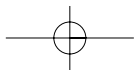
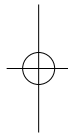
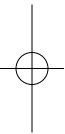
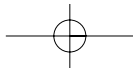
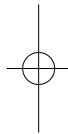
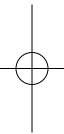
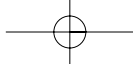


Part I
Germania





1

Land and People

The Land

The heartland of the immense area of northern Europe occupied by the early Germanic peoples was the great expanse of lowland which extends from the Netherlands to western Russia. There are no heights here over 300 metres and most of the land rises no higher than 100 metres. But there is considerable variety in relief and soil conditions. Several areas, like the Lüneburg Heath and the hills of Schleswig-Holstein, are diverse in both relief and landscape. There was until recent times a good deal of marshy ground in the northern parts of the great plain, and a broad belt of coastal marshland girds it on its northern flank. Several major rivers drain the plain, the Ems, Weser and Elbe flowing into the North Sea, the Oder and the Vistula into the Baltic. Their broad valleys offered attractive areas for early settlement, as well as corridors of communication from south to north. The surface deposits on the lowland largely result from successive periods of glaciation. A major influence on relief are the ground moraines, comprising a stiff boulder clay which produces gently undulating plains or a terrain of small, steep-sided hills and hollows, the latter often containing small lakes and marshes, as in the area around Berlin. Other features of the relief are the hills left behind by terminal glacial moraines, the sinuous lakes which are the remains of melt-water, and the embayments created by the sea intruding behind a moraine. Subsequent erosion has significantly modified the glacial relief. The melt-water flowed in the great valleys towards the northern seas, depositing masses of gravel and sand, commonly called *Geest*, over large areas. South of the regions affected by glaciation, huge deposits of gravel were laid down by the rivers, while the wind brought in the light, loamy sand known as loess, which settled on the lower-lying parts of central Europe and provided a fertile, easily worked land for early agriculturists. Blown sand also

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occupied the floors of the larger valleys and covered extensive areas of eastern Holland and north-western Germany, again producing soils that were attractive to early settlement. The coastlands from Holland to Schleswig-Holstein are characterized by clay marshland, on which early settlement adopted specialized forms.

To the south, the great plain is bounded by the central European uplands which form plateaus rather than well-defined ranges of hills. The more prominent hills, like the Harz and the Bohemian upland, rise sharply from surrounding high ground. Others, such as the Lysa Gora range in southern Poland, arise more gently and present a rounded profile above the Silesian lowland. The uplands are by no means barren terrain. Most regions could support at least some arable agriculture and all offered opportunities for the raising of stock. The Carpathian mountains to the south-east offered least to early settlers and for long set a boundary to the early Germanic peoples.

To the north of the European plain, the western Baltic lands had much in common with northern Germany. Much of the Danish peninsula is a low plateau, offering mixed soils and an equable climate. Central Jutland was the least attractive area to settlers with its heaths and marshes. Eastern Denmark and the Danish islands were much more amenable. Southern Sweden, outside the region of Skåne with its rich boulder-clay soils, offered a rugged landscape of troughs and steep ravines, though the sediments of Västergötland and Östergötland yielded good land. The Baltic islands of Öland, Gotland and Bornholm were all productive and supported sizeable populations in Antiquity.

The picture which Roman and early medieval writers present of a grim and forbidding land, densely forested and deep in treacherous marshes, is heavily, if understandably, overdrawn. Most of Germania was productive enough to support a substantial population. Large areas, especially the broad river valleys and the loess plains, were very fertile. There was, no doubt, a good deal of woodland, but clearance had made major progress before the first century AD and continued apace thereafter. In some areas, especially in northern Germany and Denmark, there were extensive marshlands which constrained settlement but which did not deter all access to them or use of their resources. The main resources of the land in general were its crops and its animals. There were no large deposits of the precious metals and only limited supplies of the others, with the exception of iron, which was abundant in many areas. Of other desirable commodities, only amber from the Baltic coasts and perhaps furs from the same region seem to have had appeal for the outside world. The human population was the only other major resource, and it was

one which won increasing attention from the Roman world. The employment of Germans as slaves, bodyguards and, above all, as soldiers is an important theme in the story of relations between northern Europe and the Mediterranean empire of Rome, and the repercussions for later European history were to be profound.

