

## THE GERMANS AND ROMAN FRONTIER POLICY (CA. A. D. 350—378)

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The last half of the fourth century A. D. has attracted the continuing interest of archaeologists and historians alike, in part because of the survival of Ammianus Marcellinus and in part because of the extensive excavations undertaken along the Roman frontiers. Concurrent with the sustained scholarly enthusiasm for late Roman studies is an ever expanding interest in the barbarians and their contacts with and adaptation to the neighboring Roman world. This article attempts to bring these areas of study together by exploring the close relationship between internal developments among the Germans and particular aspects of Roman frontier policy. Despite the fact that Lucien Musset published his provocative essay, *Les invasions: les vagues germaniques* (Paris, 1965), over fifteen years ago, demonstrating the profound cross-fertilization that occurred on the frontier and beyond, few have taken up the challenge for late fourth century frontier policy. In fact, the same outworn answers are still reproduced; in brief, that the frontier system, begun in earnest by Diocletian and Constantine, failed to appreciate the changing realities of the opposition and so failed to adapt. The facts are otherwise, for, as will be demonstrated, Constantius II and his successors, especially Valentinian I, thoroughly understood the strength and weaknesses of the Germanic societies they faced and implemented measures accordingly. Unfortunately for the Empire, their solutions failed in execution and resulted in developments diametrically opposed to imperial wishes.

Minor skirmishes, petty raids, and occasionally open warfare characterized life along the northern frontiers of the Empire, but during the first half of the fourth century years of peace far outweighed seasons of warfare.<sup>1</sup> After the revolt of Magnentius (350—53), if not shortly before, the era of peace gave way to three decades of accelerating violence between Rome and her Germanic neighbors. Throughout the reigns of Constantius II, Julian and Valentinian I, Rome retained the upper hand along the frontiers, planning and carrying out policies designed to keep the Germans off-

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balance, fragmented, and enmeshed in a noose of alliances with Rome.<sup>2</sup> The Germans witnessed the construction of heavily fortified defenses and experienced the wanton slaughter of their people, especially women and children, by ill-disciplined Roman soldiers. The pace of their internal development, instead of slowing and stabilizing as Rome hoped, quickened and shifted even more decisively to favor those specializing in violence, the warbands. Before plunging into the wars of Constantius and Julian, it is necessary to chart, albeit briefly, the course Germanic society traveled before the revolt of Magnentius.

Tacitus depicted Germanic society in equilibrium between ties of kindred and bonds of the warband. Very few of the Germanic peoples had large scale political structures capable of sustaining military cooperation. Tacitus was, in fact, clear that kings were primarily sacral and left warfare in the hands of strongmen, *duces*.<sup>3</sup> Rome, with its highly structured society, more sophisticated technology, and formidable army exerted constant pressure on the Germanic world. In peace even as in war Germans were attracted to the refined products of the Roman craftsmen, some of whose most splendid creations filled Germanic graves. The evolution of military and political traditions in response to Roman civilization was gradual but ceaseless. For her part Rome accelerated the development of indigenous aristocracies and ultimately kings from the time of Julius Caesar. The client system of the principate rested on foundations deep in the fabric of Germanic society. And all the while the balance between kindred and warband tilted towards the latter as Rome at once recruited specialized units from among the German allies and gave periodic stimulation on the battlefield to the perfection of a warrior ethos. Objects of booty and trade, hardly distinguishable to Germanic eyes, flowed into the hands of warriors and especially their leaders.

Despite the incentives given to warbands, the familial structures proved very viable. They were the focus of the agrarian world, and, especially among those Germans not in direct contact with Rome, they retained some of their hold even in military organization long after Rome had expired in the west. Roman policy in the late fourth century struck another blow at the family, by attacking villages without warning. The results of three decades of Roman raiding was a further imbalance in Germanic society since the warbands generally fared better during the raids. Often they simply retreated into the forests, where Romans dared not go fearing ambushade.<sup>4</sup>

The situation along the river frontiers in the late fourth century was a direct outgrowth of the program pursued so successfully by Probus, the Tetrarchy, Constantine and, to at least a modest extent, the Imperium Galliarum.<sup>5</sup> Rome sought to stabilize and defuse the explosive mixtures of barbarians, who had discovered a very vulnerable Empire with fertile lands ripe for conquest and settlement. For example, during the third century Gothic wagons filled with women and children found vacant lands south of the Danube, but undefeated and undivided they were unwelcomed.<sup>6</sup> As soon as the eastern theatre stabilized, first through the rather deft handling of the Palmyrene problem and later by vigorous campaigns waged by Aurelian, Roman armies reasserted their dominance and redeemed the reverses suffered under Decius and Gallienus. Although military action solved the military crisis, a return to the long term stability of the early principate required systematic modification of Roman frontier policy. The massive building program carried out under the Tetrarchy and Constantine is well known. In some areas Rome built new lines of watchtowers and fortifications; in others, old

legionary and auxiliary camps were repaired. Dacia and the Agri Decumates ceased to be integral parts of the Empire, although Constantine clearly maintained a strong transdanubian presence in lower Dacia.<sup>7</sup> These accomplishments, including the creation of mobile field armies behind the frontier, exemplified Rome's political and military superiority over the Germans, but at no time in imperial history was the frontier problem addressed solely, or even primarily, by military responses.

The population of the Empire never expanded to fill its borders, and the series of demographically disruptive wars and diseases during the second and third centuries retarded, or perhaps, reversed, agricultural expansion in much of the western Empire. The vacant lands on or just behind the river frontiers needed settlement for a host of reasons: by the end of the third century the recruitment of Roman legionnaires was centered on the frontiers;<sup>8</sup> the supply network feeding the army and the mushrooming bureaucracy was sorely taxed and to bring supplies from the core provinces was very costly;<sup>9</sup> the tax system remained tied to agricultural production in spite of taxes on other goods and services.<sup>10</sup> These factors could be considered only after the Romans defeated the barbarians, and this they accomplished by the close of the third century.

Having suppressed the barbarians, Roman leaders systematically granted *recipitio* to Germans, settling some as *laeti* and enlisting others directly into military service. Probus, Maximianus, Constantine Chlorus, Diocletian and Constantine took the initiative and allowed thousands of former enemies to settle within Roman boundaries.<sup>11</sup> To govern the newly admitted barbarians they modified the old system of the *civitates* employed earlier. The *Notitia Dignitatum* lists the *prefecti laetorum* now charged with supervising the integration of barbarians into the fabric of Roman life; but, as in the central and northwest regions of Hispania, the process of Romanization was slow at best.<sup>12</sup> The immediate effect of Roman efforts to stabilize the frontier zones was the gradual reestablishment of a client system with those groups remaining outside the frontier. For example, the Goths were apparently brought into a treaty system in which they agreed not to move into Dacia, and further they agreed to send troops to assist Rome when so requested.<sup>13</sup> Yet the same forces that had consistently pushed the Germans to consolidate in ever larger confederations, apparent as early as Maroboduus and the Marcomanni and continuing throughout the third century, quickly produced new problems as the barbarians responded to the Diocletianic-Constantinian military system.

