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Rome, Constantinople, and the Barbarians

WALTER GOFFART

IF THE PHYSICAL LAW OF INERTIA applies to historical developments, then perhaps the Roman Empire was legitimately destined for eternity, and those who know that it did not endure are bound to ask what interrupted its tranquil course through the ages. On a superficial level, there is no mystery. Almost everyone agrees on what it was that turned Rome in unexpected directions. Edward Gibbon said that his narrative of decline and fall described “the triumph of barbarism and superstition”; Arnold Toynbee’s modernized version of the same phrase attributed the fall to “the ‘internal’ and ‘external’ proletariat.”¹ These provocative formulations have a neutral alternative. No one seriously doubts that the Roman Empire in its final phase was most profoundly affected, on the one hand, by the Christian religion and, on the other, by those foreign tribes generally called “the barbarians.” If we wish to understand not just the fall of Rome but also the opening of the Middle Ages, we have to come to terms with these separate and highly complex phenomena.

Only the barbarians will be considered here. As Gibbon implied, Toynbee affirmed, and everyone else widely believes, they epitomized the “external” dimension of the fall of the empire. This perception is obviously true inasmuch as barbarians are, by definition, foreigners. Yet to acknowledge the ethnic or cultural distinctiveness of barbarians is not necessarily to maintain—as many historians have tended to do in recent years²—that the Roman Empire, or part of

The immediate ancestors of this article are a talk given at the Conference on Medieval Studies, held at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, in May 1978, and its fuller development into a lecture given at the University of Arizona, Tucson, in March 1979. Other antecedents, with thankful acknowledgments that also apply here, are spelled out in my *Barbarians and Romans (A.D. 418–584): The Techniques of Accommodation* (Princeton, 1980). This article was written while I held a Guggenheim Fellowship. Extracts from it were delivered as lectures at the Universities of Cambridge, Oxford, and Leeds in February and May 1980.

¹ Gibbon, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. J. B. Bury, 7 (London, 1909): 308; and Toynbee, *A Study of History*, 1 (London, 1934): 41.

² André Piganiol, *L'Empire chrétien* (Paris, 1947), 421–22; Émilienne Demougeot, *De l'unité à la division de l'Empire romain, 395–410* (Paris, 1951), 566–70; A. R. Hands, “The Fall of the Roman Empire in the West: A Case of Suicide or *Force majeure*?” *Greece and Rome*, 2d ser., 10 (1963): 153–68; A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1964), 1027–31; B. H. Warmington, Review of *ibid.*, in *History*, 50 (1965): 57–58; and J. F. Matthews, Review of Massimiliano Pavan, *La Politica Gotica di Teodosio nella pubblicista del suo tempo* (Rome, 1964), in the *Journal of Roman Studies*, 56 (1966): 245. Matthews has stated the point succinctly: “Gothic pressure on the frontiers was in the long run irresistible.” As historians of Rome have turned their attention increasingly to late antiquity, the easy denigrations of the age have been replaced by positive assessments, pioneered by art historians but now applied, as by Jones, to social and economic history as well. If the empire is judged not to have been internally “sick,” one is bound to bring back to prominence the “ruin which comes from outside.”

it, was overcome by pressure from outside its borders. The dualism of internal and external causation has its classic statement in Polybius's meditation on the fall of states, written in the second century B.C.: "And it is also all too evident that ruin and change are hanging over everything. The necessity of nature is enough to convince us of this. Now there are two ways in which any type of state may die. One is the ruin which comes from outside; the other, in contrast, is the internal crisis. The first is difficult to foresee, the second is determined from within."³ The latter had sole claim to Polybius's analytical skills, leaving it for us to ask whether barbarians of the Christian era, like the Goths, Vandals, Huns, and so forth, may be adapted to his idea of an unforeseeable "ruin which comes from outside." Although Polybius did not give concrete examples, much later incidents of unexpected calamity come readily to mind—most notably, the arrival of the *conquistadores* in America. No one would suggest, however, that what Rome experienced in late antiquity bore any resemblance to the fate of the Aztecs and Incas. The barbarian invasions definitely did not happen to an unsuspecting empire, as though mysterious beings had landed from outer space. On the contrary, Rome had always had warlike tribesmen at its gates and had centuries of experience in dealing with them.

Polybius is, perhaps, an inappropriate guide. A less famous historian—a late Roman familiar with the Old Testament as well as with the themes of ancient historiography—was able to evoke a pattern in which aliens play a passive but crucial part in a downfall "determined from within." This author was Sulpicius Severus, whose compendium of Hebrew history (more rarely read than his life of St. Martin) is full of object lessons for the Christian Romans of the turn of the fifth century.⁴ A brief extract, based on Judges 1 and 3, contains the essentials.

Under [the] guidance [of Judah], matters were successfully conducted: there was the greatest tranquility both at home and abroad. . . . Then, as almost always happens in a time of prosperity, [the Hebrews] began to contract marriages from among the conquered, and by and by to adopt foreign customs, yea, even in a sacrilegious manner to offer sacrifices to idols: so pernicious is all alliance with foreigners. God, foreseeing these things long before, had, by a wholesome precept, enjoined upon the Hebrews to give over the conquered nations to utter destruction. But the people, through lust for power, preferred (to their own ruin) to rule over those who were conquered. Accordingly, when, forsaking God, they worshipped idols, they were deprived of divine assistance and, being vanquished and subdued by the king of Mesopotamia, they paid the penalty of eight years' captivity.⁵

Though crude and xenophobic, the passage has the advantage of portraying a "ruin" that Polybius never imagined. Sulpicius presented a drama whose motive force is provided not by the aliens as such but by the Hebrews' typically "imperial" relations to them. The role played by foreigners, however objection-

³ Polybius 6. 57. 1–2, as quoted in Santo Mazzarino, *The End of the Ancient World*, trans. George Holmes (London, 1966), 23.

⁴ For notable examples of such lessons, see *Chronica* 2. 3. 5, 1. 32. 3.

⁵ *Chronica* 1.24. 1, in Alexander Roberts, trans., *Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2d ser., 11 (New York, 1894): 82.

able Sulpicius's account of it may be, is as much an internal one as if, instead, the strife of domestic factions had undermined the state. Should we not have something like this in mind when thinking of Rome and the barbarians?

MORE THAN POETIC CONVENTION was involved in the practice that late ancient authors adopted of portraying the tribes of their time under anachronistic names drawn from Herodotus and Tacitus. Disguising the Goths as Getae or Scythians, the Franks as Sicambri, and the Huns as Massagetae expressed the underlying truth that there had been no change of substance beyond the frontiers. The turbulent tribes of yesteryear prolonged their existence under new names; as they had once been kept in check, so could they be today.⁶ The Celts who had captured Rome in 390 B.C. and burned it down, Hannibal and the Carthaginians, the redoubtable Mithridates of Pontus, Ariovistus and Vercingetorix in Gaul—all these and many more were no less barbarian than the Dacians of the high empire and the Goths and Huns in the 370s. Precisely because the barbarians were always there, never seeming to contemporary observers from the Mediterranean to acquire new characteristics more dangerous than those of the past, there is little reason to look among them for a clue to their startling career in the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. The changes in their relations to the Roman Empire need to be examined from the Roman side of the border, for it was on that side—not least because the literate observers were there—that the terms of the encounter were formulated and the dynamics governing the relations of the parties almost invariably generated.

The term barbarian itself is, as everyone knows, a Greco-Roman generalization. It began as the Greek name for all of those who did not speak Greek, and, with somewhat altered meaning, it survived its encounter with Goths, Franks, and Saxons to win a secure place in the vocabularies of medieval and modern Europe.⁷ Similar words for “foreigner” and “alien,” with similarly negative associations, are common to many tongues.⁸ Human beings and groups inevitably look upon their neighbors with suspicion and distaste and ascribe unflattering characteristics to them.

What is worrisome about the name “barbarian” is the generalization it embodies: the term tends to transform the neighbors of the Roman Empire into a collectivity. In a few contexts, that idea is unobjectionable. When addressing the emperor ca. A.D. 370, a writer on military affairs said, “The first thing to know is that the madness of the nations lurking about everywhere surrounds the Ro-

⁶ The most explicit expression of this sense of continuity occurs in Synesius of Cyrene (ca. A.D. 400), *Discours sur la royauté*, trans. Charles Lacombrade (Paris, 1951), 66. Goths appear as Scythians, Getae, and Massagetae in Synesius, Franks as Sicambri in Claudian, Sidonius Apollinaris, and Gregory of Tours, and Huns as Massagetae in Procopius. There are other instances.

⁷ Karl Christ, “Römer und Barbaren in der hohen Kaiserzeit,” *Saeculum*, 10 (1959): 273–80; and Lieven van Acker, “*Barbarus* und seine Ableitungen im Mittellatein,” *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, 47 (1965): 125–40. For a less satisfactory discussion, see W. R. Jones, “The Image of the Barbarian in Medieval Europe,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 13 (1971): 376–407.

⁸ For example, the Old English *wealh*, whence Welsh, and West Slavic *němec* (pronounced “nyemets”), whence the Slavic name for Germany.

man Empire, and treacherous barbarity, concealed by advantageous terrain, assails every side of the frontiers." Except for a note of paranoia, there is nothing wrong with statements of this kind or with the boast of the emperors whose inscriptions proclaimed them to be victors over "all the barbarians."⁹ We moderns, however, do not occupy the same lookout platform and need, therefore, to remind ourselves often of the limits of the word. Barbarians were a collectivity only when seen from a Greco-Roman or Mediterranean perspective. Even Romans were astute enough to realize how diverse were the *gentes* embraced by that name. The many populations bordering the Roman Empire had their separate labels, as well as their own customs, languages, and traditions. They included the Irish and Picts of the British Isles, the highly civilized Persians on the Syrian frontier, the Berbers of North Africa, Asiatic nomads like the Sarmatians, and many more. An early fourth-century compendium of the Roman provinces—the so-called Verona list—reminds us of this diversity when it complements the catalogue of provinces with one of "the barbarian peoples who multiplied under the emperors." The compiler sensed that a sketch of the empire was somehow incomplete without these nearby foreigners, and he did not fail to recognize that some of them, such as the Isaurians, were natives of lands that had long been integrated in the empire.¹⁰

In most narratives, the barbarians of the invasion period are identified as a matter of course with the Germanic peoples. However correct this identification may be in a scheme of linguistic classification, the collectivity of Germans is a historical anachronism if transposed to the sixth century or earlier. The only collectivities then in existence were particular tribes called Saxons, Alamans, Goths, Herules, and so forth.¹¹ In A.D. 98, a description of the Germans and their lands and customs was written, but its author, typically, was a learned Roman with a trained ethnographer's ability to classify and generalize. No Vandal, Burgundian, or Gepid read Tacitus's famous monograph or otherwise acquired a sense of cross-tribal kinship.¹² Although the name "German" was comparatively widespread in Latin writings of late antiquity, it applied exclusively to the Rhine peoples, notably the Franks. Tribes from the lower Dan-

⁹ On such imperial inscriptions, peculiar to late antiquity, see Christ, "Römer and Barbaren," 281; for the military author, *De rebus bellicis* 6. 1, ed. E. A. Thompson as *A Roman Reformer and Inventor* (Oxford, 1952), 113. The anonymous author's paranoia has an unintended modern counterpart in Owen Lattimore's idea that "excluded barbarians" know much more about the (civilized) peoples "who ejected them" than vice versa, "study [their] strength and weakness in order to break the barrier," and seize the first opportunity to take the offensive; Lattimore, "La Civilisation, mère de barbarie," *Annales: Économies, sociétés, civilisations*, 17 (1962): 107. By the criterion of surviving evidence, there is every reason to think that the Roman Empire was much better informed about neighboring peoples than these "barbarians" were about Rome. Is not such a pattern more normal than the one Lattimore imagined?

¹⁰ Alexander Riese, ed., *Geographi Latini minores* (Heilbronn, 1878), 128–29. The tribes are named one by one, in a catalogue that runs roughly from the North Sea to Mauretania via the Euphrates.

¹¹ See František Graus, *Volk, Herrscher, und Heiliger im Reich der Merowinger* (Prague, 1965), 23–24. For linguistic and other modern perspectives on the term "German," see Rolf Hachmann, *The Germanic Peoples*, trans. James Hogarth (London, 1971), 11–49.