The eastern regions of the Germanic world merged with the steppelands of western Russia and the Ukraine. The distinction between Germanic peoples who were settled on the land and nomads who roamed over the broad, flat plains north of the Black Sea is still generally emphasized by writers on barbarian Europe. The distinction is misleading. There were steppe-dwellers who were settled agriculturalists, or only partially nomadic. There were Germanic peoples who were either semi-nomadic themselves or associated with nomads for economic purposes. The region between the lower Danube and the Dnieper was occupied by a population which included many nomad groups, some of which had long been accustomed to move south of the Danube into the northern Balkans. The establishment of a Roman frontier on the lower Danube thus set up a barrier which interrupted movement of peoples which had been going on for centuries. Beyond that frontier, the movement westward continued during the period of Roman domination, though record of it is thin. Not until the late fourth century and the irruption of the Huns from deep inside Asia was the Mediterranean world forcibly made aware of the continuing process. By then, the Roman Empire was ill-equipped to deal with the consequences.

Germans, Celts and the Eastern Peoples

The influence of the Celtic world on the material culture of Germania is evident at several levels.¹ Minor metalwork objects such as brooches and pins were clearly influenced by the design and decoration of La Tène metalwork current to the south in Bohemia and the middle Danube. The techniques of Celtic craftsmanship, especially in metals and pottery, penetrated as far east as the area between the Oder and Vistula, and, to the south-east, to the very edge of the Ukraine. The most spectacular contacts with the world of high Celtic craftsmanship, however, are evident in a number of prestigious items found in northern Germania,

1 H. Birkhan, *Germanen und Kelten bis zum Ausgang der Römerzeit* (Vienna 1970); A. Haffner and S. von Schnurbein, *Kelten, Germanen, Römer im Mittelgebirgsraum zwischen Luxemburg und Thüringen* (Bonn 2000).

in modern Denmark. The best known of these is the silver bowl or cauldron found in a peat-bog at Gundestrup in north Jutland, a work of an eastern Celtic master based on the lower Danube in the later second or earlier first century BC. The origins and stylistic affinities of this extraordinary object are still much debated, but south-east Europe best satisfies the criteria which define its area of origin. Whatever its precise significance, this was a cult object, bearing not only repoussé heads of male and female deities and an astonishing gallery of divine and totemic animals, some of the latter showing possible connections with the Hellenistic world, but also scenes of cultic observance, sacrifice and myth. A silver cauldron, we are told by Strabo, was the most sacred vessel of the Cimbri, a fitting gift for the Roman emperor himself, and the treasure of the Boii contained cauldrons as well as a great quantity of silver. The Gundestrup vessel belongs to the same milieu and it presumably arrived in the north as an object of booty (resulting from the southward thrust of the Cimbri?) or of gift-exchange marking high-level contacts between Jutland and the lower Danube region.

There are suggestions of direct links between the North and the western Celtic world in burial ritual. The burial of dismantled carts with the dead at Husby in Schleswig, at Kraghede in Denmark and Langå on Fyn is closely paralleled in the Rhine valley and northern Gaul.² The Husby grave is the most fully recorded. The burnt remains of the four-wheeled cart were thrust under a stone cist along with a bronze vessel containing the cremated remains of the dead and the claws of a bear-skin which had been wrapped round his body. The cart itself was of a type well known in the wider Celtic world. The other northern burials of this type also contained cremations and all three probably date from the latter first century BC, a time when alliances between the northern peoples and those nearer the Rhine may well have assumed greater significance in the face of the Roman advance.

Other imports to Denmark further testify to the wide-ranging connections between the Celtic and the northern Germanic worlds in the late pre-Roman Iron Age. A great bronze cauldron, with a capacity of 130 gallons, was found at Brå in Jutland, but had been made in central Europe, perhaps on the middle Danube. Probably from eastern Gaul came two elegant four-wheeled wagons which accompanied a cremation burial in a peat-bog at Dejbjerg in west Jutland. These were superbly constructed vehicles, presumably designed for cult

2 K. Raddatz, *Das Wagengrab der jüngeren vorrömischen Eisenzeit von Husby, Kr. Flensburg* (Neumünster 1967).

progresses like that described by Tacitus for the fertility-goddess Nerthus, whose shrine lay in this same northern region. The Dejbjerg wagons date from the first century BC or a little later. Celtic war-equipment also found its way to the north. The votive deposit at Hjortspring on the western Baltic island of Als contained many rectangular wooden shields, mail garments and iron spears, along with a substantial wooden boat, the whole assemblage being placed in a peat-bog between 150 and 80 BC.³ Celtic weaponry, including the long slashing sword, the *spatha*, is represented in Germania by single finds, as are many lesser items of metalwork such as torques, brooches and other personal ornaments. It is not possible to estimate how regular these contacts with the Celtic world were. The uniformly high quality of the goods imported would readily support the idea that many of them were supplied through the medium of gift-exchange between leaders. But successful military campaigns could also account for the weaponry and the other equipment at Hjortspring, for example.

