

Interrogating the 'Germanic'

Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde



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und Steffen Patzold

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Interrogating the 'Germanic'



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and the Early Middle Ages

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James M. Harland and Matthias Friedrich

Introduction: The ‘Germanic’ and its Discontents

The origins of this volume lie in a chance meeting between the two editors, while both were postgraduate students at the University of York in 2015. A copy of another volume from the RGA *Ergänzungsbände*, Philipp von Rummel’s groundbreaking *Habitus barbarus*, is ultimately responsible.¹ One, walking by the other’s desk, spied a copy of that volume, and expressed surprise that a British scholar should have interest in archaeological research coming out of Freiburg, which has been notable in Germany in recent years for its challenges to interpretative paradigms regarding ethnic and cultural identity in the late Roman and early medieval periods.² Neither of us had met at this point, and Friedrich quickly outed himself as a Freiburg graduate. Harland was shocked meanwhile, that he had not only encountered another graduate student of late antique ‘Germanic’ archaeology (neither of us, ironically, were based in York’s Department of Archaeology and students of this theme were in any case rare in York at the time), but one who might actually *agree* with him about the problems with using such labels at all.

This event (and, specifically, the excitement at finding a fellow dissenter) highlights how isolating it can feel to be sceptical about the notion of ‘Germanic antiquity’ today. This is a puzzling situation, because doubt about the validity of such an analytical framework is hardly new. The modern cultural construct of the ‘Germanic’ is an invention of the early modern period, and owes its origins to the rediscovery, in the fifteenth century, of Tacitus’s *Germania*. As Stefan Donecker shows us in his article for this volume, even the early modern humanists who attempted to establish and identify ‘Germanic’ ethnographic traits struggled, despite their seemingly rich source

1 Philipp von Rummel, *Habitus barbarus: Kleidung und Repräsentation spätantiker Eliten im 4. und 5. Jahrhundert*, *Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde* 55 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007)

2 For the Freiburg School, see, e.g., Sebastian Brather, *Ethnische Interpretationen in der Frühgeschichtlichen Archäologie*, *Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 42 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004); Philipp von Rummel, “Gotisch, barbarisch oder römisch? Methodologische Überlegungen zur ethnischen Interpretation von Kleidung,” in *Archaeology of Identity/Archäologie der Identität*, edited by Walter Pohl and Mathias Mehofer (Vienna: Verlag ÖAW, 2010), 52–53; Guy Halsall, “Commentary Two: Careful with that Axe, Eugenius,” in *Cemeteries and Society in Merovingian Gaul: Selected Studies in History and Archaeology, 1992–2009* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 131–68; For the historiographical origins of modern ‘Germanic’ archaeology, Bonnie Effros, *Uncovering the Germanic Past* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012). For more critical views of the Freiburg School, cf. e.g. Florin Curta, “Medieval Archaeology and Ethnicity: Where are We?,” *History Compass* 9, no. 7 (2011): 537–48 or Curta, “The Elephant in the Room: A Reply to Sebastian Brather,” *Ephemeris Napocensis* 23 (2013): 163–74.

material, to reconcile a variety of competing narratives (which ranged from the biblical to the Hellenistic) with the new notions of autochthony that the “Tacitean paradigm” introduced. This struggle resulted in a vision of the *Germani* that might, Donecker suggests below, have been rather more fluid than the stable ethnonationalist categories which became fixed after the professionalisation of scientific philology in the nineteenth century.

That such a struggle existed from the earliest stages of the invention of the notion of a ‘Germanic’ people can today feel difficult to believe. For many, late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages *were* the ‘Germanic world’. The fourth to sixth centuries CE are usually portrayed, certainly in the popular imagination, and all too frequently in scholarly discourse, as a period in which all-conquering ‘Germanic’ barbarians from the distant north overran and demolished the Western Roman Empire, before founding new successor kingdoms in its ruins.³ But there is considerable debate concerning this range of historiographical assertions. Doubt concerning what we now consider to be the traditional narratives of *Völkerwanderung* emerged at the very latest in the early modern period and maintained a continual presence in historiographical discourse into the nineteenth century, in reaction to historical analyses which increasingly relied upon these narratives to rationalise German and English nationalism. The French historian, Numa-Denis Fustel de Coulange, for example, severely doubted the scale and impact of ‘Germanic’ migration that had been proposed by his German contemporaries, and this perspective can scarcely be separated from his hostility toward German expansionism in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War.⁴ Such tendencies were a minority view outside of France, and it must be emphasised that such dissenting views had very little to do with challenging of the epistemological or ethical difficulties inherent to *germanische Altertumskunde*. They were rather themselves fuelled by a nationalism no less pernicious than that of the German variety. Indeed, Bonnie Effros has recently suggested that through clinging to such anti-Germanist narratives, French scholarship produced an “absence of tenable narrative about Germanic grave goods in France”, which “provided German nationalist scholars with an opening that allowed them to exploit these significant gaps”.⁵

The legacy of such processes is still felt. The general tendency in humanities scholarship is, arguably, still simply to assume that the ‘Germanic’ is a self-explanatory

³ For an overview of this widespread and popular notion, see Guy Halsall, “Two Worlds Become One: A ‘Counter-Intuitive’ View of the Roman Empire and ‘Germanic’ Migration,” *German History* 32, no. 4 (2014): 515–32, 515–19.

