account of his good relations to the sultan, he obtained the assistance of Arabian scientists, civil servants, doctors and clerks; his court was the most developed institution in contemporary Europe.

Germany was of lesser importance to him, and he only crossed the Alps twice to inspect his titular possessions. He had surrendered a few of the old Imperial privileges, the imposition of tariffs or duties, for example, to the major German princes, in return for their electoral support of his son's succession to the Imperial dignity. Such deals were common and the most compelling factor in the gradual diminishment of the Imperial authority. They were called *CAPITULATIONS*, and the name correctly describes their contents. Perhaps comparable to the way the English aristocracy had gained, in the development of the four centuries between the Magna Charta of AD 1215 and the Bill of Rights in AD 1689, more and broader limitations of the powers of the crown, the capitulations of the German emperors decreased their executive powers. Friedrich's attempt to secure his son's succession was the last effort to establish a hereditary line on the throne of the Occident until the usurpation of the office by the House of Habsburg three centuries later.

The form of the actual Imperial election was reformed in AD 1356 with the publication of the "Golden Bull", which delegated the franchise upon the shoulders of the seven *ELECTORS*, whose majority vote would ennoble the successful candidate. The original bull named three men of the cloth and four members of the nobility: the three clerical electors were the archbishops of Mainz, Cologne and Trier, of whom the gentleman from Mainz officiated as Imperial Arch Chancellor and *primus inter pares*: he was the chairman of the election board, voted last, and supervised the coronation ceremonies. The four secular electors were the Count Palatine of the Rhine, the Duke of Saxony, the Marquis of Brandenburg and the Duke of Bavaria, replaced later by the King of Bohemia.

The convoluted design effectively prevented the establishment of dynasties for more than two centuries; no single family was permitted to accumulate undue influence by too long a reign. Therefore, at a time when England was ruled by the Plantagenets and their descendents, the Yorks and Lancasters, and France governed by a succession of Capets, Orleans, Valois and Bourbons, no German dynasty was allowed to leverage a unifying influence upon the German people. This absence explained, to a degree, the differences between the national consciousness of France and Germany: the French perspective was early formed by territorial, that is, increasingly possessive motivations, while the German outlook was restricted to the vagaries of ever-changing and frequently shifting political coalitions.

A glance at an early medieval map of Europe readily illustrates the effect: the word "*FRANCE*" appears on maps as early as the tenth century, while it will take another half millennium until "*TEUTSCHLAND*" emerges as a geographical term. But when the two long delayed projects "Germany" and "Common German Language" took their first steps into geographic and linguistic existence, a further problem arose: medieval reasoning pondered that, as far as Germany's future borders were concerned, they should be congruent with the linguistic expanse; in other words, wherever German was spoken, Germany must be. This proved problematic, as we will see.

About a century after the Golden Bull, the eastern parts of the Holy Roman Empire, as it was now commonly called, were invaded by an assembly of tribes from western Turkey, called the Ottomans. This Turkish state had been founded at the end of the thirteenth century by Sultan Osman I [r.AD 1288-1326] as a spin-off of the larger Turkish estates of the Selchuks, and had established itself as an independent sultanate in Anatolia. The dominion expanded aggressively against the opposition of the leftovers of the Byzantine Empire, and at length conquered Constantinople in AD 1453, concluding the history of the Imperium Romanum. In the century between their conquest of today's Bulgaria in AD 1361 and 1460, the greater part of the Balkan had fallen prey to the sultan's warriors. A general invasion of south-eastern Europe in AD 1471, however, under Sultan Mohammed II, called "The Conqueror", was repulsed, despite his title. Yet that

had not been the zenith of the Ottoman expansion, which was reached under Sultan Suleyman II [r.AD 1520-1566], whose domain reached from Southern Russia to Hungary and comprised Anatolia, the Levant, Mesopotamia, and practically the whole coast of Northern Africa including Egypt.

The expansion was checked partly by the naval victory of Don Juan of Austria, who led a Venetian/French/Austrian fleet to victory over the Muslims in the battle of Lepanto [AD 1571], and, more effectively, during the great Turkish wars between 1683 and 1699. The renewed invasion ended with a failed siege of Vienna and the resulting loss of the northern and western provinces of the Balkan, which were eventually gobbled up by Austria. It was, perhaps, the defeat at Vienna that derailed the Ottoman designs on the continent for good: the town had been beleaguered for seven weeks by a large Turkish army when, in one of the few really decisive battles of the century, a Polish/German relief corps commanded by the Polish King John Sobieski III and the Duke of Lorraine assaulted the exposed rear of the siege force; within a few hours the Turkish army and the nimbus of its invincibility were history.

We are now closing in on the crucial years between AD 1450 and 1520, in which the mechanical invention of a Saxon tinkerer and the religious theories of a Thuringian monk at length caused the liquidation of the medieval age, together with the use of Latin as the language of church and court and the whole medieval class system. Yet even these pivotal events might have been relegated to minor importance had not the rise of the town as political unit completely upended the economical roundabout of the Middle Ages.

Every former peasant, who left the fields he did not own anyway, and on which generations of his forefathers had toiled in sweat for little gain, and spent a year and a day in the nearest officially recognized Imperial town was freed of his obligations to the liege-lord and absolved from lifelong servitude; he became, in principle, a free man. The sharecroppers flocked to the towns in great numbers and took part in the revolution of the medieval economy: towns, and with them their new and recent citizens, could and did get rich by trade, which a nobleman was prevented to do by ancient Roman law. Before long, the burghers broke the church's monopoly on education; the ancient sciences were taken up by a new generation of students and experienced a rebirth, a *RENAISSANCE*; a first wave of enlightenment purged the continent of many strictures of the Catholic Church.

The rise of towns established the *bourgeoisie* as a political class;⁶ differing from the simple hierarchy of Middle Age society, towns harboured a complex multitude of peoples that defied easy categorization: cobblers and masons, artisans and merchants, doctors and lawyers,⁷ their helpers and assistants, and soon, philosophers and historians of both the abstract and the natural schools;⁸ professions the Holy Catholic Church had practically outlawed in her eternal wisdom since Justinian's closing of the schools of Athens and Alexandria in AD 529.

This is the appropriate place to introduce the originators of the metamorphoses. They were two men from a land not yet called Germany; with a little help from their friends, their pursuits were to elevate the faculties of man to unknown heights of good and evil.

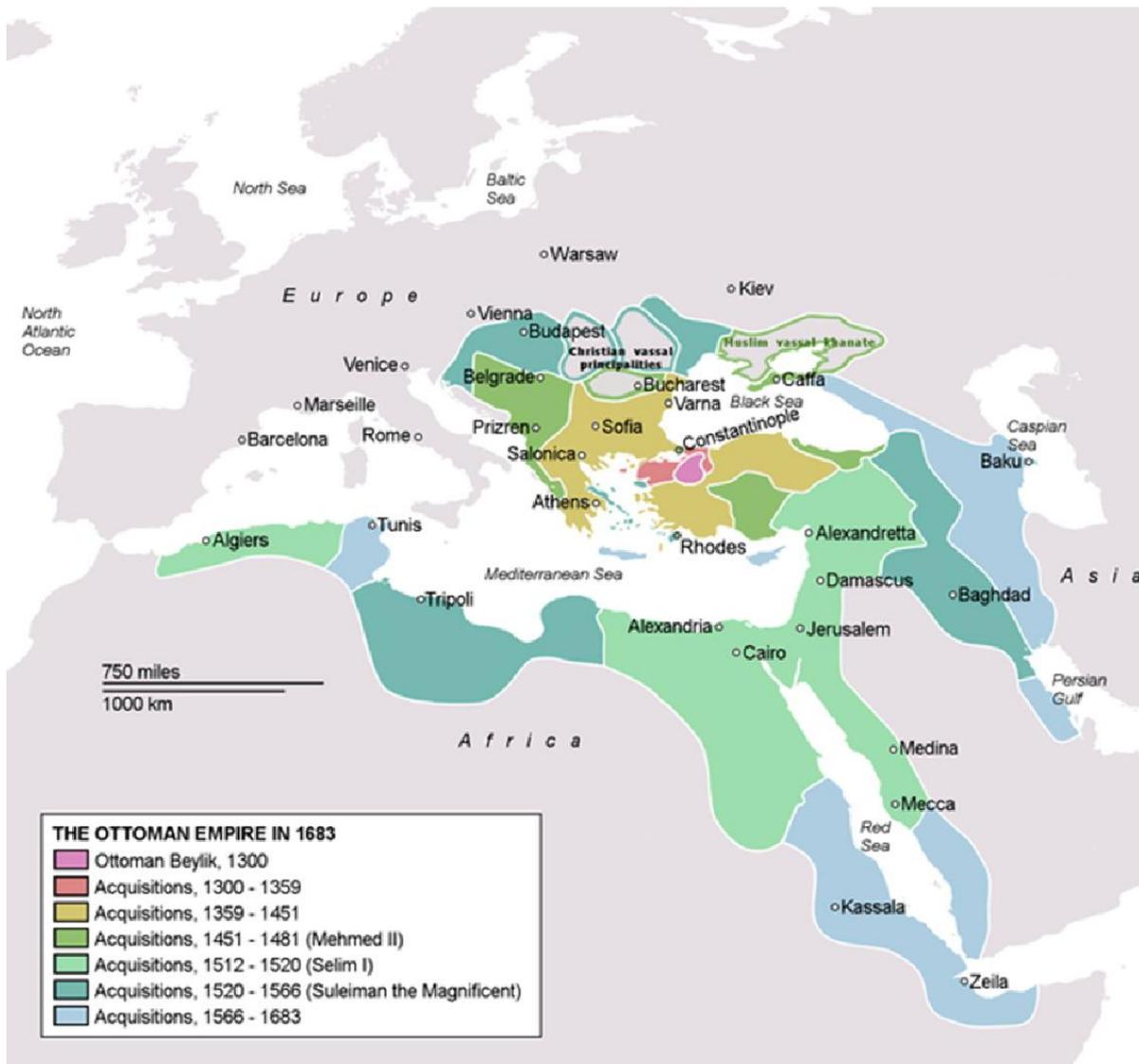
Scribes had sought a mechanical way to duplicate their efforts since the invention of writing. Around the year AD 1050, a Chinese writer named Bi Sheng came up with the first model of what we today call the movable type: he created a clay type for every character he wanted to print. But since the Chinese language requires one type for every symbol of its writing, Bi Sheng quickly faced the problem that he required so many different characters respectively symbols that his printing method proved too clumsy; not user-friendly enough, we would call it today. Eventually, the Chinese replaced the clay types with woodblocks, which worked fine but had a durability problem. They were still far ahead of Europe.

In the Occident, books were still laboriously copied by hand, usually by monks. Copying books was one of the few allowable in an average monk's life, and a good part of the income of an abbey or cloister depended on the dexterity and dedication of its copyists. The variety and multitude of these copies, however, were humbled by a circulus vitiosus: since all books were copied by hand, they were very expensive, thus only important books were copied at all; important books, by

⁶ From Vulgar Latin "burgos", fortified place.

⁷ The first public university opened in Bologna, today's Italy, in AD 1088.

⁸ What we call "Science" today was then called "Natural History".



MAP XX: THE RISE OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AD 1453-1683

the standards of the Church, were, of course, only such books which supported the teachings of Christianity: hence only such books were copied.

Meanwhile, in a small town of not-yet-Germany, a prospective print-shop owner named Johannes Gensfleisch combined several recent ideas of his into a device which, after protracted tinkering, introduced to a perplexed world the first viable and sturdy printing press. He had formed, much as Bi Sheng had done, separate types for each letter of the alphabet, but of cast metal, not clay, which improved their durability.

He had, of course, the advantage to require only thirty-five or so letters and numbers. He then assembled rows of these types, forming lines, then paragraphs, and soon whole pages which were fixed in a frame against which ink was applied and paper pressed. As far as the inner mechanics of the press were concerned, rumour had it that Gensfleisch had profited from the study of the wine presses he used for the preparation of his libations.

At any rate, a skilled worker could produce three hundred pages a day with Gensfleisch's machine, a hundred times the daily output of a monk. It was a miracle. Of a sudden, books could be produced at a fraction of their former cost and in unlimited quantities, for instead of expensive parchment simple paper could be used, which

was soon produced in bulk. Books became so cheap and ubiquitous that they were, for the first time, written in or translated into the vernacular of the common people, into *Teutsch*. Naturally, the first bestseller was the Christian Bible. Herr Gensfleisch meanwhile, suitably proud of his achievement, adopted the nom de plume under which he is known to posterity, *JOHANNES GUTENBERG*.

Before Gutenberg, only members of the clergy or the families of the nobility could afford to possess their own, personal, copies of the Holy Writ: the average man could not afford one, and even if he could buy one, he could not read it for it was written in (a sort of) Latin. This now changed swiftly, and everybody could either buy or at least borrow a Bible written in German and check the contents independently.⁹

The Church was not truly ecstatic over the sudden development of amateur competition in Biblical exegesis, and for decades defiled printing as a satanic art; but the levee had broken, and it was too late to turn back the clock. It was bad enough that the Bible was now accessible to the laity; that it was printed in the vernacular was worse, for every literate person could now read, for example, that Jesus had advocated poverty as the natural state of affairs for Christians, and this mandate, one would surmise, would be equally appropriate for the clergy. Yet when concerned Christians learned from the Bible that Jesus had declared not to own any earthly possessions and exhorted his apostles as well as his lesser disciples to follow his example, they dispatched embassies with dire warnings to the princes of the Catholic Church. The deputations explained that material wealth was in fact a handicap, instead of a benefit, in the acquisition of salvation, and recommended that the Church renounce its secular possessions and concentrate on the salvation of their parishioners' souls instead of amassing worldly treasures. The Church was not amused and declined the spiritually advantageous offer.

Yet the more mere mortals read the holy writings, the more the former spiritual and intellectual monopoly of Catholicism was forced to retreat. It was not only that scripture and reality were at odds: both the spiritual decay and the wealth of the Church, or rather the ways in which this wealth was accomplished, the abuses of simony and the atrocious selling of indulgences, would no longer be accepted by a new, more critical generation of Christians. Sixty years or so after Gutenberg's invention, the crisis of the Roman Church became acute. A young monk, professor for Biblical Theology at the University of Wittenberg, set out to change the faith of Christians forever.

Within the confines of the present volume, the complex history of Martin Luther and the Reformation can be presented only briefly. Luther composed ninety-five theses, which summed up his criticism of the orthodox, Catholic exegesis of the Bible and the conclusions he had drawn from his findings. These theses he had sent to the office of his superior, Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz, the Imperial Arch Chancellor, where they might have caused damage or not. But he nailed a copy of them onto the door of his home church in Wittenberg, for public discussion [November 1517]. Perhaps not the primary but certainly the most aggravating cause for Luther's public admonition was the flagrant indulgence trade. In AD 1515, Pope Leo X approved the sale of indulgences in the archbishop's domain around Mainz, to finance various clerical projects, one of which, and self-evidently the most sacred and distinguished, was to raise funds for the enlargement of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Bishop Albrecht did not sell the documents personally; he had an agent, a man named Johann Tetzel, who sold them on a commission basis. Herr Tetzel, a devout believer, explained to his prospective customers that his documents could alleviate the duration or intensity of the purgatorial punishments their sins had purchased, or, for a few dollars more, could accomplish the immediate release of their souls from the sulphurous wells of the devil's domain. Luther directed his reformatory ire in particular upon such fraudulent practices and composed a stream of theses condemning these theological outrages, and a few other little sins the Catholic Church had allowed herself in one-and-a-half millennia of orthodox rule. Yet soon Luther found himself mired in much more treacherous terrain. James Kugel explains

Well before the early 1500's, individual Christians had been expressing dissatisfaction with the ways of the church, and their dissatisfaction focused on a broad variety of issues. One of the things that bothered them

⁹That is, of course, official Christian propaganda. It stands to reason that, like it was in the development of the internet, pornography and political propaganda were just as much responsible for the people's newfound desire to read.

was what they saw as corruption within its ranks - priests' sale of indulgences to their parishioners, for example, or the role of money in obtaining high office within the church hierarchy (called "simony").

Along with these, some Christians objected to the church's vast holdings of land and its evident concern for furthering its own wealth and political power (accompanied by a lack of concern for the poor): to many, the bishops and cardinals seemed more the servants of Mammon than of God.

In addition to these dissatisfactions, however, were others of a more theoretical and intellectual nature. The very idea of papal authority seemed illogical to some; how could a reasonable person accept a priori that the rulings of the altogether human leader of the church would always be correct?

And why should a human institution like the church, even if its existence was divinely authorized, play such a crucial role as intermediary between God and the individual Christian? Lastly - but probably not last in importance - what about the Bible?

Should the church have the unchallenged authority to say what the Bible means, especially when that meaning seemed to be derived not from the Bible's own words as much as from old doctrines and questionable methods of interpretation? (24)

Luther's answer was a resounding "no". The sole justification of faith, he argued, is the belief in the Divine Promise that Jesus died for the salvation of the sinner; and neither church nor pope are necessary paraphernalia in the achievement of this faith. Sinners, that is, every man who believes in the Biblical message, will be represented at God's judgement by Jesus Christ and will be absolved, as Jesus is absolved. No purchase necessary.

That was the rub, as far as the Catholic Church was concerned. Orthodox dogma had held for thirteen centuries that the faithful qualify for eternal benefits by the charitable works they donate to the community or the financial endowments they dedicate to the apostolic coffers for the relief of the poor. In other words, good deeds, or equitable pecuniary considerations, open the door to preferred treatment on Judgement Day. Yet if Luther's findings were correct, such deeds had no relevance whatsoever to redemption or salvation, and the Church's eagerness in collecting these contributions was nothing but the sign of a parasitic organism's avarice. Just as useless would be the strange rituals of symbolic cannibalism, performed by men only, who were dressed in garish costumes and aided by clouds of frankincense. If one could indeed find redemption without the folly, independent of such ceremonial ministrations, the Church would be out of business soon.

This was, of course, not the first attack the Church had to weather; Catholicism had emerged from the annihilation of the major heresies between the fifth and eighth centuries as a doctrinal monolith, whose weight suppressed intermittent canonical deviations with ease. Luther's frontal attack, however, was well-aimed, theologically accurate and fundamentally reasonable: for a moment, the Vatican had no answer. Yet as the consequences of the Reformation were to change the geographical borders of the European countries to a great degree, we must digress here for a moment and review the map of Europe as it presented itself before the Reformation, circa AD 1500.

