EARLY GERMANIC WARFARE

THREE TOPICS ARE DISCUSSED IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES: (i) WEAPONS and Tactics, (ii) Siege Warfare and (iii) Food and Strategy. But it is necessary to begin by stressing the immense technical superiority of the Roman Empire over all its neighbours.

Throughout the heyday of their civilisation the Romans made a comparatively small contribution to the development of mechanical techniques; but their capacity for absorbing and developing the inventions, and particularly the weapons, of others aroused widespread discussion in the ancient world and indeed became something of a commonplace in Greco-Roman literature. When Roman armies first entered north-western Europe in force, the natives of that region were astounded and often demoralised by the sheer technical ability of the invaders. Again and again in his BG Caesar remarks on the astonishment of the Gauls, Britons, and Germans at the techniques of his troops. Now, the techniques of the Gauls themselves were by no means primitive by Roman standards, and the Gauls were quick to learn from their conquerors. But they could only imitate what they had the technical resources to make for themselves and what their Roman prisoners could teach them to construct (though they might be impressive pupils); and when their country had risen in its last assault on the invaders, the Gauls believed that they had been beaten not by Roman courage and discipline but by Roman technical superiority, especially in siege operations.

On every frontier the barbarians suffered from this same inferiority. The Dacians, the steppe nomads, and even the great Persian Empire itself were no match for the Romans in technical achievements. Moreover, apart from technicians and technical skill the Romans also had at their disposal far greater quantities of the raw materials essential to war than had any of their neighbours. (Two passages which will well repay study in this connexion are Herodian, Hist. iv. 10. 4, and Libanius, Or. lix. 66 ff.). Consider a random entry in a late Roman chronicle. A certain Aristus, commander of the Illyrican troops in 499, marched out with 15,000 soldiers to fight the Bulgars who were devastating Thrace in that year; and he brought with him no fewer than 520 wagons loaded with the weapons alone which were essential for the campaign. No other ancient State had soldiers with such “fire-power” as these figures imply. More than half a millennium earlier Julius Caesar did not conceal the efforts which
he made to impress upon the Gauls the vastness of the resources of Italy — any losses which the Romans might suffer in war could be replaced over and over again.¹⁰

I

Now, the Gauls, to say nothing of the Persians, had reached a higher level of material development than the Germans at the time when both alike clashed with the armies of Julius Caesar. In Caesar's time the use of iron among the Germans was severely limited, at any rate by Roman standards. Indeed, it has been said that German weapons, both defensive and offensive, were characterised by poverty of metal; and Tacitus points to their weapons to prove the shortage of iron among the German communities.¹¹ Germanicus could encourage his men without absurd exaggeration by pointing out to them that the German warriors had neither breastplates nor helmets, that their shields were not strengthened with iron or leather but were made merely of wickerwork and thin, painted boards, and that the spears of many of them were not tipped with iron at all but were merely hardened by fire.¹² In fact, the character of German weapons was elucidated many years ago by M. Jahn in his fundamental study; and a brief summary of some of his conclusions will be enough for our purpose.

When the German warrior, whether horseman or foot, went into battle in the first century A.D., his main weapon was a long lance with one end sharpened and hardened by fire, or else fitted with a short narrow iron point, which could be hurled or used for thrusting.¹³ Some foot-soldiers also had several spears each which they could throw;¹⁴ but only a handful of them — the more well-to-do — could afford to carry a sword in addition.¹⁵ These offensive weapons left them at an inferiority to the Romans. For while the lances and spears might possibly match the Roman *pilum* (which, of course, was not a thrusting weapon), the German sword was found wanting (quite apart from the fact that the majority of Germanic warriors possessed no sword at all): swords appear to have been used much less frequently in the early Roman period, even by those who could afford to own them, than had been the case before the Germans came in contact with the Romans. In some measure the sword as such was found to be an unsatisfactory weapon in warfare against the Romans. When their defensive armour was so scanty, it was advisable to use a long thrusting spear and so to keep one's distance rather than to use a sword and so be forced to come to grips with the heavily clad Romans.¹⁶
In their defensive armour the Germans were at a disastrous disadvantage to the Imperial troops. They went into battle either naked or wearing only a short cloak. Helmets and breastplates were practically unknown. Their only defensive weapon was the light wooden or wicker shield which Germanicus spoke of with contempt. But these shields were not used only to parry their opponents’ blows or to deflect their missiles: they were fitted with an iron boss sometimes as much as twelve centimetres high and so fashioned that the shield became a thrusting weapon in itself. Their smiths showed almost endless initiative in working out independently of Celtic or Roman influences new types of boss which would make a thrust of the shield more effective. But in fact the shield of wickerwork or light boards (sometimes fitted with an iron rim) was as a rule only half a centimetre thick at the edges and one to one and a half centimetre round the boss in the centre; and even when it was strengthened with leather — for Germanicus exaggerated when he said that this was not done — it could easily be smashed by the adversary’s steel. In all, we can hardly hesitate to agree with an historian of the sixth century A.D. who, having occasion to comment on the arms and armour of the Germans, says that their armament was paltry and such as would need no skilled technicians to repair it if it were damaged: repairs could be carried out by the warriors themselves.