⁴ Numa-Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *L’invasions germaniques et la fin de l’Empire* (Paris: Hachette, 1904); Walter Goffart, “Rome’s Final Conquest: The Barbarians,” *History Compass* 6, no. 3 (2008): 855–83, here 858–59; Ian N. Wood, *The Modern Origins of the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013), 174–91.

⁵ Effros, *Uncovering the Germanic Past*, 365.

label, which accurately describes phenomena including identities, social, cultural or political groups, to material cultural artefacts, languages and texts, and even specific chemical sequences found in human DNA. We need only to consider a few examples to demonstrate just how pervasively this assumption still persists: an archaeological excavation took place over the summer of 2018 near the village of Scremby, Lincolnshire, in eastern England. The excavation was led by the Department of Archaeology at the University of Sheffield, and the excavators discovered an inhumation cemetery which contained numerous inhumations with grave-goods typically associated with early ‘Anglo-Saxon’⁶ material culture. For the directors of the excavation not just these grave-goods, but the development of the cemetery in general, could be described, in a press release from late 2018, as being clearly associated with “the early centuries of the Germanic migrations to eastern England”.⁷

The treatment of the ‘Germanic’ as an axiomatic assumption has also found favour in publication outlets usually dedicated to the natural sciences. In particular, in articles concerned with using ancient and modern genomic evidence to answer questions about historic population movement and ethnic change. There has been an enormous increase in studies drawing upon such work in order to study the so-called ‘Migration Period’ in the past decade, and one still frequently finds references to ‘Germanic peoples’ in such works.⁸ Indeed, when trying to discuss the aspects of historic ancestry that might be demonstrated by the modern DNA samples that they have studied, Leslie *et al.* even go so far as to refer to the putative

6 This term, too, is one fraught with great difficulty due to its use as a racial classification in order to justify white supremacism and colonialism. The most comprehensive and up-to-date survey and analytical intervention on this issue is Matthew X. Vernon, *The Black Middle Ages: Race and the Construction of the Middle Ages*, The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), especially 1–28. See also, e. g., María José Mora and María José Gómez-Calderón, “The Study of Old English in America (1776–1850): National Uses of the Saxon Past,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 97, no. 3 (1998): 322–36, and Howard Williams, “Burnt Germans’, Alemannic Graves and the Origins of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology,” in *Zweiundvierzig. Festschrift für Michael Gebühr zum 65. Geburtstag*, edited by Stefan Burmeister, Heidrun Derks and Jasper von Richthofen (Rahden, Westf.: Leidorf, 2007): 229–38. Susan Reynolds, “What Do We Mean by ‘Anglo-Saxon’ and ‘Anglo-Saxons’?,” *Journal of British Studies* 24, no. 4 (1985): 395–414.

7 University of Sheffield, “Remains of an Anglo-Saxon Cemetery Discovered,” 27 November 2018. Available at: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/news/nr/remains-anglo-saxon-cemetery-discovered-1.818242>, accessed 29 March 2019.

8 E. g. Stephen Leslie *et al.*, “The Fine-Scale Genetic Structure of the British Population,” *Nature* 519 (2015), 309–14. Stephan Schiffels and Duncan Sayer, “Investigating Anglo-Saxon Migration History with Ancient and Modern DNA,” in *Migration und Integration von Urgeschichte bis zum Mittelalter/Migration and Integration from Prehistory to the Middle Ages*, edited by Harald Meller, Falko Daim, Johannes Krause and Roberto Rische. Tagungen des Landesmuseums für Vorgeschichte Halle (Saale) 17 (Halle: Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie Sachsen-Anhalt, 2017); Carlos Eduardo G. Amorim *et al.*, “Understanding 6th-century Barbarian Social Organization and Migration through Paleogenomics,” *Nature Communications* 9, no. 3457 (2019).

‘Germanic ancestry’ of the descendants of so-called ‘Anglo-Saxon’ migrants as a phenomenon that would be manifest in the survival of particular genetic haplotypes in the modern population.⁹ The persistence of such assumptions in outlets such as *Nature* is at least seeming to cause discomfort among some researchers, as the journal recently felt the need to publish a statement on “the use and abuse of ancient DNA”. In this statement, *Nature*’s editorial board directly expressed concern about the possibility for this research to be used in a similar manner to that in which the Culture Historical framework, devised by Gustaf Kossinna, was employed by the Third Reich. The statement recognises the risk that such studies pose for the potential non-empirical reification of putative ethnic groups from the ‘Migration Period’. The editors thus urge researchers to do more to refute the deployment of genetic evidence in manners “that can be used politically to justify disrespect, or worse, to groups of people.”¹⁰

The letters ‘RGA’, which emblazon the spine of this volume, are also testimony to the dominance of the ‘Germanic’. The *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde* first began as an encyclopaedical project initiated by Johannes Hoops (1865–1949), professor of English philology at Heidelberg, in 1908 with four volumes published between 1911 and 1919,¹¹ which aimed at providing a “compendium of the culture of the Germanic peoples from most ancient times until the end of the Old High German, Old Low German, and Old English period”.¹² The chronological and geographical scope of the RGA increased significantly with the introduction of the second edition in 1973, of which the last volume was published in 2007 amounting to a total number of 35 volumes.¹³ In 2010 the RGA reached the World Wide Web as *Germanische Altertumskunde Online* (GAO) providing the full text of the second edition

9 Leslie *et al.*, “Fine-Scale Genetic Structure”: “The Germanic ancestry these migrations brought to what is now France would have been Frankish, rather than Saxon [...] it thus seems unlikely that ancestry in the UK arising from the Saxon migrations would be better captured by FRA17 than by people now living near the homeland of the Saxons (represented by GER3) [...]”