Our sources are too meager to reconstruct in any detail the internal evolution of Germanic society during the essentially peaceful decades of the first half of the fourth century;<sup>14</sup> however, more than pale hypothesis is possible. On the lower Danube Constantine's transdanubian activities attest to the gradual expansion of the Goths into Dacia after 300 — an expansion demonstrable in the archaeological record.<sup>15</sup> During the 340's the Goths experimented with short lived confederate leadership under a *iudex* or *Thiudans*.<sup>16</sup> They achieved some military success but became increasingly dependent on trade with Rome along the frontier.<sup>17</sup> The trading centers were fixed here and along the Rhine where Germans sought Roman items; not just weapons (legally excluded) and personal ornaments, which found their way into graves and so had to be replaced by the living, but foodstuffs of various types were also in great demand.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps basic changes in diet had already penetrated into free Germania, but more likely the imbalance among village, familial ties and warbands had produced a chronic shortage

of stables while simultaneously providing the currency necessary to purchase Roman stores. Surely the Germans had very little in the way of manufactured goods to trade, for except for amber and a few items of jewelry found on Roman sites, there is little evidence of a bilateral exchange.<sup>19</sup> The slave trade has attracted considerable scholarly interest, but, if we discount the famous dispute between the Sarmatae and their slaves, the Limigantes, the evidence for Germans vigorously pursuing slaving is marginal. Admittedly selling slaves to Romans already existed in Julius Caesar's day, but more often that not the Germans sold Roman captives back to Roman slave traders. In times of open hostilities the trade was brisk, virtually uninterrupted, and profitable. During the late fourth and fifth centuries when the sluice gates of war stood open, there was a steady traffic in Roman bodies, decried unsuccessfully by churchmen and imperial legislation. However, during the early fourth century limited warfare yielded few slaves and provided only an irregular flow of wealth. On the other hand, more and more Germans found service with the Roman army, and without question, they recycled this income through trade.<sup>20</sup>

Farther up the Danube the Quadi developed a well-defined social and political system during the fourth century as Ammianus reports:

Quorum regalis Vitrodorus, Viduari filius regis, et Agilimundus subregulus, aliique optimates et iudces, variis populis praesidentes.<sup>21</sup>

The rather elaborate ranking within Quadic society, nonetheless, could not prevent small bands raiding Roman territory. After all, raiding was a feature of Germanic life especially among young men eager to demonstrate their prowess. Such petty raids gave Valentinian cause for retaliation, but for the Quadi his "just concerns" were merely a pretext to further his grand design.<sup>22</sup>

The Alamanni were created as a people and then developed a hierarchy similar to that reported for the Quadi completely in the context of the frontier development outlined above. By erecting the Raetian and Upper German *limes*, Hadrian ignored the underlying ethnic structures upon which the earlier *limes* rested. His new line shortened and secured communications between Noricum and Germania Superior but gave a *casus belli* for repeated warfare in the area. By Hadrian's reign the Romans had attempted various solutions to the problem of the salient. The area was Celto-Germanic with few inhabitants and little political or military organization.<sup>23</sup> Hadrian abandoned any attempt to combine military requirements and what may have seemed feeble Celtic and Germanic traditions in this sensitive area.

By the early third century we hear of Alamannic horsemen raiding along the *limes* (Aurelius Vict., *Caesares* 21.2), and, as their name suggests and our sources prove, they were a new confederation of mixed ethnicity.<sup>24</sup> Hadrian sought a quick resolution of the *limes* problems and in his haste forgot to anchor his military and political policy on solid pre-Roman foundations. Rarely did Rome achieve peace and stability without building on pre-Roman cultures, certainly not in Germany between the Rhine and Danube. Perhaps exasperated or convinced that the pre-Roman elements were too weak to matter, after decades of war and Roman garrisons, Hadrian prepared the mortar that was to hold a warlike and splintered people together. Throughout the mid-third century the Alamanni routed Roman garrisons, some if not most of whom evacuated before the

blows struck — thereby accounting for the often systematically buried finds, notably at Straubing.<sup>25</sup> Only rarely can we know whether a fort burned in a vain effort at defense or was simply later put to the torch to erase a hated reminder forever.

Julian faced Alamanni divided into separate subtribal groups each living in a distinct area with its own leaders

Re hoc modo finita, . . . et Lentiensibus, Alamannicis pagis, indictum est bellum, collimitia saepe Romana latius irrumpentibus.<sup>26</sup>

At Strassburg (Argentoratum) Julian confronted the two high kings, Chonodomarius and Serapio, whose father, schooled in some aspects of the Greek mysteries as a hostage in Gaul, had changed his son's name from Agenarichus.<sup>27</sup> Beneath these two in rank were five sub-kings, ten princes, and numerous nobles:

Hos sequebantur potestate proximi reges, numero quinque, regalesque decem, et optimum series magna, armatorumque milia triginta et quinque, ex variis nationibus partim mercede, partim pacto vicissitudinis reddendae quaesita.<sup>28</sup>

New Germanic federations of increasing magnitude posed a very grave threat to Roman security and the integrity of the frontier system that had largely created them. These groups had coalesced during the years of peace following the successes of Diocletian and Constantine.<sup>29</sup> To be sure occasional disturbances erupted along both river frontiers (excavation has revealed some building activity at numerous strongholds between 330 and 345 for example at Gundremmingen and Vermania),<sup>30</sup> but the organization of the Quadi, Alamanni and Visigoths (Tervingi) evolved slowly. Roman civilization as a whole, not only its army, nourished this development at every stage.<sup>31</sup> However, full comprehension of the changes on her frontiers was not manifest to Roman leaders until the revolt of Magnentius momentarily opened the gates.

Although the devastation of Gaul following the rebellion and defeat of Magnentius was confined largely to those cities and fortresses immediately along the *limes*, the accounts of catastrophe echoed in Jerome, Libanius, and Rutilius Namatianus bear witness to a belief widely held in the late fourth century that the invasions of the Alamanni and Franks combined with the brigandage of Magnentius' defeated rebels to mark the onset of a new crisis with the barbarians.<sup>32</sup> Julian, of course, made the most of his successful reestablishment of order when speaking to the Athenians in October 361.<sup>33</sup> Constantius appeared ready to strike, leaving Julian to confront the northern groups only. Constantius was determined not simply to rid Gaul of her invaders but to cross the Rhine and properly punish the Alamanni in traditional Roman fashion. His army contained numerous recruits of Alamannic blood including several high ranking officers. These men, unwilling to stand idly by while Constantius launched a punitive attack, warned their kinsmen, who moved to block the Rhine crossing and hurried an embassy of nobles to offer peace. After Constantius put the terms before the army for their approval, the treaty was duly signed according to the rituals of peace sacred to the Alamanni.<sup>34</sup> Thus before Julian took the field, Rome had brought to heel one of two major Alamannic groups. Julian had more difficulty subduing the northern invaders, but with relatively few troops and admittedly good generalship he succeeded.

