Diskussionen

Germania and the *Germani* – where are we now?

By Roland Steinacher

For the 100th issue of a journal called "Germania" it seems appropriate to take another look at this and related terms, especially since several monographs, collected volumes, and exhibition catalogues have appeared in recent years that again question and scrutinise our understanding of ancient ethnic terminology. Generally speaking, the ancient world had a completely different view of ethnic terminology. Writers defined identities of human societies in the known world and bequeathed ethnonyms. Since the 6th and 5th centuries BCE, these categories were most often little more than learned constructions. For most Greek and Roman writers, categorising peoples north, east, and south of the Mediterranean basin simply meant distinguishing their ways of life from the urbanised civilisation they knew, and at the same time, disregarding the fact that farming communities in the Mediterranean did not really differ from the barbarian communities. Be it as it may, ethnonyms like Celts, Scyths, *Germani*, *Suebi*, *Mauri* and many others are highly problematic and not applicable in modern scholarly discourse without elaborately problematising them and their background[1].

One basic problem is that the use of the term *Germani* in antiquity was ambiguous from the beginning. At the same time, this exact ambiguity later formed the basis for a political and, later, nationalistic use, more or less clearly naming the ancestors of the modern German nation. Residua of this use and meaning of *Germani* are still in the back of the minds of the non-academic public.

In the following, I will discuss the tension between an archaeological and a historical use of the term *Germani* based on recent publications. These include the catalogue of the exhibition "Germanen. Eine archäologische Bestandsaufnahme" in Berlin and Bonn, Heiko Steuer's new book "'Germanen' aus Sicht der Archäologie", and "Interrogating the 'Germanic'" edited by Matthias Friedrich and James Harland, as well as other more or less recent publications[2]. I will do this as an historian critically commenting archaeological debates and points of view.

It can be observed that the debates of two decades ended up in a somehow paradoxical compromise. While many historians plead against further use of the umbrella term *Germani* to describe historical societies in antiquity and the Early Middle Ages[3], several other scholars not only continue

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[1] Gruen 2020 raises the question whether ethnic identity mattered at all in the ancient world. Pohl 2013 develops a nuanced and sophisticated model of how ethnic identity had its part in specific political and social circumstances. See Steinacher 2021, 32–33 for the learned constructions.

[2] Matijevic / Wiegels 2022; Friedrich / Harland 2021b; Steuer 2021; Langebach 2020; Uelsberg / Wemhoff 2020. – Ed. Brather et al. 2021a offers twelve texts illustrating the history of archaeological as well as historical research from the mid-19th century on: Georg Waitz (1845), Ludwig and Wilhelm Lindenschmit, Gustaf Kossinna, Hans Zeiß, Heinrich Dannenbauer, Walter Schlesinger, Reinhard Wenskus, Heiko Steuer, Jörg Jarnut,

Walter Pohl, Hubert Fehr, and Philipp von Rummel (2013).
In the following I will use the Latin term *Germani* to avoid ambiguity. In English "German" refers to modern Germans, "Germanic" to the ancient *Germani* / Germanic peoples. Cf. Kulikowski 2021, 19. Translations of citations are my own.

[3] Jarnut 2004, 111 (reprinted in Brather et al. 2021a, 307–315): "Was sollen wir von einem historischen Begriff halten, der eine Großgruppe entweder voraussetzt oder aber konstituiert, die es wohl nie gegeben hat, die sich selbst jedenfalls nie als solche empfand und dementsprechend sich auch niemals so bezeichnete?" Cf. furthermore Steinacher 2021; Meier 2020a, 51–61; Kulikowski

to use the term, but have further built the concept of a major exhibition in Berlin and Bonn on a renewed definition of a Germanic world spanning from the Rhine to the Vistula in the first four centuries CE. For later periods, namely the transformation of the Roman World and the Early Middle Ages, the term *Germani* is, however, no longer used by most scholars[4].

H. Steuer explicitly states in his extensive new overview on the archaeological material from the Rhine to the Vistula and from today's Ukraine to the Baltic Sea: "A people labelling themselves 'Germanen' never existed." Steuer continues: The term "Germanen" should only be used as an auxiliary construction *(Hilfskonstruktion)*. Scholars must bear in mind that the collective term "Germanen" was coined by Roman authors. It serves modern archaeology only to simplify the designation of cultural legacies in large parts of northern, central, and eastern Europe[5]. Thus, Steuer seems to rigidly reject the term. But he continues: We should not forget, however, that *Germani* serving as Roman soldiers learned from their officers and the Roman administration that they were labelled as such. While an all comprising term including material from the Neolithic up to the Viking Age should be avoided, its use seems reasonable for the period in between Caesar and Tacitus up to around 300 CE. The Romans defined an area from the Vistula to the Rhine and to the southeast as far as today's Ukraine and the Crimea as the lands of the *Germani*. Steuer concludes: "Since one has to communicate with the simplest possible terms, I will actually use 'Germania' in the following and name its inhabitants 'Germani'"[6].

Steuer's point of view reflects a widespread use of the term in question in archaeological, as well as in historical debates. Many problems are, however, attached to the use of *Germani* as a historical term. Consequently, many historians with an expertise in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages meanwhile tend to avoid the very use of the term *Germani*[7]. Latin and Greek sources from the 1st century BCE to the 10th century CE – that is, roughly speaking, from Poseidonios of Apameia – to 9th and 10th century Byzantine and Carolingian writers, must be considered in order to understand the contemporary use of the ethnic denomination. In Latin texts, the term *Germani* was to describe a barbarian population beyond the Roman borders east of the Rhine and north of

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2007, 43–70; Goffart 2006, 20–22; 40–55; Pohl 2004a; Pohl 2004b; Geary 2001, 25–28. – Meier 2020b, 36: "Wer oder was also sind die antiken Germanen? (...) In erster Linie eine Projektion – jedoch mit erheblicher Wirkungsgeschichte."

[4] Brather et al. 2021b, 34.

[5] Steuer 2021, 37: "Ein Volk, das sich 'Germanen' nannte, hat es nie gegeben. (Dabei sollten wir aber nicht vergessen, dass Germanen unterschiedlicher Völkerschaften, die im Römischen Reich als Soldaten dienten, eben von der römischen Verwaltung und Politik gehört haben, dass sie von diesen als Germanen bezeichnet wurden. Der Begriff erscheint bei allen Triumphen für diesen Raum)." Interestingly enough Steuer partly quotes Walter Pohl (2000, 1) who started his overview in the "Enzyklopädie deutscher Geschichte" with: "Ein Volk, das sich 'Germanen' nannte, hat es *vielleicht* nie gegeben" (my emphasis). The "*maybe*" of the first sentence provoked the critique of Walter Goffart. Goffart (2006, 7; 233) traced a "Germanic contention" and attacked Pohl concerning the introduction of his

book cited above: "Pohl is, of course, committed to the existence of his subject, a coherent 'Germanic' people foreshadowing the 'Deutsche' of today" (Goffart 2006, 274). Pohl (2007, 913) answered, this was "the exact opposite of my real position". Cf. Steinacher 2021, 33 and note 6; Friedrich / Harland 2021a, 6–7 and the pertinent notes. The exhibition "Germanen. Eine archäologische Bestandsaufnahme" in Berlin used Pohl's citation to introduce visitors to the exhibition, cf. Uelsberg / Wemhoff 2020, 14.