10 “Editorial: Use and abuse of ancient DNA,” *Nature* 555 (2018): 559.

11 Heinrich Beck, s.v. “Hoops, Johannes,” in *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, 15: 109–11.

12 On the history of the RGA, see Rudolf Schieffer, “Das “Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde” in der Typologie geisteswissenschaftlicher Enzyklopädien,” in *Altertumskunde, Altertumswissenschaft, Kulturwissenschaft: Erträge und Perspektiven nach 40 Jahren Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, edited by Heinrich Beck, Dieter Geuenich and Heiko Steuer, Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde 77 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 5–19: “Das Reallexikon soll eine Gesamtdarstellung der Kultur der germanischen Völker von den ältesten Zeiten bis zum Ende der althochdeutschen, altniederdeutschen und altenglischen Periode [...] geben.”

13 Cf. Heiko Steuer, “Ein wissenschaftliches Großprojekt ist abgeschlossen: Das Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde,” *Archäologisches Nachrichtenblatt* 13 (2008): 309–11; Timo Stickler, “Zum Abschluß des Reallexikons der Germanischen Altertumskunde,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 292, no. 1 (2011): 125–32.

print volumes, while new *lemmata* are being published online only. Here, the present editors of the RGA take a different stand from the original aims of the RGA first and second editions:

The question of “what we may describe as ‘Germanic’” had already become a problem for the editors by the second edition. Today the concept remains important for linguistics, but is no longer useful for archaeology or history. It is thus difficult at present to speak of an interdisciplinary *germanische Altertumskunde*. In any case, the temporal, geographical and content-related boundaries of this encyclopaedia are not defined by the notion of “Germans” as the bearers of a particular culture.¹⁴

The current volume has to be seen in the light of such critical approaches towards the ‘Germanic’. Both editors felt that, given this situation, and the sheer volume of historiographical work that appears to have continually been ignored in certain spheres of so-called ‘Germanic’ studies, a conference had to be organised to bring together (we hoped) sceptics alongside champions of the ‘Germanic’ paradigm, to make an attempt at producing a statement on the current state of the field. The resulting conference, ‘Interrogating the Germanic: A Category and its Use in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages’, was held at the University of York from the 13th to the 15th of May, 2016. The conference brought together twenty-three speakers of no fewer than ten nationalities, working in the fields of history, archaeology, linguistics, literature, numismatics, and art history. We discussed the relevance, applicability, and legitimacy, of using the ‘Germanic’ paradigm in our respective fields, attempting to establish an interdisciplinary channel of communication through which to determine why a term which in some fields could function simply as a categorisation for a set of characteristics could in other disciplines function as a highly charged, arguably dangerous, set of political ideas. Across the following pages we present fourteen articles based upon papers delivered at that conference.

The event was originally conceived as a follow-up to a conference held at the University of Toronto at the turn of the new millennium, resulting in a volume published by Brepols under the title *On Barbarian Identity* in 2002.¹⁵ This volume was explicitly framed as the first major volume in English-language scholarship dedicated to

14 “Schon für diese zweite Fassung war es für die Herausgeber ‘ein Problem geworden, was wir als ‘germanisch’ bezeichnen dürfen’ (Vorwort 1972). Heute ist der Begriff zwar in der Sprachwissenschaft nach wie vor bedeutsam, in der Archäologie und der Geschichtswissenschaft aber analytisch nicht mehr fruchtbar. Es ist daher gegenwärtig schwer, eine ‘germanische Altertumskunde’ interdisziplinär zu definieren. ‘Germanen’ als Trägergruppen einer Kultur jedenfalls können weder zeitliche noch geographische noch inhaltliche Grenzen des Lexikons klar bezeichnen.” Heinrich Beck, Sebastian Brather, Dieter Geuenich, Wilhelm Heizmann, Steffen Patzold, and Heiko Steuer, “Vorwort,” *Germanische Altertumskunde Online* (2013). Available at: <https://www.degruyter.com/databasecontent?dbid=gao&dbsource=/db/gao>, accessed June 2019.

15 Andrew Gillett, ed., *On Barbarian Identity: Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002).

responding to (and critiquing) popular developments on the study of late antique ethnicity (and its relationship with *germanische Altertumskunde*) that had been developed under Herwig Wolfram and his students at the University of Vienna (building, of course, on the work of Reinhard Wenskus).¹⁶ Early medieval scholarship does not need another summary of the Toronto/Vienna debate. Such summaries are numerous and detailed, and would not be improved upon by further detailed elucidation here.¹⁷ But the debate is relevant here for two reasons: the first is that many sub-fields of early medieval scholarship appear either to have ignored, or else completely misunderstood, the attack made by the Toronto School upon the legitimacy of treating ‘Germanic’ identity as a coherent phenomenon. This attack, for all the controversies the attack provoked, and targets sometimes unjustly caught in the authors’ line of fire, was surely just. The blistering criticisms of such scholars as Walter Goffart or Alexander Murray highlight the absurdity of believing that scant traces in later literary sources give us windows into a broader, late antique pan-Germanic *ethos* for which the late antique source material provides decidedly no evidence,¹⁸ yet in studies ranging from philology to archaeology, such assumptions remain, as we have seen, firmly embedded in contemporary scholarship.