The empire of Charlemagne had comprised, in the West, the northernmost parts of Spain, all of France with the exception of Brittany, Belgium and the Netherlands. In the middle, it had embraced Germany and about half of Italy; its eastern borders had run through today's Slovenia, Croatia, Hungary, the Czech and Slovak Republics, and reached the Baltic Sea after following the present German/Polish border at the Oder and Neisse rivers. In the north, the frontier was close to where it is today, at the Eyder River, which separates Denmark from Germany.

The most conspicuous change that had occurred since the day of Fontenoy was, of course, the separation of France, the former kingdom of Neustria and core of the Carolingian realm. A few other territorial losses are easy to see, especially in Italy, whose midriff, known as Patrimonium Petri, now belonged to the pope. North of it, the Republic of Venice had emerged as an independent state. On the positive side, the empire had gained in the East, adding Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia and Pomerania. In the southwest, the Turks nibbled at the Balkans, but their eventual gains proved transient and were retaken by the Habsburgs from the eighteenth century on.

In AD 1493, when Christopher Columbus had just returned from his first, epochal journey, Maximilian I of the House of Habsburg was elected German emperor. During his reign, an interplay of three developments began which at length occasioned the transition of the empire from its traditional, medieval form, to an agglomeration of de-facto independent states. There was, first, the metamorphosis of the Imperial dignity from an elective title to a hereditary office, assumed by the Habsburg family, second, the necessity of reforms within the Imperial administration, required by the increasing economic power of the towns, and, third, the political results of the Reformation and the Catholic Counter- Reformation, which, within a few decades after the publication of Luther's theses, had split the princes of the continent into a Protestant and a Catholic camp.

The last quasi-dynasty on the Imperial throne had been the House of Hohenstaufen, whose reign ended in AD 1254; since then a succession of mostly weak emperors had been forced to agree to capitulations that over time eliminated their prerogatives. The contracts shifted power to the local rulers of clergy and nobility, whose grip on political power, however, was loosened by the economical emancipation of the towns; in particular of Imperial free towns and the members of the *HANSE* trade association.

The Habsburgs had briefly appeared on the Imperial throne in the thirteenth century, but from AD 1438 on, with a single exception, succeeded to hold on the emperorship until the dissolution of the realm in 1806. As in so many "noble" families, the main characteristic of the Habsburgs was avarice, in particular a perennial craving for territorial expansion. The business of governing the empire often played second fiddle to the acquisitive brood and from their preferred mode of enlargement the immortal words were born, "Et tu, felix Austria, nube!" ["And you, Happy Austria, marry"! ¶].

The motto contained more than a quantum of truth: Austrian armies were seldom able to extend the family's possessions much, hence marriage proved a far cheaper and safe alternative. While the rich mining resources of the Duchy of Tyrolia had joined Maximilian's property sheet by conventional means, that is, war, he clearly valued bloodless conquests higher. In 1496, his son Philip wed Joan, the daughter of the royal Spanish couple, thereby adding Spain and the Netherlands to the Habsburg family fold [Charles V was born out of this marriage, ¶], and in 1516 his grandson married the heiress of Bohemia and Hungary, thus laying the foundation for the later Austro-Hungarian Empire. In the tradition of the family, perhaps, Maximilian himself was rather unlucky in war: a few Italian campaigns failed, he eventually lost most of Switzerland, and was barred from bagging Burgundy by French intercession.

As far as the reform of the Imperial administration was concerned, all sides promoted their own agendas but little compromise could be reached. The local rulers wanted what little central authority they were prepared to accept subservient to their own patronage, against the Imperial interest. Neither side prevailed, a stalemate ensued, and a permanent state of discord was created between the sovereign and the estates.

Luther's teachings had direct and severe ramifications not only for the empire but the continent, indeed the whole world, but it was only after the fact that everybody agreed on the necessity of reforms. The Catholic Church had become a victim of its reliance on priests who proved altogether too human; equally disinterested in the fate of their flock as they were blind to their own hypocrisy; but whatever shape the reform had taken, it would have played out differently without Luther's charisma, his thunderous personality, and his sense of mission in support of the faithful.

Since the late thirteenth century, consent had deepened among lay Christians that the Holy Roman Catholic Church was in dire need of reform. Corruption had manifested itself through a colossal lack of spirituality within the higher echelons of the clergy, the incessant interpositioning in secular affairs and blatant fiscalism in the misdeeds of simony and indulgence sale.

Many of the faithful believed that the church had stopped to represent their individual concerns and began to long for a more personal faith; the church, alas, remained unresponsive. For the worse, many simple village priests found themselves victims of the sudden availability of the Gutenberg bible; finding themselves too frequently mired in theological discussions that the seminaries had not suitably prepared them for.

MAP XXI: THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE IN THE 16TH CENTURY



A new school of thought, the Christian Humanists, led by the great Erasmus Desiderius, known as Erasmus of Rotterdam, intended to find out what was best for man, committed "to the idea that ethics and social policy must be based on our best understanding of human nature and the human condition." (25) The Bible was to be investigated for teachings relevant to this aim of civic virtues, but since Erasmus's writings "had the effect of weaning many away from the narrow

confines of religious orthodoxy," (26), both the Catholic as well as many of the newly developed Protestant churches declared Erasmus anathema. Very soon after their initial appearance, Protestant churches proved just as doctrinally inflexible, or even more so, than the Catholics they proposed to replace. The conflict now turned to the administration of clerical properties and their staff: protestant nobles threatened to form *Landeskirchen*, territorial churches, over which they intended to effect complete control. There was a specific "German" element in this struggle, for it was the liege lord's ancient right to "protect" any church on his estates: he had the right of patronage, could hire or fire the pastor, and could use this authority to decide which sort of Christianity would be preached on his grounds.

Luther's theses undermined not only the theological authority of the Catholic church but could be interpreted to question her secular administration as well, and the poor, the sharecroppers and simple labourers, for whom hunger had been a steady companion for years, found enough in Luther's theses to petition their oppressors for a change, in particular the abolition of serfdom. Naturally, church and nobility failed to listen, independent of their sympathy or antipathy to Luther's teachings, riots arose and, eventually, a peasant insurrection broke out in 1525. Luther bore no personal responsibility for any of these events, but like a lens bundles the rays of the sun, the *Zeitgeist* had found itself focused in his arguments. Socioeconomical change and religious zealotry found their expression in his theses, and the rebellion of the peasants was laid at his door, even if he had been concerned, as he said, only with the imperatives of faith.

What had happened in the years following Luther's publications was that the tenor of religious discussions in Germany and her neighbours, which now also included a greater share of laymen than ever before, began to express decidedly profane overtones: many commoners interpreted Luther's admonitions as a challenge to both secular and religious authority. Consequently, when violence erupted from peasants and labourers, the authorities struck back, and a vicious circle was born that encompassed in particular southwest Germany, around the Upper Rhine and Danube. But not only there; in Thuringia, Franconia,¹⁰ Alsace, Swabia and Tyrolia as well, peasant armies attacked their enemies: castles and churches burned, palaces and abbeys were attacked with equal vigour - significantly, towns hardly suffered at all.

Luther, whose theses had initially encouraged the rebellion, now executed a 180° turn and began to support law and order. In an embarrassing address, he famously urged the landlords' mercenaries to "cut them [the peasants] down, hit them, choke them, wherever you can." He was afraid of being made liable in person for the insurrection, and began to cloud his treason - for that it appeared - in theological disguise. His anti-peasant argument employed the thesis of the two realms, the spiritual, in which his theses could be applied, if carefully, and the secular, in which Caesar gets what Caesar's is [see Luke 20: 21-26].

His critique, he swore, was purely spiritual, a sort of dialogue with the celestial sovereign only; never had he intended to question secular authority or to foment rebellion. Luther's capitulation ended, for the moment, the revolutionary potential of the Reformation: without spiritual support, the peasants' cause collapsed. In due course the rebels were slaughtered and the German princes returned to bickering as usual.

Or so everybody thought. The canonical disagreements between newly "protestant" princes and the Catholic Church, however, were inflamed, when the orthodox axis of Habsburgs and Vatican began to organize the counter-reformation. The Council of Trent [AD 1545-1563] and the establishment of the Society of Jesus, better known as the Jesuits, became the weapons of an attempt to resuscitate the Catholic monopoly. On the reformers' side, Calvinism began to blossom much at the same time, and explosive concoctions of politics and faith sought allies abroad for the furtherance of their respective cases. A hundred and one years after Luther's initial publication the Great War started which we know today as the Thirty-Years-War.

It began as a family dilemma. Emperor Rudolf II of Habsburg found himself deposed of crown and title on account of his mental incapacity in 1612, and his brother Matthias had to take over. Nationalist movements in Bohemia, Moravia and Hungary forced the temporarily weakened monarchy to grant religious freedom to these provinces in a "Letter of Majesty", and the aforementioned territories consequently turned protestant. When Matthias died in 1618, he left no heir in direct line, and his nephew Archduke Ferdinand, of the Styrian line, eventually succeeded him. In a move worthy of the

¹⁰ The reference is to the Bavarian "Franconia", the lands around Nuremberg and west and north of it, which originally had been part of Austrasia, not Bavaria. They were incorporated into the Duchy of Bavaria at a later date.

family's persistent political blindness, his first act as emperor was to revoke Matthias's "Letter" and to order the restitution of Catholicism in the protestant areas. The Bohemians and their sympathizers were upset, and angry, told the Habsburgs whither to stick their Catholicism, and elected a Calvinist, Friedrich V of the Palatinate, to the newly established office of King of Bohemia.

Alas, Friedrich reigned for a single winter only: in the following spring, the Catholic armies of the emperor and the Liga [the "League", a confederation of Catholic princes, ¶] invaded Bohemia, defeated the locals and restored orthodox Catholicism. This development caused irritation in France and other countries, but for reasons of political balance, not religion.

One might assume that the arch-Catholic House of Habsburg and just-as-Catholic Valois of France would be natural allies; the fact that they were indeed sworn enemies shows that religion was only the fig leaf for the real issue. France's fear was to be encircled by Habsburg territories, which, since the acquisitions by marriage of Spain and the Netherlands in 1496, almost fully abutted France's frontiers. To forestall this possibility, which the Habsburgs too easily might exploit by military means, it became French policy to assist the enemies of the Habsburgs for the next three hundred years or so, independently of their religious affiliation.

The Catholic League, it turned out, was far from satisfied with the recapture of Bohemia alone. Spanish and Bavarian troops invaded the Palatinate and deposed Friedrich V of his second throne. Maximilian of Wittelsbach, Duke of Bavaria, was instituted as the new, Catholic, monarch and from then on was King of Bavaria and the Palatinate. He instituted the same return to rigid Catholicism that the Habsburgs had prescribed for Bohemia, yet his troops did not pause at the Palatinate's frontiers but proceeded to bring the (eternal) felicity of the Catholic counter-reformation to Hessa and Westphalia. At the same time, in a concerted action, more Spanish troops moved into the Netherlands, which had switched to Calvinism decades earlier and had to be delivered from its error. The League appeared to head towards a triumphal restitution of the Catholic monopoly.

The premonition of a complete Habsburg success alarmed France, and her diplomatic channels related urgent proposals inviting neutral countries to enter into an anti-Habsburg coalition. Britain came aboard swiftly: King James I was father-in-law to the deposed "Winter King" Friedrich V, and the Calvinist nations of Denmark and Sweden joined the anti-Habsburg crusade as well. The "Allianz", Alliance, was born, to fight the Catholic "Liga".

The military leadership of the new body was entrusted to the Danish King Christian IV, whose principal opponent in the Liga was the flamboyant Albrecht von Wallenstein, the subject of Friedrich Schiller's famous drama. Wallenstein had devised a plan by which, striking through north-eastern Germany, he should be able to cut off British and Danish supplies sent through the Baltic Sea to Sweden, which had recently joined the Alliance. The Swedish army led by King Gustav Adolf II had earlier invaded Prussia, which, although Protestant, they occupied since an earlier campaign against Catholic Poland over the control of the Baltic Sea. The whole thing was confusing, and it only got worse.

Initially, Wallenstein was blessed by Fortuna and defeated an Alliance army decisively at the battle of Lutter in 1626; forcing Denmark to sue for peace soon thereafter. Ferdinand of Styria, now Emperor Ferdinand II, subsequently attempted to utilize the fortunate momentum to the maximum and issued, in March 1629, another stupid ukase, the "Edict of Restitution," which compelled the Protestants to restore more than five hundred Catholic bishoprics, monasteries, convents, abbeys and other properties that had been secularized since 1552.

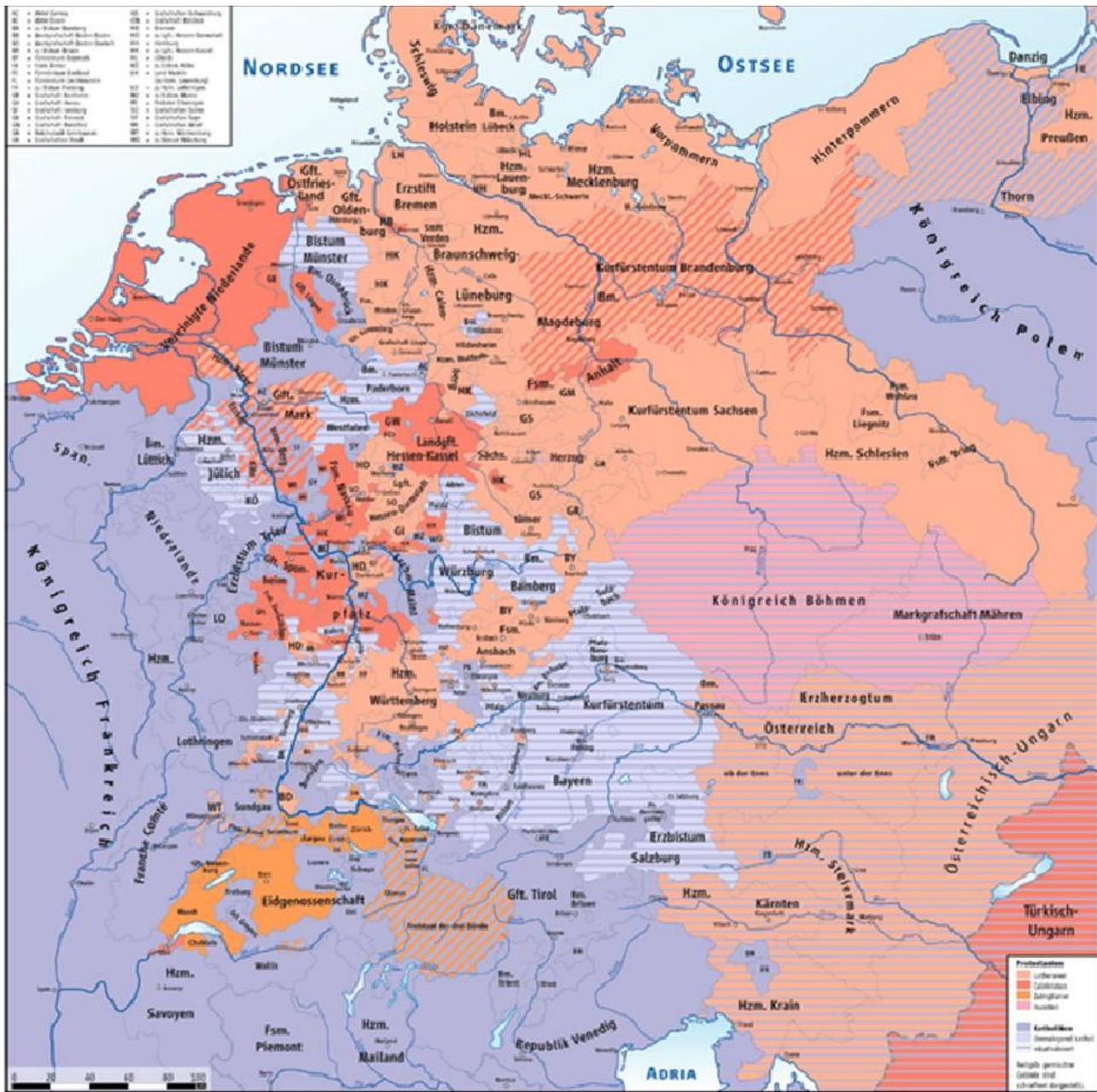
It is unclear whether Ferdinand believed that, by adding insult to injury, the peace of the realm could be restored; at any rate, the document had the opposite effect; encouraging the Protestants to stand up for another round. It came to their advantage that the Protestant princes found themselves wooed by the leaders of a few smaller Catholic territories, who harboured the suspicion that their own states' continued existence might be imperilled by too complete a success of the Habsburgs, considering their well-known penchant for territorial enlargement.