There is no need to recount the litany of battles, raids and successes in Ammianus Marcellinus's detailed narration of Julian in Gaul.<sup>35</sup> In general Julian carried out the policies Constantius dictated. Julian, however, developed and implemented the plan to perfection. What Rome sought was nothing less than the complete disruption and reversal of the evolution of Alamannic society. Constantius and Julian perceived that a cycle had developed with raiding as a feature of Germanic life, and this they sought to break decisively.<sup>36</sup> Julian first cleared Gaul of invaders and then pursued the barbarians across the Rhine seeking to capture their leaders and disrupt the Alammanic settlements so that they could not unite against Rome. He attempted to tie each facet of their leadership to him or destroy it. To do this required the rebuilding of vanquished fortresses and the creation of some new strongholds to the east of the Rhine.<sup>37</sup> From these centers he launched repeated raids against unprotected villages, driving the warriors into the forests and slaughtering civilians.

A raid before the Battle of Strassburg stands as a shocking reminder made indelible by repetition:

Finally Julian, learning from the report of some scouts just captured, that now in the heat summer the river [Rhine] could be forded, with words of encouragement sent the light-armed auxiliaries with Bainobaudes, tribune of the Cornuti, to perform a memorable feat, if fortune would favour them; and they, now wading through the shallows, now swimming on their shields, which they put under them like canoes, came to a neighbouring island and landing there they butchered everyone they found, men and women alike, without distinction of age, like so many sheep. Then, finding some empty boats, they [the Romans] rowed on in these, unsteady as they were, and raided a large number of such places; and when they were sated with slaughter, loaded down with a wealth of booty (a part of which they lost through the force of the current) they came back safe and sound.<sup>38</sup>

After the survivors fled into the interior with families, grain, and personal items, Julian repaired the fortress at Tabernae to block future barbarian incursions. The scene was repeated by Julian along the Rhine against the Franks and Alamanni and by Constantius on the Danube against the Limigantes, the Quadi and Sarmatians.<sup>39</sup>

Kings and nobles yielded to the holocaust of flames. Julian sent the great Alamannic king, Chonodomarius, to Constantius in bondage with his band of loyal followers numbering 200.<sup>40</sup> When possible, Rome replaced fallen barbarian leaders with their own candidates — a policy familiar to Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius. Constantius and Julian, in effect, revived the client system and made provisions for its continuance.<sup>41</sup> However, now the barbarians were required to supply the materials, including food, for their watchmen.<sup>42</sup> Julian had few alternatives since Gaul could not provide provisions for his new troop depositions without extraordinary taxation, which he was unwilling to impose.<sup>43</sup> Yet the barbarians were already becoming dependent on Roman grains to offset their poor harvests before 350, and the Germans could only have viewed Julian's requisitions as excessive cruelty. Surely this created new scarcities, accelerated barbarian dependence, and instilled a new bitterness born from poverty, similar to the laments Priscus recorded when the Huns took food from their Germanic allies in the fifth century.<sup>44</sup>

Unlike earlier client systems the one imposed by Constantius and Julian offered little to the barbarians except a promise of peace. Such a system required a massive

rebuilding campaign along the frontiers in order to prevent a large scale invasion. Begun by Constantine and renovated under Constantius II and Julian the frontier system was further refurbished and strengthened under Valentinian I. Some of Julian's building programs have been mentioned above and the list is easily extended to include many to the Diocletianic-Constantinian cities and fortifications on the Rhine.<sup>45</sup> Along the Danube several sites preserve traces of Constantius II's construction. In Pannonia, especially between Esztergom and Szentendre, the building program was intense under Constantius II and Valentinian. Here perhaps better than anywhere else on the *limes* we can see that Constantius created the new Roman offensive policy of keeping the Germans off guard through raids and forward outposts, for the latest dating assigns all four transdanubian watchtowers to Constantius II with modest renovations under Valentinian. No doubt remains of the continuity of policy and construction, which culminated under Valentinian and began under Constantius II.<sup>46</sup> Another aspect of the program continued the practice of selected reception of barbarian groups and leaders into the Empire for rapid dispersal and incorporation into the army. The "hut-type" coinage of Constantius II probably relates to this custom.<sup>47</sup>

Elsewhere the archaeological record for the second half of the fourth century prior to the Battle of Adrianople is also quite extensive, especially in Raetia and Noricum. The traditional dating of much of these data to Valentinian is tenuous because of the absence of a truly Valentinianic style and the obviously significant activities of Constantius II and Julian. Dating modifications in town and fort reconstruction is especially trying, including even the *burgi* built or rebuilt in this period. The watchtowers are easier to date for, in numerous instances, again especially in Raetia, Noricum and Pannonia, they were new creations. In general both old and new sites were given very stout walls, several meters thick. The late *burgi* often have the rear of interior buildings placed against the wall leaving an open area in the center, thereby adding strength and protection against ballistae. Where old forts could still serve, they were allowed to remain on the old plan with strengthened towers and gates.<sup>48</sup> The Germans could not have cared less which emperor built a specific stronghold. On the contrary, they faced a basically unified frontier system of great depth created to further a predatory policy begun in the 350's and followed with escalating violence at least through the reign of Valentinian. The system and its usage from Constantius II to Valentinian I struck at the heart of their societies. For them the Roman *limes* had a formidable offensive capacity as well as obvious defensive strengths.

Roman fortifications on barbarian soil in conjunction with forts on the Roman bank were fairly common. On the Rhine at Köln-Deutz, Engers, Niederlahnstein; at the confluence of the Main, a cluster of three — Wiesbaden-Biebrich, Wiesbaden (unfinished), Kastel; above the Main at Mannheim-Neckarau, Wyhlen, and the burgus opposite Basel.<sup>49</sup> From Basel to Lake Constance watchtowers were erected by Valentinian.<sup>50</sup> In numerous sites along the Rhine frontier old, sometimes abandoned, fortifications were restored. Similar activities were undertaken on the upper and middle Danube: in Valeria, Cirpi became the headquarters of the northern flank of the *Leg. II Adiutrix*, inscriptions attest to building on the Pannonian *limes* at Esztergom and Visegrad in 372. Valentinian also built or rebuilt at Carnuntum and Ybbs.<sup>51</sup> Between Budapest and Belgrade nine fortresses of Constantius and Valentinian were built in Quadic territory; some of these sites were probably garrisoned under the Tetrarchy.<sup>52</sup> Some fortlets in

barbaricum were clearly bridgeheads with fortified landing ramps such as Wyhlen opposite Kaiseraugst.<sup>53</sup> Other landing areas are suspected along the Rhine and Danube but have yet to be discovered. Surely the watchtower at Hatvan-Gombospuszta, some 60 Km into Sarmatian territory,<sup>54</sup> designed under Constantius II, was a forward observation post and not a point for launching attacks, but for the barbarians it was a reminder of oppression.