One of the most fertile areas of contact between Germans and Celts was Bohemia and Moravia. Here, powerful and culturally inventive Celtic peoples had been settled since the middle of the first millennium BC. By 300 BC a major centre of barbarian power had been established in these uplands north of the Danube, aristocratic, aggressive and artistically creative. Even before this, from about 400 BC, Celts had been pushing southward, to the Danube, into northern Italy, through the Carpathians and into the northern Balkans. In 279 a large force of Celts plunged deep into Greece, through Thrace and Macedonia, plundering the treasury at Delphi and threatening cities. These Celts were driven off, but those groups which made for the Danube area were able to create stable kingdoms there, notably the Scordisci about Singidunum (Belgrade) and others on the lower Danube and the Dobrudja plain. The kingdom of Noricum, centred on what is now Austria and north-eastern Italy, emerged as a major power early in the second century BC and quickly attracted the attention of Roman strategists. In the meantime another major tribe, the Boii, had settled in the upper basin of the Elbe, which thenceforward carried their name (*Boiohaemum*: Bohemia) even after they had removed themselves. Further east, the Volcae Tectosages moved into Moravia and the Cotini into Slovakia. These areas of Celtic settlement were to be of particular significance for the Germanic peoples. The development of centres of political power, represented by huge

3 A recent summary in: M. Müller-Wille, *Opferkulte der Germanen und Slawen* (Stuttgart 1999).

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strongholds, or oppida, in these regions led to the exploitation of natural resources on a grand scale and to the concentration of skilled craftsmen under the patronage of strong and wealthy chieftains. This oppidum-based culture flourished in the period from 150 to 50 BC, by which time some of its centres had developed into extensive urban complexes. At Hradisté near Stradonice, craftsmen working in iron, bronze, glass, enamels, gold and pottery were active during the first century BC. Several oppida were carefully planned settlements, with a rectilinear layout of streets reminiscent of Classical cities. The siting of oppida reflected their close control of natural resources. Staré Hradisko, for example, lies close to rich deposits of iron ore. These embryonic urban centres not only produced goods, they also imported. Bronzes, pottery and wine from the Mediterranean world were all brought in, as were amber and other products of northern Europe. This extraordinarily vital culture, which depends almost wholly on archaeology for its reconstruction, lasted for not much more than a century. From the mid-first century BC onward, it was sharply on the wane, partly at least because of the increased pressure of Germanic expansion southward and eastward. The Boii and Scordisci were strong enough to deflect the Cimbri and other northern groups westward in the late second century BC, but more insistent Germanic pressure would shortly afterwards bring about a major reordering of peoples in central Europe. The Boii were pushed eastwards to the middle Danube by the German Marcomanni in the first century BC, there to suffer at the hands of the Dacians, then approaching the summit of their power. The Helvetii of the western Alps were compelled to migrate into Gaul by the encroachment of their northern German neighbours in 58 BC, thereby giving Julius Caesar an excellent pretext for intervention in Gaulish affairs. Already before this, in 71 BC, the Gaulish Arverni and Sequani had invited the Germanic Suebi from east of the Rhine to assist them against their neighbours the Aedui. Once into Gaul, the Suebi were reluctant to return. Thus, against the western Celts German expansion made significant progress in the first century BC.

The power and cultural influence of the eastern Celts was also on the wane in this period. Celtic peoples had crossed the Carpathians early in the third century and moved on to the Dniester valley in the Ukraine. La Tène material in these regions is far from scarce here, especially in the Dniester valley, and later along the Dnieper. Fine war-equipment is to the fore, especially swords and bronze helmets, in princely burials, but humbler objects such as brooches and pins also indicate the widespread influence of Celtic craftsmen. By the first century BC, this

cultural influence appears to have been much diluted, but it had not entirely vanished. By then, however, a clear Celtic identity had been all but lost in the mingling of populations, both mobile and settled, in south-east Europe.

Among the eastern peoples, the Bastarnae seem to have been a much greater force than is often realized. They are mentioned by sources dating from the third century BC to the fourth century AD, usually in relation to the lower Danube basin. They seem to have arrived there during the disturbed third century BC, probably from the Vistula valley. It is far from certain that they were a Germanic people, whatever that may mean at so early a date. The wide range of their operations prompts the suspicion that they were either a nomadic or a semi-nomadic people. Tacitus made mention of their intermarriage with Sarmatian nomads, a sure sign of degeneracy to a Roman writer. They may, however, have included German elements in their composition, especially after their movement south to the Danube. A separate bloc which might represent the Bastarnae cannot be identified in the archaeology of the lower Danube region. This, in itself, might support the idea that their economy was based on pastoral nomadism, their material culture being largely borrowed from other inhabitants of the area.