Sweden re-entered the war in 1630, assisted, again, by France, the Netherlands and the newcomer Saxonia, whose fresh troops gathered a few initial victories before, at length, succumbing to the endless doldrums of war just as their opponents did. In this middle period of the war, carnage, even genocide, became a recurring pattern. The armies of

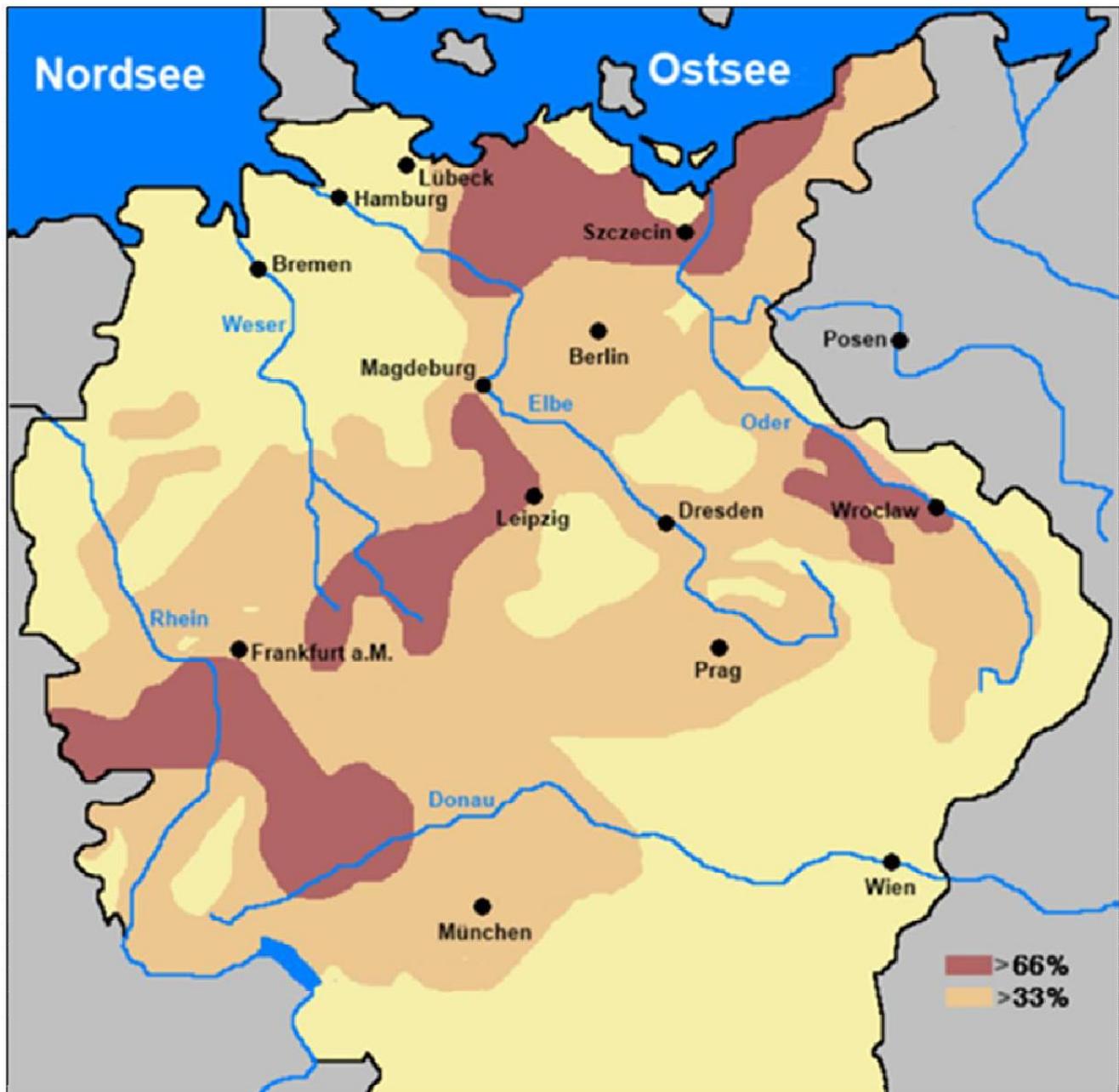
both sides replaced actual battle with the safer occupation of burning and robbing their way through the increasingly barren country; the smallest hamlets as well as the largest cities became their victims. Magdeburg, for example, a major city with over 20,000 inhabitants at that time, lost two thirds of her burghers after succumbing to a protracted siege by Catholic troops in 1632. It is estimated that, overall, between one and two thirds of the population of central Europe vanished in the war; far more died of hunger or disease than from military causes.

In 1635, Emperor Ferdinand and the Elector John George of Saxony signed the Peace of Prague, and, with the German Protestants out of the way, the final phase of the war continued as a conflict of France and Sweden versus the Habsburgs; France's principal aim, the *idée fixe* of her foreign policy, remained to forestall the lethal Habsburg encirclement, cost it what it may. During the last decade of the slaughter, Franco-Swedish troops operated as far south as Bavaria and Austria, and France occupied, for the first time, the provinces Alsace and Lorraine, parts of the former Lotharingia and later Burgundy, which were to become the objects of a perpetual tug-of-war between Germany and France in later years. Contrary to the cliché, Alsace and Lorraine were German provinces annexed by France, not the other way around.

MAPS XXII: RELIGION IN GERMANY 1618 - BLUE - CATHOLIC, RED VARIOUS LUTHERAN DENOMINATIONS



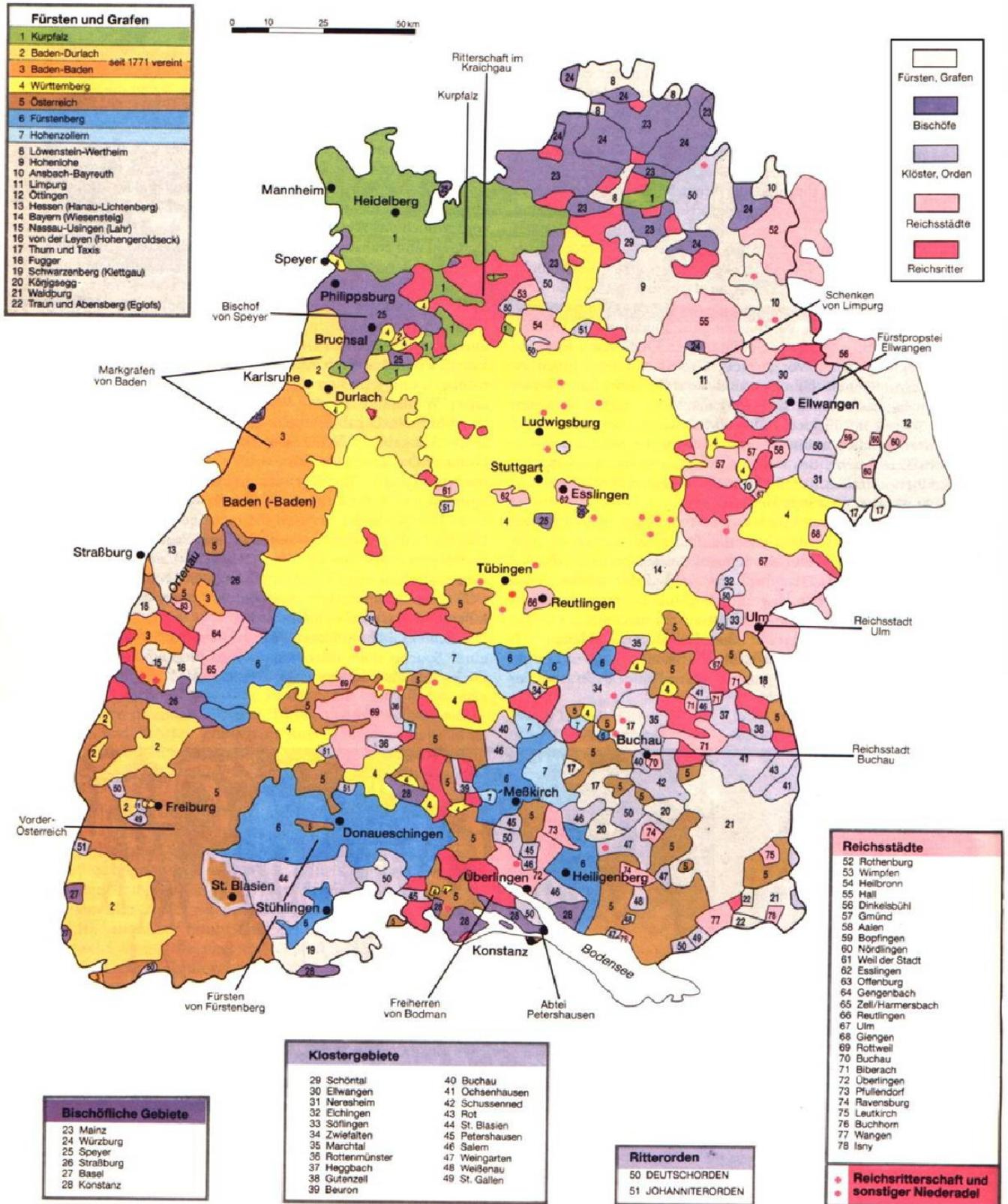
MAP XXIII: POPULATION LOSSES DURING THE THIRTY YEARS-WAR



By AD 1648, the war that had lasted for almost two generations had exhausted all participants, and the subsequent Peace of Westphalia terminated the hostilities. The conditions of the treaty favoured the Alliance: France and Sweden expanded; the annulment of the "Edict of Restitution" allowed the Protestants among the German princes to retain the clerical properties they had confiscated earlier; on the Catholic side, only Bavaria came out ahead: the Wittelsbachers were elevated to the status of electors.

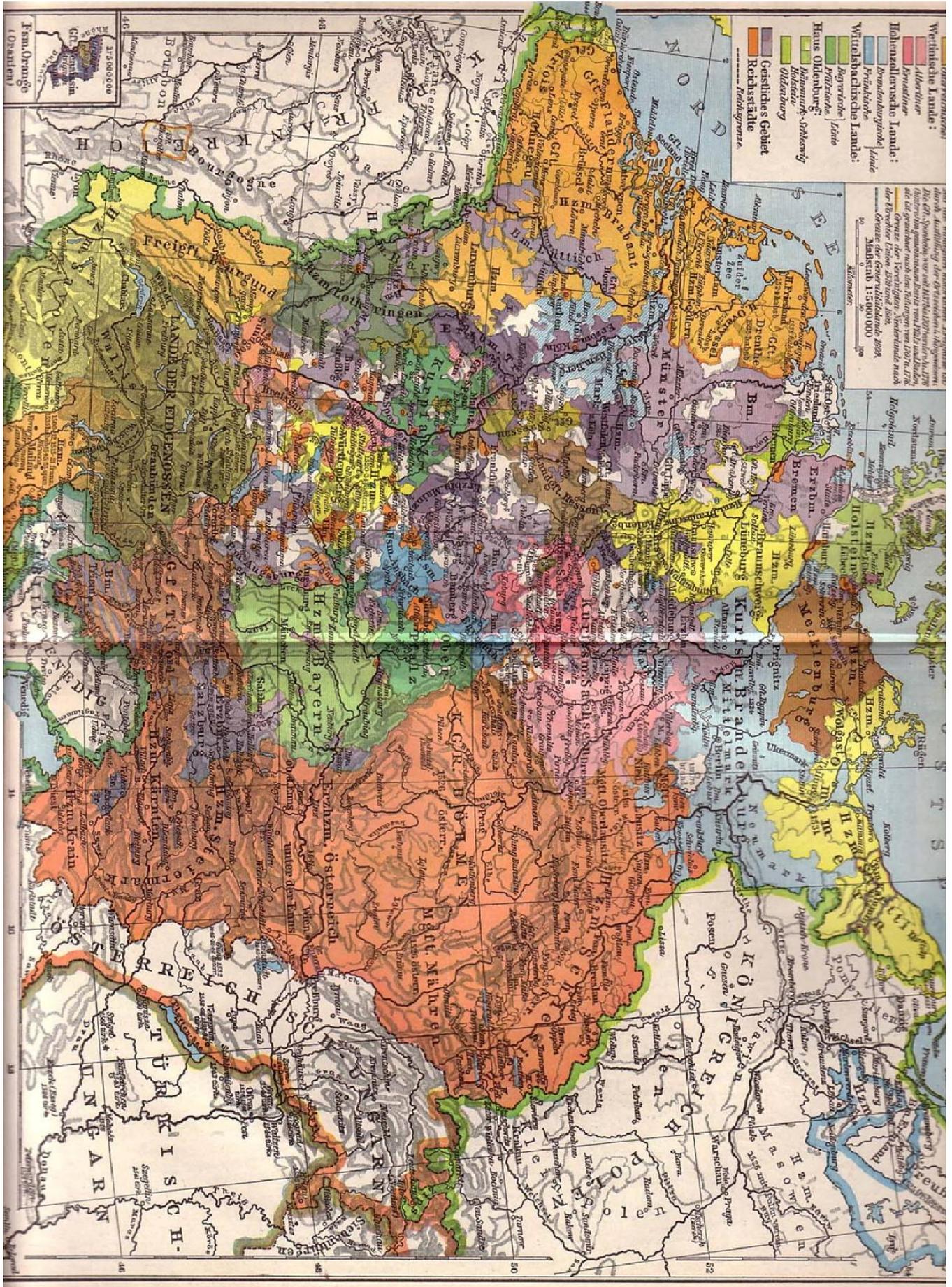
The Calvinist territories of the Netherlands and the Swiss Confederation left the Imperial jurisdiction, and it was the empire itself that became the great casualty of the war. The treaty reduced the Imperial dignity to a mere title, a formality without power, and established the independent and undiminished rule of the German princes, secular or clerical, over their territories. From 1648 on, the Holy Roman Empire consisted of over two hundred independent kingdoms, duchies, margravates, earldoms, archbishoprics, bishoprics and abbeys, fifty-one Imperial free cities, and about

MAP XXIV: CLASSIC GERMAN PARTICULARISM IN THE SOUTH-WEST



THIS MAP, WHICH DEPICTS A TERRITORY TODAY ALMOST IDENTICAL WITH THE FEDERAL GERMAN STATE OF BADEN - WÜRTTEMBERG ON THE BORDER TO FRANCE, SHOWS ON ABOUT 30.000 km² OR 11.600 SQUARE MILES APPROXIMATELY EIGHTY SOVEREIGN TERRITORIES WHICH EXISTED BEFORE THE FRENCH REVOLUTION - POSSESSIONS OF PRINCES, COUNTS, BISHOPS, MONASTERIES AND ABBEYS, KNIGHT ORDERS AND FREE IMPERIAL TOWNS

MAP XXV: 17TH CENTURY PARTICULARISM IN THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE



two thousand tiny but independent territories of Imperial barons or knights. The latter fervently held on their microscopic possessions, over which they executed the authority of a sovereign lord. Famous became the example of the Abbey of Baint in Swabia: it consisted of a parcel of land less than five hundred acres in size, was inhabited by twenty-nine nuns and their retainers, and governed by a princess-abbess. Yet the mini-state was a political entity as sovereign as, say, the Kingdom of Poland or Louis XIV's France.

Despite the fierce independent-mindedness of the nobility, a certain amount of political coagulation set in after the war, which at length saw the emergence of two gravitational centres within the German quilt. Hohenzollern Prussia and Habsburg Austria began to compete over the dominance in Germany in a conflict that was to last the next two centuries. In hindsight, the rise of Prussia was the most important result of the Thirty-Years-War. Everybody knows the famous dictum that Prussia was not a state owning an army but an army running a state. Yet it is somewhat oversimplifying to account for the ascendancy of Prussia solely in the context of the military events: in her infancy and adolescence, when she was but the Margravate of Brandenburg, military affairs played a minor role in her development.

The history of Prussia is indissolubly connected with the House of Hohenzollern. The Hohenzollerns were, originally, the earls of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, a county in southwestern Germany at the Upper Danube, only a few miles northeast of Lake Constance. In AD 1415, Emperor Sigismund promoted Count Friedrich to Marquis of Brandenburg, the sandy territory around the small towns of Potsdam, Berlin and Coelln, which guarded the Polish border. Only two years later, Friedrich was promoted to elector and thus became, of a sudden, one of the most influential of the German princes. Within the next two hundred years, the family added Pomerania, Prussia, and most of Silesia to their possessions.

The initial effort in Prussia's rise to a continental power is commonly ascribed to the leadership of Friedrich Wilhelm, who reigned 1640-1688 and earned the moniker of the "Great Elector". He was, far more than the average German prince, interested in his country's economic development, created, from scratch, a mercantilist, protectionist system of national economy, and profited nicely when he took in, after 1685, over twenty thousand French Huguenot families who fled Louis XIV's repeal of the Edict of Nantes and the wrath of Cardinal Mazarin. These industrious Protestant families much aided the local economy and, for that matter, explain why many classic Prussian names appear French. His successor, Friedrich III, obtained, in 1713, the title *KING IN PRUSSIA* [NB: not "of Prussia", ¶] from the accumulated receivership of the advantageous outcome of the War of the Spanish Succession [AD 1710-1714].

Yet it was not until the reign of his son Friedrich Wilhelm I, the "Soldier King", that Prussia became known as a military power. His reign was frugal not only in regards to the commoners but the nobility as well, for the king understood the draught upon the royal finances caused by a standing army. He was, like his father, interested in economy and constantly sought ways to improve the national revenue. The governance of the country was based on sober reliance on the king's sturdy Calvinism, a grave Lutheran clergy and an obedient army and bureaucracy. By 1740, Prussia was widely recognized as the most powerful German kingdom.

Prussia's neighbours observed these developments with scepticism, and suspicion, but the Habsburgs looked more to the west and southeast instead of to the north. Austria continued to spend most of the early eighteenth century in her perennial competition with France over European hegemony, and with the Ottoman Empire over the Balkans. By the beginning of the reign of Empress Maria Theresia in 1740, the former Habsburg possessions in Spain had been lost, and the consolidated realm now only comprised Austria proper, Bohemia and Moravia in the northeast, Hungary in the southeast, and, west of the Rhine, the duchies Brabant, Luxembourg and Flanders. A few bits of Lower Italy completed the picture.

The Austro-Turkish conflict in the Balkans moved the frontiers hither and yon, yet did not change the overall picture much. The rise of Prussia finally alerted the Habsburgs to divert their attention from the observation of France and focus it upon the northern neighbour, whom they proceeded to fight openly, and sub rosa, for the next one hundred and twenty-five years [AD 1740-1866]. Most of her lifetime, Empress Maria found out, she had to fight the Soldier King's son Friedrich II, known as "Frederick the Great" to posterity.

The most dramatic parts of this struggle occurred within the Seven-Years-War [AD 1756-1763], also known as the French and Indian War, which may be called, with some plausibility, the first real "World War": for its theatres ranged from the Mississippi to the Indus. In the main theatre, Europe, it was the hot continuation of the previously cold war between Austria and Prussia in addition to the ongoing conflict between Great Britain and France, whose colonial troops also clashed in the secondary theatres of America and India. Hence the antagonists were Great Britain, under the Elder Pitt and

Prussia under Friedrich II, on one side, and France, Austria and Russia on the other. One may note here that, of a sudden, France appears on the side of Austria as if nothing adverse had happened in the last two hundred years; proof that Louis XV regarded Pitt and Friedrich a greater threat than the notoriously bungling Habsburgs.

The pretext for the war was Maria Theresa's desire to recover the province of Silesia, which Friedrich had conquered in a blitzkrieg in the early 1740s. The empress coveted revenge and found a related soul in Czarina Elisabeth of Russia, who was a mortal enemy of Friedrich. It was whispered that the enmity had its origin in a bon mot Friedrich had dropped regarding the beauty of the Czarina, or lack thereof, and for such a petty reason men were to die. It reminded of Troy.

Although Maria Theresa was thus assured of Russian complicity, she still regarded Prussia too strong an opponent to be faced without the assistance of a timely French invasion of the western Prussian borderlands. The first shots fired in anger were heard in early 1756, when Friedrich pre-emptively invaded and conquered Saxony, an Austrian ally, before either of the opposing armies was ready. It was an auspicious beginning of a road that, however, proved far more toilsome than the king expected. His initial problem was that his only ally, Great Britain, was a naval power and not in a position to aid him with infantry at short notice. The fate of Prussia consequently hung in the balance, although the king's unconventional generalship allowed it to survive, for a time, the two-pronged attack of his opponents. Friedrich was able to destroy one invading French corps in the Battle of Rossbach in western Saxony, and, only a month later, an Austrian army at Leuthen, in Silesia, the south-eastern corner of the country.