All this explains the need for that swift, wild rush in their wedge-shaped formations with which the Germans would charge the ranks of their heavily armed opponents. Their only hope of overwhelming a Roman commander in open country, clear of their own woods and marshes, was to break his line by the impetus of their first attack; and on at least one occasion their charge was so headlong as to leave the Roman troops no time to hurl their javelins at all. They attacked of necessity: they dared not wait to be attacked. (It was advisable, of course, to avoid the error of judgement of which some of Caesar’s enemies were guilty, who charged so rapidly over such a long distance that when at last they arrived at the Roman lines they were panting and breathless and quite unable to fight a battle.) But if the Germans were caught up and entangled in a prolonged hand-to-hand grapple where their light shield and thrusting spear were confronted with the heavy metal helmet, breastplate, and shield, and the steel sword of the Romans, their personal bravery would often avail them little. This was particularly the case since many of them, when once they chose or were compelled to hurl their spears, would be left without any weapon of any kind, offensive or
defensive, apart from their heavily bossed shields — unless they could pick up a spear which had already been thrown or unless they chose to pick up stones and throw them: we even hear of German throwing stones. The fact is that in open battle against Roman legionaries the Germanic warriors were little, if at all, more effective than the Achaeans heroes of Homer would have been. It was useless to fight the Imperial armies with the tactics and equipment of Achilles and Agamemnon, which even in A.D. 552 the last Ostrogothic king employed in his last battle against the Romans. As a rule it was also useless for the Germans to fight the Roman invaders inside the forests of their country. There, as Germanicus told his men (and he soon proved it in action), among the trees and undergrowth the advantage would have lain with the Romans. If the mass of the warriors were closely crowded together among the trees, the German’s long lance became unwieldy, he could not run to pick up a lance or other weapon lying on the ground, and he could not exploit his fleetness of foot: he merely stood defenceless for the legionaries to cut him down. But if they could not fight successfully either in the open or in the woods, what were they to do? The Germans solved this problem by catching the Romans, whenever it was possible, on an open plain surrounded by woods (or marshes) and by launching incessant, sharp and short attacks on them from all directions using the woods as cover.

German cavalry was somewhat less ineffective than German infantry, and from Caesar’s day onwards German horsemen were frequently used in the Roman army. But their number was severely limited, for only a few Germans could afford to keep a horse: the cavalry were in general identical with the nobles. Moreover, at a later date, when the Germans were using bows and arrows (with which they began to arm themselves extensively in the third century), their ability to fight the Romans inside the forests was somewhat increased. But from the point of view of weapons the position of the Germans had improved only slightly in the late Roman period. How, for example, were the Visigoths armed when they engaged Valens at Adrianople? What is known of their warfare in general does not suggest that their main strength lay in their cavalry. It is true that their nobility were mounted (on horses which were inferior to Roman horses), but the army was still essentially an army of infantrymen. These infantrymen still used the spears which had always been the chief weapon of the Germans, and they used axes and clubs hardened by fire, which may or may not have been impromptu weapons used only because the mass of
the people had been disarmed in 376 and had not yet succeeded in re-arming themselves fully. They also used bows and arrows tipped with iron (though these were not in any sense their characteristic weapons), and their horsemen, i.e. their nobility, had a long two-edged cavalry sword adapted from the sword which was used by the Sarmatianas and Alans of the Pontic region. There is no reason to think that Fritigern's men had appreciably greater quantities of metal at their disposal than Arminius' warriors had had 350 years earlier. On the other hand, we cannot suppose that they were a more primitive people than the Germans of whom Tacitus speaks; and so we may take it as certain that some, though perhaps not very many, of the Visigoths at Adrianople wore breastplates and helmets. There is no evidence, however, for the traditional view that the battle of Adrianople was a great cavalry victory. Although Ostrogothic cavalry took a decisive part in the struggle, Adrianople was in fact a victory of Visigothic infantrymen over Roman infantrymen. Again, it might be thought that a people who try to defend their country by building a wall around it in the middle of a campaign, as the Visigoths did when the Huns attacked them in 376, are not a nation of horsemen. The fact is that few, if any, German peoples before the sixth century are known to have relied mainly on cavalry in times of war. It is true that Aurelius Victor, Caes. xxi. 2, describes the Alamanni as "a numerous people who fight wonderfully on horseback"; but we must beware of such facile generalisations. What Aurelius Victor really means is that the Alamannic nobles were good horsemen — the bulk of the Alamanni fought on foot, like the bulk of all Germanic peoples before the fifth or sixth century A.D.