The second reason the Toronto/Vienna debate matters to this volume is because of the considerable controversy and acrimony that it produced. The ferocity of the attack launched by the Toronto-based scholars against members of the Vienna School was exceptional, associating *Traditionskern* Ethnogenesis Theory with intellectual traditions associated with the Third Reich. Some of the arguments of the volume’s authors occasionally veered into territory which risked asserting, baselessly, that members of the Vienna School harboured sympathies for that awful regime, and it is rumoured that the original draft of certain essays in the *On Barbarian Identity* volume had to be edited to avoid making such explicitly libellous allegations. For many of us who came of age as scholars in the wake of this conflict, it is difficult to see how such allegations were possible. Later products of the Vienna School such as Walter Pohl, for example, had clearly committed themselves to dismantling the notion of a unified

16 Reinhard Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung: Das Werden der Frühmittelalterlichen Gentes* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1961); Herwig Wolfram, *Geschichte der Goten, von den Anfängen bis zur Mitte des sechsten Jahrhunderts: Entwurf einer historischen Ethnographie* (Munich: Beck, 1979); Walter Pohl, “Introduction,” in *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of the Ethnic Communities, 300–800*, edited by Walter Pohl and Helmut Reimitz (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 1–15.

17 In English, see, e.g. Guy Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), 14–19, 457–70, and Michael Kulikowski, this volume. In German, the most useful account is Mischa Meier, *Geschichte der Völkerwanderung: Europa, Asien und Afrika vom 3. bis zum 8. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2019), 61–74.

18 Walter Goffart, “Does the Distant Past Impinge upon the Invasion Age Germans,” in Gillett, *On Barbarian Identity*, 21–38; Alexander Callander Murray, “Reinhard Wenskus on ‘Ethnogenesis,’” in Gillett, *On Barbarian Identity*, 39–68.

'Germanic' ethos in their other works.¹⁹ Moreover, the set of ideas which are, rightly or wrongly, labelled by Toronto as '*Traditionskern* Ethnogenesis Theory', whatever its faults, was surely a horrified reaction against the evil to which notions of *germanische Altertumskunde* had lent ideological justification under the Nazi regime.²⁰ Moreover, some of the charges brought forward by Toronto about this work, such as those relating to the arguments of Walter Pohl, are demonstrably false.²¹

Guy Halsall has pointed out that the hostility of the 'Toronto' School to the output from Vienna appears to stem more from what the latter *fails* to say, rather than the statements they explicitly make about differences between ethnic and non-ethnic identities in the late antique world. But as Halsall points out, such silences are no less present in the work of Toronto scholars, and a reading which attributes to the work of Walter Pohl an active support for the ideas which underpinned the Third Reich is quite misleading, to say the least! Nevertheless, even if one believes the Toronto reading to be a distortion, it is at least possible to understand how Toronto scholars were able to identify what they believed to be the ghosts of older historiographical tendencies in the work of the Vienna School.²²

The debate has moved on, and it is more important than ever to ensure that we integrate our critiques into a new set of interpretative methods, rather than continue rehashing old arguments. Broadly speaking, advocates of both camps have shared goals, and oppose the racist and ethnonationalist agendas which draw upon interpretations of the late antique world as an ideological resource. Someone often perceived as a member of the Toronto School due to his participation in *On Barbarian Identity* is Michael Kulikowski (though he would protest this designation). In his opening article to this volume he notes that the 'formative dogma' which framed the research responsible for so much of this vitriol has vanished. A more sociologically-attuned early medieval studies now more confidently faces the complexities posed by late antique conceptual categories. Otávio Luiz Vieira Pinto outlines in his contribution how much of the current scholarship on 'barbarian' ethnicity derives from a need to reconcile the 'primordialist' understanding of ethnicity

19 Walter Pohl, *Die Germanen*, 2nd ed., *Enzyklopädie deutscher Geschichte* 57 (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2004), 50–51.

20 Pohl's own response is instructive with regard to just how poorly the attacks against him seem to have understood much of his argument. Walter Pohl, "Ethnicity, Theory, and Tradition: A Response," in Gillett, *On Barbarian Identity*, 221–40.

21 See Walter Pohl, "Von der Ethnogenese zur Identitätsforschung," *Neue Wege der Frühmittelalterforschung: Bilanz und Perspektiven*, edited by Walter Pohl, Maximilian Diesenberger and Bernhard Zeller (Vienna: Verlag ÖAW, 2018), 9–34, 16–30, for his most recent, comprehensive rebuttal of the attacks made on him by Toronto.