In 1758 a British Expeditionary Force became available, at last, and took off some pressure at the western front, where the French were advancing. But the longer the war continued the more Prussian successes began to resemble Pyrrhic victories: its army won battles but in the process bled itself white. Prussia's resources also proved too meagre to sustain a long war, and Sweden recognized a tactical opportunity and declared war on a weakened Prussia, whose south and east were already occupied by fresh Austrian and Russian armies. The Swedish attack opened a third front, at the Baltic Sea.

The situation appeared hopeless. Over two thirds of Prussia was already under foreign occupation, and the army, forced to fight a multi-front war, was on the verge of collapse. The court cartographers of Paris, Vienna and St. Petersburg already planned the partition of the country when, of a sudden, Czarina Elisabeth died and was succeeded by Czar Peter III, who happened to be a great admirer of Friedrich [AD 1762]. The Russian troops melted away, and the Swedes, who now found themselves alone in the northern theatre, did likewise. France declared that everything had been some kind of error from the beginning and recalled her troops as well.

That left the Austrians alone in the cold. Within a month they were beaten twice by Friedrich's men and a peace was signed in February 1763, ending the conflict on the continent. Silesia remained with Prussia, and everything else stayed much as it had been before the melee. The sudden change of fortune by the Czarina's death, however, became known in court parlance as the "Miracle of Brandenburg", salvation in the last second. One hundred and eighty-two years later, in a bunker below the Reichs Chancellery in Berlin, Adolf Hitler, the last of Friedrich's successors, hoped in vain for a repetition of the lucky fate, while Russian tanks destroyed Berlin.

Peace was gained for a generation, as long as both contestants licked their wounds. In the hope of finally untying the Gordic Knot of Franco-Austrian relations, and to persuade Louis XVI, if possible, to take part in a renewed anti-Prussian coalition, Emperor Joseph II, Maria Theresa's successor, gave the hand of his kid sister Marie Antoinette in wedlock to the French king [AD 1770]; little did he know the hard choices his teen sister would face twenty years later.

We have observed that, in the decade after Luther's publications, peasant revolts had briefly challenged the rule of nobility and clergy. The insurrections had been wiped out bloodily by the princes' mercenaries, but the spectre of civil rebellion could only temporarily be subdued. The Enlightenment, with its progress of science and philosophy, undermined the medieval order and sponsored a slow reawakening of republicanism, long thought having died alongside Rome. The Peace of Westphalia had seen the triumphant recognition of the Republic of the Netherlands and the Swiss Confederation.

MAP XXVI: AUSTRO-PRUSSIAN DUALISM IN GERMANY AROUND 1864 -

FROM AD 1525 ON, AUSTRIA HAD STEERED A STEADY POLICY OF EXPANSION BUT FOUND HER GROWTH BLOCKED BY PRUSSIA.



One hundred and fifty years after the defeat of the peasant wars, another surge of political insubordination took place, and since it happened chiefly in Paris, is known as the French Revolution. A century after Louis XIV had asserted his absolutist claim "*L'ÉTAT, C'EST MOI!*" ["I am the state!"]¹, his grandson Louis XVI found out that there could be, in fact, a state without him. Together with his wife Marie Antoinette, Emperor Joseph's sister, he lost his head on the guillotine.

Regicide was not an unknown phenomenon by itself. It was mostly performed by the knives of amateur assassins, although a public and professional procedure had been performed relatively recently in England, by beheading King Charles I at the Tower of London [AD 1649]. The cause célèbre, however, had rather been Charles's lack of popularity than an expression of systemic revolt; it was different in France.

The increasing literacy and easy availability of books had done much to popularize the writings and teachings of, among many others, Rousseau and Voltaire about the rights of man and the social contract, and had provided the basics of a political position for the great mass of people that never had one before. The idea of human rights disputed, and overcame, the assertion that God himself had put the king in his place; for the first time peasants and burghers evidenced not only disgruntled dislikes of the ruling oligarchies but the beginnings of an alternative, of a theory, a plan: first, how to

build up solidarity among the disenfranchised, and second, how to proceed against the enemy. For the first time, slowly, hesitantly, peasants, workers, and the bourgeois middle class imagined common goals for a common cause.

Slowly but steadily, at every gathering, in every inn, discussions asserted that man has rights, every man, at least some, and these rights should be recognized by the state. The concepts of *LIBERTÉ*, *FRATERNITÉ* and *ÉGALITÉ* were tossed around in the taverns and the salons of the bourgeoisie. The closest thing pre-revolutionary France possessed in regards to a representation of the people were the *ESTATES GENERALES*, a convocation of deputies from the three estates; the clergy or First Estate; the nobility or Second Estate; and the people, the Third Estate. The voting was rigged like in ancient Rome: every estate had one (1) vote, which meant that the first two estates always outvoted the people. Another major irritation of the construct was that the first two estates were exempt from taxation, and nothing could be done about it.

It goes without saying that nobility and clergy followed the stirrings of the commoners with suspicion. A few minor noblemen apparently felt portents of misfortune and came out in favour of bestowing some rights upon the people lest they, by revolution, took them all. The Bourbons, however, did not share such silly ideas. The kings of France had always identified the common good with their own fortunes and remained ignorant of the reality their governance imposed upon the lesser men.

The clergy was, of course, on the side of God, who was on the side of the king. The following English ditty explains the relation between Church and Crown:

In good King Charles's golden days,
When loyalty no harm meant,
A furious High-Churchman I was,
And so I gained preferment.

Unto my flock I daily preached,
Kings are by God appointed,
And damned are those who dare resist,
Or touch the Lord's Anointed.

And this is Law, I will maintain,
Unto my dying days, Sir,
That whatsoever King shall reign,
I'll be the Vicar of Bray, Sir!

[*"The Vicar of Bray"*, British Musical Miscellany (1734) Vol.I.]

Hence disobedience of the secular authority was not only a crime but a sin as well, and the earthly punishment of the delinquent was only the overture to the sinner's posthumous torment in the sulphurous caves of hell.

But Reformation and Enlightenment had corroded the spiritual authority of the Catholic church (none other existed in France after the repudiation of the Edict of Nantes), and when an exiled Swiss writer named Jean-Jacques Rousseau suggested that a secular government is properly formed of, and regulated, by the common people, the popularity of the idea should have suggested caution to court and clergy. But caution is a product of humility, and modesty was not their forte.

Louis XVI's problem in the 1780s was money: in general, and for the military. The cost of the Seven-Years-War, whose battlefields had spanned half around the globe, had exercised too heavy a toll on the royal treasury and all but bankrupted the nation. While the king's authority to levy taxes and excises was far-ranging and liberally used, certain limits were prescribed by ancient edicts of the Estates Generals that could only be exceeded by their leave. Since Louis was in urgent need of fresh funds, he had no choice but to convocate the Estates, which had last met in 1614, one hundred and seventy- five years ago.

The august body dutifully assembled in the capital and opened for business on May 5, 1789, at the Palace of Versailles. Trouble was in the air. The delegates of the Third Estate harboured no doubt that clergy and nobility would proceed in the obvious fashion and try to pass their plans by the usual majority, but this time the scheme, once proposed, was met with stern counter-propositions: why not, asked the commoners, merge everybody present into a National Assembly, which then could pass majority resolutions? Why not, bourgeois deputies wondered, enact a constitution, too?

That was not truly what the king wanted to hear, but the burghers had meanwhile discovered a few ancient rules of procedure which enabled them to temporarily block voting and thus also Louis's funding. These were unanticipated problems, and Louis was not a man used to the solution of problems, or any good in it. He set out to dissolve the impertinent rabble, but found out that he could not legally do so. Emboldened by the king's vain ministrations, the delegates picked up the gauntlet Louis had thrown at their feet, and constituted themselves as the National Assembly of France; resolving, as the first order of business, to compose and enact a provisionary national constitution.

Louis initially pretended to cooperate, trying to gain time by delaying measures or by granting the one or other trifling matter while clandestinely gathering troops around the capital. Yet his prevarications did not delay the inevitable long enough: not only did the National Assembly, which had rapidly gained respect and popularity, remain unperturbed and went to work, on July 14, 1789, an angry mob stormed the Bastille, the symbol of Bourbon oppression. The Bastille was a fortress that was used, in times of peace, as an arsenal and a prison. The crowd stormed the building, perhaps in the hope to arm themselves against the royal troops whose deployment had been reported from outside and of whom rumour held that they were ordered to shoot to kill. The building was dutifully ransacked but no armaments were found and only two prisoners, common thieves, were found and freed.

Nevertheless, within days the mob spawned its own leadership and a Revolutionary Citizens' Council was established. The news of the insurgency spread like the proverbial wildfire and all over the country peasants and burghers united in opposition to the Ancien Régime. Six weeks later, on August 26, 1789, a novelty in the political self-organization of the European people occurred in the National Assembly: the people of France, as represented, adopted the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. Other decrees guaranteed equality before the law, introduced a representative government and proposed the rights to "liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression."

The reform of government yielded a constitutional monarchy with a single-chamber parliament, and divided France into eighty-three administrative departments. The suffrage was, it must be said, not truly equal or unlimited: only taxpayers were enfranchised, and only those above a certain threshold. Still, the properties of the church, the crown, and of émigrés were confiscated, and the clergy as well as the judiciary reorganized along elective principles [October 10, 1789]. Full religious tolerance was established, and the tax exemptions of nobility and church revoked. Then the National Assembly disbanded itself, to be relieved, on October 1, 1791, by a newly elected LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY, which was to play its part, presumably, along with the king in governing the nation.

Had Louis XVI assented to the constitution the Assembly created, he would have kept his head and most of his powers; but seldom were kings then known for moderation. Louis had his mind firmly set on a counter-revolution, which he attempted to expedite with the aid of the nation's aristocracy and the support of the European kings. This support, Louis believed, he would receive independently of the sympathy or antipathy of his royal colleagues, as a simple matter of necessity: to avoid the proliferation of the revolution beyond the French borders. To assist the French king would be a part of their self-preservation. It was true that the European monarchs were afraid of the revolution kindling fires in the own backyards, but Louis's inept diplomacy not only failed to secure Austrian support, which he sought not least on behalf of his wife, it actually led to war in 1792. The Habsburgs were trying to profit from France's internal problems.

At first, the weak and ill-motivated French troops were defeated with ease, for Louis's soldiers, now citizens, felt no urge to die for the Bourbons. But since the Austrian mercenaries were not keen on dying for the Habsburgs, either, the war began to idle. In August 1792, another mob snatched the royal family from Versailles and detained them in the city. In September, the Assembly officially dethroned Louis and Marie, and called for a new National Convention, this time elected by almost universal male suffrage of the ages twenty-one and over. The gathering opened on September 21, 1792, and

declared France a republic, under the official slogan *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*. Louis was tried for treason and quickly found guilty. The new republic then arrived at its first political crossroads: was the former king to die, or would he live?

The problem split the populace as well as the delegates right down the middle, and the intensity of debate reached new heights with each passing day. The end of the year drew near, and with it the day allotted for judgement. In a public vote, a small majority of the National Assembly resolved in favour of death by guillotine, and on January 21, 1793, Louis and his wife were executed. Shock waves roiled around the globe: the more thoughtful noblemen wondered whether their time was running out.

The split over the royal execution deepened the differences between the more conservative deputies and the more radical ones. In due time these two groups constituted themselves as factions, and their mutual relations soon drifted apart beyond the realm of reconciliation. The summer of 1793 brought an escalation over the Republic's finances and foreign policies, and, eventually, open hostilities erupted.

The left wing, that called itself *Jacobins*, for the club in which they met in the vicinity of the Place des Piques [today's Place Vendôme, where the famous Hotel Ritz is situated, ¶], putsched, seized power, and for a few frightening months exercised a reign of terror.

The horrors were justified with a political argumentation that sounds eerily familiar to anyone who lives during the "War on Terror", as F. Fürstenberg explained in the *New York Times*, on "Bush's Dangerous Liaisons":

Much as George W. Bush's presidency was ineluctably shaped by Sept. 11, 2001, so the outbreak of the French Revolution was symbolized by the events of one fateful day, July 14, 1789. And though 18-th Century France may seem impossibly distant to contemporary Americans, future historians examining Mr. Bush's presidency within the larger sweep of political and intellectual history may find the French Revolution useful in understanding his curious brand of 21'stCentury conservatism.

Soon after the storming of the Bastille, pro-Revolutionary elements came together to form an association that would become known as the Jacobin Club, an umbrella club of politicians, journalists and citizens dedicated to advancing the principles of the Revolution. The Jacobins shared a defining ideological feature. They divided the world between pro- and anti-Revolutionaries - the defenders of liberty versus its enemies. The French Revolution, as they understood it, was the great event that would determine whether liberty was to prevail on the planet or whether the world would fall back into tyranny and despotism.

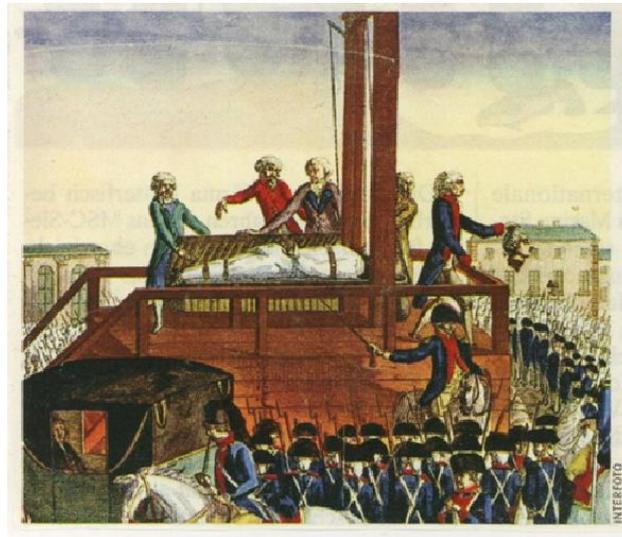
The stakes could not be higher, and on these matters there could be no nuance or hesitation. One was either for the Revolution or tyranny. By 1792, France was confronting the hostility of neighbouring countries, debating how to react. The Jacobins were divided. On one side stood the journalist and political leader Jacques-Pierre Brissot de Warville, who argued for war. Brissot understood the war as preventive - "une guerre offensive" he called it - to defeat the despotic powers of Europe before they could organize their counter-revolutionary strike. It would not be a war of conquest, as Brissot saw it, but a war "between liberty and tyranny". Pro-war Jacobins believed theirs was a mission not for a single nation or even for a single continent. It was, in Brissot's words, "a crusade for individual liberty".

Brissot's opponents were sceptical. "No one likes armed missionaries," declared Robespierre, with words as apt then as they remain today. Not long after the invasion of Austria, the military tide turned quickly against France. The United States, France's "sister republic", refused to enter the war on France's side. It was an infuriating show of ingratitude, as the French saw it, coming from a fledgling nation they had magnanimously saved from foreign occupation in a previous war.

THIS JUST IN:**WHAT CAUSED THE REVOLUTION, STARVATION OR ROUSSEAU?**

The Munich economist Hermann Schubert has recently unearthed, in the archives of the French Army in Paris, 29,500 dossiers of French soldiers recruited or drafted from the beginning of the 18th Century until after the revolution. These files allow tracking the changes in the average body height of the candidates over the century.

"The average body height of these militia classes, for almost forty years, shrank from a short enough average of 165 centimetres [5'5"] at the beginning of the century to an even less imposing 162 centimetres [5'3"]. Such shrinkage of a whole people is interpreted, by anthropomorphics like Schubert and his mentor John Komlos of the Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich, to be a certain indication of a desolate food situation. The special advantage for scientific research is that the data deliver a statistical representative sample, for the fact that the militia members and soldiers had been determined by a lottery and subsequently drafted, if they failed to volunteer.



These numbers can be of assistance to answer the enduring question whether the revolt was an act of a starving population or an insurgency of the bourgeoisie in search of their political representation.

That the population was, in fact, starving, had been known for a long time, even if no exact quantifications were possible. The new discovery is therefore the first to present comparable figures over a significant time. With the new results, it may be asserted that the nutritional situation of the French population indeed worsened for decades, and reached a nadir in the five years before the revolution. ...

The subsequent revolution actually did improve things, as far as the food supply was concerned. One decade after the revolution the average height began to climb again." (27)

Confronted by a monarchical Europe united in opposition to revolutionary France - old Europe, they might have called it - the Jacobins rooted out domestic political dissent. It was the beginning of the period that would become infamous as the terror.

Among the Jacobins' greatest triumphs was their ability to appropriate the rhetoric of patriotism - "Le Patriote Francais" was the title of Brissot's newspaper - and to promote their political program through a tightly coordinated network of newspapers, political hacks, pamphleteers and political clubs. Even the

Jacobins' dress distinguished "true patriots": those who wore badges of patriotism like the liberty cap on their heads, or the cocarde tricolore (a red, white and blue rosette) on their hands or even on their lapels. Insisting that their partisan views were identical to the national will, believing that only they could save France from apocalyptic destruction, Jacobins could not conceive of legitimate dissent. Political opponents were treasonous, stabbing France and the Revolution in the back.

Robespierre - now firmly committed to the most militant brand of Jacobinism - condemned the "treacherous insinuations" cast by those who questioned "the excessive severity of measures prescribed by the public interest." He warned his political opponents, "This severity is alarming only for the conspirators, only for the enemies of liberty." Such measures, then as now, were undertaken to protect the nation - indeed, to protect liberty itself.

If the French terror had a slogan, it was that attributed to the great orator Louis de Saint-Just: "No liberty for the enemies of liberty." Saint-Just's pithy phrase (like President Bush's variant, 'We must not let foreign enemies use the forums of liberty to destroy liberty itself.') could serve as the very antithesis of Western liberal tradition.

On this principle, the terror demonized its political opponents, imprisoned suspected enemies without trial and eventually sent thousands to the guillotine. All of these actions emerged from the Jacobin worldview that the enemies of liberty deserve no rights.

Though it has been a topic of much attention in recent years, the origin of the term 'terrorist' has gone largely unnoticed by politicians and pundits alike. The word was an invention of the French Revolution, and it referred not to those who hate freedom, nor to non-state actors, nor, of course, to 'Islamofascism'. A terroriste was, in its original meaning, a Jacobin leader who ruled France during La Terreur. (28)

Meanwhile in Paris, the guillotine was busy cutting the necks of the Right; the Gironde, as they were called, for the department whence their leaders came. But the Revolution soon turned to swallow her own children, when radical Jacobin delegates began to purge their ranks from suspected spies and traitors. In poetic justice, none of the Jacobin leaders survived the terror they had unleashed: Jean-Paul Marat was assassinated by Charlotte Corday, while Georges-Jacques Danton and, last not least, Maximilien Robespierre, lost their heads over the same bucket that had received the severed heads of their political opponents [July 28, 1794].