Regardless of Roman reasons for building fortifications in barbarian territory, the barbarians could scarcely have conceived of these installations as mere listening posts. They also had various ways to discover the nature of Roman defenses within the Empire. They traded at the designated places, usually at or near fortifications, and were welcomed as seasonal laborers or found employment building the forts themselves. Inter-marriage between Romans and barbarians (prohibited doubtless to no avail by *Cod. Theod.* 3. 14. 1. in 368) provided family links, and numerous men of barbarian blood served in the Roman army without forgetting their tribal origins.<sup>55</sup> The barbarians knew that from 20 to 30 Km inside the frontier the land was honeycombed with forts, fortified roadhouses and supply depots.<sup>56</sup> Deeper still were the principal garrisons of the field armies billeted in heavily walled towns.<sup>57</sup> All this for defense alone? Whose ships were beached at Wyhlen? If these questions begged for answers, Valentinian resolved them in blood.

The reigns of Julian and Valentinian witnessed a general upturn in violence and warfare along most of the frontier zone under investigation; the Franks in the far north alone were relatively quiet. Many Germanic groups raided Roman territory. The Alamanni revolted and were duly crushed, their villages destroyed, and Roman fortifications built on their soil. Procopius raised the standards of revolt against Valens and called upon the Visigoths for the aid promised by them in treaty.<sup>58</sup> Roman domestic squabbles filled the few leisure moments as the old aristocracy challenged the military leaders of the government.<sup>59</sup> Valentinian could ill afford to allow small border skirmishes to escalate into a full-scale conflict, but his efforts to perfect the system led to the war he hoped to prevent. According to Ammianus, the Quadi were quiet following their defeat at the hands of Constantius but were aroused by the murder of their king at a banquet.<sup>60</sup> Valentinian, fearing that any sign of weakness would ignite the entire frontier, attacked the Quadi in force. The whole campaign raises echoes of Marcus Aurelius and the Marcomanni but with a higher degree of brutality. Valentinian himself led one column in a pincer movement. His actions speak for themselves:

Valentinian then advanced forcing the pace as far as occasion demanded, put to death without distinction of age all those who were still roaming about and were taken unawares by his sudden onset, burned the dwellings, and returned without losing a man of those whom he had led with him.<sup>61</sup>

He died in a fit of rage at the insolence of the peace-seeking Quadic ambassadors, who dared tell him the truth! They, the leaders of their people, could not prevent stray bands from raiding Roman territory, and, furthermore, they thought the building of fortifications on their side of the river was unjust. Still they promised peace, recruits and supplies for the Roman state.<sup>62</sup>

Far to the east the Huns were changing the dynamics of the Roman world forever. By setting the Gothic peoples in motion toward the Roman frontier, their final refuge



against a people so violent that the very name Hun symbolized destruction for a millennium, the horsemen from Asia destroyed the fragile peace tremendous Roman efforts had achieved since the revolt of Magnentius. The disintegration of Valentinian's accomplishments took about three decades. Gratian and Valens, when not concerned with establishing a personal preeminence over the other,<sup>63</sup> continued Roman policy along the river frontiers. Gratian completed some fortifications in the west and launched more punitive strikes into barbaricum, while Valens at first regarded the Visigoths as mana from heaven — the recruits he so desperately needed.<sup>64</sup> Both emperors thought that the dark clouds abuilding north of the lower Danube were a passing squall.

Even if they had been correct concerning the Huns, it is difficult to imagine how Rome could have survived its own frontier policy. From the Rhine down the Danube to the Black Sea, Rome sought to retard the emergence of Germanic societies as cohesive political and military entities, but, just as Hadrian's *limes* had spurred the Alamanni, the late fourth century frontier gave final form to large Germanic confederations, especially the Alamanni, the Quadi, the Visigoths, and the Ostrogoths. Lesser groups too coalesced as never before: notably the Burgundians and Gepids.<sup>65</sup> All were agents of Rome's demise in the West, crossing the frontiers after 378 in units far larger than during the crisis of the third century. They settled on Roman soil in accordance with their own social and political systems under chiefs and dukes whose powers over their own people transcended anything known to Constantine and Diocletian. Rome tried to control the Germanic warbands by recruitment into Roman army and selected settlement throughout the fourth century, but the preemptive strikes against barbarian villages simultaneously increased the role of the warband, ignited their hatred, and turned them and their peoples against the frontier. In the early fifth century Olympiodorus gave a glimpse of the following of the great warrior Sarus. The general society of followers, typical of Tacitus' Germans but already giving way by late fourth century, had disappeared, replaced by a hierarchy of nobility within the band itself.<sup>66</sup>

The agricultural dependence of the barbarian world on Rome was strengthened when Roman raiders destroyed whole villages and then demanded supplies from the conquered Germans. The basic agrarian society of the Germanic world was not destroyed, every group still dreamed of a return to farming and peace. After the defenses in the west disintegrated and the Germans began to build kingdoms in former Roman provinces, their technological inferiority made a sharing of agricultural systems and resources very attractive if not imperative. Early medieval agrarian patterns reveal the influence of Roman concepts of estate structure in Francia and elsewhere.<sup>67</sup> The *hospitalitas* system used in Italy and southern Gaul paired the hierarchies of German and Roman societies in a successful agricultural and political settlement.<sup>68</sup> The early medieval Germanic nobility led elements derived from both the warbands of the late fourth century and lingering communal loyalties of remote antiquity.

The restructuring of the Roman frontier in the period from Constantius II through Valentinian I was the last attempt to stabilize the nexus of Germanic-Roman relations. The emperors correctly assessed the trends within Germanic society and created a policy, complete with massive fortifications, to check or, if possible, reverse the processes. To barbarian eyes Romans capriciously destroyed villages in preemptive strikes, assassinated barbarian leaders, and placed unjust demands on the barbarians' scant resources. Rome failed because her leaders could not realize that throughout their entire

evolution Germanic societies had, in fact, responded to increasing Roman pressure by increased cohesion. However, Rome's concept of preclusive defense, her consistent goal since Hadrian, allowed no viable alternatives. Certainly mass settlement of unconquered barbarians was as yet unthinkable.

Thus, Rome enhanced the position of the warbands and created conditions favorable to the evolution of confederate leaders strong enough to weld the raucous bands into cohesive and effective societies. After the establishment of the Germanic Kingdoms in the West, the challenge of the Roman frontier and Roman society waned, and the nobility, their leadership rooted in the warbands of the fourth century, reasserted their independence. The settlement territorialized noble power, especially in the areas appor-tioned under the *hospitalitas* system, and defined the parameters of early medieval society for centuries to come. Royal lines begun in the period of frontier violence quickly lost control over their people.