22 An explicit attempt at reconciling the two camps can be found in Guy Halsall, "Transformations of Romanness: The Northern Gallic Case," in *Transformations of Romanness: Early Medieval Regions and Identities*, edited by Walter Pohl, Clemens Gantner, Cinzia Grifoni, and Marianne Pollheimer-Mohaupt, *Millennium-Studien* 71 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 41–58.

which seemed to early twentieth-century scholars to so well reflect what was available in the source material with many of the problems with understanding that source material to accurately depict such phenomena. Pinto proposes that we can treat ethnic identity as ‘fictive’, a construct sometimes more imposed upon those it seeks to describe than necessarily descriptive of their own self-identification, a move that would well align with recent trends in ethnic sociology which appeal that we cease to rely on the statements of the emic member of a self-proclaimed ethnic group, and suggest we should not assume that group’s actual existence outside the reality of those proclamations.²³ Such approaches to ethnic sociology show that we no longer need to take lumps out of each other over the unprovable conviction that the work of Herwig Wolfram might be clandestinely harbouring some of the more unsavoury ideas of Otto Brunner.

Moreover, there are real targets of concern, against whom we would do better to direct our critical efforts. Our awareness of the dangers posed by previous interpretative approaches to the early Middle Ages has only sharpened since the papers contained in this volume were first presented in May 2016. The subsequent years have witnessed the US president Donald Trump’s increased courting of white nationalists. In August 2017, his supporters marched through Charlottesville, Virginia, and intimidated and assaulted people of colour, Jews, and members of the LGBTQ+ community, all the while chanting “Jews will not replace us”. As they did so, they carried shields which bore such emblems as the Odal Rune and the Sonnenrad, iconic symbols from the Third Reich, representing the Nazis’ fascination with the Germanic occult.²⁴

These symbols still represent very real, murderous violence. Shortly after the thorough routing of the fascists in Charlottesville by counter-protestors, a white supremacist in attendance at the rally ploughed his car into a crowd of peaceful counter-protestors, in the process murdering 32-year-old Heather Heyer and injuring 28 others. The perpetrator, James Alex Fields Jr. (who was already known in high school for his National Socialist beliefs) had earlier that day been photographed bearing a shield emblazoned with the logo of Vanguard America. This relatively young neo-Nazi organisation has called for “race war”, and espouses a

²³ Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Harvard, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2004); Andreas Wimmer, *Ethnic Boundary Making: Institutions, Power, Networks* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013).

²⁴ The Odal Rune was originally simply a means in the elder Futhark of representing the letter ‘o’. It was used by two Waffen-SS divisions during the Second World War, and has subsequently become immensely popular among white supremacist and neo-Nazi movements, possibly due to it being a more inconspicuous signifier than the Swastika. The Sonnenrad is a well-known item of Nazi iconography, consisting of 12 mirrored ‘sig’ runes, which formed part of a mosaic in Wewelsburg, a castle refurbished by Heinrich Himmler. The symbol may owe its inspiration to early medieval ‘Alemannic’ *Zierscheiben*. Cf. Alexandra Pesch and Sigmund Oerhl, “Runen, Thorshämmer und Schwarze Sonnen: Rezeption und Missbrauch frühgeschichtlicher Symbole und Zeichen,” *Archäologische Nachrichten Schleswig-Holstein* (2017): 110–21.

typically Third Reich-inspired ideology, epitomised by its “Blood and Soil” motto. Its members are sometimes seen bearing flags depicting a *Sonnenrad* superimposed over the stripes of the United States’ flag.²⁵ The worst crimes produced by the ethnonationalist obsession with *germanische Altertumskunde* continue to haunt us. If there is any area of scholarship where we would do well to direct our critical efforts, it is surely toward the recent attempts to apply the use of ancient and modern genetic material to the study of the distant past with regard to questions of migration, mobility, and ethnic identity, that have already been outlined.²⁶ The considerable interest the far-right have shown in this research, or, more usually, in response to the widely shared reports on it found in mainstream media outlets, is substantial and as Susanne Hakenbeck has recently demonstrated, still growing. As Hakenbeck points out, “[s]cholars working on genomic population histories have so far not engaged enough with the wider social context in which their work is received”.²⁷ The possible consequences of the emergence of a new scholarly hegemony, which seeks to unify questions of the ‘Germanic’ past with cutting-edge DNA technology, the collection of the modern population’s DNA data in mass databases owned by private, unaccountable multi-national corporations, as well as the mass surveillance of social media and the manipulation of populations via such media, that we now know to be undertaken both by governmental and extra-governmental organisations, when all considered in unison, are utterly chilling. It does not take much to envisage how these practices could be harnessed to the ethnonationalist and eugenicist ideologies of extermination that caused so much harm in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; surely the stuff of nightmares. For scholars of ancient genetics to engage with the historical contexts to which Hakenbeck refers to is surely a solemn duty, if we are to avert such disastrous possibilities.

The irony, of course, is that those who would cite the ‘Germanic’ past to justify their modern ethnochauvinism are simply repeating fictions that were no less malleable or fluid in antiquity than they are today.²⁸ Roland Steinacher’s article demonstrates that descriptions of *Germani/Germanoi* always, even from their early uses by

25 “Vanguard America”, *Anti-Defamation League*. Available at: <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/vanguard-america>, accessed March 2019.

26 Sebastian Brather, “New Questions instead of Old Answers: Archaeological Expectations of aDNA Analysis,” *Medieval Worlds* 4 (2016): 5–21.

27 Susanne E. Hakenbeck, “Genetics, Archaeology, and the Far-Right: An Unholy Trinity,” *World Archaeology* 51, no. 4 (2019): 6.