¹² Francis Haverfield, "Tacitus during the Late Roman Period and the Middle Ages," *Journal of Roman Studies*, 6 (1916): 195–200.

ube, like the Visigoths, though Germanic in speech, would never have dreamt of applying this name to themselves.¹³

So much modern writing implies or presupposes a homogeneous Germanic identity that the disunity of the early Germans can hardly be too emphatically stressed. The desire of recent Germans to believe in their antiquity has been so great that even cautious statements of theirs about early conditions have tended to embody wishful thinking. An appropriate example comes from the historians Johannes Haller and Heinrich Dannenbauer: "As betrayed by the lack of a collective name, the Germans did not conceive of themselves as a unity, but they always [considered themselves] related. Thus they knew of a common descent that they traced back to the earthborn god Twist (Zwitter) and his son Mann."¹⁴ This observation would be correct only if the belief in a common descent came directly out of Germania and expressed a thought in the minds of those tribesmen who, in the fifth and sixth centuries, established themselves on Roman soil. The source, however, is Tacitus, whose information is radically limited in space and time. Whatever the situation was in his day, not a shred of evidence from the age of the invasions intimates that the tribes of that era thought of themselves as descendants of a common ancestor.¹⁵ The first faint trace of a "German" consciousness—a sense of kinship among a variety of Germanic peoples—begins to be discernible only in the ninth century—that is, in the Carolingian era.¹⁶ Even then, it was a highly learned idea, not a sentiment rooted in popular consciousness. When the last centuries of antiquity are evoked, the extreme fragmentation of the barbarians should never be overlooked. Even among those speaking similar dialects, there were many hatreds and rivalries; the tribes were at least as ready to cooperate with Romans against their neighbors as they were to join with the latter to make an incursion across the imperial frontiers. At no time in antiquity, early or late, was there a collective hostility of barbarians toward the empire or a collective purpose to tear it down.

The tiresome repetitiveness of Roman relations with the barbarians can, from a modern standpoint, be regarded as a problem in itself. Why is it that, as the

¹³ Hachmann, *The Germanic Peoples*, 29, 49.

¹⁴ Haller and Dannenbauer, *Der Eintritt der Germanen in die Geschichte* (4th ed., Berlin, 1970), 18. For one instance out of very many in which the consciousness of Germanic unity is imprudently exaggerated, see Frank M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (3d ed., Oxford, 1971), 192.

¹⁵ Tacitus, *Germania* 2. The contrary was once believed, on the basis of the so-called "Frankish Table of Peoples," but this text has long been recognized to derive information from Tacitus; see, for example, J. Friedrich, "Die sogenannte fränkische Völkertafel," *Sitzungsberichte der bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philol.-historische Classe* (Munich, 1910), no. 11. Reinhard Wenskus cited only books published in 1940 and seems to have forgotten what regime ruled Germany in that year, in affirming "Freilich ist das Bewusstsein der Gemeinsamkeit der germanische *gentes* wohl nie völlig erloschen"; Wenskus, "Die deutschen Stämme im Reiche Karls des Grossen," in Wolfgang Braunsfels, ed., *Karl der Grosse: Lebenswerk und Nachleben*, 1 (Düsseldorf, 1965): 190, 196, nn. 102, 108, 168. Anyone who claims that a sense of early Germanic community never "died out" must first establish when it might possibly have burned brightly, let alone been kindled.

¹⁶ Erich Zöllner, *Die politische Stellung der Völker im Frankenreich* (Vienna, 1950), 46–47, 52. The situation in the century before the Carolingians is well illustrated by Isidore of Seville, in whose classifications the Goths, Gepids, Lombards, Saxons, and Franks are definitely not Germans, the Burgundians are foreigners forcibly settled in Germany by the emperor Tiberius, and the *Germanicae gentes* are documented by ancient tribal names, of which only one (the Suevi) had anything to do with the era of the invasions; Isidore, *Etymologiae* 9. 2. 97–101.

fourth century began, the Roman Empire was still more or less surrounded by turbulent, untamed tribesmen? Rather odd statements on this subject have been made in the last decades. A French historian, soon after World War II, unconsciously adopted the tones of an embittered colonial administrator: "The Germans inhabited dreadful lands whose soil they were too lazy to clear. They preferred war to organized work and invaded neighboring states 'pressed by hunger.' Neither the influence of Greece nor that of Rome had succeeded, after so many centuries, in civilizing them." Another scholar believed he had identified the flaw in Roman society that explained why the empire could never win an "ultimate victory" over the barbarians, as though such a victory could have been won, or ought to have been.¹⁷ A healthier approach, perhaps, is to recognize that, in the imperial scheme of things, the barbarian problem was so structured as to be interminable. Outsiders were to be kept clear of the provinces, nothing more. The Roman military frontier could move forward, stand still, or retreat; in any eventuality, there would always be more or less hostile aliens on the other side, because the frontier existed for no other reason than to contain them. It has been suggested that the treaties sometimes made by Rome with neighboring peoples were a step in their "progressive assimilation," but the existence of any imperial plan or intention to assimilate outsiders is highly doubtful. The treaties were simply a means of defense or a preparation for expansion—in either case a useful complement to military action.¹⁸

It is not as though Rome lacked powers of assimilation. In the many centuries since it had entered upon the conquest of distant lands, millions of barbarians had been pacified and absorbed into a common civilization, a Romania whose component peoples, however imperfectly homogeneous, looked to the emperor for defense against outsiders and had no desire for liberation from his rule.¹⁹ Though massive and imposing, assimilation had taken place only inside the zone encompassed by the Roman armies. Submitting or being conquered had traditionally been the condition for participating in the benefits Roman rule had to offer. Thus, the progressive internal development of the empire took place against a backdrop that consisted of an unchangeably barbarous exterior. The never-ending savagery, deceitfulness, and turbulence of barbarians bore witness to the virtues of legally ordered society; their existence justified the imperial regime as the hand that staved off chaos from engulfing the ordered world. While *barbaricum*, aggressive and disorganized, waited to be conquered, its

¹⁷ Piganiol, *L'Empire chrétien*, 420; and E. A. Thompson, *The Historical Work of Ammianus Marcellinus* (Oxford, 1947), 129.

¹⁸ For the assimilation of outsiders, see Gilbert Dagron, "L'Empire romain d'Orient et les traditions politiques de l'Hellénisme: Le Témoignage de Thémistios," *Travaux et mémoires*, 3 (1968): 99. For other perspectives, see Max Cary, "The Frontier Policy of the Roman Emperors down to A.D. 200," *Acta classica*, 1 (1958): 131–38; and D. B. Saddington, "Roman Attitudes to the *externae gentes* of the North," *ibid.*, 4 (1961): 90–102. Christ has rightly stressed peaceful contacts across the border; however fruitful, their effect was not assimilation; "Römer und Barbaren," 282–84.

¹⁹ In the late republic, Cicero commented on conditions within Rome's sphere of domination: "there is no people that is . . . so cowed as to be subdued or so reconciled as to rejoice in our triumph and rule"; Cicero *De provinciis consularibus* 12. 31. The imperial period witnessed a wholesale transformation of these attitudes. For sensible remarks on this shift, see Jean Gaudemet, "L'Étranger dans le monde romain," *Studi classici*, 7 (1965): 44, 46.

denizens served as necessary actors in the ritual of the imperial victory or, more practically, as a resource of manpower to be dipped into to meet imperial needs.²⁰

According to many modern scholars, the empire had an easier time keeping the barbarians at bay during the first two hundred years of its existence than it did thereafter. There is a common impulse to juxtapose the triumphant expansion of the imperial frontiers in the first century B.C. and the inroads of alien hordes in the third and fifth centuries after Christ. Although the contrast is beyond argument, it encourages the misconception that, when outward pressure ended, the reverse process of barbarian advance began, as though a coherent barbarian world had patiently awaited its chance to take the warpath against Rome. Special emphasis is invariably laid on the year 180, or thereabouts, as a turning point from easy to difficult defense. In 180, allegedly, a new and much heavier barbarian pressure began to be felt.²¹

Despite the widespread currency of 180 as the pivotal year in Rome's external relations, due caution is needed before accepting this idea, not least because it is a modern discovery. No known contemporary observer was conscious of a change.²² Nor is this surprising. Every century of Roman history had witnessed military disasters at the hands of barbarian armies. The conquests of the republican age exacted a heavy toll of lives among the conquerors, and, even during the imperial peace, barbarians sometimes annihilated large Roman armies along with their generals and forced heavy expenditures of resources for the restoration of orderly conditions. The Roman Empire never had an easy time with its neighbors; otherwise, it would scarcely have needed a burdensome professional army. Always too large in view of the limited means available to the emperor, the army was always too small for the length of the border to be defended. To us, it seems as though the epoch when Tacitus wrote was profoundly secure from external danger; yet Tacitus, by placing Rome's unimpaired destiny to world rule in dramatic contrast to the niggardliness of the goddess Fortuna, allows us to realize that, even at the end of the first century, managing the Roman Empire was a delicate balancing act.²³ Only our knowledge of barbar-

²⁰ Christ has emphasized the increased polarization occasioned in late antiquity by the *Constitutio Antoniniana*; for example, the term *barbaricum*, like its opposite *Romania*, made its initial appearance in the fourth century; "Römer und Barbaren," 279, 281-82. For the prolongation of late Roman conditions, see Kilian Lechner, "Byzanz und die Barbaren," *Saeculum*, 6 (1955): 294-96. On the changing look of the imperial victory, see Jean Gagé, "La Théologie de la victoire impériale," *Revue historique*, 171 (1933): 30-31.

²¹ M. I. Finley has made a very representative statement: "The turning point was the reign of Marcus Aurelius (who died in the year 180). The Germanic tribes in central Europe, which had been fitfully troublesome for several centuries, now began a new and much heavier pressure on the frontiers which never stopped until the western empire finally came to an end as a political organism." Finley, "Manpower and the Fall of Rome," in C. M. Cipolla, ed., *The Economic Decline of Empire* (London, 1970), 86.

²² Cassius Dio likened the accession of Marcus Aurelius's son Commodus in 180 to the passage from a golden "kingdom" to one of iron and rust, but he neither mentioned nor implied the barbarians in this connection. Moreover, Cassius Dio specified that the downfall was over by the time he wrote, a few decades later. Cassius Dio 72. 36. 4.

²³ Tacitus *Germania* 33: "Long, I pray, may the Germans persist, if not in loving us, at least in hating one another, for, although the destiny of the Empire is urging us on, fortune no longer has any better gift for us than the disunion of our foes." The translation comes mainly from Harold Mattingly's *Tacitus on Britain and Germany* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1948), 128, with modifications suggested by Herbert W. Benario's "Tacitus and the Fall of the Roman Empire," *Historia*, 17 (1968): 37-50, esp. 40. Although Benario has

ian successes in late antiquity leads us to imagine that Rome's neighbors exerted less pressure at earlier times.

The Roman state continually watched the barbarians. As long as it insisted on a high level of security for the provinces, it could not take its borders for granted. Yet the barbarians were never an isolated problem. Defense of the frontiers had an assured place on the agenda of imperial priorities, but other, more pressing considerations sometimes took precedence over defense. For one thing, the government had to worry about how much in the way of resources it could squeeze out of the civilian population. The big Roman conquests had coincided with an epoch of plunder and reckless exploitation. In the sedate empire, however, the army received regular pay and the civilians were lawfully taxed. Income and expenditure had to balance. Although the empire could, and with gradually loosening restraint did, depreciate the currency, it could not use modern deficit financing. The limits upon armed expansion were aptly summed up by the third-century historian who described the exploits inaugurating the brief reign of Maximinus: "He threatened (and was determined) to defeat and subjugate the German nations as far as the ocean . . . , and his actions would have added to his reputation if he had not been much too ruthless and severe toward his associates and subjects. What profit was there in killing barbarians when greater slaughter occurred in Rome and the provinces? Or in carrying off booty captured from the enemy when he robbed his fellow countrymen of all their property?"²⁴ The prompt overthrow of Maximinus suitably rebuked his expansionist designs. In a vast and responsibly administered empire, the government could not unleash its troops on one frontier without giving thought to the question whether unendangered taxpayers were willing to foot the bill.

As the fate of Maximinus suggests, another continuing concern was internal security. Glen Bowersock has recently shown that Gibbon's main shortcoming as a historian of the empire was his persistent downplaying of domestic turbulence: "The view of almost uninterrupted peace from Augustus to Commodus depends not only on the deprecation of disturbances Gibbon mentions but on the omission of others."²⁵ After Commodus (180–92), the evidence is too obvious to be ignored. Rebellious slaves, rioting city mobs, and turbulent internal barbarians called intermittently for attention, but none of them was a persistent danger. The serious threat to the imperial government came from usurpers—usu-

rightly endorsed J. M. C. Toynbee's reading of this famous passage, the precise meaning may be better approximated by introducing the ablative absolute phrase *urgentibus imperii fatis* with "although" rather than "since." I also agree with Benario that, in the perspective of Tacitus's audience, the "fate" of Rome could not have been to fall, as we moderns are tempted to think, but rather "to rule the nations with [its] sway" (*regere imperio populos*), as Virgil put it; Virgil *Aeneid* 6. 851. For damaging invasions in the first century A.D., see Ronald Syme, "Flavian Wars and Frontiers," in S. A. Cooke *et al.*, eds., *Cambridge Ancient History*, 12 vols. (Cambridge, 1931–39), 11: 168–72.