Another point calls for discussion. The Visigoths set foot on Roman soil in 376 without food and largely without weapons; and the process of re-arming the Visigothic people was not completed until the end of the century, when they compelled the State arms factories of Illyricum to supply them with Roman weapons and with iron. In the years following 376 we hear repeatedly that the Visigoths took every opportunity of obtaining Roman arms. Sometimes after an encounter with Roman forces they would strip the Roman wounded and dead of their armour and weapons. Once, the defenders of a besieged city noticed that the Visigoths were using the actual weapons which had been hurled at them from the city walls a moment before. It looks as though the battle of Adrianople were won by men who had to a considerable extent armed themselves from the enemy. The position of the Visigoths
in the desperate years 376-8 was, of course, exceptional, for they had been disarmed at the frontier. Yet it is noteworthy that in the third-century raids they are also reported as looting weapons at Chalcedon; and on that occasion there is no reason to doubt that they had set out on their venture as fully equipped in weapons and armour as they were capable of making themselves. Moreover, we more than once hear that in the period of the early Empire, too, the Germans equipped themselves by stripping the Roman dead after a battle. The fact that Roman weapons were so often stolen or picked up during a raid may perhaps be no more than a tribute to the superior make of Roman weapons over barbarian ones. But it is tempting to ask whether the Germans were able to equip themselves fully even with their own inferior weapons for a prolonged, distant, and full-scale campaign (as distinct from a fleeting frontier raid). No German chief could begin a campaign with 520 wagon-loads of weapons like Aristus in 499 (p. 1 above). The nomads of the Eurasian steppe could not manufacture enough weapons to supply their own needs in times of full-scale warfare. Even the Romans themselves had difficulties in this respect. The reader will recall how often in the first three books of Tacitus' Histories, where great armies are on the move, the historian turns aside to mention the manufacture or the requisitioning of arms: when the civil wars broke out, the various armies apparently had insufficient stocks to see them comfortably through their campaigns. Now, the quantity of metal and the number of skilled smiths at the disposal of the German civitates could easily be thought greater than it in fact was. For example, at one point in their war with Commodus the Buri were actually obliged to beg the Emperor again and again for a truce in order that they might re-arm themselves before resuming the struggle. Accordingly, throughout Roman history competent Roman generals, when dealing with peoples of low technical capacity, were nearly always insistent in a moment of victory that the enemy should surrender all his weapons. Primitive though the weapons were, the means of producing them were equally primitive; and the process of re-arming might be very prolonged even in peace-time.