Robespierre's decapitation indicated that the worst internal conflicts were over, and a newly elected National Congress took on the necessary legislation. The Constitution of 1792 was replaced with the model of 1795 (Égalité suffered, again, when the vote was restricted to taxpayers). The executive authority was entrusted to a five man committee called the "Directorate", which governed alongside a two-chambered parliament.

Good news was received from the field, where the arms of the nation, revived by a fresh outpouring of revolutionary élan, had defeated first the Austrian invaders and subsequently one Prussian and British corps each. Yet as soon as the situation on the fronts improved, a second wave of internal strife was inflicted on the nation. The new constitution had, somewhat intentionally, created a weak executive that was subject to checks and balances galore. The drawback, which did not take long to materialize, was that the directorate had little authority to decisively suppress the renewed power struggle between the bourgeoisie and the royalists, who now returned from exile in droves, with vengeance in mind. A counter-revolution threatened to disrupt the public peace that had only recently been regained, with so much difficulty, and to secure its authority, the directorate relied on the military leadership which was, at length, asked to restore law and order. Which they did, sort of, and more.

A young officer from Corsica, who had distinguished himself in two successive Italian campaigns in 1796 and 1797, was approached to lend a helping hand to the directorate, which he did, but never let go. By 1799, the directors realized their dependence on the advice and assistance of the young Napoleon Bonaparte to get anything done; but by then it was too late. By the end of the year, the young general had formed, it seemed, a definitive opinion about his superiors and putsched them out of the way, replacing the directorate with a three man "Consulate", with himself, no surprise here, as "First Consul" [November 9, 1799]. Ten years and four months after Bastille Day, France was again ruled by a single man; the revolution was over.

Its legacy, however, was not, and as long as monarchs existed who claimed to rule through God's good graces, the nemesis of the French Revolution remained on their minds: from 1789 on, removal by revolution was an inherent part of the average royal nightmare. Although none of the Revolution's specific political achievements survived for long, the foundation of French republicanism was laid and returns to a monarchical system, which occurred more than once, remained unpersuasive and relatively short-lived.¹¹

When European kings applauded the putsch, they did so under the impression that any autocratic rule, which Napoleon was expected to exert, would sympathize with their own reactionary designs. Bonaparte was appraised as a rash upstart who would, no doubt, in short time offer peace, busy with establishing the legitimacy of his reign. The royal fathers of the continent mustered their nubile daughters in the hope of a future French Connection.

A reasonable first approximation of a modern citizen army appeared among the by-products of the Revolution in France. It demonstrated greater motivation and thus cohesion, and achieved superiority over the uniformed serfs and mercenaries employed by the European monarchs. In 1793, the anti-France, or, rather, anti-revolutionary, coalition had comprised Austria, Prussia, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Spain, Sardinia, Portugal and the kingdom of Naples, essentially the whole continent with the exception of Russia. The simple fact that France still existed in 1799 proved the value of her citizen army, inspired since 1796 by the military genius of Napoleon, under whose generalship they defeated coalition forces twice, at Marengo and Hohenlinden. In the Peace Treaty of Luneville in 1801, the new Austrian emperor Francis II found himself compelled to concede his territories on the western bank of the Rhine to France.

As soon as the treaty was to be enforced, a small problem appeared: among other territories, Francis had agreed to surrender the Austrian Netherlands (much of today's Belgium): they were a Habsburg possession and hence in his license to give up. He had, however, agreed to cede all territories west of the Rhine, some of which, unfortunately, did not belong to him. A hastily assembled conference of Imperial counsellors determined that whoever had, through the emperor's oversight, lost possessions on the left bank of the river would be compensated with territory on the right bank. The generous offer failed to specify whose lands were to be used: no unclaimed land could be found, nor did any volunteers offer their possessions as charitable constitutions. It was a mess.

A general conference, which was to arrange a complete redistribution of land seemed the only practical solution, and the Imperial Diet created a committee of deputies, the *REICHSDEPUTATION* or Imperial Deputation. The august body was entrusted with a complete and fair redrawing of the political map, not an easy task, even under the best of circumstances.

The best of circumstances were, unfortunately, not present. Behind closed doors, that deputation depended on the good will of Napoleon, without whose consent nothing could be decided. Two years after Luneville, the deputation published the *REICHSDEPUTATIONS-HAUPTSCHLUSS*, the Final Recess of the Imperial Deputation [1803]. The main provisions of the decree were *SECULARIZATION* and *MEDIATION*: secularization seized all clerical possessions with the exception of the Archbishopric of Mainz and divided them among the secular princes; mediation did the same with the tiny entities of the lower nobility and the lesser Imperial towns. The winners were the big states: most of all Prussia, but Bavaria and the duchies of Württemberg and Baden as well, who received most of the former knights' territories in southwest Germany.

Although the nobility was slow in realizing, and might not have approved it, the reduction of German particularism eventually resulted in a furtherance of the national consolidation. The proclamation of the French Empire, by Napoleon in 1804, ended many a thousand-years-old Imperial tradition and obsoleted the last vestiges of the German Imperial authority. A third war against France since 1792, that of the "Third Coalition", Great Britain, Russia, Prussia, Austria and Sweden versus France, Spain and the southern German duchies of Bavaria and Württemberg, that began in 1805 ended a year later with Napoleon's triumph in the Battle of Austerlitz. In its aftermath, Emperor Francis II resigned the

¹¹ The Bourbons returned to the throne with Louis XVIII in 1814 and, after Napoleon's One Hundred Days, in 1815. Charles X followed in 1824, but his attempt to reintroduce absolutism ended in the July Revolution of 1830 that deposed him. He was followed by Louis Philippe, from the Orleans branch of the Bourbons. Corruption soon undermined his government, and another revolution, in 1848, unseated him and declared the Second Republic. A nephew of Napoleon I, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, was elected President of the Republic in 1848, for a term of four years. He putched in 1851, and a year later proclaimed the Second Empire and heralded himself as Emperor Napoleon III. He unleashed war with Prussia in 1870, lost, was removed to exile, and France became a republic again. It remains one to this day, with constitutional changes in October 1945 (the "Fourth Republic") and September 1958 (the „Fifth Republic“).

Imperial crown and title: the "Holy Roman Empire" ceased to exist, 843 years after Otto I's coronation in Rome. The winners were Bavaria and Württemberg, allied with France, which became independent kingdoms.

The formation of proto-Germany began exactly in these years of French domination, unnoticed by either Napoleon or Francis II, in the subdued kingdom of Prussia. Napoleon's armies had severely defeated the Prussians at Jena and Auerstaedt in 1807 and subsequently occupied most of the country, that is, these portions which Napoleon had not confiscated and given away to his brother Jerome, whom he had made King of Westphalia, or to the newly established Grand-Duchy of Poland.

Occasionally, a loss may turn an unexpected gain. It was precisely in the years of her humiliation, after the defeat of her proud army, that Prussia initiated the reforms which were to result in making her a modern state which in some respects led the world. Many things that are nowadays, for better or worse, associated with the workings of a modern state were first introduced in Prussia in the early years of the nineteenth century: communal self-government, freedom of trade and contracts, the income tax, compulsive education and, last not least, military service by conscription. The feudal system had limited the nation's entrepreneurial activities along social borderlines: to buy or sell land was the prerogative of the nobility, but to become a merchant or artisan, one had to be a commoner. These limitations fell, and with the eventual abolition of serfdom, the world's first labour market was created; a necessary condition for Germany's extremely rapid industrialization.

The economy of feudal Prussia depended on serfs working the extensive farms of the "Junkers", the local barons. They ruled with a heavy hand, essentially independent from governmental supervision. On their possessions, they were employer, policeman and judge in one. They had the right to inflict corporeal punishment, could grant, or forbid, marriages; in some cases, while technically illegal, whole sharecropper families were bought and sold, in particular at the fringes of the country where the eye of the law was short-sighted. A feudal right the Junkers were loath to give up was the *IUS PRIMAE NOCTIS* or *DROIT DE SEIGNEUR*; the alleged right of the lord to claim the sexual favours of a vassal's bride on her wedding night.

Under the impression of the French Revolution, demands for the abolishment of the old customs surfaced in Prussia as well. Although the calls for political reform were based, as in France, on the theories of Rousseau, Locke and John Stuart Mill, there was another important theory for the framers of the new Prussian state: Adam Smith's *THE WEALTH OF NATIONS* (1776), which described a possible new economical model for the country. Smith's paradigm was based upon, first, the private right to property, second, the principle of competition, the "free market", and third, the abolition of trade obstacles like customs, excises or levies. These basic tenets of *CAPITALISM* happened to coincide with the most important invention of the modern age, the partnership of coal and the steam engine, which absolved man from a plethora of manual labours. Industrialization began in the English midlands in the late eighteenth century but it took decades for Prussia and the other German states to catch up.

Five distinguished names are eternally united with the Prussian reforms: on the, less important, military side the generals Gerhard von Scharnhorst and August von Gneisenau; on the civil side of the government the Barons von Stein and von Hardenberg; none of whom would have effected much without the reforms of Wilhelm von Humboldt, brother of the famous geographer and botanist Alexander von Humboldt.

Any serious reform of the land, so much was clear to reformers and hesitators alike, had to begin with and centre on the situation of the peasantry. They formed the basis of the population, of agriculture, and of the military, and to improve their lot should have positive repercussions on the rest of the nation. The first issue the reformers attacked was the social integration of all "Prussians", for there was a problem. The concept of being a "Prussian" did not come easy to many inhabitants, for the simple reason that they only had recently become Prussians; only a generation or so earlier they had been Brandenburgers, Silesians or Pomeranians, collected as spoils of war. In the fall of 1807, Minister von Stein convinced King Friedrich Wilhelm IV that agrarian development was the key to progress and received the royal sanction to enact a Reform Act. On October 9, 1807, serfdom was outlawed in the kingdom of Prussia, peasants freed from feudal obligations, tithes were abolished, and sharecropping verboten. About half of the peasantry was freed immediately, and

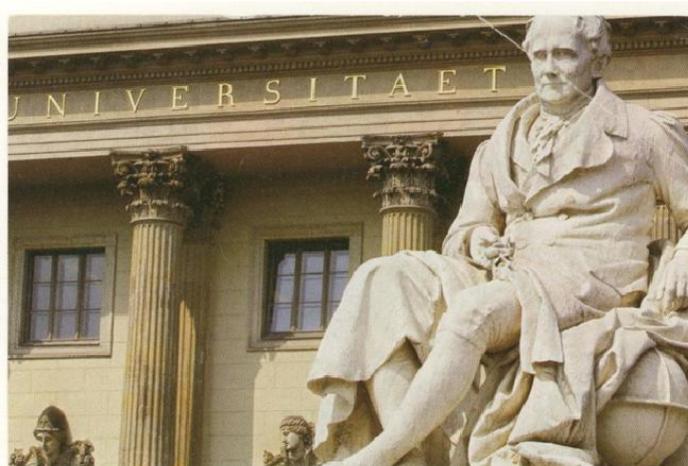
the rest had to wait until St. Michael's Day, November 11, 1810. Anybody could now, at least in theory, own land, or move, or marry, without permission.

As one would suspect, the nobility was not exactly pleased with the reform package and resisted fiercely. They had been used to enjoy the unpaid labours delivered by their "subjects", and now complained that they were entitled to a compensation for the loss of it. They organized themselves in leagues and clubs and, for a time, succeeded in watering down essential provisions of the law. On account of their resistance, it was to take another generation before the changes achieved full effectiveness. Yet a beginning had been made, and food production rose 40% within ten years.

Other reforms proved just as decisive. Gerhard von Scharnhorst was promoted in July 1807 to become the head of the Military Reform Commission, and he developed a few ideas his fellow noblemen could only call "radical". As it were, only aristocrats had been able to secure officer's commissions: this tradition was buried without ceremony, as was the custom that promotion depended on the officer's favours with the ladies-in-waiting or the king's game wardens: now advancement would be based upon performance, the shocked oldtimers learned. The gauntlet was abolished, as was hazing, and in the future, so Scharnhorst's plan, military service would be compulsory.

Now that was a brick the king was not willing to swallow yet, and Scharnhorst was fired in 1810. The most crucial reform, however, had already been passed: Wilhelm von Humboldt created the Prussian educational system, the first one to compass a whole nation. He introduced compulsory schooling, and guaranteed the building and maintenance of schools and the employment of secular teachers in every nook and cranny of the land. But not only were primary schools established, Humboldt also invented the German *GYMNASIUM*, a feeder school for colleges and universities. The curriculum was prescribed by law, and schools unwilling or unable to keep up with requirements, as some religious schools did, were closed. Personally, Humboldt also founded the Berlin University that still bears his name. It is hard to imagine today, but even the simple proviso that a school year starts only once a year had not been considered a necessity until Humboldt ordered it. From now on, school began in September, and all over the world children still obey the regulation of the venerable Prussian scholar. Reform also assailed the ancient privileges of the universities: not only did Humboldt manage to liberate enough funds from the frugal king to run the university, where the teaching staff soon was to comprise names as august as Hegel and Fichte, he also invented the symbiosis of academic teaching and research: professors were required to provide both.

WILHELM VON HUMBOLDT



Baron von Stein's most important innovation regarding the practical aspects of governance was the invention of the minister with portfolio; it sounds like a simple idea yet was unknown. Since the dawn of time, decision-makers had relied on the assistance of advisors, but seldom had the hired help been systematically organized; the gentlemen might work against each other or ignore each other, and most governments thus depended on a sort of chaos theory.

Stein replaced chaos with a pyramid of power and responsibility: the king as the head of government could rely on a cabinet of ministers with specialized portfolios below him, who, in their turn, could rely on a staff of higher officials that

would not change with every new incoming minister and could provide continuity. Thus the (hopefully) knowledgeable ministerial secretary was born, who could serve successive administrations. This system was replicated in every nation.

It did help the Prussian reformers that these developments were overshadowed, in the attention of the world, by the commanding presence of Napoleon Bonaparte. In addition to his considerable military talents, he had evidenced an aptitude for civil administration and improved France much like Humboldt and Scharnhorst were reforming Prussia. He finished the internal reconstruction of the government that the National Assembly had begun in 1795; sub specie aeternitatis, his civil reforms far outshine his transient military conquests.

His permanent achievements lie in the revision and reorganization of his country's laws. In 1804, his government issued a completely reworked *CODE CIVIL* and an associated *CODE DE PROCEDURE CIVIL* in 1807, the same year which also saw the publication of a new *CODE DE COMMERCE*. In 1808, the criminal code was purified from medieval severity and the Jacobins' revolutionary overindulgence, and the *CODE D'INSTRUCTION CRIMINELLE* of 1808 was followed by a new *CODE PENAL* in 1810. These works were approved in several Francophile countries: Poland adopted the Code Civil in 1808, and local versions were created in Romania in 1865, in Italy in 1866, and in Spain in 1889. Portugal incorporated the greater part of it in 1867, as did even the Muslim Ottomans in the same year and Egypt in 1875; despite, in the case of the latter two, for some obvious religious incompatibilities. Haiti formed its civil code of 1826 after the French model, as had done, by 1871, Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia and Mexico.

Yet his legal interest did not keep the French Emperor from the military expansion of his domains; by 1810, he controlled most of the continent either personally or through his relatives. Imperial France reached from northern Germany to mid-Italy and from the Atlantic Ocean to today's Croatia. Family members reigned over the rest of Italy, Naples, Spain and Westphalia, and a collection of German satellite states made up the so-called *RHEINBUND*, the Rhine Federation, which existed by Napoleon's good graces. It comprised all German states except for Prussia and Austria-Hungary.

A look at the map reveals the military reasoning behind the design: Germany was carved up into three distinct entities to prevent an eventual unification which might endanger France. The Rheinbund also acted as a cordon sanitaire against Prussian or Austrian attack by denying these countries borders with France that might be used for an invasion.

The Rheinbund itself was a gallimaufry consisting of the leftovers of the Holy Roman Empire: the kingdoms of Bavaria, Saxony, Württemberg and Westphalia, the grand duchies of Holstein, Berg, Hesse, Oldenburg and Baden, and a dozen or so of smaller duchies; all of them associated loosely enough to disable their cooperation and to prevent their unification.

At length, Napoleon had felt it his duty to fulfil the desires of the French people to be ruled by an emperor and had promoted himself to this exalted dignity on December 2, 1804. By 1810, his empire comprised most of Europe but for the continuing resistance of Great Britain and Russia. The former had always employed the principle of divide et impera, divide and rule, in European politics, which worked by always supporting the smaller nations against the hegemony of a dominant state.

Yet as an essentially naval power she was temporarily powerless to oppose the French armies that had conquered the continent. The Royal Navy had done well enough: Lord Nelson had destroyed a French fleet at Abukir, near Alexandria, in 1798, and followed up on this success with the legendary victory over the combined French and Spanish fleets at Cap Trafalgar in 1805, which secured the inviolability of the British coast. Without a fleet, Napoleon could not invade England; yet, without an army, Great Britain could not attack the French mainland.

The small cadres of infantry that the Britishers did have they used in small landings in the Netherlands, Portugal and a few Mediterranean islands, but these enterprises were mere pinpricks and would remain so until the expeditionary corps that England was meanwhile setting up was ready

MAP XXVII: THE "RHEINBUND" ('RHINE CONFEDERATION'), CA. AD 1807



THE VARIOUS SHADES OF PURPLE AND BLUE AND GREY DENOTE FRENCH CLIENT STATES. WITHIN THE RHINE FEDERATION (PURPLE BORDER), THE KINGDOM OF WESTPHALIA AND THE GREAT DUCHY OF BERG ARE GOVERNED BY RELATIVES OF NAPOLEON, WHILE HANOVER AND A FEW SMALLER ENTITIES WERE GOVERNED DIRECTLY BY FRANCE. ONLY PRUSSIA AND AUSTRIA-HUNGARY ARE, TECHNICALLY, STATES INDEPENDENT OF FRANCE.