²⁴ Herodian, *History of the Roman Empire* 7. 2–3, trans. Edward C. Echols (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1961), 177.

²⁵ Bowersock, "Gibbon on Civil War and Rebellion in the Decline of the Roman Empire," *Daedalus*, 105 (Fall 1976): 66.

ally generals who put themselves at the head of their troops to overthrow the reigning emperor and set themselves in his place. Security from such challenges may well have been the main problem of the Roman Empire, necessarily impinging on Rome's treatment of its neighbors. For, if a choice had to be made between fighting a foreign enemy or a domestic challenger, there is no doubt which one was regarded as more dangerous. Few emperors hesitated to enroll barbarian troops to fight a usurper or to pay a border tribe for attacking him and dividing his forces. The Byzantine historian Ioannes Zonaras evoked a moment when the emperor Claudius Gothicus (A.D. 269) had to decide whether to take the field against a barbarian invasion or against a rival to his throne: "The war against [the usurper] Postumus concerns me, [but] the barbarian war [affects] the state, and its interests must be considered first."²⁶ The example is more edifying than typical. Political competitors invariably occupied a higher place on the agenda than alien enemies; barbarians were the natural allies of emperors and usurpers alike in their fratricidal struggles for power.

The Roman government had other things to worry about than just barbarians. The welfare of the provincials and the danger of usurpations were among the considerations that called as insistently for its attention as did the defense of the frontiers. There is no reason to take a gloomy view of these circumstances. The limited resources of the empire, its social tensions, ambitious generals, and aggressive neighbors ought never to be looked upon as forming a catalogue of symptoms of decline.²⁷ Such problems simply identify the complexities involved in the management of a vast and highly developed state, one whose remarkable endurance testifies to a continual power to adapt and adjust to changing conditions. In the face of this Juggernaut, the fragmented tribes beyond the Roman borders were left with little scope for pursuing their own ambitions. Indeed, the exertions and strivings of the empire determined their future together with that of the provinces. In this sense, the competing priorities among which the imperial government had to choose provided the motive force of barbarian history, the main reason why the neighbors of the Roman state escaped from their long-lasting immobility.

One last general point deserves to be mentioned—namely, the matter of invasions and migrations, what the Germans call the *Völkerwanderung* ("migration of peoples"). Many books and historical atlases contain a map purporting to show the tracks of the barbarian invaders, typically from Scandinavia to Spain and North Africa or from Central Asia to the center of Gaul. In most instances, as many as five hundred years of migration, real and supposed, are plotted on a single geographical background. By a mere glance at the arrows boldly sweeping from every direction through the Roman frontiers and provinces, the impression is gained that no empire could withstand such pressure. Moreover, the accompanying narratives tend to deploy a rhetoric of waves, tides, and floods,

²⁶ Zonaras *Epitomae historiarum* 12. 26, ed. Maurice Pinder, 2 (Bonn, 1844): 604. For the first instance of co-operation with barbarians in a usurpation, see Bowersock, "Gibbon on Civil War and Rebellion," 65–66.

²⁷ On this point I part company with Bowersock's interpretation, "Gibbon on Civil War and Rebellion," 63–68.

suggesting the relentlessness of natural processes.²⁸ The maps and metaphors reflect the desire of modern historians to look upon the barbarian invasions as a purposive movement of upwardly mobile Teutons or as an irresistible force of nature—or both. Hardly anything has done more to obscure the barbarian question than the talk and images of wandering peoples tirelessly battering down the Roman frontiers and flooding into the empire.

Of course, there were invasions and migrations in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries. The mistake derives from lumping these various events into a generalized, self-explanatory phenomenon that in itself characterized the barbarian peoples of those and earlier centuries. The Germans, like the Celts, were sedentary agriculturalists, not nomads. Only extraordinary circumstances uprooted them. They engaged in occasional invasions throughout the imperial period and did so with little more frequency in late antiquity than before. Each incident of invasion or migration had its particular causes; people move because of specific decisions, and they often do not travel very far. Most of the prominent tribes of the invasion period, such as the Goths and the Franks, were near neighbors of the empire; there were hardly any newcomers from far away. The Huns are an exception and have to be treated as such. Demography offers another negative consideration: no single group of invading barbarians was particularly large or cohesive. Although the statistical information is meager, it would probably be wrong to estimate the size of any tribe in more than five figures, a trivial number in comparison to the millions of Roman provincials. Besides, it is important to distinguish areas like Britain and the Balkans, where immigrants permanently altered the ethnic mix, from much larger areas like North Africa, Gaul, and Spain, where barbarians remained a tiny minority precariously positioned in a Latin-speaking society. Finally, it should be remembered that the incidents of invasion were almost never one-sided. For example, the Goths crossed the Danube in 376 because the Roman government expressly allowed them to do so; the Vandals invaded North Africa in 429 because a rebellious general invited them; and the Saxons moved into Britain several decades after the Roman army had spontaneously pulled out. Once the details are considered, the idea of the invasions as a mysterious force of nature is discredited. These are ordinary historical events, in whose exposition even on maps the rules of chronology and evidence should be respected and metaphorical language strictly controlled.²⁹

In the centuries before Christ, Rome conquered as many barbarians as it saw

²⁸ For a particularly appropriate map, see Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Medieval Civilization* (New York, 1968), 95. Against maps of this sort, see Gerold Walser, "Zu den Ursachen der Reichskrise im dritten nachchristlichen Jahrhundert," *Schweizer Beiträge zur allgemeinen Geschichte*, 18–19 (1960–61): 153–54. The narrative of Lucien Musset runs the gamut from "avalanches" to "capricious ricochets"; Musset, *Les Invasions*, volume 1: *Les Vagues germaniques* (Paris, 1965), 50–74 *passim*. This language has a long past. When, toward A.D. 660, the chronicler known as Fredegar came across the statement of St. Jerome that plague had decimated the army of Marcus Aurelius, he substituted *inundatio gentium* for *pestilentia*; *Monumenta Germaniae historica* [hereafter, *MGH*], *Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum*, 2: 62 l. 31.

²⁹ For a discussion and bibliography, see my *Barbarians and Romans (A.D. 418–584)*, chap. 1. For an outstanding case study, with special attention to place names, language, archeology, and other auxiliary evidence, see B. H. Slicher van Bath, "Dutch Tribal Problems," *Speculum*, 24 (1949): 319–38.

fit to subdue; it kept the others at bay during the first two hundred years A.D. In the third century, the internal upheavals of the empire were compounded by massive invasions, but, by A.D. 305, when Diocletian retired as emperor, the intruders had been cleared out and the frontiers restored almost to their widest dimensions. The climactic encounter of the empire with its neighbors occurred thereafter, beginning in the 370s and continuing through the sixth century. Before turning to this critical phase, it may be appropriate to sum up the general considerations that have occupied us up to now.

First, the term "barbarian" is unobjectionable as long as we recognize that it expresses a Greco-Roman point of view. In the language of the empire, its neighbors sometimes formed a collectivity. To themselves, however, those whom the Romans embraced in one word were diverse and disunited. Since they had no collective mind or collective aspirations, it is incorrect to evoke a single "barbarian side" and to believe that a history can be written from that perspective.³⁰ In order to narrate the invasions from a non-Roman standpoint, as many different circumstances and motives would have to be portrayed as there were barbarian peoples. The lack of adequate information prevents us from even beginning this task.

Next, there was nothing new or unexpected about the barbarian problem. Relations with foreigners, peaceful or hostile, had a constant place on the imperial agenda, but only as one item among others. The government had to choose among competing priorities in determining the actions to adopt in any given case. Year by year, it had to decide how much defense the taxpayers could afford or whether repulsing a barbarian incursion took precedence over eliminating a challenger to the throne. The ability of barbarians to assert themselves hinged far less upon their strength and wishes than upon the response that the Roman government could make to them in the short and long run.

Last, there is no truth to the idea that the barbarians were carried forward in a relentless migration from the wastes of the Baltic to the Mediterranean sun. Although deeply rooted in the tradition of European historical writing, this tale is just as mythical as more ancient origin stories, such as the one that made Aeneas, a refugee from Troy, the forefather of the Roman people. In its twentieth-century guise, the myth of Germanic migrations has drawn its vigor from a patriotic desire "to roll away the enormous burden of biblical-classical convention in historical conceptualization and to find an independent point of departure for German history outside the *orbis universus*."³¹ To perpetuate this

³⁰ To the contrary, Gerald Bonner: "Future historians will have to . . . try to build up a comprehensive picture of the German invasions from both sides"; Bonner, Review of Pierre Courcelle, *Histoire littéraire des grandes invasions germaniques* (3d ed., Paris, 1964), in the *Journal of Roman Studies*, 56 (1966): 247. It is impossible to build up a "side" on so narrow a basis as grave goods; archaeological evidence from *barbaricum* is necessarily contaminated if conflated with literary testimony, since the latter is of imperial origin and, *inter alia*, strives for schematic simplicity.

³¹ Hermann Aubin, "Zur Frage der historischen Kontinuität im Allgemeinen," in his *Von Altertum zum Mittelalter* (Munich, 1949), 70. For "the German 'romantic fallacy'" that accompanied the incomparable contribution of German scholars to the study of medieval history, see, in brief, M. D. Knowles, "Some Trends in Scholarship, 1868-1968, in the Field of Medieval History," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 19 (1969): 140-43.

myth merely prolongs the wishful thinking that has nurtured it thus far. The migrations that matter in the history of Rome and the barbarians do not embody mysterious forces. They were the expressions of human decisions, some known to us and others not, and it is doubtful that they were more momentous than armed conflicts in determining the outcome of events.

WHAT COMPELS OUR ATTENTION in the tale of Rome and the barbarians is the massive, unmistakable, and comparatively rapid replacement of Roman by alien rule in the western provinces of the fifth century. The temptation to emphasize earlier developments, strong as it is, should be restrained. We have seen what must be made of the contrast between easy and difficult defense or between light and heavy pressure. Our ability to measure shifts in ratios of force along the borders is notably defective; besides, we have little assurance that they mattered.³² Scholars have been right to emphasize that many more officers and troops from among distant tribes were recruited into the Roman army in the 300s than before. Yet the documented tendency of recruiting officers to shift their activities in every century from developed districts to more backward ones prevents us from imagining that the practice of late antiquity was a radical novelty.³³ Theodor Mommsen and Alfons Dopsch, among others, liked to think that the invasions were prepared by a slow "Germanization" of the empire through the infiltration of alien peasants and soldiers.³⁴ Such a view presupposes the existence of a uniform Germanic or at least barbarian identity. The certainty of its absence implies that the infiltrators were more likely to acquire coatings of Greco-Roman culture than to impress their variegated ethnicities upon their adopted home. Identifying the cultural distinctiveness of barbarians in the sixth century is hard enough without supposing that the empire in the third and fourth centuries was affected on more than a small, local scale by its numerous but scattered alien subjects. Although the "fall of Rome" was, of course, neither sudden nor catastrophic, we are well advised to concentrate our attention on an unambiguous break with tradition—namely, the treaties allowing barbarians to settle with autonomy inside the provinces, the context in which these treaties were made, and, most of all, the progressive abandonments of territory they occasioned. After this final change is summarized, four questions that seem crucial in an analysis of the events will be examined at greater length.

The last emperor of the West Roman line was overthrown in A.D. 476 by Odoacer, a barbarian general in his employ. Odoacer undertook thereafter to rule Italy and adjacent lands as the delegate of the Roman emperor in Constantinople. Since the opening of the fifth century, military control of many

³² On the latter point, see my discussion of the Saxons in Britain, pages 294–95, below.

³³ There is a large bibliography on this subject. For recent work, see K. F. Stroheker, *Germanentum und Spätantike* (Zurich, 1965), 9–29, 30–53; and Manfred Waas, *Germanen im römischen Dienst im 4. Jahrhundert n.C.* (Bonn, 1965). On the practices of recruiters, see Andreas Alföldi, "La Grande Crise du monde romain au III^e siècle," *Antiquité classique*, 7 (1938): 10–11.