In final analysis the frontier system built by Constantius II and Valentinian was untenable, especially in the aftermath of the defeat at Adrianople, and the magnificent system gave way to desperate measures. Under Theodosius parts of the system were completely abandoned including numerous watchtowers along the Danube.<sup>69</sup> The policy of defense through periodic raids and bloodletting all but ended in the ashes of a farm-house outside Adrianople covering the body of Valens.

<sup>1</sup> For a survey of Roman-Barbarian conflict in the fourth century from a Roman perspective see B. Stalknecht, *Untersuchungen zur römischen Aussenpolitik in der Spätantike (306-395 n. Chr.)*, Bonn., 1969. The lower Danube, although essentially peaceful, demanded more attention in the first half of the century, see K. Horedt, »Die grossen Erdwälle an der mittleren und unteren Donau«, in *Actes de IXe Congrès international d'études sur les frontières Romaines*. (Mamaia, 1972, [Bucurest, 1974]).

<sup>2</sup> The most detailed discussion of Roman policy, from a purely Roman viewpoint, remains I. Peters, *Die Germanen Politik der Kaiser Konstantius II. und Julian in Rahmen der römischen Reichspolitik des 4. Jahrhunderts* (unpubl. diss., Heidelberg, 1945). More recently, R. Günther (ed.), *Die Römer an Rhein und Donau* (Berlin, 1975).

<sup>3</sup> Tacitus, *Germania*, 7.

<sup>4</sup> Mauricius, *Strategikon*, chapters three and four on the Scythians, Franks, Lombards and others, ed. H. Mihăescu (Bucurest, 1970). Ammianus Marcellinus, xxxi, 4. 2 Note especially the strength of the *fara* (a subtribal group combining family and warband) into the seventh century. In some areas on the Rhine the inhabited zone extended only ten miles eastward before the forest began, Ammianus, xvii, 1.8.

<sup>5</sup> *Historia Augusta, V. Probi*, 14.7; 18.2. For some of the rebuilding activities of the Imperium Galliarum see *C. I. L.*, XII. 2228; XIII, 8879 and 8882. In general, E. Wightman, »Some aspects of the Late Roman Defensive System in Gaul,« in *Roman Frontier Studies*, 1967, (Tel. Aviv Univ., 1971) pp. 46-51; T. Pekáry, »Zur Ostgrenze des Gallischen Sonderreiches in 3. Jh. n. Chr.,« in *R. F. S.*, 1967, Tel Aviv, pp. 128-31; and R. Laur-Belart, »The late *limes* from Basel to Lake Constance,« *Congress of Roman Frontier Studies*, 1949 (Durham, 1952) pp. 55-67. In addition, see the site gazetteer in H. von Petrikovits, »Fortifications in the North-Western Roman Empire from the Third to the Fifth Centuries A. D.« *JRS* 61 (1971), pp. 207-13 (lists 1-4).

<sup>6</sup> I have discussed the sources relevant to the analysis of third century barbarian society in »*The Barbarians and the Scriptores Historiae Augustae*,« *Collection Latomus*, 164, *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History*, I (Bruxelles, 1979) pp. 521-40.

<sup>7</sup> The Germans apparently moved into the area between the Rhine and Danube only gradually, for few significant Germanic artifacts have come to light before the mid-fourth century, H. Schönberger, »The Roman Frontier in Germany: An Archaeological Survey,« *JRS*, 59 (1969) 178. In detail

see R. Roeren, »Zur Archäologie und Geschichte Südwestdeutschlands in 3. bis 5. Jahrhundert n. Chr.,« *Jahrbuch RGZM* 7 (1960) 214-94, and E. Keller, »Zur Chronologie der jünger-kaiserzeitlichen Grabfunde aus Südwestdeutschland und Nordbayern,« in *Festschrift für Joachim Werner zum 65. Geburtstag* (München, 1974) 247-91.

<sup>8</sup> G. Forni, *Il reclutamento delle legioni da Augusto a Diocleziano* (Milan, 1953).

<sup>9</sup> R. Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire* (Cambridge, 1974) pp. 366-69.

<sup>10</sup> W. Goffart, *Caput and Colonate: Towards a History of Late Roman Taxation* (Toronto, 1974).

<sup>11</sup> The evidence is surveyed by R. MacMullen, »Barbarian Enclaves in the Northern Roman Empire,« *Antiquité Classique*, 32 (1963) 552-61. Constantius tried to organize such a *receptio* for the Limigantes near Acuminum in Pannonia in 359, but the crossing ended in chaos, Ammianus, xix, 11.7-17.

<sup>12</sup> *Not. Dig.*, Occ. 42.33-44. (ed. O. Seeck, Frankfurt am Main, 1876). J. M. Blazquez, »The Rejection and Assimilation of Roman Culture in Hispania during the Fourth and Fifth Centuries,« *Classical Folia*, 32 (1978) 217-242, is an interesting case study of the problems of assimilation of ethnic units both Celtic and Germanic. Perhaps the gradual process, including Laeti, is best documented for northern Gaul, which became increasingly Germanic in the fourth and fifth centuries; H. W. Böhme, *Germanische Grabfunde des 4. bis 5. Jahrhunderts* (München, 1974).

<sup>13</sup> Burns, *op. cit.*, and A. Bodor, »Emperor Aurelian and the Abandonment of Dacia,« *Dacomania: Jahrbuch für Östliche Latinität*, 1 (1973) 37.

<sup>14</sup> In general see R. Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung: das Werden der frühmittelalterlichen gentes* (Cologne, 1961). The typical reaction was confederacy, and this was still the case in the fourth century, see Ammianus, xvii, 12.7 for the Sarmatians, xviii, 2.8 for the Alamanni.

<sup>15</sup> E. Popescu, »Das Problem der Kontinuität in Rumänien im Lichte der epigraphischen Entdeckungen,« *Dacomania*, 1 (1973) 69-74; M. Comsa, »Sur la romanisation des territoires nord-danubiens aux IIIe - VIe siècles de N. è.,« *Nouvelles études d'histoire* (Bucarest.), 3 (1965) 23-39, and »Zur Romanisierung der Gebiete nördlich der Donau im 4. Jh. n. Z.,« *Dacia* 9 (1965) 283-98; G. Diaconu, »Einheimische und Wandervölker im 4. Jahrhundert auf dem Gebiete Rumäniens,« *Dacia* 8 (1964) 195-210.

<sup>16</sup> E. A. Thompson, »Constantine, Constantius II, and the Lower Danube Frontier,« *Hermes*, 84 (1956) 372-81.

<sup>17</sup> The magnitude of the trade can be seen in O. Brogan, »Trade between the Roman Empire and the Free Germans,« *Journal of Roman Studies*, 26 (1936) 195-222; and H. J. Eggers, »Zur absoluten Chronologie der römischen Kaiserzeit im freien Germanien,« in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, II. 5.1 (Berlin, 1976) with an update by H. Jankuhn. For one example of a trading center in Pannonia see *C. I. L.*, III, 3653.