Russia found herself in a paradoxical situation. Although allied with France on paper, pursuing a path of modernization since Czar Peter I, the Great [r.AD 1682–1725], the country was loath to play second fiddle to Bonaparte or anyone else on a continent which, who knew, might be dominated by France for centuries. Although Russia was, in strict military terms, not a first-rate power, her vastness had made her nigh impervious to conquest and had always allowed her troops to trade space for time until the onset of the Russian winter forced an invader to suspend his campaign. At the end of 1810, Czar Alexander I announced that Russia would cease to observe the French continental blockade imposed on England; this was, for all practical purposes, a declaration of divorce, perhaps even of war, against France. Napoleon deciphered the message correctly and began to make arrangements for a Russian campaign.

Considering Russia's gigantic expanse and the large population the Tsar could mobilize for its defence, Bonaparte proceeded to amass the biggest army the continent had ever seen, except, perhaps, for Attila's Huns. The work took the whole year of 1811, and by conscripting troops from all his clients and allies, the Corsican was able to raise over 500,000 men. In June 1812, a gigantic centipede, almost fifty kilometres long, began to crawl eastward into Russia. Among the troops were over 100,000 Prussians, Bavarians and draftees from the Rheinbund states.

The Russians retreated into the vastness of the great plain, denying Napoleon a decisive battle much as Fabius Maximus had denied battle to Hannibal. A medium-sized encounter eventually occurred at Borodino, a hundred miles west of Moscow, but it ended indecisive, and the Russian forces retired into the limitless hinterland a second time. Napoleon conquered Moscow unhindered, in the early fall of 1812, only to find the town empty and aflame: in a Russian version of scorched-earth tactics houses had been burned, bridges destroyed, and wells poisoned.

The emperor and his vast but starving army anticipated Russian peace feelers which never materialized. Since the ravaged town denied the occupants both sustenance and shelter from the impending winter, Napoleon had no choice but to order general retreat in October. The multitudes set out to withdraw, but in the following six months La Grande Armée lost the greater part of its numbers to snowstorms, wolf packs, starvation and disease. Small but nimble Russian guerrilla troops, familiar with the climate, attacked the supply trains or foraging parties, laid ambushes and gathered captives. Sometimes whole battalions wandered around, for days, in circles, snow-blind, hopeless men in a lost cause.

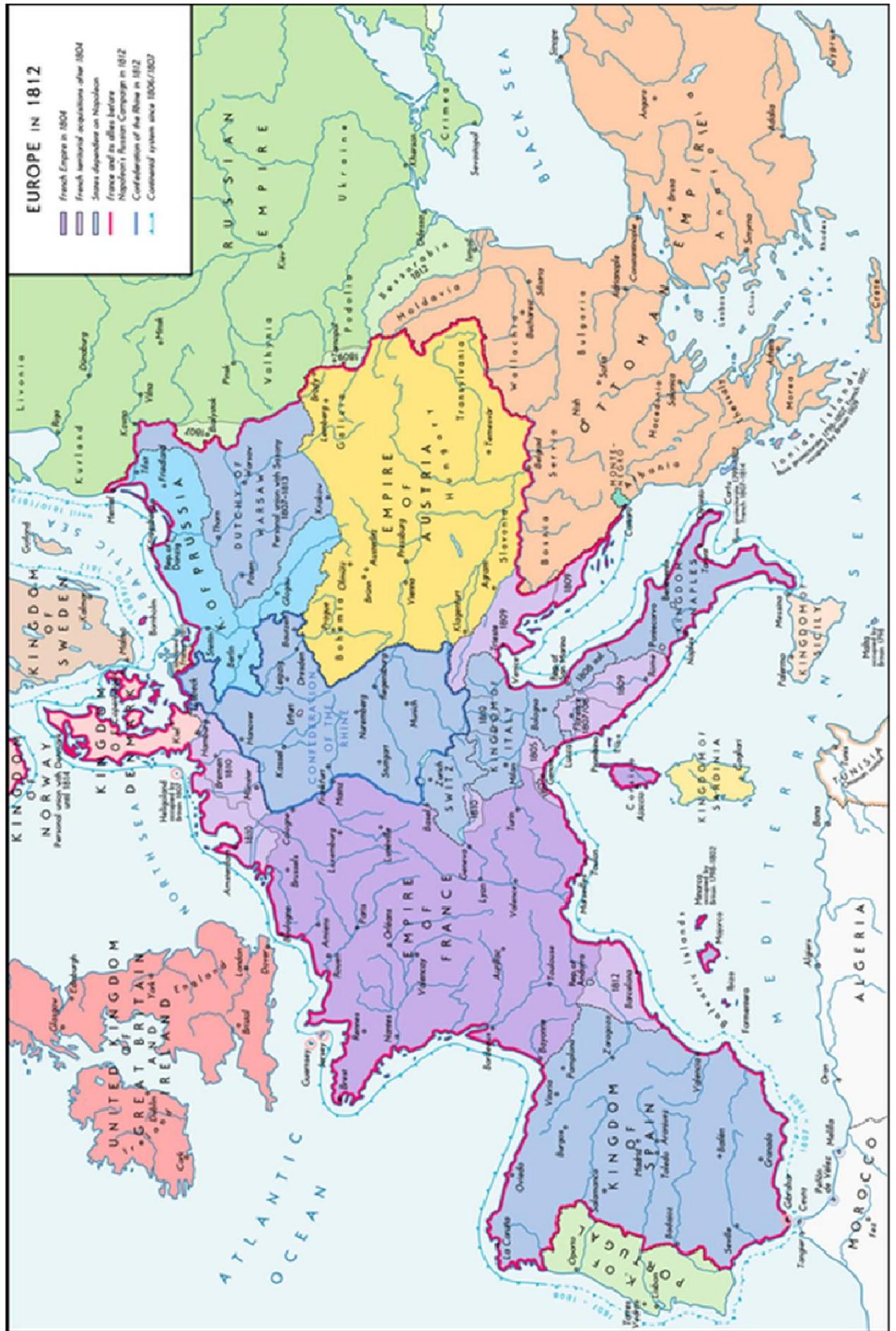
The calamity of his Russian campaign spelled the beginning of the end for the Corsican overlord. After his return from Moscow, Napoleon faced a rebellious coalition of all the nations he had subjugated, and of the three he had not, Great Britain, Austria and Prussia. Their armies overcame Napoleon's troops at the *VÖLKERSCHLACHT*, the Battle of the Nations, at Leipzig in the fall of 1813, and the victorious alliance pursued him to Paris, which they conquered in March 1814. Three weeks later, Napoleon renounced the Imperial Throne [April 11, 1814].

Old-fashioned chivalry saved the Corsican, for the moment, from the worst: he was made prince and ruler of the small island of Elba, between Corsica and Italy, on the understanding that he would enjoy a quiet retirement on the beach. Bonaparte, however, felt too young for retirement, and the next spring sailed from Elba to Cannes, accompanied by a thousand old followers, and began to march on Paris. An army corps under the command of one of his former aides, Michael Ney, now Marshal of France, was sent to intercept him but, instead of arresting the renegade, joined him. On March 20, 1815, Napoleon returned to Paris, on the shoulders of a rapturous multitude.

He was a little wiser now, and attempted to defuse a situation whose flammability he was well aware of. His first act back in power was to promulgate a new constitution, which limited the authority of the executive, that is, his own power; to convince his enemies that he was harmless now. Nobody believed him and scant weeks later he found himself back in the field. He raised a new army, overnight, and moved into Flanders with a plan to attack and defeat in detail, that is, sequentially, the two adversaries he faced before they could unite: the British Expeditionary Army under Arthur Wellesley, the famous Duke of Wellington, and a Prussian corps under Field Marshal Gebhard von Blücher.

On June 16, Napoleon defeated Blücher at Ligny, fifteen miles northwest of Namur, and proceeded further northwest in the direction of Brussels, where, rumour had it, Wellington was to be found. Two days later, at the field of La Belle Alliance, three miles southeast of the little town of Waterloo, he attacked the British army. Most of the ensuing battle saw the French charging from advantageous positions, more than once on the brink of overcoming the British lines.

MAP XXVIII: EUROPE UNDER NAPOLEON BONAPARTE, CA. AD 1812



The solid walls of the English infantry finally seemed to crumble, and, facing the setting sun, the French cavalry assembled for a decisive attack. Yet the blinding sun they were approaching hid from the French troops' view the danger that materialized in their rear, where Blücher appeared, advancing with the Prussian corps he had collected, reassembled, and marched from Ligny to Waterloo in the last two days. They arrived at a moment in which the charging French army's rear was completely exposed, and for the Gauls, exhausted from a day of fighting, nigh victory turned into disaster [June 18, 1815].

Bonaparte retired to Paris and abdicated again, but was not paroled a second time. The British arrested and banned him to the arid island of St. Helena in the Southern Atlantic, where the former emperor died six years later of stomach ulcers brought on, as every Frenchman knows, by the abominable English food.

As soon as the Battle of Waterloo had solved the Napoleon issue, the winners invited the continental diplomats to a peace conference in gay Vienna; the famous "Congress of Vienna", which took, due to countless parties, dinners, receptions and dances more than a year to decide that nothing much was to be changed.

Although France had lost the war, she was saved from dire consequences by the efforts of one of her all-time diplomatic aces, Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord, the famous Talleyrand. He had ample diplomatic experience, was famed for his aperçus, and possessed the appropriate elasticity of mind required of an inveterate liar or successful ambassador. He convinced Austria and Russia that the key to future peace on the continent lay in a near nullification of the war's results: Great Britain, he chirped into every willing ear, was bent on nothing but the domination of the world, with Prussia acting as her continental guard dog. Therefore, Prussia must not be allowed to gain undue influence: in general, and specifically over the other German states. This argument appealed to the Austrian and the Russian emperor, who happened to be in town, and they resolved that, whatever else might be decided, German particularism must be upheld: only a divided and hence weakened Germany guaranteed peace, Talleyrand maintained. Heads nodded around the dinner table.

The spectre of a German unification under Prussia's leadership was utilized to great success, and, as a hindrance against such a harbinger of fear, the former Rhine Federation was re-established with only minor adjustments; everything else remained much as it had been. The new German conglomerate was renamed the *GERMAN CONFEDERATION*, and the loose, almost provisional character of the association was to prevent an eventual consolidation of its constituents. The new entity lacked central governmental institutions, except for a parliament that convened in Frankfurt's St. Paul Cathedral; the venerable body, however, did not possess any legislative authority, and the executive power remained the sole and exclusive domain of the princes. The Diet was but a democratic fig leaf, designed to hide the naked avarice and corruption of the aristocratic administrations.

If there was one thing the reactionary rulers of the German states feared then it was a repetition of their bête-noire, the French Revolution. Wherever liberal, democratic or nationalist movements were imagined or detected, they were sought out, repressed, or brutally destroyed. Austria's chancellor Prince Metternich established a special secret political police, an invention that was copied by all other governments, yielding the predecessors of the KGB, the Gestapo and the FBI. For a generation after the Congress of Vienna, the silence of the tombs lingered over the political scene of the continent.

But the flame of rebellion was rekindled, and again it happened in France. The regime of the "Citizen King" Louis-Philippe was ousted and the Second Republic declared in 1848. This time, the revolutionary inflammation spread immediately over France's frontiers. Revolts erupted all over the continent and frightened rulers initially conceded reform. Constitutions were forged and granted, civil rights promised, government posts opened to bourgeois ministers: for a breathless moment, freedom seemed possible.

Liberals and democrats were ushered into the antechambres of power, into state offices that for centuries had been the exclusive domain of the nobility. In the German states, the first "nationwide" elections were held, to a parliament which would represent about 90% of the German people. A new National Assembly assembled in St. Paul's Cathedral, to prepare a constitution for a liberal and united Germany.

Did somebody say "united"? Not so fast, my son. The deputies had arrived in Frankfurt full of élan and highfalutin expectation, but few of them had considered the practicability of their ideas. One of the most important questions was future Germany's unity. But what, exactly, should be unified? (Austria and Prussia?) (All German states?) Who should be unified? (Bavarians and Württembergers?) (Pomeranians and Swabians?) (All of the above?) Things were not as easy as originally thought.

After weeks of excruciating debate, two factions emerged from the venerable delegacy: they were usually referred to as the "Liberals" and the "Democrats". The former, initially making up the majority of the deputation, were in general content with the progress already achieved as far as liberty was concerned, while the latter insisted upon further democratic reform. The first and foremost question for the parliament was the geographic dimension of the new German state: should it strive to be a "Greater Germany", including Austria, or was only a "Small Germany", without the Habsburg provinces, feasible, desirable, or even practicable?

The supporters of the big plan were clearly fascinated by the sheer size of the design, and were just as vocal as their opponents, who contested that all these non-German minorities that were part of the Habsburg domains, the Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Hungarians and what-not-all, would never fit into a true German nation and should be left out, together with the bumbling Austrians, thank you very much.

When the scales in Frankfurt appeared to move against the inclusion of Austria, the Habsburgs, arguably belonging to the worst oppressors, realized that the chances of their inheriting the German peoples were dwindling, and, convinced that their patience and tolerance had been tested more than enough, instituted the counter-revolution in their territories. The eighteen-year-old Emperor Francis Joseph appointed Prince Felix zu Schwarzenberg to the post of chancellor that Metternich had held, and asked him to duplicate his predecessor's efficiency. Austrian armies bloodily crushed uprisings in Venice, Friuli and Bohemia, and every citizen suspected of political activity landed in prison. The Habsburg doctrine was as clear as it was simple: they would not support any kind of centralized German government unless it was their own.

Austria's clampdown convinced the delegates in Frankfurt, even those who had been formerly of "Greater German" persuasion that Austria had betrayed the national cause, and a majority of delegates offered the Imperial German crown, orphaned since 1806, to Friedrich Wilhelm IV, King in Prussia.

Who refused it. Nobody had anticipated this reaction, and the whole affair became pretty embarrassing. In Friedrich's view, the crown was tainted beyond reproach by its association with a democratic parliament, and soiled with the stench of revolution. No king of the House of Hohenzollern, appointed by God, could recognize democrats, and the lingering danger of renewed uprisings might, at any rate, render the proposed all-German state an ungovernable conglomerate. Thanks but no thanks.

Then the whole thing became ugly. After a year of observation and preparation, the German princes launched their own counterattack à la Habsburg: political movements, whether liberal, democratic or nationalist in orientation, were brutally destroyed; their members thrown into prison, tortured, or outright murdered. The princes did not shrink from sending their armies into the defiant towns, with the order to shoot to kill; unbelievably, in some instances soldiers fired field artillery straight into the ranks of unarmed citizens. It was truly inhuman. The deputies of Frankfurt returned home, perplexed, and the German princes returned to oppression as usual.

In Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm IV suffered a nervous breakdown and was succeeded by his brother Wilhelm I. The Hohenzollerns had accommodated the revolution of 1848 by establishing, a bit later, when heads had cooled, a sham democratic parliament which, they made sure, was elected by taxpayers and other reputable gentlemen only, and had the additional advantage that its resolutions did not bind the king. Facing the same problem which had, at length, confused his elder brother, namely that the parliament, despite its limitations, proved too irksome, Wilhelm sought competent ministerial assistance. After some hesitation, he appointed to the post of chancellor the former Prussian ambassador to St. Petersburg and Paris, Otto Eduard Leopold Prince von Bismarck, Count of Bismarck-Schönhausen and Duke of Lauenburg, better known to posterity as Otto von Bismarck, the Iron Chancellor.

He was born, on April Fool's Day, 1815, at Schönhausen in north-eastern Prussia. His family was from Swabia, as were the Hohenzollerns, but had settled in Pomerania as Junkers, the land-owning nobility. His mother was a Mencken, of the sturdy family whose most famous scion was to become, much later, the American iconoclast and journalist H.L. (Henry Louis) Mencken, who, among many other honourable deeds, enriched the English language by the term "ecdysiast".



OTTO VON BISMARCK

Bismarck was elected to the Prussian Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of the Prussian Diet in 1849 and moved to Berlin. His loyalty to the Hohenzollerns yielded him, in 1851, an early and most crucial deputation: Friedrich Wilhelm IV appointed him to the post of Prussian delegate and liaison to the Bundestag, the Diet of the German Confederation in Frankfurt. During the duration of this tenure, Bismarck came to realize that whatever the German future would behold, there was no place for Austria in it. It was not only the fact that the Habsburg Empire was burdened with foreign minorities, but that the sheer size of it would dominate "Greater Germany", and neither Bismarck nor the Hohenzollerns would be willing to play second fiddle to an Austrian emperor. His loyalty brought him the sympathies of the court, and one day an absolutely baffled King Wilhelm asked him for advice in a delicate matter.

Wilhelm's problem was how to find enough money for the upkeep of the Prussian army, his and every Hohenzollern king's favourite toy. As unlimited as in other respects his power was, army bills had to be sanctioned by parliament. Wilhelm was not much of a diplomat, and had tried to intimidate his way through the Diet: but the Prussian delegates knew when they had their monarch by the royal oats and had made it clear that in the absence of a quid pro quo, no military bill would be forthcoming.

Bismarck explained the king that if, hypothetically, he had the power of chancellor, he might find a way to deal with the stubborn diet and the army bill. Wilhelm, not an outstanding reader between the lines, finally caught on to the exhortative character of Bismarck's sibylline observations and promoted him to the post of chancellor. Having successfully delivered the baby, Wilhelm retired to the throne and awaited the outcome of the gamble.

Bismarck told the Prussian parliament on September 30, 1862, that, if the august body continued to disallow the army bill in the way the king intended it, his government would simply take out the required monies from the general revenue, and if the deputies dissented, unpaid grenadiers and their hungry families might visit the Diet for a bit of frank discussion. Yet, being a political professional, Bismarck did not forget to throw the deputies a bone: the monies required for the army were not, as they deputies seemed to fear, to further internal oppression but for the higher aim of national improvement. This goal, he claimed, was shared by all, and went on to contemplate in the famous winged words that...

"... Prussia must collect and keep its strength for the right moment, which has been missed several times already. Prussia's frontiers as laid down by the Treaties of Vienna are not conducive to a healthy national life; it is not by means and speeches and majority resolutions that the great issues of the day will be decided - that was the great mistake of 1848 and 1849 - but by blood and Iron."

From this day on he was called the "Iron Chancellor". His speech had made use of a little white lie: of course, one *raison d'être* of the Prussian military was the suppression of unwelcome political activity, and the parliament was well aware of it. But in a rare display of backbone, the delegates did not cave in, and relations between Diet and chancellor remained sombre until Bismarck discovered an issue he could use to detract as well as undermine the deputies' reservations: war.