28 Useful overviews of classical ethnography and the study of race in Antiquity include the introduction and collected sources found in Rebecca F. Kennedy, C. Sydnor Roy and Max L. Goldman, eds. and trans., *Race and Ethnicity in the Classical World: An Anthology of Primary Sources in Translation* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2013) as well as the articles in Rebecca F. Kennedy and Molly Jones-Lewis, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Identity and the Environment in the Classical and Medieval Worlds* (London: Routledge 2016). For an overview of classical ethnography, notions of identity, and their relation to late Antiquity specifically see Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, 35–62.

Julius Caesar, served as a tool for specific purposes in Roman political affairs, which varied immensely based upon situation and circumstance but could always be identified as a construct which does not especially reflect any real sense of unity on the ground. This being the case, the articles in this volume mostly reject the ‘Germanic’ as a meaningful and useful analytical category in application to phenomena from the late antique and early medieval past, but there are two major obstacles which should be overcome in order for such a goal to be feasible. The first obstacle is a question of empiricism, as appeals to jettison the ‘Germanic’ label are always met by the countering claim that such appeals allegedly fly in the face of the empirical reality of what we find in the evidence from our period of study. Archaeologically it is remarkably easy to demonstrate this not to be the case. Since the post-processual advances of the 1980s and 90s, archaeology has become very comfortable with the idea that ethnic identity is a situational construct; archaeologists now treat the material cultures which survive to us today not as the passive reflection of static social groups but as active materials which were (and are) used to shape the societies which use them. Nevertheless, the implications of this position are not always taken to their logical conclusion: accepting that ethnic identity is a situational construct necessitates accepting that it is impossible to demonstrate the presence of ethnic (and thus ‘Germanic’) sentiment, *prima facie*, through purely archaeological means.²⁹

Such observations have always been rather more difficult for linguists and philologists to accept, and not without good reason, as the materials with which these scholars are concerned tend to offer what usually looks, at first glance, like quite compelling evidence for ‘Germanic’ cultural unity. Whole corpuses of poetry and literature exist which appear, both through their structural frameworks and via the cultural references which they deploy, to point to conscious cultural links shared between diverse, sometimes distant, parts of the so-called ‘Germanic’ world.³⁰

For the high Middle Ages see Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2018), especially 1–14 and 15–54. For the most recent statement on questions of the study of race in the early Middle Ages, see Nicole Lopez-Jantzen, “Between Empires: Race and ethnicity in the early middle ages,” *Literature Compass* 16, no. 9–10 (2019), which makes a compelling case for following the lead of Classical Studies and Later Medieval Studies by introducing Critical Race Theory to the study of late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages.

29 On this problem see Siân Jones, *The Archaeology of Ethnicity: Constructing Identities in the Past and Present* (London: Routledge, 1997), Bonnie Effros, “Dressing Conservatively: Women’s Brooches as Markers of Ethnic Identity?,” in *Gender in the early Medieval World: East and West*, 600–900, edited by Leslie Brubaker and Julia M.H. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), 165–184, Sebastian Brather, *Ethnische Interpretationen*, and Guy Halsall, “Ethnicity and Early Medieval Cemeteries,” *Arqueología y Territorio Medieval* 18 (2011), 15–27.

30 This assumption is so widespread and firmly embedded in axiomatic assumptions that it is difficult to point to specific examples, but a good instance might be Brian Murdoch, *The Germanic Hero: Politics*

Alexandra Pesch, for example, defines this 'Germanic' world as "as a region (also known more generally as 'Germania') where groups of Barbarians lived that are defined by their related Germanic language".³¹ But here, too, empiricism is not so great an obstacle as it may seem, and the authors in this volume who deal with literary and linguistic material demonstrate in diverse ways that this putative coherence is anything but real. Ludwig Rübekil subjects a series of Germanic-seeming words from classical antiquity to careful philological analysis, in order to explore just to what degree historiographical ethnic data can be reconciled with linguistic changes, drawing upon a careful historiographical analysis to deal with the difficulty that all of our preserved early Germanic words are transmitted through Latin source material. His results do not suggest the existence of a straightforward relationship between Germanic language and a coherent cultural identity, but this does not mean that valuable information about the relationship between modes of speech and possible cultural groups cannot be found—Rübekil clearly demonstrates dialectical differences that might originate from such group variation, for example. Erin Sebo takes us much further forward in time, to explore the Old English epic *Beowulf*. She demonstrates that notions of an overarching 'Germanic' system of honour, derived from a Tacitean model, cannot be found in the text. She suggests, furthermore, that if such a code were at play in the society described by the *Beowulf* poet, it would have been enormously damaging. Nelson Goering's article, meanwhile, ties the implications of Rübekil's philological and Sebo's literary analyses together. He offers an explanation for how cultural references which appear (at face value) to be coherent, and how the poetic structures by which they were conveyed, may have come to be utilised by the diverse peoples who spoke Germanic languages across the first millennium AD, without this requiring us to assume that this indicates some form of shared cultural identity which Germanic speakers possessed.

A second obstacle is the proposal that we cannot simply jettison labels which are so firmly embedded within the discipline's discursive frameworks, however much we might wish to. Michael Kulikowski's opening to this volume, printed in the form of the keynote which he delivered at the conference, tackles this issue by highlighting that we need to develop an alternative form of adequate language to tackle the very real differences that we do perceive in cultural phenomena, without re-inscribing the essentialising assumptions that are usually relied upon to achieve this task. Otherwise,

and Pragmatism in Early Medieval Poetry (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996). See also, Wilhelm Heizmann and Sigmund Oehrl, eds., *Bilddenkmäler zur germanischen Götter- und Heldensage, Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde* 91 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 1–2.