³⁴ Dopsch, *Economic and Social Foundations of European Civilization*, abr. trans. M. G. Beard and Nadine Marshall (London, 1937), 49, 52–53; Dopsch cited Mommsen's opinion.

western regions had been gained, more often than not with official Roman sanction, by barbarian peoples: Vandals in North Africa, Visigoths in Spain and Gaul, Burgundians in southeastern Gaul, and a few others elsewhere. In 476, these dominations became independent kingdoms. Britain had been evacuated about 407 and transferred to the control of its Romano-British inhabitants, who, in the 470s, were still fighting off attacks and immigration from several directions. The Roman state, in its Constantinopolitan incarnation, had not wholly given up the western provinces. Under its auspices, toward 490, a strong force of Ostrogoths seized Italy from the "tyrant" responsible for the coup d'état of 476. Constantinople maintained active diplomatic relations with the western kingdoms and did not shrink from intervening in their internal affairs. From 533 to 555, expeditionary armies under its direct command wrested North Africa from the Vandals, Italy from the Ostrogoths, and even a part of Spain from Visigothic rule.³⁵ After the loss of much of this conquest, however, notably to the Lombard invasion of Italy in 568, there opened a period of relative stability interrupted only by the unrelated (for the purposes of this essay) expansion of Islam in the seventh century.

As is well known, Roman surrenders of territory in the fifth century were preceded by two successive barbarian incursions. The first of them was not an invasion but, rather, a rebellion of Goths who had been peacefully admitted across the Danube in 376. This rebellion was punctuated in 378 by a devastating defeat of Roman arms at Adrianople in Thrace, where the emperor Valens and many others lost their lives. The other incursion occurred on New Year's Eve, 406, and saw a variegated horde—containing Vandals, Alans, and Sueves—breaking across the Rhine, rushing destructively through Gaul, and, in 409, taking control of a large part of Spain.³⁶ Though dramatic and hideous, these incidents were hardly unprecedented in Roman history. Some twenty years passed between the first of them and the next, and even later in the fifth century there were long breathing spaces during which recovery among the Romans was not only possible but actually took place in various forms.³⁷

However risky it is to expect uniformity of policy across long periods of time, one may hardly avoid contrasting the circumstances of 376–82 and 406–18 to those of the third century: why did the emperors of the late fourth century not respond to massive barbarian incursions in the same way that their predecessors had one hundred and fifty years before? From the 250s to the end of the third century, the empire experienced many severe attacks at different points on the borders. An attentive examination of these incidents suggests that, in the short

³⁵ For the events noted in this paragraph, see the standard modern narratives: J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, 2 vols. (reprint ed., New York, 1958); Ernst Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, trans. J. R. Palanque, 2 vols. (Paris, 1949–59); and A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 170–317.

³⁶ One more might be added: the rush on Italy by a horde under the leadership of Radagaisus in 405. What sets this incursion apart from the other two is that the attackers were completely annihilated the next year.

³⁷ The spirit of renewal in the early fifth century (documented, for example, by the poem of Rutilius Namatianus) has been commented on many times. The idea is captured by the title of Arturo Solari's work, *Il Rinnovamenti dell'impero romano*, 2 vols. (Genoa, 1938–41). Also see my remarks (and references) concerning the middle of the century in "The Date and Purpose of Vegetius' *De re militari*," *Traditio*, 23 (1977): 87–88, nn. 105–06.

run, they were considerably more damaging than the invasions experienced from the 370s on. Nevertheless, all of the third-century intruders were annihilated or expelled, and the frontiers were restored. Some sections of the empire were evacuated, notably the province of Dacia north of the Danube; on the border with Persia, new territory was annexed. The whole process was long and very costly, but the job was done.³⁸ Successive emperors and their advisors evidently took the view that strenuous armed defense was the correct response to barbarian attacks. At whatever sacrifice, the aliens had to be driven out, and they were.

Although faced with more isolated attacks at longer intervals, the Roman government after 378 departed from the military solutions of the third century. Armed force was used only to contain the damage, to pin the Goths, Vandals, or whomever into positions where they became disposed to negotiate and make a treaty. The main instrument of the late Roman government for ending barbarian aggression was to grant the offending tribe an area of settlement within imperial territory. First made in 382, such grants became a recurrent pattern. Their result by the 450s, as we have seen, was a set of autonomous Gothic, Vandal, and Burgundian districts in the western provinces, an apparent dismemberment of the empire in the West.³⁹

The pertinent question why western districts were singled out for surrender will be considered shortly. For the moment, it suffices to ask why did the later emperors behave so differently from their third-century predecessors. The currently accepted answer seems to be that they had no choice: either the Goths were too strong or sufficient resources were not available to permit a strenuous Roman counterattack.⁴⁰ No one, however, has been able to this day to mount a convincing proof suggesting that these answers are correct. The strength of the Goths and other relevant barbarians does not, in isolation, bear examination. As for the resources of the empire, every modern attempt to argue depopulation, agricultural disaster, or calamitous overtaxation has failed when subjected to critical scrutiny.⁴¹ Nevertheless, we continue to be told that the inability of the empire to master "disorganized peoples who did not wish to be its enemies and of whom none numbered more than 100,000" can only be explained by its having been thoroughly impoverished in manpower, supplies, and money.⁴²

³⁸ A. Alföldi, "The Invasions of Peoples from the Rhine to the Black Sea" and "The Crisis of the Empire (A.D. 249–270)," and H. Mattingly, "The Imperial Recovery," in *Cambridge Ancient History*, 12: chaps. 5–6, 9; Fergus Millar, *The Roman Empire and Its Neighbours* (London, 1967), 239–48; and Michael Grant, *The Climax of Rome* (Boston, 1968), 13–65.

³⁹ For the mechanics of these territorial awards, see my *Barbarians and Romans (A.D. 418–584)*, chaps. 2–5.

⁴⁰ Matthews's phrase—"Gothic pressure on the frontiers was in the long run irresistible"—is particularly representative; see note 2, page 275, above.

⁴¹ On barbarian strength, see P. A. Brunt, "Reflections on British and Roman Imperialism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 7 (1964–65): 276. For major rebuttals of Roman internal weaknesses, see M. I. Finley, Review of A. E. R. Boak, *Manpower Shortage and the Fall of the Roman Empire in the West* (Ann Arbor, 1955), in the *Journal of Roman Studies*, 48 (1958): 156–64; and C. R. Whittaker, "Agri deserti," in M. I. Finley, ed., *Studies in Roman Property* (Cambridge, 1976), 137–65. Finley's review argues against the thesis of depopulation. Although inclined to minimize internal problems, A. H. M. Jones once argued the case for overtaxation; see his "Over-Taxation and the Decline of the Roman Empire," *Antiquity*, 33 (1959): 39–43.

⁴² Haller and Dannenbauer, *Der Eintritt der Germanen in die Geschichte*, 61.

The danger here is not so much that the argument circularly infers cause from effect but that the notion of impoverishment, unless it is meant as a vague metaphor, focuses upon the passive condition of imperial wealth rather than upon the desire and determination of the state to mobilize such wealth as there was. The resources of the Roman world in any age are bound to look paltry in modern eyes, but that impression is irrelevant. In view of the domestic and external shocks suffered by the third-century empire, especially in the later 200s, its aggregate resources could hardly have exceeded those available for mobilization after Adrianople, yet they had sufficed for clearing the provinces of barbarian intruders. For lack of convincing proof to the contrary, we may only assume that the wherewithal for war was at least adequate in the fourth and early fifth centuries. Growing knowledge of the later empire tends to confirm this view. Not even the evocation of corrupt bureaucrats and greedy noblemen, often encountered in modern scholarship, quite suffices to explain why strenuous defensive exertions were avoided.⁴³ Any profiteer from the regime risked—and would endure—greater losses than small farmers from the dismemberment of the empire.

There is much, to be sure, that we still do not know about the economic history of the fourth century. A. H. M. Jones summed up a few important and well-established facts about its course: in the late 200s and early 300s, prolonged inflation imposed the need for radical remedies upon “the imperial government, whose fiscal system was so rigid that the tribute . . . could not be raised to counterbalance the decreasing value of the currency. The state was thus forced back onto an economy in kind, paying its soldiers and civil servants mainly in food and clothing, and making levies in kind to supply its needs. . . . By the early fifth century [however] the Empire was on a gold economy, nearly all taxes, salaries and rents being paid in *solidi*, and all important economic transactions being conducted in *solidi*.”⁴⁴ Cheerful conclusions are usually drawn from this return to the economic normality of major transactions in sound currency. But is that favorable assessment altogether adequate? The Roman state that had requisitioned goods and issued rations to its employees had also been the one that strenuously cleared the provinces of barbarians, whereas the state of the early 400s, which collected and dispensed gold *solidi*, took the soft option of quartering autonomous aliens in its lands. The gradual reconversion of public finance from levies in kind to taxes in gold quite possibly built such rigidities into the economic fabric of the empire that the government was denied the choice of extraordinary defense. Nevertheless, an economic determinism of even this limited kind has yet to be confirmed. The terrain is promising but its harvest is still in doubt.

⁴³ George R. Monks, “The Administration of the Privy Purse: An Inquiry into Official Corruption and the Fall of the Roman Empire,” *Speculum*, 32 (1957): 748–79. On selfish magnates, after the work of Johannes Sundwall and Ernst Stein, see M. T. W. Arnheim, *The Senatorial Aristocracy in the Later Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1972).

⁴⁴ Jones, in *Third International Conference of Economic History, Munich, 1965* (Paris, 1969), 104. Most general accounts of the economic decline of the empire seem still to derive, directly or indirectly, from an essay by Max Weber that was superb when originally published in 1896; see his “The Social Causes of the Decay of Ancient Civilization,” trans. C. Mackauer in *Journal of General Education*, 5 (1950–51): 75–88.

A subtler, and more certain, connection between economic conditions and responses to barbarians is provided by Gilbert Dagron's study of the orator Themistius, a pagan Constantinopolitan whose public career extended from the 350s, under a son of Constantine, to Theodosius I in the 380s.⁴⁵ Themistius was not normally haunted by thoughts of a barbarian menace or of the need for greater exertions against mounting pressure. Even when he had the frontiers in view, he was concerned above all with cutting state expenses:

The emperor must understand that the true king, like Apollo, bears the lyre as well as the bow. . . . Like a shepherd, he must pay even more attention to the health of his flock than to such external dangers as wolves and wild beasts.

By neglecting internal health for external glory, Cyrus, Darius, and Alexander showed that "they were generals, not kings. The praise of a general is to have defeated his enemies; that of a king is the happiness of his subjects."

"Booty and prisoners profit only those who bear arms . . . ; the true victory is that which will allow us to be equally unconcerned about the Scythians [= Goths] and about the tax collectors. . . . I shall take account of the plunder taken from the Scyths only when no one will any longer plunder me [for taxes]. . . . To a wretch it hardly matters whether his misery results from the act of a Scythian or from that of a Roman."

"In sum, a unanimous commitment can be aroused only by what is undertaken for the benefit of all. The point is not to recover Mesopotamia [from the Persians] or to bring back to reason the Scythians beyond [the Danube] or to rebuild the cities ruined by the Germans: even if we succeeded in doing so, the only ones to notice would be the Syrians, Thracians, and Gauls, and the victory in each case would belong only to the neighboring territory. But if a moderate fiscal policy were conducted, it would be for the common benefit of all those inhabiting the world."⁴⁶

The implied preference for inactivity vis-à-vis barbarians is of little moment in this case, for Themistius spoke when the frontiers were still secure. Even in more aggressive ages, peace had been at least as common a counsel as war for relations across the borders. Neither was it unorthodox for someone to maintain that the triumphs of Roman armies were bought by the tears of the taxpayers.⁴⁷ What does sound novel is that Themistius sharply opposed the interests of threatened provinces to those of the total population. Fighting against barbarians, he alleged, was advantageous only to the provincials of Syria, Thrace, and Gaul, whereas the general interest—that of Romans as a whole—consisted of peace and tax cuts. Such a sentiment would not surprise if it came from an ordinary resident of a safe district near the Mediterranean; the empire was too large and individual horizons too narrow to permit a widespread sense of inter-provincial solidarity. But Themistius belonged to the Establishment. He was a learned philosopher, a senator of Constantinople, broadly representative of those close to the government who spoke for civilian interests and peaceful solutions. When a man of his stamp actively denied that the security of a part of the em-

⁴⁵ Dagron, "Le Témoignage de Thémistios," 1–203.

⁴⁶ Themistius *Oratio* 15 (A.D. 381), 10 (A.D. 370), and 8 (A.D. 368), in Dagron, "Le Témoignage de Thémistios," 101–04, nn. 125, 129. The passages not set off by quotation marks are translated from Dagron's paraphrases.

⁴⁷ On peace, note, for example, Hadrian's reversal of Trajan's expansionism and Commodus's of Marcus Aurelius's. For the tears of taxpayers, see Herodian, *History of the Roman Empire* 7.2 (page 282, above); and, for Marcus Aurelius's reply to the army's demand for higher pay, see Cassius Dio 71. 3. 3.

pire was a good cause for collective sacrifice, his position raises the question whether the unified system for defending the empire had any future at all.