At the northern Prussian border with Denmark, mild trouble had evolved between the German and Danish populations of the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein. Politically, both provinces were parts of the Danish monarchy, but, inexplicably, Holstein was also a member of the German Confederation, and Schleswig's population was chiefly German. Bismarck understood that the ridiculous situation could be exploited to political gain with the proper means. In this case, the proper means was a quick campaign that, with the connivance of Austria, to national applause and a very modest number of victims expelled the few Danish troops from the territories. In the subsequent peace treaty, the Convention of Gastein, it was decided that Schleswig would be administered by Prussia and Holstein by Austria [August 1865].

The Habsburgs' perennial greed for territorial expansion had led them straight into Bismarck's trap. The ink had barely dried on the treaty when some minister in Vienna realized that the empire now had to govern a new province to which it had no common border, no historical ties, no justification for governance in the first place (there were not any Austrians in Holstein), and whose population was decidedly anti-Habsburg and anti-Catholic.

Bismarck could now point out the obvious absurdity of a Habsburg colony five hundred kilometres north of the closest Austrian border, which oppressed, as he added, innocent German citizens. Everybody, except for the government in Vienna, agreed to his analysis, and by playing the national card Bismarck had assured both the consent of the public opinion as well as the support of the Diet in Frankfurt. The rest was easy.

He used his excellent connections to the Czar's court in St. Petersburg, where he had been Prussian ambassador from 1859 to 1862, to ensure that Russia would remain neutral in the case of a Prusso-Austrian war. France, Bismarck, calculated, could be expected to stay neutral at least, if not openly supporting Prussia due to the ancient feud with the Austrians. Italy was signed to an alliance by promising the Savoy the inheritance of the Habsburg possessions in Italy; their avarice was hardly less developed than that of their neighbours.

To draw the Austrian attention away from his designs, Bismarck - the great counter-revolutionary - began to stir up local revolts by Hungarian nationalists in the puszta, east of the Danube. By providing funds to various insurgencies, he putted a blindfold over Vienna's eyes: busy chasing Hungarian terrorists, the Austrian government was completely surprised by a Prussian army corps invading and swiftly conquering its new province Holstein. When Emperor Francis Joseph, at length, sought allies against Prussia, he found the market cornered: every other significant power had already signed up with Bismarck except for the small kingdoms of Saxony, Hesse and Hanover, which joined the Habsburgs.

Austria dutifully mobilized and fielded her army, which was just as dutifully defeated at Königgrätz - or Sadowa, as the Austrians call it - by a superior Prussian force, organized by the Elder Moltke. The Prussian troops were equipped with modern breech-loading rifles, whose rapidity of fire and protection of the gunner the Austrian units, mostly fielding front loaders, could not match.

In the moment of victory, Bismarck unveiled his diplomatic intentions. He halted hostilities, arranged a cease-fire, and cancelled the victory parade Wilhelm and his generals were already planning to hold in the streets of Vienna. Instead of public humiliation, Bismarck offered Francis Joseph a proposition tailored to the customs of the House of Habsburg: should they abstain from mingling in inter-German affairs in the future, they could keep all their assorted provinces;

Prussia would not make any territorial demands. The chancellor's offer indeed appealed to the Austrian government, which quickly sold out its allies; abandoning Saxony, Hesse and Hanover to annexation by Prussia, and their ruling houses to forced abdication. But public opinion in these states, in a rush of sudden feelings for national community, flocked to the Prussian banner, and the equilibrium of politics was permanently altered; Austria was out, Prussia was in.

With Austria relegated to the sidelines, Prussia took over the leadership of the German states, which still numbered in excess of a dozen. On the map, the changes were slight; the geography of the "German Confederation" was little altered by the disappearance of Austria's unfortunate allies. More important changes occurred in the economical cooperation of the German states, especially in the critical sector of customs and tariffs. Despite industrialization and the rising importance of direct taxes, they remained a major part of every state's income.

The *DEUTSCHER ZOLLVEREIN*, the German Customs Union, had been steadily expanding in the nineteenth century from its profane origins as the Common Prussian Customs Tariff of 1828: by 1836 it included the southern German states of Bavaria, Württemberg and Baden, and in 1867, Austria having been knocked out of the picture, most of the remaining German states joined up; the duchies of Schleswig, Holstein and Mecklenburg and the Kingdom of Hanover. By 1869, the Zollverein's and the German Confederation's geographical borders were virtually identical. Following a slight update of the political structure, the German Confederation was renamed the "North German Confederation", the only significant difference being the introduction of the universal male suffrage at twenty-one years of age.

Funnily enough, the first election results under the new terms caught Bismarck in a rare miscalculation: he had assumed that the victory over Austria would benefit his conservative parliamentary allies most, yet, in the event, the majority of the seats went to his enemies, the Liberals, and a few even to his nemeses, the Social Democrats and the Catholic *Zentrum* (Centre), party. Due to this unexpected failure of the German voters, Bismarck's further plans hit a few parliamentary snags, but the Iron Chancellor proved himself fit to overcome mere human challenges.

His reasoning in regards to a possible German unification was that the passions of war might overcome the political impediments again - as they had done in 1866. If the southern states, in particular the outspokenly independent Kingdoms of Bavaria and Württemberg, were reluctant to follow his lead, the fervour of war might tip the scales. A suitable opponent and bogeyman was readily identified in the person of Napoleon III, emperor of France.

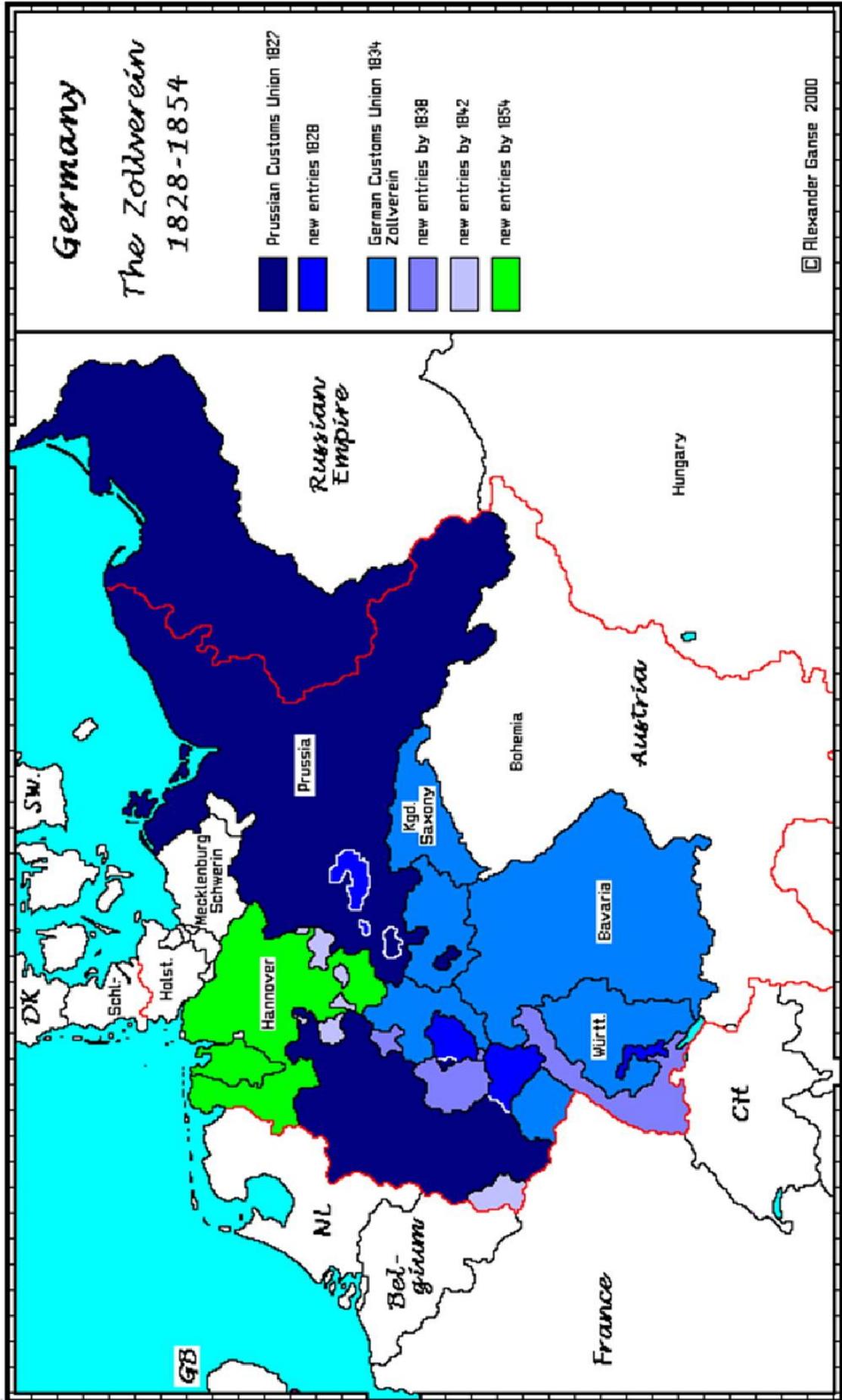
It was true that, since 1815, no open hostilities had occurred between France and Prussia, but Bismarck, an experienced French hand on account of his tour of duty as Prussian ambassador in Paris in the 1850s, had a clear idea which buttons to press to inflame France with patriotic belligerence.

Napoleon III, nephew and successor of the great Corsican, who had proclaimed himself Emperor of France in 1852, was in dire need of military, or any other, glory. His Mexican war in support of Emperor Maximilian had been an unmitigated disaster [AD 1861-1867], and the military grandeur of the empire was in sore need of restoration. He had viewed with distaste the emergence of Prussia as the new German power; not so much as a matter of principle, of which he had none, but because he had cast a longing eye upon the Duchy of Luxembourg as the price for his neutrality in the Prusso-Austrian war of 1866. He was furious when Bismarck explained, after the victory, that, since Luxembourg did not belong to Prussia, it could not cede it to France.

Bismarck interviewed Graf Helmuth von Moltke, the chief of the Prussian General Staff, on the chances of a Prusso-French war. Moltke indicated that success seemed likely, and Bismarck went on to seek a suitable opportunity for war, a *casus belli*. He did not have to wait too long.

In 1869, the Spanish throne had been left without issue, once again, and after protracted discussion the Spanish crown council decided to offer the crown to Wilhelm's cousin, Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen. When the news of the Spanish offer and the prince's eventual acceptance reached Paris, Emperor Napoleon as well as his loyal subjects interpreted the message from Madrid as proof of a renewed German conspiracy to encircle France. Proper vigilance demanded to exert the necessary precautions at once; to nip the planned crime in the bud.

MAP XXIX: THE "GERMAN CUSTOMS UNION"



The French ambassador to Prussia, Vincent Benedetti, was urgently dispatched to the spa town of Bad Ems, where Wilhelm was taking the waters. Benedetti's orders comprised two objectives: in the first instant, to demand that Leopold's acceptance be withdrawn, and, for seconds, to demand Wilhelm's public affirmation, in his capacity as the head of the Hohenzollern family, that under no circumstances any prince of the house was to accept a Spanish offer should one be renewed.

The demands were quite unusual, to say the least, for Napoleon III certainly lacked authority in the matter. Wilhelm responded that nothing kept the Emperor of France from discussing the topic with Prince Leopold himself, who was a grown man, and he, Wilhelm, was not his mother. As far as the second demand was concerned, Wilhelm pointed out his lack of authority to speak for future Hohenzollern generations. Benedetti cabled to Paris, reported Wilhelm's answers, and was advised to ask for a second audience, to repeat Napoleon's requests. Such reiterated inquiries were not exactly good diplomatic style. Wilhelm's secretary, Heinrich Abeken, summarized the second interview as follows in a telegram to Bismarck:

His Majesty the King has written to me:

Count Benedetti intercepted me on the promenade and ended by demanding of me, in a very importunate manner, that I should authorize him to telegraph at once that I bound myself in perpetuity never again to give my consent if the Hohenzollerns renewed their candidature.

I rejected this demand somewhat sternly, as it is neither right nor possible to undertake engagements of this kind [for ever and ever]. Naturally, I told him that I had not yet received any news and, since he had been better informed via Paris and Madrid than I was, he must surely see that my government was not concerned in the matter.

[The King, on the advice of one of his ministers], decided, in view of the above-mentioned demands, not to receive Count Benedetti any more, but to have him informed, by an adjutant, that His Majesty had now received [from Leopold] confirmation of the news which Benedetti had already had from Paris and had nothing further to say to the ambassador.

His Majesty suggests to Your Excellency, that Benedetti's new demand and its rejection might well be communicated both to our ambassadors and to the Press. (29)

Bismarck changed the text a bit and leaked it to the French press bureau HAVAS:

After the news of the renunciation of the Prince von Hohenzollern had been communicated to the Imperial French government by the Royal Spanish government, the French Ambassador in Ems made a further demand on His Majesty the King that he should authorize him to telegraph to Paris that His Majesty the King undertook for all time never again to give his assent should the Hohenzollerns once more take up their candidature.

His Majesty the King thereupon refused to receive the Ambassador again and had the latter informed by the Adjutant of the day that His Majesty had no further communication to make to the Ambassador. (30)

Bismarck had given the message a new edge.

He cut out Wilhelm's conciliatory phrases and emphasized the real issue. The French had made certain demands under threat of war; and Wilhelm had refused them. This was no forgery; it was a clear statement of the facts. Certainly the edit of the telegram, released on the evening of the same day (13 July) to the media and foreign embassies, gave the impression both that Benedetti was rather more demanding and that the King was exceedingly abrupt. It was designed to give the French the impression that King Wilhelm I had insulted Count Benedetti; likewise, the Germans interpreted the modified dispatch as the Count insulting the King. ...

The French translation by the agency Havas altered the ambassador's demand to a question (il a exigé). It also did not translate "Adjutant", which in German refers to a high-ranked aide de camp, but in French describes only a non-commissioned officer (adjudant), so implying that the King had deliberately insulted the ambassador by choosing a low-ranked soldier to carry the message to him. This was the version published by most newspapers the following day, which happened to be July 14 (Bastille Day), setting the tone, letting the French believe that the King had insulted their ambassador, before the ambassador could tell his story. ...

France's mistaken attitude of her own position carried matters far beyond what was necessary and France mobilized. Following further improper translations and misinterpretations of the dispatch in the press, excited crowds in Paris demanded war, just as Bismarck had anticipated. The Ems Dispatch had also rallied German national feeling. It was no longer Prussia alone; South German particularism was now cast aside.

Benedetti, the messenger for the Duc de Gramont's demands for pointless guarantees (the Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen family had withdrawn Prince Leopold's candidature on 11 July 1870 with Wilhelm's "entire and unreserved approval"), became an unseen bit-player; his own dispatches to Paris no longer mattered. In the legislative chamber, by an overwhelming majority, the votes for war credits were passed. France declared war on 19 July 1870. (31)

Which was exactly what Bismarck had expected. In a series of clandestine treaties with the southern and central German states since 1866, he had laid the foundation for the eventuality which now had occurred - war with France. In the case that France declared war on Prussia, as it had transpired, the German states had pledged their support to Prussia. Two more agreements Bismarck had negotiated sub rosa, with Russia and Austria, secured their neutrality in the events that were unfolding. Napoleon could not find a single ally, and the German countries he had hoped to win to his cause now appeared on the side of Prussia, to defeat the third Bonaparte as they had defeated the first.

For the first time since the defeat of the Turks at Vienna in the seventeenth century, a concerted German army took to the field. The campaign of 1870 subsequently became the apotheosis of modern military staff planning, because it largely went as scheduled. For the first time in a substantial European war, the railway lines became the principal means of troop transportation and the coordination of train movements the decisive factor for the appropriate deployment and subsequent supply of the forces. The opening skirmishes along the borders were mostly won, as Moltke had expected, and followed up by a large-scale thrust into the Lorraine. The main axis of the approach aimed at the Meuse river, the crossing of which the French had to deny the enemy at all cost, because it was the last natural defence line on the way to Paris. Napoleon III had taken over command himself, and deployed his troops chiefly in the vicinity of Sedan. Moltke's plan was to encircle the French army, by the simultaneous forward movement of two pincers north and south of their defensive position, and to use the river to block their retreat. The operation succeeded, and on September 2, 1870, Napoleon III and the French army were forced to surrender. In numerical terms, the Battle of Sedan became the largest victory of modern times achieved in a single encounter: over 100,000 French soldiers had to march into captivity. The emperor's capitulation vaticinated the eventual success, even if mopping-up operations and a protracted siege of Paris kept the German soldiers busy for a few more months.

On January 18, 1871, in the great Hall of Mirrors of the Palace of Versailles, the assembled German princes declared the establishment of a new "GERMAN EMPIRE", and unanimously elected Wilhelm I, King in Prussia, to the dignity of GERMAN EMPEROR [not "Emperor of Germany"¶]. Since the new entity was technically only an, "eternal", the treaty said, federation of sovereign princes, who remained independent to various degrees, the Second Empire was not a centralized state like France or Russia.

Yet soon flaws appeared in Bismarck's grand design, which was appropriately called a "revolution from above". Unification was not a result of the will of the German people but a covenant of thirty-six German princes, who agreed on elevating one of their number to emperor but little else. The German bourgeoisie had been unable to achieve the same political emancipation the citizens of the United States, England or France had secured: not for a lack of trying, but for the bloody repulsion of the reform movement of 1848. The German peoples' efforts had collapsed in the horror of soldiers that fired upon their own families, and suffocated in the subsequent terror of the political police. These dreadful experiences must not be underestimated: together with the horrors of the Thirty-Years-War still alive in the folkish subconsciousness, they explain much of the political apathy that abounded in Germany before 1871. For the bourgeoisie,

Bismarck's "top-down" revolution only amplified the feeling of being excluded from political decisions. Peter Watson explains:

In a real sense, and as Gordon Craig has pointed out, the people of Germany played no part in the creation of the Reich. "The new state was a 'gift' to the nation on which the recipient had not been consulted." Its constitution had not been earned; it was a contract among the princes of the existing German states, who retained their crowns until 1918.

To our modern way of thinking, this had some extraordinary consequences. One result was that the Reich had a parliament without power, political parties without access to governmental responsibility, and elections whose outcome did not determine the composition of the government. This was quite unlike - and much more backward than - anything that existed among Germany's competitors in the West. Matters of state remained in the hands of the landed aristocracy, although Germany had become an industrial power. As more and more people joined in Germany's industrial, scientific, and intellectual successes, the more it was run by a small coterie of traditional figures - landed aristocrats and military leaders, at the head of which was the emperor himself. This dislocation was fundamental to "Germanness" in the run-up to the First World War.