³¹ Alexandra Pesch, "The Impact of 'Wyrms': Germanic Snakes, Drakes, Saurians and Worms in the First Millennium AD," in *Tiere und Tierdarstellungen in der Archäologie: Beiträge zum Kolloquium in Gedenken an Torsten Capelle, 30.–31. Oktober 2015 in Herne*, edited by Vera Brieske, Aurelia Dickers and Michael M. Rind (Münster: Aschendorff, 2017), 247, n. 1.

as he puts it, “the disciplines and subdisciplines represented in this volume [...] may continue to imagine that they are in dialogue with one another while in fact performing a pantomime – hewing to specialist technical vocabularies each with its synecdochic certainties, while in the world outside, others are ranting simplistically and dangerously about immigrant violence in the fifth century”.³² This problem—how to kick against the very discursive frameworks which enable one’s engagement with a particular phenomenon—has long been discussed by poststructuralist philosophers.³³ Cătălin Țăranu’s article in this volume explicitly draws upon their scholarship by using a Foucauldian analytical framework in order to offer a new means of working with these labels, without reifying them as stable, oppressive categories. For Țăranu, the problem of the ‘Germanic’ is not that it stands for something, but rather that it stands for too much. Like an overinflated balloon, all meanings funnelled into the ‘Germanic’ superstructure become too inextricably associated with it, precisely because the ‘Germanic’ signifier is, ultimately, entirely without absolute meaning. Țăranu thus proposes that whenever we make reference to the ‘Germanic’, we should both historicise the term and create a genealogy of the term. By this he means not a genealogy in the classic sense, but rather the term as applied by Michel Foucault: not a search for origins but for the relationships of hierarchy, contestations of power, etc. that operate in a given structure. Țăranu regards the ‘pan-Gothic’ milieu of the ninth-century Carolingian world as an ideal example to demonstrate these contestations at play. Drawing upon the analyses of the new Carolingian interest in *teutones* made by such scholars as Roberta Frank, Țăranu, like Steinacher, demonstrates the highly flexible and contingent nature of the ‘Germanic’ signifier.

Similarly, Veronika Egetenmeyr offers us a close textual reading of the use (or rather, the lack thereof) of such terms as *barbarus* and *germanus* in the literary works of the fifth-century Gallic senator and bishop, Sidonius Apollinaris. Drawing upon postcolonial theoretical approaches to depictions of ‘self’ and ‘other’, Egetenmeyr demonstrates that despite scarce reference to stark, explicit ‘barbarian’ terminology, Sidonius nevertheless constructs an ideological discursive narrative of ‘the barbarian’ through allusion, imagery and the use of metaphor, which clearly intersects with existing preconceptions of the ‘barbaric’ in Roman ideology. Egetenmeyr reveals how Sidonius’s deployment of this narrative transformed as the typical, normative Roman values of *paideia* came under increasing assault in the fluid, turbulent context of fifth-century Gaul. On this basis, Egetenmeyr argues that centuries of historiographical construction render our terminology inescapable. She therefore proposes that a more effective route out of our current bind is a methodology not unlike that proposed by Țăranu: careful, attentive analysis of the specific discursive contexts in which terminology was (and is) deployed, and their

³² Michael Kulikowski, this volume.

³³ See, e. g., Jacques Derrida, *De la Grammatologie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967).

chronological alteration. The need for careful contextualisation is also outlined by much of the archaeological work in the volume. Steve Walker takes issue with the depictions of stark British and Saxon ethnic conflict depicted in such literary source material as Gildas's *De Excidio et Conquest Britanniae* or Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, and his article offers a firm challenge to the notion that so-called 'Anglo-Saxon' material culture can be regarded as straightforwardly 'Germanic'. Walker's basis for this is empirical, and he argues that distribution patterns within which particular material cultural types appear do not appear to indicate straightforward patterns of division or ethnic strife, and Walker makes an appeal, on this basis, for the interpretation of early 'Anglo-Saxon' material culture as indicative of the formation of a new set of hybrid identities.

It can also be illuminative to contextualise the manuscripts in which the texts purported to evidence the 'Germanic' past are contained. Michael J. Kelly's paper explores the compilation and transmission of the codices, both medieval and early modern, which contained the text and first scholarly critical editions of the Visigothic *Liber Iudiciorum*. This complex set of legal codes had a history that defies a simplistic attribution of its texts to a 'Germanic' tradition. Kelly, like Donecker, reveals how the philosophies of history which concerned early modern editors were considerably divergent. The editions initially collated by Pierre Pithou, for example, firmly contextualised the *Liber Iudiciorum* in an Iberian, not a 'Germanic' context, and this context continued to frame the overarching interpretative framework applied to the text even as late as 1884, for the subsequent copies which were derived from this edition. It was only with Friedrich Lindenbrog's 1613 edition that the text became 'Germanicised'. Kelly shows the close relation of this 'Germanicisation' to the edition's political-ideological function as an explicitly secular text, which was aimed at lending glory to the contemporary Holy Roman imperial court. It was from this context that a historiographical divergence occurred between the text's German and 'Germanicized', and French, Flemish and Spanish 'Ibericized' editions, with the 'Germanic' form becoming firmly entrenched as authoritative in the nineteenth century.