Among the major cultural groups which emerged between the Black Sea and the Vistula basin after about 100 BC was that named after Zarubintsy, centred on the valleys of the Dnieper and the Pripet. First identified in 1899, this culture was of mixed origin, showing signs of contact with the eastern La Tène world, the steppe nomads and, later, the Roman provincial communities on the lower Danube. The influence of peoples from the western steppes is particularly marked and is represented in weaponry, personal ornaments, pottery and other domestic objects. It must be stressed that the bearers of the Zarubintsy culture were settlers, not nomads. Their economy was based on a productive system of agriculture and stock-rearing, including the raising of cattle, horses, sheep, goats and pigs. As in the case of other population groups in these regions, there has been long and diverse discussion about the ethnic character of the Zarubintsy culture, much of it heavily influenced by modern ideology. From an early date, Russian and other eastern scholars related the culture to the proto-Slavs, laying stress on links with the peoples of the Vistula basin. Others pointed to influences from the western forest-steppe, where settled groups had existed from at least the late Bronze Age. Material of Scythian origin from the Black Sea hinterland was interpreted, with reason, as trade goods. The eastern La Tène material is more deeply embedded in the

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Zarubintsy culture and is indicative of a much closer relationship over several centuries.

The most convincing characterization of the Zarubintsy culture is that it was a polyethnic complex, composed of elements from the Vistula and Dnieper valleys, the steppe immediately to the east, and the La Tène groups which occupied the plains between the lower Danube and the Sea of Azov. From the first century AD onward, the La Tène connection was progressively superseded by interaction with the provincial Roman population on the lower Danube and, possibly, Asia Minor. It is at present impossible to assign the Zarubintsy culture to any one ethnic group. The region between the Vistula and the Black Sea lay at an interface between the steppe and the more amenable landscapes of the Ukraine. It is not surprising that this area was the parent of a mixed and shifting population. Proto-Slav elements may have emerged from this melting-pot, but this cannot be proved. Early Slav river names occur along the Dnieper and its tributaries, and watercourses are notoriously tenacious of their ancestry. The mixture of cultures, and presumably of populations, continued in these regions for centuries to come and new elements arrived during the later Roman period. Within this complex of cultures lay groups of people which were to play major roles in the dissolution of Roman power.

The peoples who lived to the north-east of the Germans, beyond the Vistula and in the plains of western Russia, were little known to the historians of the ancient world. The people whom Pliny, Tacitus and Ptolemy called the Venedi have often been seen as ancestors of the Slavs, or even early Slavs, though the identification is not wholly convincing.⁴ The name Venedi is not itself Slavic, though later Germans used the form *Wends* to mean Slavs. We do not know for certain who the ancient Venedi were. They may have been an Indo-European people who were later submerged in one of the large German groups of eastern Europe, such as the Vandals or the Goths, or they may have formed one of the groups from which the Slavs eventually emerged. The Slavs do not enter the full light of history until the sixth century, when they appear in possession of Slovakia and Moravia. Where and how they had originated and why they had moved westward are questions which are hotly debated. The written evidence says hardly anything. Archaeological research, notably in Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia,

4 Z. Vana, *The World of the Ancient Slavs* (London 1983) provides an excellent summary down to the early 1980s. P. M. Barford, *The Early Slavs* (London 2001) gives a full, balanced and detailed account.

has begun to make its contribution, but there is still a long way to any firm ground.

The dominant archaeological culture in the broad region from the upper Oder to the Vistula and extending south towards the middle Danube was that is now generally known as the Przeworsk culture.⁵ Its origins lay in the late second century AD and drew together several elements from eastern Europe. Often linked with the Vandals, the Przeworsk culture probably extended over several eastern peoples. Most of the material evidence comes from a range of cemeteries, several very large. Burial was mainly by cremation, with occasional inhumations. The goods buried with the dead, usually richer than those to the west, were often broken or bent before consignment to the grave. Warrior graves were relatively common and they include a high number which contained horse gear. The pottery vessels display a very varied range, with tall jars and pedestal urns predominating. By the late third century a major factory situated in southern Poland was turning out wheel-made vessels. Before this, the material evidence for the Przeworsk culture suggests an expansion towards the south-east, into the Ukraine and the Carpathian basin. This extension to the south-east is difficult to interpret in ethnic terms and may signify no more than a diffusion of material culture. Richly furnished graves are rare until the later third century and then become prominent. The burials at Zakrzow (Sakrau) in Silesia are among the most striking instances, but there are others in the Vistula basin. In general, however, the later burials are poorly furnished which may represent changes in funerary practice. Alongside this change in burial rite is another in which the remains of the cremated dead and their grave goods were scattered over a wide area rather than being interred in separate graves.