When we turn to the sixth century A.D. we find fortunately that weapons were a subject which keenly interested Procopius; and indeed he discusses them in the very first chapter of his History. When he comes to describe the great siege of Rome by the Ostrogoths in 537-8, he turns aside to draw attention to the question of the barbarians' armament. Witigis, he says, failed to notice the difference between his men and the Romans in equipment and in military
The Romans and their Hunnish allies were nearly all mounted archers, ἰπποτοξότιται. The Ostrogoths had cavalry, and they had archers: but their archers were not their cavalrymen. The Ostrogothic cavalrymen were armed only with spears and swords, while their archers fought on foot. Hence, if the barbarian cavalry failed to get to close quarters with the foe, they had no defense against his arrows — they could not fight eminus — while the barbarian infantry, although armed with bows, could scarcely advance against heavy horse. Unlike Witigis, Belisarius was quick to notice this fundamental difference and to see that his possession of mounted archers outweighed his inferiority in numbers. What made the position worse from the Ostrogothic point of view was that their warriors do not seem to have had protective armour to safeguard them from Roman arrows. It is true that Procopius occasionally turns aside to say that such-and-such an Ostrogoth was armed with a helmet and breastplate; but the mere fact that he sometimes finds this worthy of mention suggests that such an Ostrogoth was exceptional and that in general the Ostrogothic nobility alone had satisfactory defensive armour. And even such defensive armour as they possessed would scarcely give the Ostrogothic optimates adequate protection, for according to Procopius, the Roman (unlike the Persian) mounted archers fired their arrows with such force as to be able to penetrate a shield or breastplate. On the other hand, the Roman ἰπποτοξότιται (again unlike the Persian) was himself equipped with a breastplate and greaves. He carried his arrows on his right side, and a sword on his left. Some of them also had a spear and a small shield slung around their shoulders to protect the face and neck. They could fire their arrows when their horses were at full gallop, both when they were pursuing and when they were being pursued, and hence were able to meet new tactical situations the moment they arose. The price which they paid was that they were not able to discharge their arrows so quickly as the Persian horsemen. In short, the war of the Byzantines and the Ostrogoths was largely a struggle between heavily-armed ἰπποτοξότιται and light-armed ἰππακοντισται (though I do not think that Procopius ever uses this latter term). At what date the Goths and (as we shall see) the Vandals learned to become a predominantly cavalry power is a puzzle to which there does not seem to be a satisfactory answer. Darků’s view that they mounted themselves as a result of their contact with the Huns and other nomadic pastoralists in the fifth century is hardly convincing, for if they modelled themselves on ἰπποτοξότιται why did they turn out in the end to be ἰππακοντισται?
The disadvantages under which the Ostrogoths fought Belisarius, then, were very great; and they were intensified at the battle of Taginae by astonishing tactical errors (as we are told) on the part of their commander. Procopius makes two criticisms of Totila’s dispositions at this battle. First, the king placed his infantry in a body behind the cavalry so that the latter might have a safe retreat if they should be forced to give ground. This was not a bad motive, especially if the king was unsure of his infantry — and Belisarius himself had done much the same thing in a battle outside Rome. But as it turned out, the Ostrogothic cavalry, unsupported by their infantrymen’s archery and relying only on their own spears, were routed, and they swept the infantry with them in their flight. Perhaps the historian would have done better to criticise the Ostrogothic cavalry rather than the king personally. At any rate, the Romans exploited the individual qualities of their infantry and their cavalry in the battle, and made the best use of them both. Their tactics were more elastic and less mechanical than those of the Ostrogoths. Secondly, Totila gave the strange order to his men that they should not use bows and arrows or any other weapon except their spears. There is an extraordinary similarity between this and the order given by the Vandal king Gelimer to his army at the battle of Tricamarum. The Vandals, too, were not good infantrymen or archers or javelin-throwers. They fought on horseback with spear and sword and with little or no defensive armour; and so they found it difficult to come to grips with an enemy of Fernkämpfer. Their army, in fact, was very like that of the Ostrogoths, though perhaps the latter had a larger force of infantry. How, then, are we to explain the fact that at Tricamarum Gelimer instructed all the Vandals to use their swords only, and not their spears or any other weapon? Procopius emphasises the folly of Totila’s similar order at Taginae, but he makes no comment on Gelimer’s order and offers no explanation of it. The fact that both kings alike instructed their men to disregard their bows and arrows suggests that there was some reason behind the order: it was not a mere personal whim, one might think, on the part of Gelimer or Totila, as we might be tempted to believe if only one of the kings had issued the order. Perhaps the aim was to do everything possible to induce their followers to come to close quarters with the Roman cavalry and to allow no one an excuse for hanging back in the distance. The Romans, on the other hand, at the battle of Taginae exploited the individual qualities of their various weapons — arrows, spears, swords, etc., — and made the best use of them all. In the battle
itself, as it turned out, Roman unmounted archers inflicted decisive losses of both men and horses on the Ostrogoths before they could even come to grips with their opponents.  

We have no description of the armament of the Visigoths of Spain in the sixth century. We have seen reason above to doubt the view that in the fourth century they were essentially a mounted force. As for the fifth century, a tantalising fragment of Merobaudes tells of both infantry and cavalry in the Visigothic army in 436. Aetius routed a large force of Visigothic infantry at the Mons Colubrarius in Southern Gaul and cut down their cavalry, which seems to have been less numerous. But unfortunately this Visigothic force, which Aetius defeated, was only a detachment of king Theodoric's army, so that we do not know whether the predominance of infantry was characteristic of the army as a whole or only of this part of it. In the seventh century, however, the evidence is explicit: Isidore of Seville informs us that although the Visigoths had both infantry and cavalry their main strength lay in the latter, and their chief weapons were the spear and the javelin. King Erwig in his great army law published in 681 specifies that the Visigothic landowners must bring one-tenth (or, according to some MSS., one half) of their slaves with them to battle; and these slaves, according to the king, must not be unarmed, but must be provided with a variety of weapons: some must have *zabae* or breastplates (Erwig cannot expect all to have defensive armour), and most of them must have shields, *spathae, scramae*, spears, and arrows. Arrows are mentioned last in the list (though in a subsequent sentence slings are named too); and perhaps it would not be rash to conclude that in the sixth and seventh centuries the Visigothic army did not differ in any important respect from the armies of Gelimer and Witigis. Hence, the Visigothic kings were hard put to it to rid Spain of the Byzantines, whom Athanagild had invited into his country in 552. No doubt they found the mounted archers as difficult to deal with as the Ostrogoths had found them. And in spite of the efforts of so powerful a king as Leovigild (568-86) the Visigoths were only able to expel the Byzantines from Spain in 629, during the troubled days of Heraclius, when the East Roman military power had been exhausted by struggles elsewhere. 