The volume is not one of unanimous agreement. Some contributors feel that the implications of a poststructuralist analytical approach are that we must contest entirely the utility of using the term 'Germanic' at all. If we acknowledge that such philosophers as Michel Foucault or Jacques Derrida were profoundly empirical in their examination of texts, the implication of their insights is sometimes not merely that certain concepts are unstable, but lack any ontological foundation at all. James Harland's article relies upon the observation that all who attempt to demonstrate the presence of a coherent 'Germanic' ideology as part of the structuring framework of early Anglo-Saxon funerary ritual are making interpretative leaps, rather than successfully empirically demonstrating their assertions. This being the case, why *not*, his article proposes, jettison tiresome frameworks that do little to advance discussion?

These frameworks have, after all, caused very real harm.³⁴ Likewise, Sebastian Brather's contribution examines how nationalist rhetoric has continually shaped, even into the modern day, interpretations of the transformation of archaeological material from Eastern Central Europe. Brather reveals how dichotomies between 'Germanic' and 'Slavic' are unhelpful in actively researching the transformative processes which took place in funerary and settlement practices, not least because notions of 'Slavic' migration have very little basis in the contemporary source material from the period in which these transformations occurred. Brather and Harland therefore both argue that the 'Germanic' should be jettisoned in favour of the alternative interpretative routes which such notions have occluded. For Harland, possible alternatives include the transformation of normative civic Roman ideology, and its impact on social phenomena such as the construction of gender. Brather also suggests examining alternative levels of space (the local, the regional, and supra-regional) alongside questions of migration and mobility as divorced from ethnic change. The types of identities that these authors explore are rather more fragmentary, and more difficult to pin down, than the illusory secure identifications which the 'Germanic' framework attempts, unsuccessfully, to provide.

This book, too, represents a set of disparate fragments, and this is perhaps appropriate, given the multivalent and fragmentary nature of the concept that it concerns. Despite the best efforts of a variety of nationalist agendas, the concept defies being hammered into a coherent, singularly applicable form. This disparate nature of the concept is demonstrated well by the example of the emblematic Sutton Hoo helmet: this exceptional find combines archaeological and historical notions of the 'Germanic' whilst also being permeated by visual ideas regarding the putative 'Germanic' imagery which adorn the helmet. It is an artefact which encapsulates all disciplines that evolved to study the 'Germanic': history, archaeology, art history, and literature studies. Of these, it is the art historical legacy of the 'Germanic', especially, that is still under-represented in the scholarly discourse of late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages.³⁵ In an article published in 2014, Neil Price and Paul Mortimer argue that "the wearer of the [Sutton Hoo] helmet was seen as both war leader and war god, a literal personification of Odin".³⁶ Here, they combine different components of *Germanenbegriffe* into a single narrative of 'divine role-playing', basing

³⁴ James M. Harland, "Memories of Migration? The 'Anglo-Saxon' Burial Costume of the 5th Century AD," *Antiquity* 93, no. 370 (2019): 954–69. See also James M. Harland, *'Anglo-Saxons' and the Archaeology of Early Medieval Britain: A Modern Framework and its Problems* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam Univ. Press, in press).

³⁵ A recent attempt at filling this gap can be found in Matthias Friedrich, "Image, Ornament, and Aesthetics: The Archaeology of Art in the Merovingian World (c. AD 450–750)" (Dr. phil. diss., Albert-Ludwigs-Univ. Freiburg, 2019), esp. Chapter 1, "The Great Divide".

³⁶ Neil Price and Paul Mortimer, "An Eye for Odin? Divine Role-Playing in the Age of Sutton Hoo," *European Journal of Archaeology* 17, no. 3 (2014): 517–38, here 517.

their arguments entirely upon the only vaguely defined 'wider Germanic world', the controversial theory that practices of so-called 'sacral kingship' represented "genuine institutions [...] of early medieval northern Europe",³⁷ and Old Norse textual evidence about Odin: "In seeking a parallel for the one-eyed ruler figure in the traditional stories of this region, there is a single individual that springs instantly to mind: the Æsir god Odin".³⁸ The problem with this approach is not that the authors combine textual, visual, and archaeological evidence—the difficulty is that in their particular approach we find the 'mixing and matching' of pieces of evidence that are only loosely connected in time and space, and which appear to form a coherent set of facts only when interpreted through a 'pan-Germanic' lens. Such an approach is surely no longer tenable. This volume seeks, therefore, to take a few steps back from the 'Germanic'—that is, to review our terminology and its use more carefully—to move toward a more nuanced, less 'black-and-white' view of the late antique and early medieval worlds. We do not intend, nor do we believe that it is possible, to offer a definitive statement on applying the *Germanenbegriff* to the phenomena which function as source material from our periods of study. What we do hope to offer below is a collection of articles that are 'good to think with'. Perhaps they may encourage scholars to reconsider some of the analytical categories which have so often been treated as axiomatic in their respective fields. It is, after all, only through such reconsideration that we may hope to improve the quality of our analytical methodologies for the study of the past.

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³⁷ *Ibid.*, 518.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 532. For a more detailed discussion on the archaeological and historical problems connected with such an approach, see Friedrich, "Image, Ornament, and Aesthetics," Chapter 1.

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