[6] Steuer 2021, 37.

[7] This approach is older than one tends to think: Feist 1927 tried to demonstrate that no Germans can be found outside Caesar's writings and that nearly all sources known classify the population named *Germani* by Caesar as Celts. His work was only received as a marginal footnote. The idea that Caesar's introduction of the term was a justification of his military and political ambitions appears again in Walser 1956, 94.

the Danube only for a rather short period[8]. Between the 1st century BCE and the 1st century CE, Gaius Julius Caesar and subsequent authors, especially Publius Cornelius Tacitus, established the term[9]. Introduced by these Roman writers, *Germani* and *Germania* survived in a variety of different meanings. After the Principate, *Germani* simply described, in most cases, the Franks or Alamanni on both banks of the Rhine[10]. The terms *Franci* or *Alamanni* replaced *Germani* in Latin sources as early as the third century, as *Germani* no longer seemed specific enough. After the third century, the term *Germani* was, if used at all, most often restricted to single *gentes*[11].

In the Augustan period, there was – because of Roman activity as far as the Elbe River (Drusus in 9 CE) – an understanding of the *Germania magna* as an area to be placed under Roman control. Its limits were defined with the Rhine and the Danube in the west and south, and the Vistula and the Baltic Sea in the east and north. Claudius Ptolemy (ca. 83–ca. 168 CE) used the term *Germania megale* for the first time. In the 1st century CE, during the reign of emperor Domitian (81–96), the geographical term *Germania* came into use to name the two Roman provinces along the Rhine – the *Germania superior* and *inferior*. Orosius differentiated between the two Roman provinces and the *Germania interior*. Consistently, *Germania* labelled a much greater area such as *Gallia* or *Italia* did. Early medieval intellectuals took over this Roman category but never related it to a clear political or territorial, let alone an ethnic concept[12]. *Germania libera* is frequently used in modern scholarship. It never appeared in the sources and is nothing but a romantic phrase introduced by Jacob Grimm in 1835/36 while giving a lecture on Tacitus[13].

Many Greek scholars simply classified Celts and Scyths in the northwest and northeast of the Mediterranean. This remained the usual concept of Greek literature until Late Antiquity. All in all, only a few Greek texts ever used the term *Germanoi*, Γερμανοί. Those texts either depended on Caesar or defined the *Germanoi* as a Celtic people[14]. Whereas from a Greek literary perspective, the Rhine area was far away, and the terminological uncertainty a peripheral category, there are major contradictions between the modern and the ancient use of 'Germanic' for Eastern confederacies. At the end of the 5th century CE, sources operated with the term 'Gothic' to label peoples as different as the Goths in Gaul, Spain and Italy, the Vandals in Africa, the Gepids and Heruli along the Tisza and the Danube, the Rugians, Sciri and Burgundians, and even the Sarmatians, and Iranian Alans. Greek and Latin authors had already adapted *Gothi / Gothoi*, or *gentes Gothicae* after the 3rd century CE as a general term for peoples north of the Black Sea. These peoples were most often classified as Scyths using ethnographical basics dating back to the Greek ethnographers Hecataeus, Herodotus,

[8] Pohl 2004a; Pohl 2004b. – Pohl 2004a reprinted in Brather et al. 2021a, 287–303.

[9] Zeitler 1986, 41–52. – Dobesch 1995 is a detailed and well researched study on the use of Poseidonios' concepts by Caesar. Caesar, Tacitus, Strabo, and others also used the Suebian name as an ethnic collective term. It is confusing that *Suebi* was used to name one specific group and at the same time used as an umbrella term. Thus, there is a certain parallelism with the Germanic problem. Both terms are first an expression of Roman categorization, although *Suebi* may have played a role as a self-designation, at least on the Rhine. Ludwig Rübekeil (1992, 182–187) thought of a Gallic translation of the Suebic name, which he translated as "the true ones" into the Latin *Germani*. Cf. Timpe 1995 and 2006.

[10] Pohl 2004a; Pohl 2004b; Pohl 2000, 90–92; Beck et al. 1998, 197–200; Timpe 1986; Krüger 1976/83, 1; 45–49; 216–219.

[11] Pohl 2004b, 172; Norden 1920, 426 observed that by the sixth century *Germani* was a mere literary term ("war nur ein Literaturwort").

[12] Steinacher 2021, 51; 54–55; 57–59 and the pertinent notes; Pohl 2004b, 175–177.

[13] Ptol. 2, 9, 2; Oros. 7, 32, 12; cf. Steinacher 2021, 31, 39–41, 45, 51 and the pertinent notes; Wolters 2008, 71–75; Pohl 2000, 59; Beck et al. 1998, 245–259; Alföldi 1997, 45–52; Lund 1990 and 1998; Timpe 2006; Wolters 2004.

[14] Steinacher 2021, 53–54; Steinacher 2017, 19–20; 28; 50; Pohl 2004b, 171 and n. 36–37.

and Eratosthenes, as well as many others. Unlike the late antique sources, 19th and 20th century scholarship included the so-called Gothic peoples within the idea of widespread Germanic unity. The Gothic peoples were classed as 'East-Germanic' peoples *(Ostgermanen)*. The development of linguistics in the early 19th century had a deep impact on historical considerations and was one of the reasons for these assumptions. Another reason was the deeply rooted wish to trace national origins back into the past as early as possible. This suggested a uniformity of different barbarian groups which had never existed. No-one in Late Antiquity would have known what was meant[15].

In most modern archaeological or historical studies, many *gentes* (barbarian groups) are classified as *Germani* without further discussion. A term like *Germani* still evokes, no matter how much one tries to avoid it, ideas of contingent identities in vast areas east of the Rhine and north of the Danube, including parts of Scandinavia, and with undefined borders to the east. This is very near to what Roman writers from the 1st century BCE to the 2nd century CE, especially Caesar and Tacitus, wanted their fellow Romans to believe. At the same time, centuries after the first use of the term *Germani* (and in the same way as with the term Celts), such categories offered some security for generations of scholars and their readers in a field of complicated and very often perplexing sources, both in material and in written culture. Such pseudo-ethnic terms became widespread by offering supposed order to puzzling material. At the same time, they have a long history in scholarship that continues today[16].