In the sixth century, then, the Germans of the Mediterranean kingdoms used the bow far more frequently than their ancestors had done in Tacitus' day. Moreover, a higher proportion of them were mounted than had been the case when Tacitus noted that "plus penes peditem roboris": the riches of Italy, Africa, and Spain
made it possible for a larger number of Germans to keep a horse, and so in the kingdoms of those countries "plus penes equitem robors". These were advances over the conditions of the first century A.D., but in the matter of defensive armour little progress seems to have been made. But it was above all their failure to combine their cavalry and their archers so as to form an adequate force of mounted archers that was the chief tactical reason for their military failures. This shortcoming is particularly surprising in the case of the Ostrogoths. When they left the low-lying area around the mouth of the Vistula c. A.D. 150 — they had been living there since the beginning of the Christian era — they expanded over vast regions of south-eastern Europe and they must have performed the very difficult feat of adapting themselves in some measure to life on the steppe. Organisation, equipment, strategy, and tactics, which had availed them in their local wars at the mouth of the Vistula, could hardly have brought them their far-flung conquests on the open plains. To have won these enormous territories in such conditions is an unsurpassed achievement in early German history. They had many opportunities of seeing the virtues of the mounted archer, but they failed to learn the lesson. And they paid the price for their failure c. 370, when the Huns attacked them and again when Belisarius landed in Italy.

When we turn to the Franks we find an entirely different style of warfare. Mounted archers, whether heavily armed or lightly armed, were unknown among them. The king and his immediate entourage were mounted warriors armed with spears; but these were only a small minority of the whole host. The characteristic Frankish warriors were infantrymen and were not armed with bows or arrows or spears, the only offensive weapons (apart from swords) known to the Goths and the Vandals. Each man had a sword, a shield, and a stout, sharp, iron, double-headed axe with a very short wooden handle. At the beginning of a battle the Frankish warriors drew these axes at a given signal and tried to break the enemy's shields and kill his men. They would throw them even at enemy cavalry. The Franks are said to have expected in 539 that this type of fighting would overwhelm even the army of Belisarius at the first clash, but they were mistaken, for the Byzantines were easily able to outgeneral them. But the Franks, too, only rarely possessed breastplates, greaves, and helmets. The decisive battle of Vouglé in 507, then, where the Franks overthrew the Gallic kingdom of the Visigoths, represented not only a victory of Franks over Visigoths but also a victory of infantry over cavalry and of the axe over
the spear. But the significance of this point could easily be exaggerated, for although Clovis' victory could hardly have been more complete, and although Childebert successfully invaded Spain in 531, yet the Franks were rarely able to defeat the Visigoths in the two centuries between 507 and 711. They never succeeded in wresting Septimania from the Spanish kingdom during that period, and when they interfered in Spanish affairs, the Visigoths usually repulsed them with vigour, as in 585, 589, and 673.

According to what Procopius tells us, it would seem that the further we go from the Mediterranean towards the north-west, the less important cavalry becomes. Beyond the English Channel and the Rhine cavalry played an even smaller part than it did among the Franks. The Werni were all infantrymen. The Angles of "Brittia" had no horses whatever and did not even know what a horse was! We need not accept this last point, but it is undoubtedly true that the Anglo-Saxon invaders of Britain can have brought few horses with them. And it may well be the case that the only Germanic peoples of the sixth century A.D. whose main arm was cavalry, were the peoples who founded kingdoms in Italy, Africa, and Spain.

In the sixth century, then, methods of warfare in the Mediterranean were far from standardised. The military methods of the Franks, of the Germans of the Mediterranean kingdoms, of the Byzantines, and of the Persians (to say nothing of the Slavs and the nomads of the steppe and the desert) all differed from one another; and it cannot reasonably be doubted that in normal conditions the equipment and tactics of the Byzantines, allied to the military skill and traditions of their commanders, were far superior to all the others. As an historical curiosity we may draw attention to the one recorded encounter of the Goths with the Persians. Belisarius had a number of Ostrogoths with him when he invaded the Persian Empire in 541, and when these charged a Persian force outside Nisibis, we are told, the Persians took to flight, unable to withstand the Ostrogoths who came at them with a dense array of long spears. But it would be rash to generalize from one skirmish and to conclude that Gothic methods of warfare were superior to those of the Persian empire.