It was one of the greatest anachronisms of history and had two effects that concern us. One, the middle class, excluded politically and yet eager to achieve some measure of equality, fell back on education and Kultur as key areas where success could be achieved - equality with the aristocracy, and superiority in comparison with foreigners in a competitive, nationalistic world. "High culture" was thus always more important in imperial Germany than elsewhere and this is one reason why ... it flourished so well in the 1871-1933 period. But this gave culture a certain tone: freedom, equality, and personal distinctiveness tended to be located in the "inner sanctum" of the individual, whereas society was portrayed as an "arbitrary, external and frequently hostile world."

The second effect, which overlapped with the first, was a retreat into nationalism, but a class-based nationalism that turned against the newly created industrial working class (and the stirrings of socialism), Jews, and non-German minorities. "Nationalism was seen as social progress, with utopian possibilities."

Against the background of a developing mass society, the educated middle class looked to culture as a stable set of values that uplifted their lives, set them apart from the "rabble" (Freud's word) and, in particular, enhanced their nationalist orientation. The "Volk," a semi-mystical, nostalgic ideal of how ordinary Germans had once been - a contented, talented, apolitical, "pure" people - became a popular stereotype within Germany. [Emphases added, original Italics bolded] (32)

Needless to say, such "contented, apolitical, pure" people had never existed outside of the imagination of overzealous history professors and racist journalists. But the "popular stereotype" worked, and resulted in a sort of anti-Socialist and anti-ultramontane nationalism, not truly directed against other nations, rather against the "enemy within" - liberals, democrats, socialists, Catholic, Jews, and so forth - against whose "internationalist" designs the Prussian secular and Protestant clerical authorities never tired to warn. It was essentially a nationalism of the upper strata of society, which attempted to ensnare the support of the bourgeois middle class against the assorted enemies of Kultur. The Second Empire's nationalism almost amounted to a negation of the effects of industrialization, of modernity, in some way even of the enlightenment. Its character remained medieval.

When a Deutsche Arbeiter Partei, a "German Workers' Party" was founded in Bohemia (i.e. technically Austria) before WW I, its agenda was not to advance the cause the working class, as one naively might assume, but to protect the interest of German workers over Czech or Moravian workers. The German people, meanwhile, remained the political wards of the old elites, which were absolutely unwilling to give up the precious authority they had barely regained after the shocks of the revolutions of 1789 and 1848 and the Napoleonic wars. The constitution, which the nobility tailored according to its needs, could truthfully be called anachronistic in its obvious fear of democracy and liberalism.

The constitutional framework of the German Reich did ... differ sharply in key respects from that of Britain or France, whose diversely structured but relatively flexible parliamentary democracies offered better potential to cope with the social and political demands arising from rapid economic change.

In Germany, the growth of party-political pluralism, which found its representation in the Reichstag, had not been translated into parliamentary democracy. Powerful vested interests - big landholders ... the officer corps of the army, the upper echelons of the state bureaucracy, even most of the Reichstag parties - continued to block this.

The Reichs Chancellor remained the appointee of the Kaiser, who could make or break him whatever the respective strength of the Reichstag parties. The government itself stood over the Reichstag, independent (at least in theory) of party politics. Whole tracts of policy, especially on foreign and military matters, lay outside parliamentary control.

Power was jealously guarded, in the face of mounting pressure for radical change, by the beleaguered forces of the old order. Some of these, increasingly fearful of revolution, were prepared even to contemplate war as a way of holding on to their power and fending off the threat of socialism. (33)

This willingness, however, was not restricted to Germany: most of the more reactionary monarchies of the continent, in particular Russia but also Italy, Spain or some Balkan countries, feared socialists much more than the armies of their fellow princes, with whom they could always find some arrangement. Yet whatever the real threat of socialism or any other modern development might truly signify, in certain respects, chiefly in its inner relations, the Second Reich showed a distinctly pre-modern character - as if nothing had changed since 1806. It could be seen most clearly in

... the Reich's federal structure, which was designed to take account of the special rights and sensitivities of the south German states in particular. The establishment of a Baden Legation in Berlin and a Prussian one in Karlsruhe [Baden's capital, ¶] is an indication in itself of the remarkably "unfinished" character of the Reich's structure - it is as if the development towards a modern, unitary constitutional structure had stopped at the half-way mark.

But the federal system of the Kaiserreich went further: in 1894 Baden Legations were also opened in Munich and Stuttgart, and a little later Russia even suggested that a Russian military attaché should be stationed in Bavaria. These legations were not merely courtesy institutions but represented an important component of the political structure of the Reich, and they were a pointer to the fact ... that the Lesser German Reich, forged by war and diplomacy, in many respects continued to be governed by foreign policy methods even after its so-called unification.

A related problem, frequently reported on by the Baden envoys, was the continued existence and indeed the constant growth of particularism, especially in Bavaria. The perceptive Baden envoy in Munich, Baron Ferdinand von Bodman, reported in December 1895 from the Bavarian capital that "under the influence of the all-dominating court and of the Austrian-clerical [Catholic, ¶] party, all measures ... are directed at building up Bavaria as a self-sufficient ... state". Above all in the two Bavarian army corps, according to Bodman, "the Reich and its head, the Kaiser, are being eliminated to the furthest possible extent."

Count Anton Monts, the Prussian envoy in Munich, was convinced that "a process of detachment [by Bavaria] from the Reich was taking place," Bodman reported. Similarly, the astute Arthur von Brauer, who had served for many years under Bismarck, observed in May 1893 that Bavarian particularism was making enormous advances. He wrote to the Grand Duke: "Under the influence of the Old-Bavarian party the monstrous idea is gaining more and more ground that south Germany should be placed under the special hegemony of Bavaria just as north Germany is under Prussia." In 1898 the Grand Duke of Baden himself felt obliged to warn the Reich government against moving too close to the Catholic Centre party because the aim of this party was "to destroy the present Reich in order to create a new federal constitution with a Catholic head."...

Whether they were based on a sober assessment of the objective circumstances or are ultimately explicable only in psychological terms, these anxiety complexes are of absolutely crucial importance in evaluating the political culture of Wilhelmine Germany. (34)

John Röhl's analysis above identifies one psychological factor in the new empire's policies, but there was another, unspoken, psychological implication. What Bismarck had ultimately "superimposed over a highly fragmented society" (35) was a formula hatched to take account of the specific German situation, that is, foremost, its political particularism; thus nationalism had to be instilled and cohesion created from the outside, and top-down, instead of bottom-up, and by the people. Yet the decisive factor why Bismarck chose this strategy was that, unlike the crown of 1849, the result would be acceptable to his king. Essentially, an emperor's new clothes were hung upon ye olde authoritative Prussian regime.

Geographically, the war brought only minor changes except for the return of Alsace and Lorraine to the Reich, which was placed under direct imperial administration. The former mid-German monarchies of Saxony, Hesse and Hanover had already been swallowed by Prussia in 1866 and hence no major territorial redistribution was necessary in 1871. The new Reich was composed of the provinces of the former Rhine- respectively German Confederation plus Prussia and the southern kingdoms, but without the Habsburg lands; it was the classic "Small German" solution already discussed in the Frankfurt parliament of 1848/49. Since Bavaria will play a considerable role in this narrative, we may note here that the kingdom retained her own police, railway, telegraph and mail services, and even the command over her army in times of peace; only foreign policy and wartime troop command had been relinquished to the unbeloved Prussians.

The Second Empire bordered nine other nations: Denmark, Russia, Austria-Hungary, Italy, Switzerland, France, Luxembourg, Belgium and the Netherlands, and it was Bismarck's duty to ensure friendly relations with all of them, if possible. That France, irate over the defeat but momentarily impotent, would remain the perpetual enemy was clear. What had to be avoided, under all circumstances, was that she found continental allies, in particular in the East, i.e. Russia, to aid her in conducting a retaliatory war. Bismarck's antidote for this particular venom was to develop the best diplomatic relations with the other two large reactionary monarchies, Russia and Austria. These two nations and Germany signed a compact called the *DREIKAISERBUND*, the League of the Three Emperors, in which the monarchs agreed to mutual neutrality in the case that one of them were attacked by France or the Ottoman Empire.

Aware that tensions developing between Russia and Austria over the Balkans might eventually exert a negative impact on this treaty, Bismarck conducted an additional pact with the Czar, the so-called "*RÜCKVERSICHERUNGSVERTRAG*" or "Re-Insurance Treaty", which held Russia to neutrality in the case of a new Franco-German war regardless of origin, and thus banned the spectre of Germany having to fight a two-front war. Bismarck's fundamental doctrine was, obviously enough, to keep France diplomatically isolated as much as possible.

To undertake this neutralization of French diplomacy, the Second Empire, one is tempted to say "naturally", relied on a Foreign Office staff composed chiefly of the nobility and not responsible to the parliament.

No statistical information about the diplomatic corps in the Kaiserreich is as striking as the share of nobles. Of the 548 diplomats in service in the period 1871-1914, no fewer than 377, i.e. 69 per cent, were noble. The percentage of nobles was higher if we count only the foreign missions and not the Auswärtiges Amt [Foreign Office, ¶] itself. The ambassadors of imperial Germany were noble to a man. The most important department in the Auswärtiges Amt was the Political Department IA, which in the period from 1871 to 1914 was 61 per cent noble.

It is true that there was a constant increase in the share of middle-class members of the diplomatic service in this period and beyond it. But during the Kaiserreich such commoners were deployed almost exclusively either in the less important departments of the Auswärtiges Amt, namely in the Trade, Legal or Colonial Departments, or else in the Consular Service. If middle-class people entered the diplomatic missions abroad at all, then during the Wilhelmine period [1888-1918, ¶] they were on the whole sent to South Africa or the Middle or Far East, areas which were important commercially but where aristocrats were unwilling to serve.

Not only was the execution of the Reich's foreign policy in the hands of the nobility, it was, with few exceptions, the northern, Protestant, that is, "Prussian" aristocracy, which occupied the lion's share of the available posts; Catholics were far less represented.

The exclusive esprit de corps of the German diplomatic service was also promoted by a degree of confessional discrimination. Until 1945 the ratio of Catholics among the diplomats was significantly lower than the national ratio. This situation can only partially be explained by the fact that until 1918 the German middle states maintained their own diplomatic service.

What was perhaps more important was that the majority of south German aristocratic families loathed the idea of state service under the detested Hohenzollerns and that until the turn of the century they saw the real focus of their social aspirations in the Hofburg of Vienna rather than in Potsdam and Berlin. Whoever reads the extensive private correspondence of German diplomats of the imperial period will be astounded at the almost pathological fear of so-called "Ultramontanism" [the idea that German Catholics and the Centre Party were remote-controlled by the pope, ¶], which prevailed among even the highest and apparently most open-minded diplomats and statesmen in Berlin.

There was a widespread conviction that any softness towards "Ultramontanism" would have as a logical consequence the disintegration of the Reich. Catholics could therefore only be recruited into the service of the Reich if they had taken a firm and unequivocal stand against Rome and against the Centre party. (36)

Quite contrary to the impression of strength and unity that the Reich government attempted to project to the outside, the formulation and execution of her foreign policy required from the chancellor an intimate understanding of the matters at hand and the ability and willpower to impose them, should the need arise, even against the ideas of the monarch. Bismarck possessed the required abilities and was able to handle Wilhelm I, who could be stubborn at times. But when Wilhelm's successor Kaiser Friedrich Wilhelm III succumbed to throat cancer in 1888 after less than a hundred days in office, the third Kaiser of the year, Wilhelm II, took over.

Things at the Foreign Office began to change soon thereafter. The young emperor did not trust Bismarck implicitly, the way his grandfather had, perhaps because he considered himself a natural talent in foreign affairs. In 1890, Bismarck was retired against his will, to be replaced by Baron Marschall von Bieberstein, whom the old chancellor mocked by calling him a "ministre étrange aux affaires",¹² and Chancellor Count Leo Caprivi, who had neither knowledge of nor experience in foreign matters and openly admitted that he desired none. By all appearances, the new staff of the office did not understand Bismarck's security system or thought it expendable. German foreign policy freed itself from the fetters of reality.

Bismarck's Re-Insurance Treaty, the pièce de résistance of his foreign policy, was simply allowed to expire; the new secretary of state did not even inquire in St. Petersburg whether the Czar desired a prolongation of the compact. The Russian court, perplexed, could only interpret Berlin's silence as a sign of inexplicable German hostility, and looked for a new ally in the West. France was ready and willing.

The next diplomatic catastrophe befell the relations with Great Britain. Ever since the Seven-Years-War, which had seen the allies emerging as victors, Anglo-Prussian relations had been amicable, for the greatest part, and the shared victory over Napoleon at Waterloo had forged a special bond. From the 1890s on, however, Wilhelmine Germany embarked upon an unnecessary and rather harebrained naval armament race with England, which directly threatened the British Empire's dependence on open sea lines for commerce, communication, and the administration of her possessions.

With the exception of the medieval Hanseatic League, Germany had no extensive history as a naval power, for her geographical position in the middle of the continent mostly obviated this need. The expansion of the French and British colonial empires in the nineteenth century, however, fatally ignited, in certain German circles, a desire for competition. The new Reich subsequently embarked upon colonizing the leftovers; those parts of the globe that other powers had

¹² It was a word play on "foreign" and "strange": a "ministre aux affaires étrangères" is a foreign minister, but a "ministre étrangé aux affaires" is a minister "estranged from", that is, "clueless about" his affairs.

judged too poor to be desired. Eventually, four African territories were identified, occupied and colonized with drum rolls and fanfare: today's Togo, Cameroon, Namibia and Tanzania. In addition, a part of New Guinea, Samoa, Tsing-Tao in China and a few island archipelagos in the Pacific Ocean were obtained.

These appropriations were, alas, no fertile lands which could feed the multitudes at home; to be honest, they were not very useful at all, unless one wanted to study exotic bacteria in fever-infested Cameroon. But there are cases in which beauty is measured by the cost or effort to achieve it, and such was the case with the fledgling German colonial empire. History teachers delivered a continuous stream of lectures and homilies to high school students in regards to the [Austrian, technically, but never mind, ¶] Empire of Charles V in the sixteenth century, in which the sun, proverbially, never set, and many obedient German pupils, and their parents, developed the desire to keep the "place in the sun" their

MAP XXX: THE SECOND EMPIRE



their emperor had publicly claimed for the country at all cost. The newly acquired German territories had to be defended against thievish hands, which included all the foreign navies that might heave anchor at any moment to rob Germany of north-eastern New Guinea and its cannibal villages, who could say?

With the explicit consent of the Kaiser, the German Secretary of the Navy, Tirpitz brought a huge navy bill through parliament which enabled the launch, at a feverish pace, of an ever increasing number of battleships and lesser vessels for the protection of the colonies. New shipyards had to be built to accommodate the program, to the bewilderment of the Britons who could not in the world imagine a reason why Germany needed a fleet of battleships, unless to challenge the Royal Navy. Great Britain, consequentially, sought aid against possible German liberties, and by 1912, two decades later, France, Russia and Great Britain were allied, at least defensively, in the *ENTENTE CORDIALE*, a treaty against Wilhelmine Germany.

The Foreign Office in Berlin clearly did not understand the realities it created, and its callous recklessness allowed France to play the "German Domination of Europe!" card against the Teutonic menace with great success. While Germany had advanced her industrial production and consumption faster than any other continental country and had become the world's second-biggest industrial nation, after the British Empire but before the USA, her political culture had remained essentially pre-modern, which was made worse by the young emperor's rashness.

Wilhelm II had been born with a crippled left arm and developed a crippled self-esteem; his cousin Nicholas II, the Russian Tsar, once called him a "shameless exhibitionist." The young monarch had a propensity to evoke the most unfortunate impressions wherever he appeared; his constant demands of greater power for Germany failed to make him popular anywhere, and, to make it worse, these exhortations were often delivered with poor personal charm and a complete lack of diplomatic sensitivity.

Negative as these developments were for Germany, Austria's position grew worse. Emperor Francis Joseph, who reigned since 1848 (!), was confronted with a new age that he could not understand. Procuring adequate governance for a potpourri of ethnic minorities in the age of nationalism was simply beyond his, and most of his ministers, ability. In 1867, he had agreed to a power-sharing compromise with the Hungarians, that resulted in the legal fiction of the so-called Dual Monarchy, in which Austrians and Hungarians, but no Slavs, would be equal partners in the government of the realm, and the emperor of Austria would be acknowledged by the Hungarians as their king.

Even if such a construction could be made to work, it ignored the other dozen peoples of the empire, in particular the Slavic minorities. Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Slovenes, Croats, Bosnians, Montenegrinos and Ukrainians; they all felt rejected and demanded political emancipation in the same fashion as it had been granted to the Hungarians. Vienna was the capital of a state, whose government required half a dozen major languages and countless dialects.

Although the civil government, it must be said, tried its best, the problems were too often beyond its scope as well as means. Soothing over political differences with dignified ceremonies and gaudy uniforms would not work indefinitely. The great movements that were to dominate the twentieth century - nationalism and socialism - could not be addressed in such old-fashioned ways. The political violence of the coming century already reared its head.

Anarchists, as they were called then, bombed, stabbed or shot politicians, aristocrats or dignitaries in the name of the -ism of the day: culminating in the assassinations of one Russian Tsar and American president each, and, in 1898, the deadly stabbing of the Austrian empress Elisabeth, wife of Emperor Francis Joseph and Duchess of Bavaria, by an Italian anarchist.

The imperial court was unable to stop the ossification of the political establishment; to nobody's surprise, given the emperor's age. The institutions of the realm had remained for decades, nay, centuries, in the hands of the selfsame aristocratic camarilla that made reform in Austria proceed even slower than in Prussia.

The talented and liberal heir apparent to the Habsburg throne, Crown Prince Archduke Rudolph, despairing of the rigidity and inflexibility of the imperial structures, committed suicide, together with a young countess dear, on January 30,

1889, in the small town of Mayerling. With his demise, the hope in the future died; from this day on Imperial Austria, as Leon Uris once remarked about Ireland, had no future left, only a past that reiterated itself over and over.¹³

Less than three months after the Crown Prince's suicide, a son was born to the Austrian Customs official Alois Hitler, on the twentieth day of April 1889, in the border town Braunau at the Inn River, only a stone's throw from the German border. The name on the birth certificate read "Adolfus Hitler".



ELISABETH AMALIE EUGENIE OF HABSBURG-LORRAINE AND WITTELSBACH, CALLED "SISI", EMPRESS OF AUSTRIA AND QUEEN OF HUNGARY (1837 – 1898)

¹³ A side effect of the Crown Prince's suicide was that the emperor's nephew Francis Ferdinand became heir apparent to the throne of the Habsburgs - the same who undertook the ill-fated trip to Sarajevo in late June 1914.