Recent historical debates

Recently, a younger generation of historians and archaeologists aimed at understanding "the Germanic", recognising and respecting a multitude of disciplinary and interpretative traditions. The volume "Interrogating the 'Germanic'" includes contributions from different perspectives. Cătălin Țăranu outlines that "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"[17].

But why? This can only be understood by looking at the early modern history of the very concept of a Germanic identity. From a historical perspective, it is still only possible to stress the point that there has never been a consciousness of an all-Germanic identity. After Caesar and Tacitus, the term simply disappeared because it was too imprecise. Chauks or Frisians, Semnones, Cherusci, and Marcomanni were organised in relatively small and fluid political associations. From the third century onwards, new, larger associations formed under Roman influence at the imperial borders: Franks, Saxons, Alemanni, Goths and Vandals[18].

Only in the late 15th century, when Tacitus' nearly forgotten *De origine et situ Germanorum liber* was printed for the first time, was Caesar's concept revived. A zombie resurrected. From the beginning, an emotional charge fed by inferiority complexes and a pre-national political agenda dominated the very use of this concept. Early modern scholars were only too happy to define glorious ancestors of the Germans during their days. When Italian and French humanists invoked Roman roots, the Germans retaliated with new images of Germanic ancestors. The religious conflicts of the

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[15] Geary 2001, 22–24; Pohl 1998, 39; Heather 1991, 135–140; Wenskus 1977, 462–484.

[16] Steinacher 2021, 31; Meier 2020a, 51–73; Kulikowski 2007, 43–70; Goffart 2006, 20–22; 40–55; Jarnut 2004; Geary 2001, 25–28.

[17] Friedrich / Harland 2021a, 12 (citation); Țăranu 2021, 89–110.

[18] Brather 2020, 408–409; Wolfram 2018, 171–177; Steinacher 2017, 27–29.

time led some authors to identify Rome with the Catholic Church and the Germans with the free Protestant Church. Thus, rather crude and dull images were created[19].

Tacitus' *Germania* "is a static, sometimes laborious ethnography in which very little happens, where chaste and upright *Germani* are mainly called upon to contrast with licentious Romans and to provide a bit of exoticism for the reader's delectation. But what the *Germania* lacks in excitement, it makes up for with names; hundreds of them, of tribes and peoples, *gentes* and *nationes*. These precious clues to an otherwise barely known past have set scholars on their trail for centuries, ever since the ancient treatise was rediscovered in the middle of the fifteenth century"[20]. Half a millennium ago, throughout the 15th and 16th centuries, when medieval Europe entered an age of fast economic, political, and social change, scholars adapted not only the term *Germani*, but also the term Celts[21]. A society claiming classical texts as its intellectual basis, frequently established historical explanations on written remains of antiquity. Learned men of that age prepared a 'modern' view of ethnic identity by looking for clear borders between the 16th century Germans, French, Italians, and Spaniards[22]. "The *Germani* of old could be equated to all the speakers of Germanic languages, and in turn to the inhabitants of modern Germany, before that state had even come into existence"[23]. There is, of course, a similar identification with the ancient *Germani* in Great Britain and the Netherlands, as well as in the Scandinavian countries.

Michael Kulikowski defines the success of such learned concepts as the "marriage of philology and race" alluding to the use of ethnic umbrella terms since the Early Modern Age in his introduction to the named volume "Interrogating the 'Germanic'"[24]. This also covers nicely the fact that Roman, as well as Greek writers, had very different concepts than those of 16th to 19th century scholars. Thus, the division of peoples into west-Germanic, east-Germanic, and north-Germanic was an 18th and 19th century hypothesis of linguists[25]. M. Kulikowski highlights that we need to develop an alternative form of terminology to encounter the differences that we do perceive in cultural phenomena "without re-inscribing the essentialising assumptions that are usually relied upon to achieve this task." Otherwise, 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"[26].

The catalogue of the Berlin / Bonn exhibition 2021

This leads to the archaeological use of the term in recent publications. In 2010, Philipp von Rummel summed up the problems in between the two disciplines dealing with the human past. In contrast to modern historical research, archaeologists often tend to use ethnic terminology to define clear geographical entities. Ethnic names deriving from the written sources are set in accordance with the cultural areas defined by archaeologists. In the following, a seemingly independent archaeological

[19] Steinacher 2021, 40–41; Steinacher 2017, 39; Krebs 2011; Goffart 2006, 14; 16; 43–46; 48–50.
[20] Kulikowski 2021, 19; cf. for the long and problematic reception Krebs 2011, see Timpe 1995 and 2006 for further background discussions on Tacitus.
[21] Maier 2016.
[22] Schöbel 2018; Steinacher 2017, 32; Sénécheau / Samida 2015; Wood 2013, 190–221; Sénécheau 2012 and von See 1970.

[23] Kulikowski 2021, 19; cf. for the background Krebs 2011; Beck et al. 2004; Lund 1995; von See 1994; von See 1970.
[24] Kulikowski 2021, 19–30.
[25] Steinacher 2021, 46–48: "All Quiet on the Eastern Front: No *Germani*, but Gothic Peoples with a Scythian Origin"; Steinacher 2017, 28.
[26] Kulikowski 2021, 27.

terminology appears and thus, a real threat for an interdisciplinary dialogue emerges. Von Rummel concludes that an independent archaeological concept of ethnic identity is impossible[27]. Does this include the very use of the term *Germani*?

The exhibition "Germans – an Archaeological Inventory", conceived jointly by the Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte of the Berlin State Museums and the LVR-LandesMuseum Bonn, displayed more than 700 items from the 1st to the 4th centuries CE from Germany, Denmark, Poland, and Romania. The catalogue "Germanen. Eine archäologische Bestandsaufnahme. Begleitband zur Ausstellung in Berlin und Bonn" comprises 640 pages and offers 32 articles subdivided in seven parts, as well as a catalogue listing the items displayed in the exhibition. The volume reflects the high-level of research on the societies living between the Rhine and the Vistula in the first four centuries CE. Twenty-three articles deal with settlements, agriculture, metalworking, the battlefields of Kalkriese and the Harzhorn, and weapon sacrifice sites in Scandinavian as well as the Baltic Sea area. Six articles discuss the problematic category of "the Germanic" from a historical point of view and reflect the archaeological background as well as the history of research. Finally, three texts point at the ideological use of Germanic concepts in museums, research, and political history throughout the 19th and 20th centuries[28]. In the following, I will discuss the catalogue referring to additional publications.