However that may be, it seems reasonable to infer from our discussion that an army of German warriors, in the first century A.D. as in the sixth, could not hope to win a victory over a Roman army unless (a) it greatly outnumbered it, or (b) it was powerfully helped by the terrain, or (c) the Roman commander was as incompetent as Quintilius Varus was in the Teutoberg Forest or as Valens was at Adrianople.
EARLY GERMANIC WARFARE

II

The more elaborate Roman weapons could not be made or used successfully by the northern barbarians owing to the low technical level of their society generally. Thus, the Batavians supplied considerable numbers of men to the Imperial forces; and their turbulent, unreliable behaviour coupled with their considerable military value, were a constant source of anxiety to their Roman paymasters. Yet as late as A.D. 69, many years after they are first known to have served with the Romans, the Batavians were utterly taken aback by at least one Roman military contrivance, the tolleno.

Those who propose to destroy an urban civilisation must be skilled in siege war; and sieges were not unknown in conflicts between the free Germans living beyond the Imperial frontiers. Little detailed information has survived to throw light upon their nature, but they certainly presented different problems from those raised when Germans attempted to besiege the walled cities and fortresses of the Empire. In the Roman opinion, however, the Germans were utterly unskilled in conducting sieges. As we have said, the siege engines which the Romans regarded as absolutely essential were too elaborate for them to make, and their lack of these and of defensive armour put them at a disastrous disadvantage when assailing the walls of a Roman town. Even if they captured somewhat complicated weapons from the Romans or had them constructed by Roman prisoners or deserters, it was beyond their powers to work them in the absence of careful instruction and long practice. Thus, when the Batavians besieged Vetera in A.D. 69 some deserters and prisoners showed them how to make various siege engines; but the ungainly contraptions which resulted from their efforts never even went into action, for they were easily smashed up by the artillery of the defending Romans. And yet the Batavians, owing to their familiarity with Roman army service, were thought to be more proficient with such machines than the Germans who lived in freedom beyond the Rhine outside the Roman frontier.

Some of these free Germans could achieve even less than the Batavians. It is true that at the siege of Thessalonica in 269 the Gothic attackers are said to have used "engines"; but there is no detailed information about these engines — except that the defenders countered them by hurling blazing missiles at them from their own artillery — and we cannot lightly assume that the Gothic engines were made by the Goths themselves rather than by Roman prisoners or deserters. Siege engines are also said to have been used by the barbarians from beyond the Rhine — either Franks or Alamanni —
when they besieged Tours during the reign of Postumus. A report reached the Eastern Empire some years later that when the defenders attacked these engines with some success by means of burning missiles the barbarians dug tanks to hold water behind their threatened engines, and filled these tanks with water. But how they used it to quench the fires started by the Romans is not recorded, for the fragmentary text of our authority breaks off at this point with a reference to lead-covered channels which would receive the water. But clearly, there is nothing here to suggest a high level of siege-craft on the part of the Germans. Moreover, at the siege of Philippopolis in the middle of the century, we are told, the Goths put some warriors in large wooden boxes or crates, the size of a small room, covered with hides to keep off the enemy's missiles, and moved them on wheels to the city gates (where the citizens dropped huge stones on them and crushed both boxes and men). Again, when they were besieging Side in Lycia c. 269, the Goths built towers of the same height as the city walls and moved them forward on wheels. They hung iron plates as well as hides in front of them so as to prevent the enemy setting them on fire. But even so their attack came to nothing. These boxes and towers and a mound of earth and wood (which they built so as to be able to fight on a level with the defenders of Philippopolis) are practically the only siege-works which the barbarians are reported to have built during the third-century invasions. There is little doubt that the invaders had the ability to make all these contrivances, but we find a different state of affairs when we come to examine the attack by Goths and others on Marcianople in 248. The city was well stocked with food, and the barbarians did not propose to besiege it for they believed that it could be taken by storm. Their first move was to collect as many stones as possible from the ground round about the city and to pile them in convenient heaps in front of the wall. They then surrounded the wall and began hurling these stones together with their spears and arrows at the defenders. But the citizens behind their battlements merely held their shields over their heads, and the stones, spears and arrows rattled and bounced off them like a heavy shower of hailstones. After a while all the stones and all the other missiles had been shot away, and little or no damage had been done to the defenders. The attackers went despondently away and encamped a short distance from the city. After a few days, which they may have spent in making new spears and arrows and in collecting more stones, they returned and began the process all over again. But the citizens, whose courage was high and who had no lack of weapons,
launched such a storm of missiles on the carelessly massed barbarians that they inflicted considerable losses upon them, broke their spirit, and convinced them that the attack was futile. There is no trace here of towers, boxes, mounds, and the like, nor is there any trace of them among the fourth-century Visigoths. These found it exceedingly difficult to take the Roman cities by siege or by storm; and competent Roman observers held that the Visigoths knew nothing whatever of siege-craft. Fritigern was quick to dissuade his men in 376 from sieges, "saying that he was at peace with walls". Occasionally, in fact, they forgot his advice, but each time they did so they met with so sharp a reverse as to recall his wise words without delay. And in this incompetence they did not differ from the contemporary Alamanni. Even in the late fifth century, when they beleaguered Clermont, they made no attempt to storm the town: they simply blockaded it, destroying the crops each year and then returning home for the winter. But there is no evidence of any development of military technique beyond what had been known to their ancestors in Fritigern's day.