Most of the remarks of Themistius that I have quoted date from 368. His reasoning would have been even more pertinent ten years later, as an argument against a military solution to the chaos following the disaster of Adrianople: the cost of expelling the Goths could not be justified since the benefit would accrue only to a small segment of the population. By implication, any fraction of the empire, such as distant Britain, whose retention called for extraordinary expense was worth abandoning for the simple reason that it was merely a fraction. It is little wonder, then, that, when in 382 the emperor Theodosius I made a peace with the Goths that accorded them autonomous status within the empire, Themistius immediately affirmed that this was not merely the correct but indeed the only possible course of action.⁴⁸ If the primary obligation of a true king was to shield the bulk of his subjects from sacrifices, then Themistius was right: even a major and unprecedented concession to barbarians should be welcomed. The critical element, however, was neither Gothic strength nor deficient Roman means; it was a scale of imperial priorities in which the repose of the many had an absolute preference over the safety of a few.

Where barbarians are concerned, even in the fourth century, the variable that merits attention lies on the Roman side of the frontiers. The oddity of the age was the government's resort to accommodation in preference to prolonged military action. Was the state forced to avoid the strenuous course of eliminating foreign intruders, or did its concessions express a conscious choice? Although the possibilities of a generalized collapse of Roman resources and of class selfishness are unpromising, more subtle forms of economic determinism could have played a part in the outcome. Even if they did, it does not follow that the empire had no alternative. Then, as in the past, its desire to maintain the integrity of the territory had to be balanced against competing considerations. Unless the Roman state can be shown to have somehow lost all freedom of maneuver, we are better advised to assume that it considered peace with barbarians to be positively preferable to extraordinary costs and military exertions. The late Romans surely did not want privileged aliens in their midst, but there were other things that they wanted even less.

An additional reason for this conclusion will become apparent in examining a second question, one that has often been asked before. It arises from the observation—rightly stressed in the literature—that the barbarian invasions had a more pronounced effect on the western parts of the Roman Empire than on the eastern provinces. As everyone knows, an imperial regime descending in unbroken succession from Augustus and Constantine survived the crises of the fifth century and prolonged its existence for another thousand years as the Byzantine Empire. The Roman state that ended in 476 was the empire of the west.⁴⁹ But why only there?

⁴⁸ Dagron, "Le Témoignage de Thémistios," 103–06.

⁴⁹ For an important statement of this theme, see Norman Baynes, "The Decline of Roman Power in Western Europe and Its Modern Explanations," in his *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (London, 1955), 83–96.

Several explanations for this regional difference in fates have an honored place in modern narratives. Allegedly, the Roman west had longer frontiers, more ferocious enemies, a smaller population, an underdeveloped and less urbanized economy, and so forth. Not all of these statements are false, but the answers they supply run the risk of being as hasty as the hypothesis of empire-wide impoverishment. The barbarians who threatened the western provinces were, in fact, less dangerous than the Persians in the east or the Goths on the lower Danube, and the west was rich in military manpower. Not only did it regularly send reinforcements eastward until as late as the 360s, but these troops were also acknowledged to have superior discipline and fighting qualities. Although the west lacked imported luxuries, it was at least as well provided as the east with essential military supplies like iron and wheat.⁵⁰ When conditions like these are placed in an accurate perspective, only one glaring and potentially dangerous contrast between the two parts of the empire can be identified: right down to 425, the west was a nursery of pretenders to the throne, and the armies of Britain and Gaul, which repeatedly backed these usurpers, were the outstanding threat to the security of the emperors. In this respect as well, a consideration of domestic priorities offers a better explanation for the activities of the barbarians in late antiquity than their own aspirations and strivings.

A closer look at the problem of internal security should begin with the observation that the "Western Empire" that was overthrown in 476 acquired its distinctive regional form only some eighty years before its end. The permanently junior partnership that the western emperor occupied vis-à-vis his Constantinopolitan colleague was prefigured by the effaced role of Valentinian II from 388 to his death and fully realized in the reign of Honorius, the younger son of Theodosius I, from 395 to 423. Although Honorius himself became senior emperor at the death of Arcadius in 408, as did Valentinian III at that of Theodosius II in 450, neither one was able or allowed to claim the prerogatives of seniority.⁵¹ Constantinople had insulated itself from political intervention by the west. Barbarian hostility had not been the cause for this precaution.

The late emergence of a distinctly western emperorship—a separate dynastic branch that buried its members in a mausoleum of its own—becomes understandable when one realizes that Constantine's establishment of a capital at Byzantium in 330 had not been meant to divide the empire into two parts. At its origin, Constantinople had been a new Rome, ruling a united realm as Rome had once done. The new Rome, like the old, was located in Europe, and it was designed to be the seat of one dynasty.⁵² This Constantinian settlement, super-

Also note H. I. Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (4th ed., Paris, 1958), 701 n. 2: "Le véritable problème porte sur ce point: pourquoi l'Occident a-t-il succombé, pourquoi l'Orient a-t-il résisté aux coups des barbares, qui ne lui ont pas été épargnés?"

⁵⁰ The comparatively greater, and dual, threat to the Danube and Syrian frontiers is documented by the shift eastward of the armies and the emperors, a pronounced tendency since the end of the first century A.D. For a vigorous argument against the supposed economic weakness of the west, see Ferdinand Lot, *Nouvelles recherches sur l'impôt foncier et la capitation personnelle sous le Bas-Empire* (Paris, 1955), 159–79.

⁵¹ In addition to the standard works cited in note 35, page 287, above, see J. R. Palanque, "Collégialité et partages dans l'Empire romain aux IV^e et V^e siècles," *Revue des études anciennes*, 46 (1944): 47–64, 280–98.

⁵² Gilbert Dagron, *Naissance d'une capitale: Constantinople et ses institutions de 330 à 451* (Paris, 1974), 19–76.

seeding the multiple nondynastic emperors and far-flung headquarters of the Tetrarchic regime, had brought promise of lasting civil peace. It enjoyed widespread support, and not only in the east. A comparison with the record of military usurpations from 235 to the downfall of Licinius in 324 shows that Constantine achieved for the age following him a startling improvement in internal stability. Not surprisingly, however, he did not attain perfection. The distant west, with its strong armies guarding Britain and the Rhine frontier, remained a point of instability, a springboard for generals with the ambition to make a grab for power. From there, in fact, Constantine himself had launched his astonishing career.

Between 324 and 475, the environs of Constantinople witnessed only one usurpation: the serious but brief rising of Procopius in 365. Yet the government was repeatedly challenged. The battle fought at Mursa in A.D. 351 between Constantius II and the western usurper Magnentius was, according to the historian Eutropius, the most tragic clash experienced by the Roman world since Caesar met Pompey at Pharsalia (48 B.C.). Ten years later, Julian verged on retracing the career of his uncle Constantine, as well as that of Magnentius, when he moved the armies of the west against the Constantius II; only the latter's demise from natural causes averted another bloodletting. The events following Julian's death and that of Valentinian I in 375 show that the political unreliability of the *exercitus Gallicanus* was a fact for statesmen to reckon with, even apart from outright rebellion: its doubtful loyalty was a major reason for Jovian's excessive concessions to Persia in 363 and the only one for the proclamation of the infant Valentinian II in 375. The latter's father, Valentinian I, had taken extraordinary precautions to win the support of the western troops for the dynasty he hoped to found. Rather than establish himself in Constantinople, where his body was in time brought for burial, he took personal charge of the Rhine frontier, spent ten years of his reign in military action against western barbarians, and went to the lengths of marrying the widow of Magnentius while his first wife was still alive. Even so, Valentinian failed in his dynastic objective: first one and then the second of his sons fell victim to a pretender. Their avenger, Theodosius I, found use for the Goths after Adrianople by recruiting them and many other barbarians to suppress the two usurpers who, within ten years, won the backing of the western armies. Even at Theodosius's death in 395, the story of western usurpations is hardly finished. From 406 to 413 and again in 423–25 new challenges arose against a legitimacy rooted in Constantinople. They were all put down.⁵³

A haunting echo of these conflicts reaches us in the accounts of the historians

⁵³ On Procopius's usurpation, see Ammianus Marcellinus 25.9.13, 26.5.8–26.10. On Pharsalia and Mursa, see Eutropius *Breviarium* 6.21, 10.12.1; in each case, Eutropius noted the wasting of forces that, combined, were capable of conquering the whole world. On Julian's usurpation, see Ammianus 20.40–21.15. On the *exercitus Gallicanus*, see *ibid.*, 25.5, 25.8.8–12, 25.9.8, 25.10.6–10, 26.1.3–6, 26.4.1, 27.6, 30.10. On Valentinian's inability to leave Gaul and fight Procopius, see *ibid.*, 26.5.1–7, 11–14; and, on the punishment of Valentinian's father for dealings with Magnentius, see *ibid.*, 30.7.3. On Valentinian's burial place, see *ibid.*, 30.10.1. About his curious marriage, see Socrates *Historia ecclesiastica* 4.31; according to Ammianus, Valentinian was not lustful; see Ammianus 30.9.2. On Gratian and Valentinian II, see Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, 1: 200–17; and, on usurpations after 395, see Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, 1: 185–202, 221–25.

Gildas, Bede, and Geoffrey of Monmouth about rulers who stripped Britain of its troops and crossed to the Continent, leaving the island to its own devices while they engaged in adventure against the power of Rome.⁵⁴ Though too simple, this tale is not without truth for the course of events on all of the western frontiers in late antiquity. How much wealth in men as well as goods was lost by the Roman west in the unsuccessful usurpations of the fourth and early fifth centuries is a matter for conjecture; none of them, so far as we can tell, undermined the productive capacities of the provinces. Even in the fifth century, Sidonius Apollinaris and his aristocratic friends enjoyed a life of abundance, and the number of churches was continually increased by new construction.⁵⁵ The weakening of defenses occasioned by civil war finds a more likely cause in the disposition of the Constantinopolitan victors. What successor of Valentinian I, even if otherwise unoccupied, would have been tempted to curry favor with the *exercitus Gallicanus*? More to the point, western defenses against barbarian incursions could have been restored to normal standards of security only if the triumphant government had made determined efforts after 388 and 394 to rebuild and discipline the armies that had followed the latest usurpers. Yet the lesson of recent events plainly counseled against such a course. Weakness in the west was the condition of security for the imperial throne, and the attachment of generals to the dynasty was a more important consideration than their military skill. In 394 and 395, therefore, the frontier forces were patched up any which way, a younger son was established as ruler in Milan, and an imperial relative by marriage became generalissimo of the west, with headquarters in Italy rather than on an exposed border.⁵⁶ The security thus attained subordinated external to domestic dangers. In view of recent history, it was a wise choice.

About one hundred and fifty years later, a historian writing at Constantinople had so dim a perception of the situation of the west as the fourth century closed that he imagined that Gaul and Spain were "almost lost" in the opening years of Honorius's reign, after 395, rather than only after the breakthrough of 406. The idea he shared with his contemporaries was that the empire had been diminished by official "negligence."⁵⁷ Such accounts are less wrong than the precise record of Roman control of the west makes them seem. The slow unfolding of fifth-century events testifies to the lack of assertive barbarians capable of making rapid headway against even feeble resistance. To judge by the nearly two hundred years that the Saxons took to gain dominance in a Britain whose garrison, once evacuated, was never restored, only sluggish change

⁵⁴ Gildas *De excidio et conquestu Britanniae* 13-14; Bede *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* 1. 11-12; and Geoffrey of Monmouth *Historia regum Britanniae* 3. 7-10 (Belinus and Brennius), 5. 12-6. 1 (Maximianus), 9. 15-10. 13 (Arthur). Only the second of these expeditions is portrayed as damaging to Britain.

⁵⁵ On the society of Sidonius, see Sir Samuel Dill, *Roman Society in the Last Century of the Western Empire* (2d ed., London, 1906), 187-223. For a survey of church construction, see May Vieillard-Troiekouroff, *Les Monuments religieux de la Gaule d'après les oeuvres de Grégoire de Tours* (Paris, 1976).

⁵⁶ See my Review of J. F. Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court, A.D. 364-425* (London, 1975), in the *English Historical Review*, 91 (1976): 353.