The curators have endeavoured to differentiate and distinguish themselves from political or judgmental appropriation, yet an exhibition with this title also perpetuates a highly problematical myth. The inhabitants of the areas east of the Rhine and north of the Danube to the Vistula and the coast of the Black Sea were in close exchange with the Roman world, in war, as well as in peace[29]. Almost 40 years after Caesar's conquest of Gaul, Augustus began further expansion north of the Alps. His stepsons Drusus and Tiberius led several campaigns as far north as the Elbe between 12 BCE and 16 CE. The *clades Variana* (Varus defeat) in 9 CE was part of these wars[30]. An imperial periphery had emerged, and the economic and political influence of the Roman world increased. The Roman system influenced and changed societies hundreds of miles away from its borders[31]. Whether or

[27] VON RUMMEL 2010, 57–58: "In der archäologischen Praxis werden, im Gegensatz zur modernen Geschichtsforschung, ethnische Einheiten jedoch häufig noch als strukturell konstante Einheiten verstanden, deren Dynamik in der zeitlichen Achse vor allem eine territoriale ist. Die aus den Schriftquellen gewonnenen und so aufgefassten Stammesnamen werden dann in Übereinstimmung mit den ebenfalls von Archäologen definierten Kulturräumen gesetzt. Es entstehen eigene, archäologische Begrifflichkeiten. Im Wortlaut unterscheiden sich diese nicht von der in der Geschichtswissenschaft üblichen Terminologie, in ihrer Semantik hingegen schon. In dieser Praxis liegt meines Erachtens jedoch die eigentliche Gefahr der Behinderung eines fächerübergreifenden Dialogs. Einen selbstständigen archäologischen Ethnosbegriff, der die mangelnde archäologische Anwendbarkeit in Nachbarwissenschaften entwickelter Ethnoskriterien kompensieren und der Archäologie das Feld der ethnischen Deutung offen halten soll, kann es nicht geben." Cf. the debate on an 'ethnic identification' of archaeological material

BIERBRAUER 2004, 45–84; BRATHER 2004; BRATHER 2000, 139–177.

[28] Cf. the articles in LANGEBACH 2020 for an ideological use of Germanic concepts.

[29] A recent publication on cultural transfer and religious landscapes and the close relations between the Barbaricum and the Roman Empire: MATIJEVIC / WIEGELS 2022. The volume mainly discusses material from the Roman provinces.

[30] TIMPE 2009; WOLTERS 2008.

[31] GEARY 1988, VI: "The Germanic world was perhaps the greatest and most enduring creation of Roman political and military genius. That this offspring came in time to replace its creator should not obscure the fact that it owed its very existence to Roman initiative, to the patient efforts of centuries of Roman emperors, generals, soldiers, landlords, slave traders, and simple merchants to mould the (to Roman eyes) chaos of barbarian reality into forms of political, social, and economic activity which they could understand and perhaps, control." Cf. STEINACHER 2017, 23–30; POHL 2005, 1–38.

not these societies shared a common material culture and a corporate feeling, remains a matter of scholarly dispute.

As late as in the 230s, a Roman army operated south of Braunschweig. In the so-called Harzhorn event, several thousand well-equipped and highly professional soldiers met outnumbered opponents. This battlefield is one of the most spectacular find complexes of recent years, which has expanded our picture of the territories controlled by Roman politics. Michael Meyer describes and compares the Harzhorn event with the battlefield of Kalkriese, identified by many scholars as the place of the Varus defeat. Additionally, Lothar Schulte studies possible consequences of the Harzhorn event, for example: Has there been a population decline in the Altmark in the middle of the 3rd century CE[32]?

Weapons from the Roman military apparatus with its own well-developed production facilities reached up into today's northern Germany and Denmark in large numbers. Weapon sacrifice sites in Scandinavia and the Baltic Sea area reveal the equipment of small barbarian armies in a unique way. About 60 different sacrifice sites comprising more than 40,000 weapons are known so far. Only a few sacrificial sites date to the first and second centuries, with the majority dating to the third and fourth centuries, only to decline sharply again throughout the fifth. The strengths of the army units whose equipment has been sacrificed can be estimated based on the weapon combinations. The described sacrifices comprised enough weapons and armour to equip 300, 600, and up to 1000 warriors[33].

The sheer quantity of finds in combination with the many different groups of objects, as well as their excellent conservation, make a reconstruction of the male-military world possible. Traces of destruction on the sacrificed objects clearly hint to a religious background and complex rituals. Ruth Blankenfeldt illustrates this by describing bog finds from Thorsberg near Flensburg in Germany. Bridles and saddles, valuable sword harnesses, and even Roman riding masks were available to the fighters. Blankenfeldt stresses that local units were not operational without high quality double-edged longswords from Roman workshops. Other elements of (provincial) Roman provenance were apparently imported much less frequently and probably reserved for high-ranking warriors. It is therefore even more remarkable that the proportion of Roman militaria in the Thorsberg Moor is not limited to sword armament but also includes Roman shield bosses, helmets, chain mail, and the fragment of a military order, all of which form an exceptionally wide range of military equipment for the Roman provenance[34].

The analysis of the fibula types in the moor findings from Thorsberg and the distribution of these different types on the continent and further north clearly show that, in this way, no areas of origin of the warriors (or women) can be determined, but rather only the integration into the general fibula distribution everywhere in the *Germania*[35]. These sacrificial find complexes with the extremely numerous material goods of armament and warrior clothing, as well as horse equipment, numbering many hundreds to thousands, are of outstanding importance for the cultural history of the pertinent areas. Steuer compares these findings to the importance of the great Romanesque and Gothic cathedrals in the history of art of the Middle Ages. Adapting modern methods will render this material a fundamental source for archaeological research. The laying down of army equipment

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[32] Schulte 2020; Schulte 2019; cf. for Kalkriese the three volumes of the exhibition "2000 Jahre Varusschlacht: 1. Imperium, 2. Konflikt, 3. Mythos": Asskamp et al. 2009. A complete publication of the Harzhorn material is forthcoming: Three volumes Röm.-Germ. Forsch. 77.

[33] Steuer 2021, 703–756.

[34] Blankenfeldt 2020, 306–335.

[35] Steuer 2021, 112.

in the moors and former lakes on the Baltic Sea region are unanimously regarded as sacrifices, not as remnants of fighting in these marginal areas. Steuer offers another important observation: Where no bogs form part of the landscape, e. g., in today's Mecklenburg or Southern Germany, however, geographically conspicuous places such as mountain peaks or mountain ranges were chosen as sacrificial places. The range of material, however, differs at these sites[36].

As a historian, I dare to add another possible interpretation: Until recently, many scholars interpreted these objects as barbarian booty gathered during plundering raids on imperial territory. Alternatively, one might think of specific measures to ensure Roman control of the periphery by equipping local confederates. Like the USA in Afghanistan, Rome outfitted militias to do the dirty work on the ground. To exert their influence, even without sending their own soldiers into battle, Roman commanders maintained close relations with leaders beyond their borders. Gold, prestige objects, food, and high-quality weapons were given to support local units, which had a massive impact on political, social, and military conditions. The close relations of the Central Europeans with Rome are reflected manifold in the finds – especially in grave inventories of rich men and women.