The towers, boxes, mounds, etc., mentioned by Dexippus and Eusebius in the third century, then, if they are to be accepted as historical — and sometimes the accounts of sieges in late Greek historians are open to considerable doubt — left little mark on the siege-craft of the invaders in general. We may suppose that some, but not all, of the groups of third-century invaders were able to make such contrivances; but such contrivances did not become part of the stock-in-trade of the northern barbarians in general. Indeed, they were forgotten by the Goths themselves before very long, for there is no parallel to them in Gothic history before the sixth century. The ability to make such things was temporary and it was local, being beyond the powers of some of the Goths themselves in the mid-third century. It may not be unreasonable to conclude that the siege of Marcianople in 248 (p. 14 above) was a much more typical siege than those of Philippopolis and Side. While the barbarians were more at home in taking unwalled cities, it is of course true that a number of walled cities are reported to have been taken by them in the course of their raids and invasions; and it must not be supposed that protracted, vigorous, and sometimes successful sieges were unknown. But few trustworthy details are available about the way in which they took the walled cities and fortresses, and it is difficult to avoid the impression that they usually did so, not by prolonged siege, but by surprise or treachery or by the panic or incompetence or negligence of the defenders.
The Germans of the sixth-century kingdoms can hardly be said to have advanced significantly in siege warfare as compared with the Germans of the pre-Migration days. Thus, when Witigis beleaguered Rome in 536 he built some wooden towers equal in height to the city walls. These towers had a wheel at each corner, and oxen were yoked to them so as to draw the towers forward. But the oxen were all promptly shot by Roman archers on the walls as soon as they came within range, and the towers became immobile; and Belisarius not unreasonably was able to laugh at the simplicity of the barbarians. (He had travelled a long way since that day when on his way to Africa he had stepped ashore in Sicily under the shadow of Mount Etna, not knowing what manner of men the Vandals were or what kind of warfare they practised.) The Ostrogoths were more successful when they tried simply to clear the walls of their defenders by firing at them an overwhelming number of arrows and without using any machines at all. Witigis, however, still persisted in building "engines" — for the barbarians never failed to grasp the value of engines if only they could be made to work — but all his constructions were set on fire and destroyed by Belisarius.

The king made yet another attempt to solve his problem when he came to besiege Ariminum in 537-8. Once again he built a wooden tower — this time higher than the city walls — and once again he mounted it upon four wheels. But he did not repeat the mistake of yoking oxen to it, for in this respect he had learned his lesson at Rome. There was a very wide ladder inside the tower; and the king's aim was that his men should swarm up this ladder as soon as it came close enough to the city wall. On paper his plan was no doubt practicable, but his tactical handling of the tower was atrocious. His men drew it close to the wall, but then darkness fell and they were obliged to leave the tower all night close to the wall of Ariminum. During the night the Romans dug a trench in front of it, and next day despite considerable effort the Ostrogoths could not move the tower forward. Hence, afraid that the Romans would burn it during the following night, they pulled the tower back, and reached their camp with it late that day. In doing so, however, they suffered such severe casualties that they decided to assault the wall no more. The tower was little more than a death-trap for its builders.

When Totila became king of the Ostrogoths he rarely besieged the Roman-held cities in an active manner: he merely blockaded them. But he pulled down the walls of cities which fell into his hands and which he feared might become centres of Roman resistance if Belisarius should manage to re-occupy them. This had been the
policy of Geiseric in Africa, when the Visigoths re-captured Cartagena in Spain from the Byzantines c. 615 they laid it waste. Witigis had initiated this policy of despair in the case of two only of the cities of Italy (Pisaurum and Fanum), but it was Totila who applied it on an extensive scale. He even planned at one time to level Rome itself with the ground. He did in fact do considerable damage to the city and left it wholly uninhabited in 546-7; but he was afterwards criticised by the Ostrogothic nobles for not destroying the city completely. In the final chapter of Procopius' BG we hear at last of the successful use of military machines by the Ostrogoths. They seized a bridge over the River Dracon or Sarnus (modern Sarno) near Nuceria, put wooden towers on it, and in these towers placed ballistae, which at long last they worked effectively. But this case is exceptional.