⁵⁷ On the loss of Gaul and Spain, see Jordanes *Getica* 154. Jordanes placed the Vandal Gaiseric too early by a generation; compare this passage with *ibid.*, 141, 145. About "negligence," see Jordanes *Romana* 332; and my "Zosimus, the First Historian of Rome's Fall," *AHR*, 76 (1971): 432, n. 88.

could be expected from a confrontation of barbarians and ordinary Romans.⁵⁸ The more rapid pace of events on the Continent, where the government exercised a continual solicitude, illustrates in itself the active role of imperial policy in transferring military control to Gothic, Frankish, and Vandal chieftains and their followers. There was logic in these surrenders, though not one of deficient material resources or even, necessarily, of a deficient will to impose sacrifices upon the population. The same imperative of internal security that argued in the 390s against the rebuilding of the armies of Gaul and Britain positively favored, in the next century, the quartering of barbarian forces among the provincials of the west. A weak offspring of the ruling house, or an equivalent representative, was now a permanent resident of Italy. The regime was safer with alien defenders than with Roman armies, for, however objectionable the former might be in other respects, nationality excluded them from having designs on the imperial throne. Besides, settled barbarian troops placed no more of a financial burden on the taxpayers than the armies had. Though headed by royal families, the Goths and others had no clear notions of sovereignty and independence; their status amidst a numerous population of Latin speakers depended in part on the maintenance of satisfactory relations with the imperial power; Roman law was not abrogated in the territories they occupied; and the property of even rich natives was normally respected.⁵⁹ The aristocracies and clergy of the affected regions retained positions of great dignity and eminence.⁶⁰ All in all, the losses endured by the Roman state might merely be transitory, whereas the immediate gains to it were beyond doubt. For the long span from 425 until Heraclius sailed from Carthage to overthrow Phocas in 610, Constantinople never had to worry about a challenger out of the west.

The third question is suggested by the indecisiveness and ambiguity of fifth-century events. As one decade succeeded the other, the advantages secured from installing barbarians in the western provinces were not clearly outweighed by the losses and dangers that their presence occasioned. No westerner at the opening of the sixth century wished to repudiate the overriding dominion of the emperor of the new Rome. The more or less orderly garrisoning of Gaul, Spain, Africa, and Italy by alien troops gives us no compelling reason to speak of a "barbarian west." Not even the evacuation of Britain or the overthrow of the too aptly named Romulus Augustulus was conclusive. The west was still full of "Romans" speaking Latin and worshipping as Catholics in a church whose temporal leadership was recognized to be divinely vested in the emperor. The sprinkling of resident Goths, Burgundians, and other certifiable barbarians mostly professed a form of Christianity that the Catholics considered repugnant and heretical, but there was no lack of pressure on them to abandon their Arianism

⁵⁸ For the course of events in Britain, see Peter H. Sawyer, *From Roman Britain to Norman England* (New York, 1978), 76–91. I have reservations about the alleged effects of plague after 549; *ibid.*, 18, 85–86. Something would have to be subtracted from my count of two hundred years if, as John H. Ward has maintained, the evacuation of Britain in 407 was not final; see his "The *Notitia Dignitatum*," *Latomus*, 33 (1974): 430–31.

⁵⁹ On these matters, see my *Barbarians and Romans (A.D. 418–584)*.

⁶⁰ For documentation (and a rich bibliography) of an important dimension of aristocratic pre-eminence, see Martin Heinzelmann, *Bischofsherrschaft in Gallien* (Munich, 1976).

and join the majority they lived among.⁶¹ Religion aside, the faces of resident barbarians are revealed in Latin law codes, state papers, and panegyrics—artifacts whose Roman character is obvious.⁶² Their prominent leaders in the early 500s were Theodoric the Ostrogoth, who gained the reputation of ruling Italy with all of the talent and benevolence of a good emperor, and the Frank, Clovis, who turned directly from a pagan into a Catholic. These conditions must make us wonder. How did it happen that the west “went barbarian”? Armed conquest by aliens could surely have little more to do with the matter. Yet the Catholic Latins, ancestors of Romance Europe, eventually found contentment in adopting the tribal names of their rulers and thus becoming honorary Goths, Burgundians, Franks, and, in due time, even Lombards. Is this because the new dynasties rallied their admiration or because the imperial masters at Constantinople cast all of the westerners adrift to find whatever new moorings they could?

When the strength of Catholicism, Latinity, and imperial loyalties in the west is kept in mind, the main oddity of the sixth century is that the emperor Justinian undertook western conquests. Although the paltry barbarian rulers of Africa and Italy posed no threat to him, he seemed to think that they needed to be subdued by force of arms. We risk missing an important point if we take Justinian’s “reconquest” at face value and assume that it was the correct response, at long last, to barbarian domination of Roman territory. The passage of time makes a difference. That there should have been no prolonged military response after 378 and 406–07 is a fact that merits astonishment; with martial emperors like Julian and Valentinian I only shortly dead, the absence of a Roman counterattack calls for explanation. But Justinian belonged to an age when the example of aggressive emperors like Trajan, or the Illyrians of the late 200s, had become entirely anachronistic. For him to undertake western expeditions was to depart sharply from the vision of the Theodosian dynasty that had reconciled the quartering of barbarian federates with a positive enhancement of imperial security from the recurrence of civil war. Although it is wrong, as we shall see, to single out Justinian as an innovator, his conquests pose the genuine problem of how Constantinople came to conceive of the west as “lost” and to regard the barbarians who controlled its provinces as amenable to little reason other than that of armed force.

⁶¹ The early “authorized version” of Gothic Arianism was that the heresy was foisted on them by the wicked emperor Valens, whom God duly punished; this is the story told by Orosius and the trio of Greek church historians. Salvian’s attitude toward barbarian Arianism is not hostile. The Burgundians slipped from orthodoxy to Arianism and back to orthodoxy; the Sueves in Spain also vacillated. The image of nasty barbarian Arians is most firmly connected to the Vandals (Victor Vitensis, 480s), but their ruling house was divided in adherence prior to Justinian’s attack, owing to a marriage tie with the imperial house. See E. A. Thompson, “Christianity and the Northern Barbarians,” in Arnaldo Momigliano, ed., *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century* (Oxford, 1963), 56–78. He has taken comparatively little account of Roman opinion.

⁶² For the Visigothic code of Euric (ca. 475) and the Burgundian code of Gundobad (ca. 500), see the challenging observations of Patrick Wormald’s “*Lex Scripta and Verbum Regis*: Legislation and German Kingship,” in P. H. Sawyer and I. N. Wood, eds., *Early Medieval Kingship* (Leeds, 1977), 105–38. For state papers, see the *Variae epistolae* of Cassiodorus, from the court of the Ostrogoths in Italy. For panegyrics of Theodoric and Euric, see Sidonius Apollinaris *Epistolae* 1. 2, 8. 9. 5; and, for one of Theodoric the Ostrogoth, see Ennodius of Pavia *Opera*, ed. W. Hartel, 261–86. Even the grave goods of Childeric (482) express Constantinopolitan, rather than “Germanic,” tastes; Peter Lasko, *The Kingdom of the Franks* (New York, 1971), 26.

The problem thus posed calls for investigation primarily on the plane of ideas and attitudes. Realistically speaking, there was nothing wrong with Justinian's expansionism. The weakness of the ruling families of Vandals and Goths offered inviting opportunities for intervention; Catholics could be thought to need rescue from heretical Arians; and there were even precedents for an attack on the Vandals in North Africa, against whom an expedition in 468 had expensively failed.⁶³ Imperial rule, however, also possessed dimensions that the language of political realism tended to undermine rather than to enhance. Other considerations than force had buttressed the long ascendancy of Rome in the world. This point is already made in recognizing that the term barbarian, with its connotations of inferiority, was a Greco-Roman invention that those whom it denoted could not help but apply to themselves. Besides, a ruler whom everyone for many centuries kept calling universal regardless of the condition of his armies enjoyed a daunting advantage. He left even hostile aliens—let alone friendly ones—at a loss to define their collective identity except in a relationship somehow dependent on his good will. The dilemma was compounded when such a monarch became the temporal head of a universal religion with millions of adherents guided by an educated clergy who daily led prayers for the perpetuation of his rule.⁶⁴ A legitimacy grounded in such intangible assets as these had subtler means of action at its disposal than generalship. More was needed to ruin it than an occasional defeat.

From the heights of their power and reputations, fourth-century emperors like Constantine and Theodosius had propagated ambitious and indiscriminate notions of their universality. Good emperors exemplified love of mankind, *philanthropia*, and were responsible for the welfare of barbarians as well as of their direct subjects.⁶⁵ The same Themistius who urged tax cuts also encouraged imperial concern for the lives of barbarians who, if spared, would prove as useful, in time, as the obedient taxpayers descended from foreigners conquered long ago. He declared to Theodosius I, "Vanquishing the barbarians by armed force resolves nothing if they are not saved afterwards by *philanthropia*, that is to say, unless a policy is afterwards devised that takes account of their existence and draws as much advantage from it as possible." Orosius's emphatically Christian version of universal history stressed how much the making of the empire had cost in barbarian as well as Roman blood.⁶⁶ Writing less than a decade

⁶³ For such practical considerations, see Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, 2: 124–26, 151–69, 286. The attack of 468 was meant to support a candidate for the western emperors, not to recover territory.

⁶⁴ A curious illustration of the problem of barbarian identity occurs in Justinian's summary of old Roman jurisprudence: an *obiter dictum* in the discussion of the rights of citizens while prisoners beyond the borders specifies that, before a *gens* can be regarded as an enemy, there must have been a relationship of *amicitia*, *hospitium*, or *foedus amicitiae causa factum* between it and the Roman state; Justinian *Digesta* 49. 15. 5. For fifth-century ecclesiastical conditions particularly favorable to the emperors, see Jean Gaudemet, *L'Église dans l'Empire romain* (Paris, 1958), 501–03.

⁶⁵ Glanville Downey, "Philanthropia in Religion and Statecraft in the Fourth Century after Christ," *Historia*, 4 (1955): 199–208. A sixth-century Byzantine treatise fails to specify whether or not imperial *philanthropia* still extended to barbarians; Patrick Henry III, "A Mirror for Justinian: The *Ekthesis* of Agapetus Diaconus," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, 8 (1967): 300–02, 306.

⁶⁶ Themistius *Oratio* 15 (A.D. 381), paraphrased by Dagron, "Le Témoignage de Thémistios," 104; and Orosius *Historia adversum paganos* 4–5 *passim*. Orosius's sympathy for the vanquished of long ago is a striking feature of his work, anticipating modern visions of Roman imperialism.

after the Goths of Alaric had sacked Rome, Orosius hailed the present era in which usurpers fell by God's intervention and even barbarians, when Christian, behaved with restraint; divine mercy was worthy of praise if the weakening of the empire was the condition for filling the churches of the east and west with Huns, Sueves, Vandals, and Burgundians who otherwise could not possibly be converted.⁶⁷ It is hard to believe that the same solicitude for barbarian lives, and for souls that could be saved by conversion, was altogether absent from the treaties of 382 and later that had given alien tribes a place in the empire as the alternative to wiping them out. Between 430 and 450, no less than three Greek historians looked back upon the events of the recent past and narrated them with confident approval: almighty God had smiled upon the descendants of Theodosius. This judgment cannot be ascribed to a narrowly Constantinopolitan perspective, for western events were not ignored. Throughout the world, according to these informants, the activities of all men, including barbarians, were continuously guided by the providence of a God who reserved His special favor for the pious youths occupying the imperial throne: "it is sufficient for an emperor to retain power merely by giving careful honor to the divine."⁶⁸

What could have happened after 450 to shake a serenity so firmly anchored as this in loftier considerations than physical force? It is true that the mid-fifth century had been the scene of hard military blows. The Vandal Gaiseric unexpectedly seized Carthage in 439 and continued until his death in 477 to direct the activities of hostile forces in the heart of the Mediterranean. From 441 to 454, Attila led the Huns in devastating attacks across the land frontiers of both east and west. Even though the empire survived these problems much as it had earlier ones, without lasting ill effects or major cessions of territory, it is tempting to think that, here if not before, there were genuine manifestations of barbarian strength, hostility, and determination.⁶⁹

Yet Gaiseric and Attila did not set a model of assertiveness to the western barbarians in the generations immediately following their deaths, and neither did the Constantinople of Justinian (527–65) trace its disillusionment with Roman universality to their exploits. Its eyes were on an earlier epoch. Two decades before Justinian took office, the historian Zosimus announced that, just as Polybius had narrated how Rome had risen to world domination in fifty-three years, so he would tell how it had descended from this pinnacle in an equal period of time. Zosimus never specified what span he had in mind, but Jordanes, a contemporary and admirer of Justinian, precisely identified it: for "almost sixty years," he said, until the advent of Marcian in 450, a succession of "dainty" em-

⁶⁷ Orosius *Historia* 5. 22 (current civil wars are milder), 7. 35. 6–9, 12–22 (God smites usurpers), 3. 23. 66–67, 7. 39 (restraint of Christian barbarians). Orosius also maintained that the *circumpositae gentes* had a positive role in God's plan—namely, to serve at His bidding as scourges of the empire when it sinned; *Historia* 7. 22. 6.