Babette Ludowici questions Tacitus' topos stating modest burial habits for the 'Germanic' elite. Many grave inventories contain glasses and drinking cups, tableware, mixing jugs, and luxury goods from Roman workshops. These imported pieces seemed to be important for the elites[37]. Benjamin Wehry outlines that an artistically processed shield boss from the princely grave of Gommern, dating from the 3rd century CE, was initially a valuable Roman cup[38]. Generally, it is far from easy to define social structures based only on archaeological evidence. The named elites might have presided over quite small confederations[39].

Matthias Egeler deals with aspects of religion and clearly demonstrates how problematic the very concept of a common Germanic mythology, let alone religion, really is. We must deal with, on the one hand, a highly problematic field of tension between partly astonishing continuities, and on the other, with breaks and ruptures. For example, research alleged a continuity ranging from the iconography of the Bronze Age to mythical motifs of the medieval Edda, e. g. a god bearing a hammer, or the sun pulled by horses. Egeler shows that comparisons on this do not work. It is impossible to write a history of 'the Germanic religion'. Instead, we need to analyse a multitude of interconnected religious views and perspectives. The Central Europeans living in the first centuries CE were an integral part of a broad field of contacts and intercultural exchange. Egeler ends his article with a promising idea. Mass sacrifices of war material – and sometimes also of mortal remains – like those at Thorsberg, Nydam Mose and Alken Enge in Denmark, have striking parallels in various La Tène sites in Gaul and Switzerland. Heiko Steuer also refers to these analogies in his book "Germanen aus der Sicht der Archäologie". It seems quite possible that a comparable use of sacrifices reflects an early European religious continuum rather than truly distinct, ethnically determined religious systems[40]. I am convinced that these are exactly the questions we should ask, but it will be necessary to do this together – historians and archaeologists must cooperate.

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[36] Steuer 2021, 738–739. – cf. Rasbach 2022, 255–282; Schmidt / Voss 2022, 283–312.

[37] Ludowici 2020, 212–225.

[38] See the *contribution by Masek et al. in this volume* on the Herpály shield boss.

[39] Wehry 2020, 348–353.

[40] Egeler 2016, 194–211; cf. Egeler 2013; Maier 2003. Cf. for the archaeological material Steuer's recent volumes and his contribution to the catalogue of the Berlin / Bonn exhibition: Steuer 2021, 691–695; 712–722; Steuer 2020 and 2006, 21–46.

Many articles in the Berlin / Bonn catalogue portray basic conditions of the societies living in the area labelled as Germania by Roman authors. Hans-Jörg Karlsen and Jan Schuster delineate the average patterns of villages in their contributions. Settlements consisted of individual smallholdings of usually five to 20 houses with up to a hundred inhabitants. The economic basis was agriculture combined with craft activities. An enormous regional diversity can be traced concerning all areas of life and work, including the very use of different types of houses. Small villages, or hamlets, were often within sight of each other[41].

Thus – contrary to Tacitus' description – the land on the right bank of the Rhine did not exclusively consist of dark forests. Susanne Jahns convincingly explains this as the result of a comparison with Italy, which was already largely deforested in antiquity. Settlements connected by roads and paths were within sight of each other, surrounded by an open landscape of fields and meadows. The density of settlements during the Roman imperial period can be grasped quite precisely for some areas today. For example, in Saxony-Anhalt, the Altmark was densely populated, while the fertile Magdeburger Börde shows hardly any finds from the third and fourth centuries. Cohesive forest areas dominated, for instance, the low mountain regions of the Harz. Agriculture with cattle breeding and grain cultivation shows hardly any takeovers from the Roman world, as Angela Kreuz demonstrates[42].

Patrick Könemann presents the findings from Kamen-Westick in western Germany, a well excavated settlement with huge amounts of imported Roman goods[43]. Christina Peek outlines the textiles of Feddersen Wierde, a terp (wurt) settlement in the North Sea marsh (i. e. an artificial dwelling mound providing safe ground during high tides). With well over 1000 excellently preserved individual pieces, the often-underestimated Feddersen Wierde textiles are among the most significant archaeological source materials of early European history[44]. Fishing hooks, salt boiling pots, and agricultural tools such as ploughshares, sickles, a scythe set (scythe, anvil, denge hammer), millstones, and weaving weights document the everyday life of most of the population – all presented by Katrin Struckmeyer[45].

Cast iron crucibles, ingots, lead smelting, and slag testify the intensive iron extraction and processing. Metalworking was an important pillar in the spectrum of craft activities. The smelting of bog iron was widespread and culminated considerably in some regions, so that in a few cases, production can be assumed to exceed its own needs[46]. Lead extraction in the Bergisches Land to the Sauerland throughout the 1st century CE was clearly geared towards supra-regional customers, to which Jan Bemmann and Torsten Rünger refer. For a period of about 30 years, the Roman market was supplied with lead from these regions. Lead extraction is thus clearly linked to Rome's efforts to establish a Roman province *Germania* between the Rhine and the Elbe rivers[47].

The supply of non-ferrous metal, however, could not be ensured. A continuous inflow of non-ferrous metal from the Roman Empire was required. This material was mainly delivered by reusing metal vessels, which often served as starting material, for example, for clothing accessories. In his contribution to the blacksmith's trade, Hans-Ulrich Voß describes the path of corresponding objects and shows how comprehensive the forging knowledge was in the *Germania*. Various hammers, grindstones, and fine tools for upsetting, driving, punching, grinding, riveting, and filing, as well as

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[41] Karlsen 2020, 66–83; Schuster 2020, 84–101.

[42] Jahns 2020, 110–117; Kreuz 2020, 118–145.

[43] Könemann 2020, 170–175.

[44] Peek 2020, 176–185; cf. Steuer 2021, 198–210.

[45] Struckmeyer 2020, 186–193.

[46] Meyer 2020; Meyer et al. 2017, 146–157.

[47] Bemmann / Rünger 2020, 354–360.

metal fragments for further processing are displayed. Fine smiths worked with precious and non-ferrous metals; they were highly specialised craftsmen. An example of their skill is the shield boss (umbo) from the elite grave of Gommern in Germany, which consists of a solid Roman silver vessel, as mentioned above, and was further decorated with pressed plates, gilding, and glass inlays[48].

Michael Schmauder and Matthias Wemhoff, the exhibitions curators, rightly emphasise that the archaeological inventory being offered brings new insights. All in all, the Berlin and Bonn catalogue is a fine guide to the state of research for the societies living in between the Rhine and the Vistula rivers in the first four centuries CE, who were dependent on Roman structures. However, labelling these societies 'Germanic' remains problematic as the Roman umbrella terms *Germani* and *Suevi* applied by Caesar and Tacitus were only partly useful, and, except the territorial name of the intended Augustan province, used only in a very limited meaning. *Germania* and *Germani* form a part of Roman thinking but were adapted and changed again and again for centuries and throughout the present.