<sup>18</sup> The most interesting item of exchange was the chip-carved jewelry unique to the frontier zone, see G. Behrens, »Spätromische Kerbschnittschnallen,« *Schumacher Festschrift* (1930), pp. 285-94; and more recently, H. Bullinger, *Spätantike Gürtelbeschläge, Typen, Herstellung, Trageweise und Datierung* (Brugge, 1969). Food was in great demand among the Goths from the time of Constantine, who regularized the exchange (*Anonymus Valesianus*, pars prior, 30, and Ammianus, xxvii, 5.7). In the late fifth century, the Rugians were always chronically short of foodstuffs and sought to extract them from the surviving cities in Noricum (*Vita S. Severini*, 3.3, 12.4, 22.4, 28.2, 31.1-6).

<sup>19</sup> M. Wheeler, *Rome Beyond the Imperial Frontiers* (London, 1954) admits the problem by having a chapter on Roman exports but not on imports. O. Brogan, *op. cit.*, does discuss Roman imports, but her meager evidence for foodstuffs is confined to the principate.

<sup>20</sup> What evidence exists for a slave trade is set forth in Heinz Grünert (ed.) *Römer und Germanen in Mitteleuropa* (Berlin, 1976), especially in the articles by Grünert, B. Krüger and R. Günther. The classic case remains the Sarmatians (Ammianus, xvii, 12.18). For the late fourth and fifth centuries examples are numerous: eg. Ambrose, *de officiis*, ii. 70 and 137 (*P. L.* xvi, 129, 148 f.) and *Cod. Theod.*, V. 7.2 and *Sirmond.* xvi, see further E. A. Thompson, »Slavery in Early Germany,« *Hermathena*, 89 (1957) 17-29.

<sup>21</sup> Ammianus, xvii, 12.21.

<sup>22</sup> Ammianus, xxvi, 4.5; xxx, 6.1-2.

<sup>23</sup> Tacitus, *Germania*, 29 and H. Nesselhauf, »Umriss einer Geschichte des obergermanischen Heeres,« *JRGZM*, 7 (1960) 166.

<sup>24</sup> See sources cited *Die Römer in Baden-Württemberg*, ed. P. Filtzinger (Stuttgart, 1976) p. 84.

<sup>25</sup> J. Keim, *Der römische Schatzfund von Straubing* (Munich, 1976). Despite numerous detailed excavations on the Raetian limes, the problem of evacuation or defense in the

third century remains insoluble. The verdict of evacuation, based on earlier studies, still appears most likely as R. Laur-Belart stated in 1949, »The Late Limes from Basel to the Lake of Constance,« *Congress of Roman Frontier Studies* (1949), ed. E. Birley (Durham, 1952) p. 55.

<sup>26</sup> Ammianus, xv, 4.1; xviii, 2.15. *regionem (cui Capillacii vel Palas nomen est) ubi terminales lapides Alamannorum et Burgundiorum confinia.*

<sup>27</sup> Ammianus, xvi, 12.25; on the battle in general, E. Nischer, »Die Schlacht bei Strassburg im Jahre 357 n. Chr.,« *Klio*, 21, (1927) 391 ff.

<sup>28</sup> Ammianus, xvi, 12.26.

<sup>29</sup> The Sarmatians too had coalesced (Ammianus, xvii, 12.11). On the lower Danube Constantine's transdanubian wars gave further stimulus to this process (*Anonymus Valesianus*, pars prior, 33).

<sup>30</sup> G. Bersu, *Die spätromische Befestigung »Bürgle« bei Gundremmingen* (München, 1964) p. 50, and J. Garbsch, »Recent Excavations at Late Roman Vermania,« *Roman Frontier Studies*, 1969 (Cardiff, 1974) pp. 159—60 with chart of coin finds revealing a surge between 330 and 345.

<sup>31</sup> Ammianus, xviii, 2.12. Some important studies of the Roman influence on the Germans are: M. Bréal, »Premières influences de Rome sur le monde germanique,« *Mémoires de la Société de Linguistique de Paris*, VII (1892) 135—148; H. W. Böhme, *op cit.*, J. Werner, »Zur Entstehung der Reihengräberzivilisation,« *Archaeologia Geographica*, I (1950) 23 ff, and J. Werner, »Zu den alamanischen Burgen des 4. und 5. Jahrhunderts« (1965) reprinted in *Zur Geschichte der Alemannen* (Darmstadt, 1975) 67—90. The difference between barbarians in contact with Rome and those of the interior was well known to Ammianus, xviii, 2.17. I have traced this development among the Ostrogoths in *The Ostrogoths: Kingship and Society* (Historia, Einzelschriften, 1980).

<sup>32</sup> Jerome, *Ep*, cxxiii, 15 dtd 410; Rutilius, *De redivo suo*, I, 413—414; and Libanius, *Or*, xviii, 35.

<sup>33</sup> Julianus, V, »To the Senate and People of Athens,« ed. J. Bidez, *L'Empereur Julien, Oeuvres Complètes*, I, pp. 213—235. (Paris, 1932). For the view that Julian exaggerated the devastation in Gaul, see F. Vercauteren, »La Ruine des Villes de la Gaule,« *Brussels Université Libre — Institute de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales; Annuaire*, 2 (1934) 955—93.

<sup>34</sup> Ammianus, xiv, 10.

<sup>35</sup> These struggles are amply chronicled in Peters, *op cit.*

<sup>36</sup> Ammianus, xvi, 5.16—17.

<sup>37</sup> Ammianus, xviii, 2.3. Dating reconstruction of the fourth century is perplexing at best, see W. Schleiermacher, »Der obergermanische Limes und spätrömische Wehranlagen am Rhein,« *Ber. R. G. K.*, 33 (1943—1950) 133—184, and in general, H. Schönberger, *op cit.*, and H. von Petrikovits, *op cit.* with index and gazetteer of sites, list 5 and 6. Peters, *op cit.*, p. 107, lists seven cities retaken by Julian: *Castra Herculis* near Leiden, *Quadriburgium Tricensima*, *Novaesium* (Neuss), *Bonna*, *Autumacum* (Andernach) and *Vingo* (Bingen). However, she and others since are hard pressed to fix the sites of fortifications, pp. 55—70. *Tricensima* has recently been identified as Xanten, see J. E. Bogaers and C. B. Rüge (eds.), *Der nedergermanische Limes* (Köln, 1974) 106—11.

<sup>38</sup> Ammianus, xvi, 11.9 trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb, 1935; other instances, xvi, 11.8—10; xvii, 1.7; xviii, 2.7, 2.17, 2.19; xx, 10.1—3.

<sup>39</sup> Ammianus, xvii, 1.4—8; 12.1—8; 13.12—14; xx, 10.2.