⁶⁸ The three Greek historians are Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret—that is, the orthodox continuators of Eusebius as distinct from the Eunomian Philostorgius. On their views, see Glanville Downey, "The Perspective of the Early Church Historians," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, 6 (1965): 57–70. On their western interests, see Walter E. Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Decline of Rome* (Princeton, 1968), 176–204. For the passage from Sozomen quoted here, whose subject is the western emperor Honorius, see Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Decline of Rome*, 186.

⁶⁹ For these events, see Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, 1: 251–60, 271–76, 288–98, 323–41, 390, 410.

perors had diminished the realm.⁷⁰ These were the same emperors reigning from 395 onwards whom the church historians had hailed for “giving careful honor to the divine” and being correspondingly blessed by God. Procopius, another contemporary of Justinian, spelled out their responsibility for the loss of the empire: “Now, while Honorius was holding the imperial power in the West, barbarians took possession of his land; and I shall tell who they were and in what manner they did so”; a little later, Valentinian III “failed to recover for the empire anything of what had been wrested from it before, and he both lost Libya in addition to the territory previously lost and was himself destroyed.”⁷¹ Such a vision of the past, which Zosimus shows to have already been current under Justinian’s predecessors, gave ample justification for a policy of military “recovery” of the west. It also underscores the puzzling question how the faith of Constantinople in a continuing universality sustained by divine favor had turned in half a century into a grim belief in the judgment of battle.

A major aspect of the answer eludes our grasp. The church historians who wrote under Theodosius II were succeeded after 450 by a series of authors reviving the tradition of lay historiography; Priscus, the most distinguished among them, died after 472. Only fragments of their works survive in the collections of Photius and other Byzantine anthologists.⁷² The integral versions have perished, taking with them any possibility for us to discern a gradual change in mood and outlook that might have been occasioned by political and military circumstances.

Failing the comprehensive resources that these lay histories would have provided, ecclesiastical affairs offer the most promising evidence for detecting the movement of opinion. The same year 451 in which Attila retreated from his western adventure also witnessed the great episcopal gathering at Chalcedon, where the bishopric of Rome joined hands with that of Constantinople to impose orthodoxy upon the church concerning the two natures of Christ. Marcian, the emperor who gathered this council and determined its outcome, earned a place of the utmost honor in the historical records of Constantinople for both “treading on the necks of all of his enemies” and instituting true Christian doctrine.⁷³ His foreign foes, however, proved to be more lastingly buried than religious controversy. As Peter Brown has recently pointed out, the closing decades

⁷⁰ Zosimus *Historia nova* 1. 1, 1. 57. 1. Jordanes *Romana* 332: “Regnum quod delicati decessores prodecessoresque eius per annos fere sexaginta vicissim imperantes minuerant . . . reparavit.” Fifty-five years from Honorius and Arcadius (395) to the death of Theodosius II (450), sixty to that of Valentinian III (455), the last male of the Theodosian dynasty. To my knowledge, no one has yet noticed the agreement between Jordanes’s figure and that of Zosimus (the unfinished *Historia nova* trails off in 410). See the bemused speculations of François Paschoud’s *Cinq études sur Zosime* (Paris, 1975), 187–206.

⁷¹ Procopius *Bellum Vandalicum* 1. 2. 1, 1. 3. 12, trans. H. B. Dewing (Loeb), *Procopius*, 2 (London, 1916): 9, 27.

⁷² The fragments have been assembled and translated by C. D. Gordon; see his *The Age of Attila: Fifth-Century Byzantium and the Barbarians* (Ann Arbor, 1960). For the works of these authors and their equally vanished ecclesiastical counterparts, notably the chronicle of Eustathius of Epiphania, see Wilhelm von Christ *et al.*, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur*, pt. 2, 2d half (6th ed., Munich, 1924): 1034–39, 1443–44, 1483–85.

⁷³ On Chalcedon, see, for example, Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, 1: 309–15. On Marcian, see Jordanes *Romana* 332; and, for a eulogy that stresses his ecclesiastical role, see Evagrius *Historia ecclesiastica* 2. 1. Interestingly enough, Marcian also earned Zosimus’s praise by implication (execration of the *folles senatorius*, which Marcian abolished); see *Historia nova* 2. 38. 4.

of the fifth century are less noteworthy for the unraveling of the Chalcedonian settlement than they are for the unshakable determination of the bishops of Rome to resist every imperial attempt to attain religious peace by compromise; while "the emperors [of Constantinople] hoped to make the partisan bishops and their flocks live up to standards of unity and obedience that were patently being realized in every other field but religion," the leadership of the Catholic church of the west profited from the physical security it enjoyed in lands precariously governed by Arian generals to oppose all modifications of Chalcedonian teachings, regardless of the cost to Christian universality.⁷⁴ Emperors who were forced to endure such defiance could scarcely sustain the illusion that the barbarian settlements in the west had left their ecumenical dominion unimpaired. The will that thwarted them had nothing alien about it; enough of their nearby subjects championed Chalcedon, and drew strength from the support of old Rome, to assure the emperors of the domestic nature of their problems. But nationality hardly made a difference. Now that God's favor was in serious doubt, official Constantinople could take no more comfort in the reverence still inspired by the imperial name among Latin-speaking Catholics and their governors; the assets for *Romanitas* that existed in the west at the opening of the 500s were irrelevant to the court. On the contrary, Byzantium had greater confidence to gain from believing that the west had long been "lost" to barbarians than from precisely defining the nature of the resistance that stood in the way of imperial designs.

In the next generation, the undermanned expeditions launched by Justinian achieved a few durable annexations to the empire. They also brought greater ruin to Italy than did all of the invaders of the previous one hundred and fifty years. Yet their most startling novelty was in the sphere of religion. The popes of conquered Rome were taken in hand and kept in Constantinopolitan custody until the emperor's wishes for orthodoxy were irrevocably espoused. Marcian's exploit of 451 was supposed to repeat itself in 553 at the second council of Constantinople; again, though by very different means, Rome joined with the east in the declaration of doctrine: by the condemnation of the Three Chapters, the decision of Chalcedon was modified in a way that, Justinian hoped, would produce religious peace. The effect of the council in the east was undramatic. The west, however, acquired something that it had never experienced before—a schism that separated large segments of the Latin episcopate from its spiritual leader.⁷⁵ In time, the papacy not only outlived the repudiation it suffered for joining with Justinian in condemning the Three Chapters but even

⁷⁴ Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (London, 1971), 146, 145–48. For the terms of Roman resistance, see Gaudemet, *L'Église dans l'Empire romain*, 503–04; and, for the events, see Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, 2: 20–28, 182–92.

⁷⁵ Louis Duchesne, *L'Église au sixième siècle* (Paris, 1925), 109–258; and Émile Amann, "Trois-chapitres," in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, 15, pt. 2 (Paris, 1950): 1868–1924, esp. 1910–17. The best sense one can acquire of the importance of the Three Chapters controversy in the west is by taking stock of the literature it generated, including a determined effort to absorb into the Latin tradition the hitherto little-known fifth-century religious history of the east.

convinced an ill-educated Latin church that it had been right to do so.⁷⁶ There was, nevertheless, an interval of hesitation, and it lasted long enough for the stoutly Chalcedonian westerners to reconsider where their immediate loyalties lay. In a world in which the temporal head of the church actively promoted heresy, the mandate of heaven might well appear to have descended upon rough-hewn kings who venerated the saints, left religious orthodoxy to bishops, and were even known, upon occasion, to take the field against the enemies of the faith.

The histories composed by Gregory of Tours from 575 to 593 are the outstanding evidence for the reconciliation of Latin aristocrats to an alien regime. To a pious Gallo-Roman bishop like Gregory, living when he did, a brutal slayer of relatives like the Frank, Clovis, seemed nevertheless to merit such high esteem that his living successors were to be rebuked for departing from the laudable example he had set.⁷⁷ Much the same process is illustrated in Visigothic Spain by John of Biclar. Though of Gothic descent, John was a Catholic and educated in Constantinople; he returned to Spain after at least seven years, in the same decade in which Gregory of Tours began to write. John chose to continue a chronicle that is heavily committed to defending the Three Chapters from Justinian's, and the pope's, condemnation. This helps explain why the Arianism of the Visigothic king Leuvigild (567–80) was no obstacle to John's emphatic praise of his reign and celebration of its effectiveness: "He wondrously restored the territory of the Goths . . . to its ancient boundaries."⁷⁸ A third historian, Marius of Avenches, allows us to see how such a reorientation of sympathies affected portrayals of the past. According to Marius, the Burgundians' move into Gaul in the 450s involved their harmoniously "partitioning the lands with the Gallic senators."⁷⁹ By their active support of barbarian kings, these late sixth-century historians lend weight to the opinion of K. F. Stroheker and other modern scholars who have urged that the turn from antiquity to Middle Ages be set in the vicinity of A.D. 600.⁸⁰

Although such an argument has merit, there is no denying that the turning point that has long had the widest currency falls considerably earlier than the

⁷⁶ A good indicator of the papacy's success in blotting out its role is found in Paul the Deacon's brief and remarkably distorted account of the controversy, written the late eighth century; see his *Historia Langobardorum* 3. 20, 26.

⁷⁷ The paradox of Gregory's admiration for Clovis is epitomized by the famous eulogy that he provocatively situated in a context of brutality; *Historiae* 2. 40–42. For his rebuke of later Merovingians, see the Preface to *Historiae* 5.

⁷⁸ John of Biclar *Chronicon* under 569, ed. Theodor Mommsen, *MGH, Auctores antiquissimi*, 11: 212. On John and his context, see J. N. Hillgarth, "Coins and Chronicles: Propaganda in Sixth-Century Spain and the Byzantine Background," *Historia*, 15 (1966): 483–508; and Jacques Fontaine, "Conversion et culture chez les Visigoths d'Espagne," *Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, Settimane di studio*, 14 (1967): 108–15. Neither of these excellent studies takes into account the divisive effects on western Catholics of the Three Chapters controversy.

⁷⁹ Marius of Avenches *Chronicon* under 456, ed. Theodor Mommsen, *MGH, Auctores antiquissimi*, 11: 232. Marius was also a contemporary of Gregory of Tours. For a discussion of this passage, see my *Barbarians and Romans (A.D. 418–584)*, chap. 4 n. 9. Religious considerations aside, it also seems noteworthy that Gregory, John, and Marius started to write very soon after the Lombards had wrested much of Italy from Byzantium.

⁸⁰ Stroheker, "Um die Grenze zwischen Antike und abendländischem Mittelalter," *Saeculum*, (1950): 440–42, 464–65, with reference to Alfred von Gutschmid (1863).

age of Gregory of Tours and Gregory the Great. The place in this transition assigned to Alaric and Attila, Aetius and Theodoric, and other worthies of the fifth century is too great to justify so late a beginning for the Dark Ages as A.D. 600. Our history books make much of aliens taking Rome in 410 and 455, of the creation of "barbarian kingdoms," and of the hostile cunning of Gaiseric the Vandal. We even have narratives, enriched by maps of our devising, that chart the slow descent of barbarians from northern lands to positions of prominence in what had been Rome's world.⁸¹ These elements do not constitute the past as conceived of by a westerner like Gregory of Tours, let alone the Briton Gildas, but neither are they merely figments of later medieval and modern European imaginations.⁸² The last question for us to consider is where this panorama of a mounting barbarization of the west has come from.

Once the problem is phrased in these terms, it ceases to be surprising that the same metropolis of Constantinople in which the ruin of the Roman Empire began to be affirmed on the eve of Justinian's accession was also the place that, in his reign, gave birth to the first circumstantial evocations of the "barbarian west." Negligent emperors of a dynasty long dead were held responsible, as we have seen, for letting lands slip from their grasp, but antagonists worthy of respect were needed to profit from their foolishness and loose living. A historian might hope, if ambitious, to detect general causes for the decline of world dominion; this was the course that Zosimus attempted to take by placing Christian emperorship itself on trial, together with its philobarbarism.⁸³ The more familiar and popular approach was to dramatize the events in the personal terms of biography and anecdote. The result reaches us in the chronicle of John Malalas, in the introductory chapters of Procopius, and, most fully, in the writings of Jordanes, the Byzantine Catholic of Gothic blood who composed in Latin the original history of a whole barbarian people. The place of heroic foreigners in the narratives of Procopius and Jordanes is too widely known to require comment; here are the fifth-century worthies in already epic dimensions.⁸⁴ The muddled chronology that was long to characterize the history of the 400s, fusing or interchanging one hero with another according to the needs of each tale, is also well

⁸¹ Concerning maps, see note 28, page 284, above. It would be interesting to establish whether their prototype antedates the nineteenth century.