The chapter "Germanen: Sichtweisen auf einen umstrittenen Begriff" refers to these problems. Reinhard Wolters, Ernst Baltrusch, Stefan Burmeister, Wojciech Nowakowski, and H.-U. Voß scrutinise the historical, philological, and archaeological background. Voß focuses on aspects of the history of research in the 19th century and addresses the use of the Germanic name in today's research. In Nowakowski's article, he deals with Polish archaeological research on Germanic tribes, not least from the point of view of political implications[49].

Sebastian Brather makes an important point that from a Mediterranean and literary perspective, Celts, *Germani,* and Slavs were not contemporaries, but merely replaced each other. Greek authors named Celts in the pre-Roman Iron Age, and Germanic tribes appeared in the sources of the early principate only to disappear again throughout the third century. Slavs followed in the early Middle Ages introduced by Byzantine observers in the 6th century CE. All three supra groups were gradually 'discovered' by Mediterranean observers who were interested in the regions in the northwest, north, and northeast. In all three cases, these were schematisations from the outside perspective, which nevertheless shaped concepts for a long time and still represent common terms today. All in all, one can assert that *Germani* can no longer be used without vast considerations and problematisation[50].

The catalogue also considers problematic aspects in a chapter on the construction and the history of research as well as the popular identification with a Germanic past in 19th and 20th century Germany. Susanne Grunwald and Kerstin Hofmann trace the changing concepts of a Germanic identity from the Early Modern period to the present day in their contribution. As an example, Marion Bertram deals with the varying Germanic images based on the history of the collections of the Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte from 1799 to 1945. Matthias Wemhoff problematises the "Patriotic Hall / Vaterländischer Saal" built in 1855 depicting Norse mythology and archaeological finds with its frescos. This hall aimed at integrating a vision of the emergence of a united German nation under Christian auspices[51].

Martin Langebach followed a similar path editing the volume "Germanenideologie. Einer völkischen Weltanschauung auf der Spur" in 2020. In his introduction, Langebach draws attention to the fact that the category of a Germanic past is "a historical-political prime example of the commissioning of the past for present or future political goals, without many even being aware of

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48 Voss 2020a, 170.

49 Baltrusch 2020; Burmeister 2020; Nowakowski 2020; Voss 2020b; Wolters 2020.

50 Brather 2020, 400–415; Brather 2021a.

51 Grunwald / Hofmann 2020; Wemhoff 2020. – Cf. the books of von See 1994; von See 1970.

it"[52]. According to Langebach, the questions of the volume are therefore aimed at the origin, development, and current forms of Germanic ideology.

Germani again? Is an archaeological category independent from other discourses possible?

Splitting the problem by problematising older research and popular or even political attitudes is, however, unsatisfactory. Adding a debate on how the very concept of a Germanic identity was abused and misused does not solve the core of the terminological setback. How will we deal with a concept rooted in 15th and 16th century debates in the future? Is it impossible to develop contingent archaeological and historical explanations? Finally, the editors of the Berlin and Bonn catalogue relied on Heiko Steuer's decision to use the term *Germani* again to define the archaeological material east of the Rhine of the first four centuries. In his contribution to the catalogue, Steuer provides the intellectual framework for the whole enterprise justifying the concept and the very title of the catalogue as well as the exhibition. From an archaeological point of view, Steuer characterises *Germani* as the population settling between the Vistula and the Rhine up to Scandinavia[53].

Steuer provides a purely geographical definition stressing that this applies only for the time up to the fourth century when things changed in the *Barbaricum*. Roman authors dominated the view for centuries. They imagined savages who – according to the ancient writers – were always ready for battle, furious, contemptuous of death, sought robbery and plunder, and that they sacrificed humans to their gods and always attacked in large groups. But apart from these literary stereotypes, Steuer perceives the population of the areas in question as sharing many similarities. Both the way of living (stable houses in the villages) and the burial customs show common elements. In contrast to the general burial custom, there are body graves with chambers and tumuli in different locations away from the other cemeteries with cremation graves. These so-called "Princely tombs *(Fürstengräber)*", mostly dating to the first three centuries CE, reflect a far-reaching supra-regional context from the Danish islands to the Danube. They show clear similarities and picture an upper class, or an elite, classified as such due to the rich gifts. The likeness of these tombs and their equipment allow Steuer to strongly assume lines of communication between these groups across the entire *Germania*[54].

Steuer finally postulates a uniform lifestyle, archaeologically visible in the funeral customs. Furthermore, supra-regional exchange is also comprehensible via the army units, reflected in the military equipment from the Jutland moors, consisting of multi-ethnic followers. Following Steuer, fighters from different areas joined warlords. They were partly equipped by these leaders with weapons from their armouries and hoped for booty from inner-Germanic wars. The population of neighbouring areas, previously Celts, later Slavs and Avars, and the people in the Roman provinces, "lived differently, wrote differently, developed different precious small artifacts and probably also had other sacrificial and cult customs"[55].

Concerning the use of a specific 'Germanic' script, I am not sure whether the use of a variety of runic alphabets convincingly proves a common linguistic habit. Runes did not serve as everyday writing. The known texts differ immensely locally and temporally, and a clear focus of the material derives from southern Scandinavia[56]. The Runic signs were adopted from Latin and even

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[52] Langebach 2020, 9.
[53] Steuer 2022; similarly, Steuer 2020.
[54] Steuer 2021, 906–988; Voss / Müller-Scheessel 2016; Wieczorek / Périn 2001. – Cf. for the wider background Quast 2009.
[55] Steuer 2021, 1277; cf. for inner-Germanic wars Tausend 2009.
[56] See the *contribution by Imer / Søvsø in this volume*.

Etruscan antetypes throughout the 1st century CE. At first, the runic script was an imitation of the Latin script, and it is very hard to say how important it really was. Elder Futhark, used for writing Proto-Norse and consisting of 24 runes, appears around 200 CE on objects and short inscriptions. There are few and very short inscriptions outside Scandinavia, roughly 70 pieces between 200–700 CE altogether. As many of these inscriptions remain completely or partly unclear, it is very difficult to work with the material or ground conclusions on it[57]. To put it simply: Engraving one's name on an object or advertising as a craftsman in a beautiful and arcane script is one thing, writing down a sentence understandable from Denmark down to the Danube and the Black Sea is another. And even if the diverse Germanic languages may have been more or less understandable for the individual speaker, there has never been a linguistic community. But of course, the superregional use of Runic inscriptions hints, like many other common habits, to a world interconnected by similar ideas and behaviour.