<sup>40</sup> Julianus, »To the Athenians,« 8 (ed. Bidez, p. 226). Ammianus, xvi, 12.60—65.

<sup>41</sup> Ammianus, xxvii, 2.9; 12.20; 13.24; 13.30.

<sup>42</sup> For example, Ammianus, xvii, 1.11; 10.7; xviii, 2.6; and especially xvii, 13.24.

<sup>43</sup> Ammianus, xvii, 3.1.

<sup>44</sup> Priscus, frag., 39. ed. Dindorf, *Historici Graeci Minores*, p. 348.

<sup>45</sup> In addition to lists 5 and 6 in Petrikovits, *op cit.*, pp. 213—15, and others listed above see T. Nagy, »The Frontier of Pannonia as Reflected by Recent Research,« *7th Int. Congress of Roman Frontier Studies*, Tel Aviv, 1971, pp. 145—50, who reports that the first phase of construction at Azaum took place under Constantius II. Farther downstream, Constantius engaged the Goths, see K. Horedt, »Die grossen Erdwälle an der mittleren und unteren Donau,« *Actes de IXe Congrès international d'études sur les frontières Romaines*, p. 212.

<sup>46</sup> S. Soproni, *Der spätromische Limes zwischen Esztergom und Szentendre* (Budapest, 1978), especially pp. 76—96. Szob was erected under Constantius. Veröce also dates from Constantius with renovations under Valentinian and signs of abandonment and destruction ca. 380; Felsögöd was built by Constantius and renovated by Valentinian.

<sup>47</sup> Konrad Kraft, »Die Taten der Kaiser Constans und Constantius II,« in *Kleine Schriften*, Bd. 2 (Darmstadt, 1978) pp. 87—132.

<sup>48</sup> For example, at Lauriacum there were new works on the towers, L. Eckhart, »Der römische Limes in West-Noricum.« *7th Int. Congress of Roman Frontier Studies*, Tel Aviv, 1971, pp. 142—44. The castellum near Gundremmingen is a good example of late Roman construction, Bersu, *op cit.* On Valentinianic and earlier watchtowers see K. Stehlin, *Die spätromischen Wachtürme am Rhein von Basel bis zum Bodensee* (Basel, 1957). In general, Petrikovits, *op cit.*, pp. 191—202.

<sup>49</sup> Schönberger, *op cit.*, pp. 177—87. On Basel and the opposing burgus see M. Hartmann, »Militär und militärische Anlagen.« in *Archäologie der Schweiz*, V, pp. 25—28 (Basel, 1975). Perhaps we might add Sponeck and Breisach, but their exact location is indeterminable because of the changing course of the Rhine, see H. Bender, »Neuere Untersuchungen auf dem Münsterberg in Breisach (1966—75).« *Archäologisches Korrespondenzblatt*, 6 (1976) 309—20, and R—M. Swoboda, »Die Ausgrabungen auf Burg Sponeck.« *Arch. Korresp.*, 7 (1977) 225—27.

<sup>50</sup> Stehlin, *op cit.*

<sup>51</sup> T. Nagy, »Die Militärbezirke der Valeria nach der Notitia Dignitatum.« *Acta Antiqua*, 7 (1959) 183—94; and S. Soproni, »Burg-Bauinschrift vom Jahre 372 am Pannonischen Limes.« *Studien zu den Militärgrenzen Roms. Vorträge des 6. Internationalen Limeskongresses in Süddeutschland*. (Köln, 1967), pp. 138—43, and Soproni, *Der Spät-römische Limes . . .*, pp. 61—62.

<sup>52</sup> A. Mócsy, »Ein spätantiker Festungstyp am linken Donauufer.« in *Roman Frontier Studies* (Cardiff, 1974) pp. 191—96. Soproni, *Der spät-römische Limes*.

<sup>53</sup> Schönberger, *op cit.*, p. 186.

<sup>54</sup> Soproni, »Eine spät-römische Militärstation im sarmatischen Gebiet.« in *Roman Frontier Studies*, 1969, 197—203; and *Limes*, pp. 81—85. See also *Tabula Imperii Romani* (Aquincum-Sarmizegetusa-Sirmium), (Amsterdam, 1968) IVa.

<sup>55</sup> Note the incident on the Rhine with Constantius above or *C. I. L.*, III, 3576. *Francus ego civis, Romanus miles in armis*.

<sup>56</sup> So too, Ausonius, *Mosella*, 455.

<sup>57</sup> R. M. Butler, »Late Roman Town Walls in Gaul.« *The Archaeological Journal*, 116 (1959) 25—50.

<sup>58</sup> Ammianus, xxvii, 1 (Alamanni), xxvi, 4.5 (other barbarians). For the campaigns against the Alamanni, xxviii, 2.4—7; 5.6—9; xxx, 7.4—6. Valens' invasion and destruction of Gothic territory in response to their support of Procopius was in keeping with Roman policy, Ammianus, xxvii, 5.1.

<sup>59</sup> A. Alföldi, *A. Conflict in Ideas in the Late Roman Empire: The clash between the Senate and Valentinian I* (Oxford, 1952) and for Julian's problems with the old and new aristocracies see W. Kaegi, »Domestic Military Problems of Julian the Apostate.« *Byzantinische Forschungen 2 — Festschrift Dölger* (1967), pp. 247—64.

<sup>60</sup> The Roman penchant for banquet assassinations, repeated several times (here Amm. xxix, 6.5) and most infamously in 376 before the Battle of Adrianople (xxx, 5.5), is consistent with Roman policy in that it temporarily disrupted barbarian leadership. If this was indeed policy, it was unsound for it provoked quick retaliation.

<sup>61</sup> Ammianus, xxx, 5.14, other examples of Valentinian's tactics against the Germans include, xxvii, 2.9; xxvii, 10.7; xxix, 4.5—7.

<sup>62</sup> Ammianus, xxix, 6.2; xxx, 6.1—2.

<sup>63</sup> Their bickering is reflected in their coinage (H. Mattingly, *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, Vol. IX, London, 1933, pp. xv—xxii) and probably explains Valens' rashness at Adrianople, when he refused to wait for Gratian.

<sup>64</sup> For Gratian's campaigns against the Lentienses Alamanni see Ammianus, xxxi, 10.2—7. Valens was so sorely pressed for recruits (*Cod. Theod.*, 7.1.5—11) that his welcoming of the Goths (Amm. xxxi, 4.4—6) is quite understandable.

<sup>65</sup> On the Burgundians see Odet Perrin, *Les Burgondes. Leur histoire, des origines à la fin du premier Royaume* (534), (Neuchâtel, 1968). The famous gold treasures attributed to the Gepids clearly indicate their system of ranking, very similar to that of the Quadi cited above. For an able summary of Gepidic society see István Bóna, *The Dawn of the Dark Ages. The Gepids and the Lombards in the Carpathian Basin* (Budapest, 1976) pp. 66—73.