Warrior graves are frequent and many contain horse-gear and spurs. Richly furnished graves occur in the earlier Roman Iron Age (Leg Pekariski, Goslawice and Kosin) and others in the third and fourth centuries (Zakrzow and Bialecin). The fact that related material is found as far to the east as the Dniester has led some eastern European scholars to seek early Slavs, or their ancestors, behind the Przeworsk culture, but the case is weak. It is difficult to believe that a single people was responsible for a unified culture which extended over so large a tract of land.

5 K. Godlowski, *The Chronology of the Late Roman and Early Migration Periods in Central Europe* (Cracow 1970); R. Kenk, 'Studien zum Beginn der jüngeren römischen Kaiserzeit in der Przeworsk-Kultur', *Bericht RGK* 58 (1977), 161.

More problematic is the large culture group to the south-east, stretching from the lower Danube and the Black Sea to the Dnieper plain, the Cjernjakhov culture, named after a cemetery near Kiev first studied in 1900.⁶ Many settlement sites and cemeteries in the river valleys attest the numerous population of this region and the dynamism of its culture. High-quality polished black pottery vessels, iron tools produced to impressive standards and fine ornaments in other metals characterize a unified culture over a huge area. Its origins seem to lie in the second century AD and its seed-bed was fairly certainly the Scytho-Sarmatian semi-nomadic population. Imports from the Roman world were common, especially wine, pottery and metal goods, and the technical advances evident in the Cjernjakhov material may well have been stimulated by craftsmen from the Graeco-Roman Black Sea cities. The main debate over Cjernjakhov, however, has centred on its relations with the Gothic advance into this region in the earlier Roman Iron Age. Some features of the material are related to equipment found in the Vistula valley and Pomerania, for which the likeliest agents were Goths and their associates. Among other peoples involved may be numbered Sarmatians, Dacians, Carpi and Alans.

Peoples from the western steppes had a major impact on the Germanic peoples of eastern Europe between the Danube and the Don.⁷ The most significant impact exercised over the longest period of time was that of the Sarmatians (Sarmatae) who originated in central Asia but had been steadily advancing westward in the later first millennium BC, reaching the Roman frontier on the Danube by the early first century AD. Although held in check by Roman forces down to the 60s AD, sizeable Sarmatian groups settled on the plain between the Danube and the Theiss and continued to threaten the Roman provinces. The Sarmatians were not a unified people and this is reflected in their archaeology. Two main groups are recorded in the ancient sources: the Roxolani, who established themselves near the Danube estuary, and the Iazyges, who moved west to the Theiss basin. Also associated with the Sarmatians were the Alans, a steppe people from the Black Sea hinterland. They were held at bay by Roman emperors until the fourth century, but their horsed warriors were on occasion brought into Roman service. Their position close

6 For connections between Chernjachov and Gothic groups, see below, p. 142.

7 Relations between the eastern Germanic peoples and the populations of the western steppes are obscure at any date. The Sarmatians occupied a central role, but other groups played a part. The best recent study is: I. Lebedynsky, *Les Sarmates* (Paris 2002). See also, V. Kouznetsov and I. Lebedynsky, *Les Alains* (Paris 1997).

to the steppe left them exposed to Hun expansion and stimulated a westward movement which carried some groups as far west as Gaul in the fourth and fifth centuries.

In such a mixture of peoples, themselves loosely structured, an archaeological record is difficult to define. The fact that a high proportion of the population was nomadic imposes its own limitations. Material culture as expressed by the usual criteria of pottery, metal and other objects does not follow any clear pattern. Still less does it allow distinction between Sarmatians, Alans and more settled groups.⁸ It will be obvious from the above that attempts to link individual peoples with defined cultures are, at best, highly subjective and in most cases impossible. This is particularly the case in eastern Europe and on the west Russian steppe. These regions formed a melting-pot of cultures and peoples over centuries. Any attempt at disentangling them is fraught with extreme difficulty.

8 In general: M. Todd, *Migrants and Invaders* (Stroud 2001), 55–63.