Steuer's thesis offers a wide variety of discourses. The rich material outlined in his overview and the Berlin and Bonn catalogue hint to an area closely linked and deeply influenced by the Roman empire sharing a common material culture. But did Rome create this uniformity? At least Roman writers introduced the terminology we deal with so intensely. Another important point to be considered is that there have been close contacts between the South and the North before. The La Tène area had dense connections to the areas of the so-called Jastorf and Przeworsk cultures[58]. Did the lasting Roman influence intensify the yet detectable common ground of material culture? Or is it only a terminological problem?

Finally, the extent of the named structures and similarities in material culture to the east is a highly problematic point. There is a controversy between historians concerning these structures. The Przeworsk and later Wielbark cultures extended into a territory that is nowadays central and southern Poland. By the late 3rd century CE, characteristic Wielbark material culture appears in the area of the upper Dniester. Peter Heather associated this southward drift of the Wielbark material with the contemporary Marcomannic Wars. Furthermore, Heather opens a door towards an ethnic interpretation. Can a southward drift of Wielbark material be associated with Goths migrating from the Baltic to the Pontic zone[59]? In a large area between the Danube and the Don River, archaeologists defined the Sântana de Mureș-Chernyakhov culture. Roughly speaking, Chernyakhov burial rites and other finds show influences from the steppes, as well as from the north[60]. Guy Halsall, however, denies any chronological development from the Wielbark to the Chernyakhov culture. The metalwork especially shows, following Halsall, only general similarities to the Wielbark types. He concludes: "Study of the Chernyakhov culture and the written sources relating to the 4th-century Goths paints a picture quite similar to that available for the barbarians east of the Rhine. Again, we see a group in which ethnicity was multi-layered. The importance of the amber routes between the Baltic and the Roman Empire as arteries for political expansion is underlined, as is the fact that the fourth century was a period of change. Political structures were fluid and dependent upon the Empire, but it is also clear that this was a period of increasing socio-economic complexity

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[57] Bleckmann 2009, 29–30; Looijenga 2004; Rix 1997, 231–248. The Negau helmet dating to the 2nd century BCE has a certain Harigast as its owner. But the alphabet used is clearly an Alpine adaption of Etruscan script. Whether the runes exercised any influence on the Gothic script is debatable. Cf. Martin 2004, 165–212 for the Alamannic material.

[58] Cf. for the Jastorf culture Brandt / Rauchfuss 2014.

[59] Heather 2009, 105; Heather 1991; Bierbrauer 1992, 7–75 and Bierbrauer 1994, 51–171 pleaded for such a southward drift and a change of cultural habits over a long timespan 'on the way' ("Kulturwandel unterwegs").

[60] See the *contribution by Petrauskas / Didenko in this volume.*

and growing potential for authority. There was, increasingly, a lot at stake in Gothic politics"[61]. Kulikowski stresses the "negative characteristic", that is, the argument of the absence of weapons in burials, in order to define a relation between the Wielbark and the Chernyakhov cultures. The Chernyakhov culture could, following Kulikowski, just as likely have been a local elaboration of Pontic, Carpic, or Dacian cultures, or a blended culture resulting from Przeworsk and steppe interactions. Kulikowski denies migration from Scandinavia or the Baltic coast. Like the Alamanni or the Franks, he defines the Goths as a "product of the Roman frontier"[62].

Now it is time to take a closer look at Andrzej Kokowski's article "Die archäologischen Kulturen des Gotenkreises" in the Berlin and Bonn catalogue. Even stronger than the historian Peter Heather, Kokowski takes Jordanes' account at face value and as clear evidence for Gothic migrations, completely ignoring historical research and the many doubts and differentiations meanwhile proposed for four decades[63]. It is true that there have been relatively stable political dominions north of the Black Sea and as far as Dacia, and in such contact zones, a reasonably uniform material culture was formed. Of course, there was immigration to this area from different areas of Northern and Central Europe, but there was also migration from the steppe areas of the East. However, migration is rarely the only explanation for complicated structures. Some names, like the ethnonym "Goths" in its many variations, had continuity; others appear for the first time in our sources[64]. Perhaps one can assume certain parallels to the Hunnic sphere of influence of the fourth century. In any case, these societies were supported by newly formed barbarian associations. Gothic, Herulian, Rugian, and Gepidian identities arose during a lengthy confrontation with the Roman world. They were not simply brought from the North[65].

We must expand our mental mappings and thus seek new interpretations. Steuer therefore proposes to refrain from the constant assertion of migration, but instead, to accept a general network that spanned throughout the whole of Europe. It was possible to reach any place in premodern Europe, as historical societies were all but isolated (as the technology, the imagery, and the artistry of the shield boss from Herpály, Hungary, demonstrate, s. *contribution by Masek et al. in this volume*). Most excavated places had been reached by imports or foreign goods, both in the time of the Roman Empire and during the Migration and Merovingian periods. Steuer concludes: "With the growing state of research, boundaries of cultural circles are becoming more and more blurred"[66].

The Jastorf-, the Przeworsk-, and the Latène cultures coexisted throughout centuries, overlapping geographically and influencing each other. They "developed as a result of a rapid – in archaeological terms – adoption and adaptation of La Tène culture models by the local population"[67]. The Jastorf- and Przeworsk cultures were equated with Germanic tribes, whereas the La Tène culture with Celts. Steuer stresses the point that whether and how archaeological groups are to be defined, and whether they have limits or can be described convincingly, remains unclear. During the early history of archaeological research, hardly anyone had difficulties with an ethnic affiliation, whereas

[61] Halsall 2007, 136; Halsall 2007, 133: "Although it is often claimed that Cernjachov metalwork derives from Wielbark types, close examination reveals no more than a few types with general similarities to Wielbark types."

[62] Kulikowski 2007, 60–68. – Steinacher 2020 follows Halsall and Kulikowski. Andrzejowski 2010, 21 warns that the system of relative dating for the Late Roman Period of the Przeworsk and Wielbark Cultures is based on tendril brooches "largely based

on subjective criteria". Cf. Halsall 2007, 131–136.

[63] Kokowski 2020, 254–269. I only refer to Goffart 2006 for the wide-ranging debates on Jordanes.

[64] Kokowski 1997, 641–833; Kokowski 1995; Bierbrauer 1994, 51–171.

[65] Steinacher 2020, 403–421; Steinacher 2017, 45–60.

[66] Steuer 2021, 109–110.

[67] Cf. for the Przeworsk culture: Andrzejowski 2010, 1–52 and the references there, citation: 2.

in recent decades more and more doubts arose. It became apparent that almost all the cultural groups or cultural circles radiated out to their neighbouring areas and those characteristic findings, and, above all, material assets have been discovered in some cases far outside the previously assumed boundaries. Trade or exogamy, let alone migration, are no longer satisfying as the only explanations. The ethnic equation of so-called cultural circles with names of peoples that have been taken over from the history of events has proven to be a methodological aberration, since archaeological facts and written group names can be located on such different levels of existence that parallelisation makes no sense[68].