<sup>66</sup> Olympiodorus, frag. 3. as preserved in Photius, *Bibliotheca*, codex 80. (ed. L. Dindorf, *Historici Graeci Minores*, p. 451).

<sup>67</sup> F. Lot, »Du Régime de l'Hospitalité.« *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire*, vii (1928) 975—1011; and W. Janssen, »Some Major Aspects of Frankish and Medieval Settlement in the Rhineland.« in *Medieval Settlement*, ed. P. H. Sawyer (London, 1976) pp. 41—60. The technological disparity between Germans and Romans produced gradients of continuity throughout the transition period.

<sup>68</sup> T. S. Burns, »Ennodius and the Ostrogothic Settlement.« *Classical Folia*, 32 (1978) 153—68.

<sup>69</sup> Soproni, *Limes*, pp. 86—96.

## GERMANI IN RIMSKA OBMEJNA POLITIKA

(ok. 350—378 n. št.)

### Povzetek

Avtor obravnava na osnovi podatkov iz Amijana Markelina in rezultatov izkopavanj vzdolž obrenskega in obdonavskega limesa tesno povezano med razvojem germanskih plemenskih struktur in določenimi aspekti rimske obmejne politike. V nasprotju z ustaljenim mnenjem skuša dokazati, da so Konstancij II. in njegovi nasledniki, zlasti Valentinijan I., dobro razumeli močne in šibke točke germanske družbe, vendar je prav njihova napačno izbrana obmejna politika kasneje pripeljala do katastrofalnih rezultatov.

Po relativno mirnem obdobju prve polovice 4. stoletja so se po Magnencijevem (350—353) uporu znova začele vojne med Rimom in Germani, ki so trajale trideset let. Konstancij II., Julijan in Valentinijan I. so se proti barbarom uspešno bojevali, izgrajevali utrdbe na limesu in stremeli za tem, da bi bili Germani čim bolj razdrobljeni. Rimski vojaki so iz dobro utrjenih obmejnih trdnjav napadali in ubijali civilno prebivalstvo, kar je pogojilo hiter notranji razvoj germanskih vojnih tolp, katerih moč in vloga sta stalno naraščali. Rim je pričakoval, da bo prišlo do stabilizacije germanske družbe, kar pa se ni zgodilo.

Na začetku principata se je rimska država naslanjala na lokalno germansko aristokracijo, zlasti kralje, ki v glavnem niso imeli oblasti nad vojsko, hkrati pa so igrali vse pomembnejšo vlogo poveljniki tolpe, „duces“, ki so perfekcionirali tehniko bojevanja v spopadih z rimsko vojsko, oziroma v njeni službi. Družinske vezi v germanski družbi so se krhale, močne so bile predvsem v zaledju; ravnotežje med družino in bojnimi tolpmi se je zaradi napadov na neoboroženo prebivalstvo vse bolj rušilo.

Pod tetrarhijo in Konstantinom se je na limesu ogromno novega sezidalo, stare utrdbe so obnovili, vendar je bilo za obmejno politiko potrebno še kaj drugega kot le vojaški posegi. Obmejno ozemlje je bilo slabo naseljeno: vladarji so sistematično naseljevali germanske barbore v obmejne province, bodisi kot *laeti*, ali pa so jih novačili v vojsko, proces romanizacije pa je bil silno počasen. Ponovno so začeli vzpostavljati klientelni sistem, kajti vedno večje konfederacije germanskih plemen so predstavljale nove probleme.

Ob mejah so bili zaradi stalnega trgovanja stiki med germanskim in rimskim prebivalstvom precej tesni. Kvadi so poznali socialno diferencirano družbo, prav tako Alamani. Hadrijanov limes je sicer skrajšal komunikacije med Norikom in Zgornjo Germanijo, ni pa se oziral na plemenske strukture, zato je prihajalo do stalnih obmejnih spopadov. Posledica tega je bila, da so se plemena začela združevati, zlasti v obdobju miru, ki je sledilo uspešnim Dioklecijanovim in Konstantinovim kampanjam. Spremembe v notranjem razvoju germanskih plemen so postale posebej očitne po Magnencijevem uporu.

Konstancij ni vodil le defenzivne politike: očistiti Galijo napadalcev, temveč se je odločil za kazensko odpravo preko Rena. Alamani so ga prosili za mir, severne Germane pa je Julijan premagal, o čemer podrobno poroča Amijan. Julijan je sklenil razdrobiti alamansko koalicijo, zato je močno ojačal obmejne postojanke. Napadel je Franke, Konstancij pa se je istočasno ob Donavi bojeval z Limiganti, Kvadi in Sarmati. Oba sta skušala oživiti nekdanji klientelni sistem, ki v tistem trenutku barbarom ni nudil ničesar razen obljube miru, zahteval pa je ogromno obnovitvene gradnje ob limesu, ki jo spričujejo izkopavanja vzdolž Rena in Donave. Konstancij je dal — kot kaže nova datacija — zgraditi celo štiri opazovalne stolpe onstran Donave; Valentinijan jih je obnovil in nadaljeval njegovo politiko. Hkrati sta sprejemala v rimsko vojsko posamezne skupine barbarov skupaj z njihovimi voditelji in obnovila vrsto trdnjav na barbarskem ozemlju vzdolž limesa. Germani so rimski vojaški sistem dobro poznali (medporoke, trgovanje na določenih mestih, običajno blizu trdnjav, sezonsko delo, vojaška služba); še preden je bila gradnja na limesu povsem dokončana, so se začeli vpadi. Valentinijan jih je zatrl v krvi.

Istočasno so Huni z daljnega vzhoda potisnili Gote proti rimski meji — s tem so uničili krhki mir, ki so ga Rimljani dosegli z največjimi napori. Postopno propadanje tega, kar je bil dosegel Valentinijan, je trajalo okoli tri desetletja. Gracijan in Valens sta nadaljevala njegovo politiko. Ta sistem je sam pogojil velike germanske konfederacije, zlasti Alamanov, Kvadov, zahodnih in vzhodnih Gotov; hkrati pa tudi manjše koalicije (Burgundi, Gepidi). Po letu 378 so vpadali čez meje v mnogo večjih skupinah kot v kriznem obdobju tretjega stoletja.

Naselili so se na rimski zemlji — pod svojimi kralji in zakoni. Rimski vladarji so hoteli kontrolirati germanske bojne tolpe s tem, da so jih novačili v rimsko vojsko in naseljevali na določenih prostorih, vendar so hkrati zvečevali njihovo moč in vlogo z napadi na germanske vasi. V okviru teh vojaških skupin sta se razvila hierarhija in plemstvo. Ker so jim unčevali vasi, so postajale nevarno odvisne od Rima tudi na področju kmetijstva.

Rimski vladarji so pravilno zaznali tokove v germanski družbi in jih skušali z velikopoteznim izgrajevanjem limesa zavreti, a so jih le pospešili, zato je njihov sistem tako kmalu propadel.