⁸² Gildas took Britain as his background, with its rule by Rome merely an interval, though an admired one, in its historical existence; Gildas *De excidio* 3–20. Gregory started with the Creation but quickly carried his narrative to the Christianization of Roman Gaul in the third century, after which Christian Gaul remained his focus; for the start of the narrowed focus, see *Historiae* 1. 29.

⁸³ See my "Zosimus, the First Historian of Rome's Fall," 414–16. This feature made Zosimus, since Löwenclav (1576), particularly appealing to modern tastes, as Mazzarino has pointed out; *End of the Ancient World*, 92–99.

⁸⁴ John Malalas *Chronographia*, ed. L. Dindorf (Bonn, 1831); Malalas deserves to be more widely known. Concerning the introductory chapters of Procopius, see my *Barbarians and Romans (A.D. 418–584)*, chap. 3. Also see Jordanes *Getica*, trans. C. C. Mierow, *The Gothic History of Jordanes* (Princeton, 1915); Mierow's introduction and notes are somewhat dated. It has been widely believed that the *Getica* mirrors, when it does not deprave, the lost Gothic History of Cassiodorus; for a forceful statement of this argument, see Arnaldo Momigliano, "Cassiodorus and the Italian Culture of His Time" (1955), reprinted in his *Studies in Historiography* (New York, 1966), 191–99. Without, to be sure, disputing Jordanes's use of Cassiodorus's History, I believe in the originality of Jordanes's version and consider it comparable to the originality of Zosimus.

established in these accounts. Attila, for example, though barely a century dead, was condemned to waging two unsuccessful campaigns against Gaul instead of one.⁸⁵ Earlier epochs were even more loosely handled: "While [the emperor Gallienus (d. 286)] was given over to luxurious living of every sort . . . , the Goths recrossed the strait of the Hellespont, . . . sacking Troy and Ilium on the way. These cities, which had scarce recovered a little from the famous war with Agamemnon [that is, the Trojan War] were thus destroyed anew by the hostile sword."⁸⁶ The message of Jordanes, like that of Procopius, would have been only blunted by accurate measurements of time.

Barbarian leaders celebrated by Constantinopolitans for their exploits against degenerate emperors also deserved a coherent ethnic context and an ancient history. When scholars of the Carolingian renaissance became aware of a wider Germanic identity embracing Scandinavians as well as Franks, Saxons, and Bavarians, they were quick to grasp how great a contribution the history of Jordanes made to their knowledge of a common past.⁸⁷ And, when modern Germans sought to trace the wanderings of their tribal forebears, they prized Procopius for the links he disclosed between the men who had established kingdoms on the shores of the Mediterranean and their homelands far to the north.⁸⁸

There were many Gothic nations in earlier times, just as also at present, but the greatest and most important of all are the Goths, Vandals, Visigoths, and Gepaedes. . . . All these, while they are distinguished from one another by their names, as has been said, do not differ in anything else at all. For they all have white bodies and fair hair, and are all tall and handsome to look upon, and they use the same laws. . . . As it seems to me, they all came originally from one tribe, and were distinguished later by the names of those who led each group.⁸⁹

So began his sketch of the "migration of peoples," remarkable in every respect as an anticipation of Ludwig Schmidt's *Geschichte der deutschen Stämme* (2d ed., 1941) and its progenitors. Jordanes added the details that allowed this tale to be traced as far back as it would go until the invention of Indo-Germanic philology—namely, to the "island of Scandza, . . . workshop of races [and] womb

⁸⁵ Jordanes *Getica* 181–218, 225–27, which is paralleled by Procopius *Bellum Vandalicum* 3. 4. 24, 29. Malalas *Chronographia*, ed. Dindorf, 358–59: Aetius rallied Alaric to fight Attila the Gepid. The development of these confusions is easily detected in Byzantine and later Latin chronicles, where, for example, Alaric's sack of Rome gets conflated with Gaiseric's, Aetius and Theodoric the Ostrogoth switch identities, and so forth. In the twelfth century, Otto of Freising protested against accounts that made Theodoric contemporary to Ermanaric and Attila; he might have had in mind the eleventh-century Annals of Quedlinburg. The curiosity is how fully these tendencies are already apparent in Procopius's work; for example, Arcadius is airily described as living "some time earlier" than Odoacer.

⁸⁶ Jordanes *Getica* 107–08, trans. Mierow, 81–82.

⁸⁷ Zöllner, *Die politische Stellung der Völker im Frankenreich*, 46–47, 52. The main exhibit is Freulf of Lisieux's chronicle, in *Patrologia Latina* 106: 967 (Frankish origins). The further influence of Jordanes on Freulf is apparent in his last books; see *Patrologia Latina* 106: 1203–58.

⁸⁸ An extraordinarily important part in modern conceptions of Germanic migrations is played by two passages of Procopius, both of dubious historicity: *Bellum Vandalicum* 1. 22. 1–12, and *Bellum Gothicum* 2. 15. See Ludwig Schmidt, *Geschichte der deutschen Stämme bis zum Ausgang der Völkerwanderung: Die Ostgermanen* (2d ed., Munich, 1941), 107, 535–55; and Ernst Schwarz, *Germanische Stammeskunde zwischen den Wissenschaften* (Constance, 1967), 51–52.

⁸⁹ Procopius *Bellum Vandalicum* 1. 2. 2–5, trans. Dewing, 9–11.

of nations.”⁹⁰ The resources of Greco-Roman learning at the command of Justinian’s contemporaries were entirely adequate to evoke a majestic panorama that no one before had ever seen. What its authors could hardly have imagined was the amazing fortune that their vision of the barbarian past would enjoy among future generations. Perhaps the most enduring conquest of the age of Justinian was the one that its historians were allowed to make by a posterity whose longing for ancient roots far from the Mediterranean disposed it to ignore the curiously Byzantine source of such wisdom.⁹¹

WHEN ALFONS DOPSCH SAID, “The conquest of the Roman Empire took place on different lines from the conquest of other states in political history,” he expressed in weak language a dilemma that many other historians have confronted in late antiquity.⁹² How can one fail to be puzzled? A great empire was bordered by fragmented neighbors whose turbulence it had kept for centuries from getting out of hand; its western provinces came under alien control with frequent assistance from the imperial government; the steps involved in bringing about the fall of the empire were so gradual that the process extended over two hundred years; and, even after imperial rule had gone, the remaining Romance population and its culture had a dominant part in the early medieval development of the west. To more than one author, “conquest” hardly seemed the right word to express so prolonged and ambiguous a process. The chronicle of St. Jerome notes a Roman success of 373 against barbarians on the Rhine frontier: “The Saxons were slaughtered at Deutz in the region of Franks.” Another Christian Latin author, three and a half centuries later, portrayed a slightly different cast of characters acting out the very same drama: “When the fervently pagan Saxons . . . rebelled, Charles [Martel] called up the Frankish army, came to the place where the Lippe joins the Rhine [about fifty miles north of Deutz], quickly crossed it and laid waste to that region with frightful thoroughness.”⁹³ In view of such persistence in behavior, is there much point in our believing that the imperialism of Rome had withdrawn over the centuries to a solitary perch in Constantinople?

If historical change is what we are looking for, another dimension of events needs to enter our range of vision. Many thoughtful men—ancient, medieval, and modern—have shared our conviction, however implausible it may be, that “the crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind” do indeed form intelligible and meaningful patterns. Our opportunity to come to terms with change lies

⁹⁰ Jordanes *Getica* 25, trans. Mierow, 57. I have made a small change in the translation.

⁹¹ For this longing, see note 31, page 285, above. For an important account of the historiography of the *Völkerwanderung*, see Hans Messmer, *Hispania-Idee und Gotenmythos* (Zurich, 1960), 9–12, 43–57. The modern version was launched by the Viennese physician and Habsburg court historian Wolfgang Lazius; see his *De gentium aliquot migrationibus* (Basle, 1557). Each of the twelve books of Lazius’s work is assigned to one tribal group, with an appropriate illustration of ethnic costume.

⁹² Dopsch, *Economic and Social Foundations of European Civilization*, 386.

⁹³ Jerome *Chronicon*, ed. Rudolf Helm (Berlin, 1956), 246; and Fredegar *Chronica, Continuationes* 19, ed. and trans. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill (London, 1960), 93. I have made minor changes in the translation of Fredegar. The same phenomenon can be set in archaeological perspective; see Edward James, “Cemeteries and the Frankish Settlement in Gaul,” in P. H. Sawyer, ed., *Names, Words, and Graves* (Leeds, 1979), 55–89.

principally in the wondrous variety and mutability of human opinion. In the context of this essay, a pertinent example concerns Alaric's seizure of Rome in 410. The event immediately moved Jerome and Augustine to speak, and the magnificent flow of their oratory would assure us that the incident had few equals in world history even if neither one had expressly said so. Besides, a careful near-contemporary record of the circumstances was set down by Olympiodorus, and, though this is lost, major extracts survive in Sozomen and elsewhere. A century or so after Sozomen, however, when the church historians were turned into Latin, the account of 410 chosen for translation was not his but the brief, oversimplified summary of Socrates.⁹⁴ Even this was truer to fact than the almost comic version already current in Justinian's empire, which begins as follows: the people of Rome rioted, forcing the emperor Honorius to withdraw to Ravenna; enraged, he called General Alaric to come from Gaul with his troops to plunder the capital; Alaric came as bidden, but, instead of obeying Honorius, he conspired with the Romans, stole the emperor's treasure and sister, returned to Gaul, and so forth. This cheerful legend was the form *par excellence* in which Byzantium chose to remember 410.⁹⁵ Naturally, there is much more to the event than this. It suffices to remember that Alaric's deed, misdated to 412, was central to Flavio Biondo's theme of the *inclinatio imperii Romani*, itself stated near the start of a line of reflection and study that culminated in Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.⁹⁶

The present essay has sought to interpret the role of the barbarians in late antiquity by integrating the record of human opinions more closely with the unfolding of events than was done, for example, by Pierre Courcelle's important *Histoire littéraire des grandes invasions germaniques*.⁹⁷ Guided by a pattern of "ruin" suggested by Sulpicius Severus at the very time when danger threatened, it has explored the idea that "the entrance of the Germans into history" can be charted by the place they held, as barbarians or whatever, in the surviving utterances of contemporary observers. For the years from Constantine to the Lombard invasion of Italy—the age when Rome fell—our attention has centered on four questions: Why did the emperors respond more peacefully to barbarian attacks after 376 and 406 than their predecessors had in the third century? Why was it the western provinces of the empire that received autonomous barbarian garrisons? How did Constantinople arrive at the belief that the west had been lost to barbarian rulers? And where was our image of the earliest "barbarian west" originally drawn? The bond between such questions is that each one forces us to look elsewhere for answers than among the nonliterate barbarians.

The solutions found to these problems are neither complete nor final. To

⁹⁴ J. F. Matthews, "Olympiodorus of Thebes and the History of the West (A.D. 407–425)," *Journal of Roman Studies*, 60 (1970): 79–97. Cassiodorus-Epiphanius *Historia ecclesiastica tripartita* 11. 9 (written ca. 570).

⁹⁵ The legend is first found in Malalas *Chronographia*, ed. Dindorf, 349–50. It was known to Procopius, who believed it to be out of keeping with Honorius's character; *Bellum Vandalicum* 1. 2. 10. It is repeated, for example, by John of Nikiu, Theophanes, Zonaras, and Nicephorus Calistus.

⁹⁶ Mazzarino, *The End of the Ancient World*, 77–82; and Christopher Dawson, "Edward Gibbon," *British Academy, Proceedings*, 20 (1934): 159–80.

⁹⁷ Courcelle, *Histoire littéraire des grandes invasions germaniques* (1948; 3d ed., Paris, 1964). Courcelle seems never to have considered where his notion of the early Germans came from.

summarize them by way of conclusion would tend to suggest that simple formulas may be substituted for the complexities of three centuries. It is more appropriate to close by spelling out the premises that have governed the method rather than the substance of this inquiry. They are, in brief, that an empire whose influence was so profound and enduring as Rome's has to be approached with extraordinary respect for its solidity;⁹⁸ that we need to be guarded and very neutral in speaking about the "barbarian" neighbors of the empire as long as they are beyond our powers to grasp on terms of their choice; and, finally, that the best defense against anachronism is for us not only to be sensitive to the origin of our sources of information but also to integrate their perceptions into our vision of the events they commemorate. Even though the discussion ought never to end, it may be possible, at least for a while, to agree on the point of departure.

⁹⁸ Sir Ronald Syme, *Colonial Elites: Rome, Spain, and the Americas* (London, 1958), 4: "What Rome achieved tends to be ignored."