New approaches and considerations are necessary as to what the constructs of archaeological cultural units actually mean. Steuer points to the Jastorf culture dissolving more and more into numerous smaller groups. The process of dissolution is accompanied by increasingly detailed studies of the chronology of the Jastorf material. What we are observing here is a change in perception through archaeology and not so much a genuine cultural change in the past. The very label Jastorf remains as an umbrella term to make archaeological discourse possible. Steuer predicts a similar evolution for eastern Central Europe and the Przeworsk- and Wielbark cultures and finally pleads for a redefinition. He concludes that an ethnic equation of so-called cultural circles with ethnonyms from historical sources proved to be a methodological aberration – naming archaeological cultures roots in concepts of migrating peoples. Defining an archaeological culture is therefore based on outdated models and today, often done nearly subconsciously[69].

Why it is problematic to still use the term *Germani*

What about the *Germani*? What does using the umbrella term from Caesar and Tacitus imply? If it is not possible to trace the background of political, social, or economic organisation of the societies living outside the Roman borders, then material culture is our only basis. But why use this term continually? Only because there has been a wide area connected by similar needs orientated versus the Roman Empire? Maybe we could label these areas an imperial periphery not depending on completely but being deeply influenced by the centre. Enormous changes took place throughout the third century, and it is no coincidence that during the third century, Roman writers no longer used the inclusive terminology *Germani*. This might testify to a certain success of Roman efforts to change the political structures and to enable the emergence of a rather cheap, advanced defence system near the borders provided by confederacies like the Franks and the Goths.

But whether these structures really implied the reality for most of the people living in these wide areas remains absolutely unclear. For all we know, most people did not fight, and those who did may have joined the emerging confederacies at the imperial borders. Maybe this was not always a deliberate choice but rooted in the sheer need to make a living. So, some truth may lie in the old narrative of migration (cf. *contribution by Habermehl et al. in this volume*), but very different from what we tend to think. Maybe many farming communities were quite happy that the unruly boys wanting to fight left the peaceful villages. In any case, the huge weapon sacrifices point to a constant presence of well-equipped military groups.

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[68] Steuer 2021, 103–105.

[69] Cf. Steuer 2021, 40; 91–95; 109; 118; 123–124; 452; 124: "Die ethnische Gleichsetzung sogenannter Kulturkreise mit Namen von Völkerschaften, die aus der Ereignisgeschichte übernommen wurden, hat sich als methodischer Irrweg erwiesen, weil archäologische Sachverhalte und schriftlich überlieferte Gruppenbezeichnungen auf derart verschiedenen Daseinsebenen zu verorten sind, dass eine Parallelisierung keinen Sinn hat." Cf. Rieckhoff 2018; Brather 2001b, 442–452.

When the *Göttinger Akademie der Wissenschaften* started the huge project of a new edition of the *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* in the late 1960s, the term 'Germanic' was avoided. The pertinent work group was labelled *Kommission für die Altertumskunde Mittel- und Nord-europas*[70]. Siegmar von Schnurbein categorised areas and societies with certain connections and interactions orientated versus the Roman Empire and contoured by ancient authors as "Middle European barbaricum"[71].

Current debates can be summarised under von Rummel's verdict that ethnic groups are both fact and discourse. They are at the same time learned concepts and acting units. Within this spectrum, there is no contradiction between written sources and soil finds. Archaeological sources are part of the same discourse as the written sources. Both fragmentary genres are traces of an ancient under-standing of reality. "There is no archaeological means to distinguish ethnicity from other possible forms of expressing identity and of defining it apart from them. Archaeology can no longer work autonomously at this level of historical interpretation. The limits of plausible argumentation are defined not only by archaeological material, but as much by texts and images. Archaeology, in its attempt to address and describe the material evidence, has to rely on terminology derived from written sources; yet both historians and archaeologists need to acknowledge that developments which appear in their respective sources may follow different rhythms, even if they form part of a shared discourse"[72].

Nowadays, I would, for example, hesitate to compare material from modern Poland and Silesia to the Vandal graves around Carthage of the fifth century. This offers the chance to be much more specific in understanding the Roman provinces under Vandal rule. Maybe historians will not be able to do much more. What we can do together is to try to reconstruct the stage. It will probably not be possible to reconstruct the plays that were given on the stage of Antiquity, but we should do our best to reconstruct the theater. Finally, remaining vague is not a solution. To be honest, I remained vague in many of my publications, as I was not able to offer better explanations.

Yet historians alone are unable to explain the named structures or solve these problems. They can offer only a framework and a critical approach to textual sources. This sometimes disappoints archaeologists who see other structures and are able to develop a much more detailed picture of local conditions. Future discourses should try to avoid the separation of archaeological and histori-cal expertise. It cannot be a solution to specialise and flee into seemingly protected niches fortified with details. We should make common efforts as historians and archaeologists to develop historical narratives. This will need courage and intellectual flexibility as well as the ability to develop new patterns and models.

Working together, however, means to develop a common terminology to be used within and out-side academic circles. While it may be problematic to completely give up the terminology *Germani* / *Germania,* the many problems and the complicated history have to be faced. The archaeological evi-dence hints to many elements of a common material culture which may have been caused at a very high level by Roman impact for centuries and a certain orientation of the population towards com-mon standards. At the same time, such common elements seem to be older than Rome's appearance on the scene and caused by communities closely related by trade and exchange. This does not, however, imply that anything like a supra-group with any kind of self-awareness ever existed. All that we know hints to much smaller entities organising due to local needs.

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[70] Steuer 2021, 33 with further references in note 91; Brather et al. 2021b, 1.

[71] von Schnurbein 2012, 135–148.

[72] von Rummel 2010, 55 refers to Härke 1993, 141–146 and Tilley 1991, 174; Schlesinger 1974, 77. Citation: von Rummel 2013, 400.

Apart from the literary constructs Caesar and Tacitus provided, no ancient writer understood such. Using the term *Germani* remains highly problematic due to the reasons listed above. Perhaps a compromise could be to describe the archaeological common ground of the areas under question with the much more neutral geographical term *Germania,* orientated and deeply influenced by the Roman empire? A purely geographical terminology is much more acceptable than the ethnic collective term *Germani*. This may seem simple, but it is not. In the end, we are talking about an area defined by Roman politicians and authors labelled *Germania*, a territory prepared to become a Roman province and categorised as being part of the Roman sphere of influence. The geographical term *Germania* is – contrary to the ethnic collective term *Germani* – in perpetual use in the written sources.

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