Finally, a description has survived from the late seventh century of a Visigothic attack on two walled cities. When king Wamba was suppressing the great rebellion of Paulus and others in 673 he found it necessary to assault the cities of Narbonne and Nîmes. Our authority for the attacks makes no reference to the use of siege engines: the Goths threw stones and fired arrows and spears at the city walls just as their ancestors had done at Thessalonica 400 years before. But they did so to such effect that they were able to get close to the gates of both cities, set them on fire, and so make their way inside the walls. Generally speaking, then, the progress which the Ostrogoths and the Visigoths had made in the latest days of their kingdoms was very slight and marked only a small advance over the abilities of Fritigern or even Arminius.

Strong though the Roman military forces were in comparison with those of the barbarians, they were nowhere stronger than in siege warfare. Tacitus may have been the most unmilitary of historians, but he knew that the barbarians were nowhere weaker, and the Romans nowhere more powerful, than in the equipment and the tactics of a siege.

III

When Constantius II heard that Julian had rebelled against him in Paris he arranged to have three million bushels of wheat distributed among the cities on the borders of Gaul, and a further three million bushels concentrated in the region of the Cottian Alps, so as to feed his army when he marched from the East to engage the rebel's forces. The commissariat of the Imperial government was almost infinitely superior to anything that any northern people could hope to organise.
When an army of northern barbarians undertook a campaign, its leaders did not think in terms of millions of bushels of wheat. They usually did not think of organising food supplies at all, for it seems to have been each man's business to supply his own food; and the Chatti, who organised some sort of supply system, were regarded as exceptional and noteworthy. Hence, as soon as the warriors assembled for the purpose of undertaking a campaign, it was imperative to enter the enemy's territory as soon as possible, for one could not plunder the food of one's own people — plundering within the *civitas* was a punishable offence.

A campaign fought far from home meant that the warriors would have to live largely off the countryside which they overran. Accordingly, one of the first measures which the Romans might take in a province where an invasion had begun or even where it still only threatened — and particularly if earlier raids had taught the population what to expect — was to drive all the livestock from the fields into the cities, to transport the grain to places of security and to remove all possible sources of food supply out of reach of the ill-stocked raiders so as to hasten the famine which would soon demoralise and destroy them. And then Roman strategy might aim, not at major engagements with the enemy and not necessarily even at a struggle with each and every one of their bands, but at starving them into surrender or flight. If the Romans chose to reach an accommodation with the raiders before the bands of the latter had altogether disintegrated, the Imperial authorities might be obliged to supply the raiders with food-markets as they made their hungry way back to the frontier. On the other hand, a cautious barbarian might refrain from charging wildly over the maximum extent of Roman territory in search of plunder and might instead content himself with merely amassing enough supplies from the Roman countryside in his immediate neighbourhood to enable him to keep his army concentrated and organised until he could bring the Imperial forces to battle. But it might often be well for him if no very long time elapsed before battle was joined.

The Visigothic campaigns on the lower Danube in 376 and the following years are an extreme illustration of the procedure of a Germanic host on entering the Roman provinces. The Visigoths had been starved by the Roman commanders on the Danube who admitted them to the Empire, which they entered without any food supplies at all. They proceeded to split up into comparatively small companies (which could be more easily fed than one large host), and guided by dissident Romans they kept constantly on the move.
from one source of supply to another, from villa to villa, from granary to granary. The war became one of "flights and pursuits", as a contemporary put it. Such a strategy gave the invaders several advantages (p. 20 below), particularly as they could rapidly re-assemble their foraging parties whenever danger threatened. But the risk was that these small parties might be cut off and destroyed one by one. In the early summer months of 378 the general Sebastian, whom some regarded as the most able Roman soldier of his day and who had not been without a chance of succeeding Valentinian I as Emperor, eventually organised a troop of 2,000 specially picked and trained soldiers to hunt them down; and we have more than one vivid picture of the surprise and shattering defeat of these small groups of Visigoths. After a good day's foraging and plundering in the fields and unfortified villages they would gorge themselves with what food they had found, and drink themselves to sleep; then an hour or two before dawn a watchful foe could sometimes kill them to a man as they lay and slept. By these tactics of continuous harrying Sebastian hoped to prevent the Visigoths from collecting food and to compel them either to surrender to the Emperor or to withdraw north of the Danube: they would face the Huns north of the Danube rather than famine south of it.

It might be thought, however, that the Visigoths were an exceptional case in 376 and that a generalisation based on their experience would give a misleading picture of Germanic invasions and raids in general. The Visigoths had been driven abruptly from their homes by the Huns, and the Romans had robbed them of whatever small stocks of food they had been able to snatch up and carry with them as they fled in panic from their country. Moreover, it was not simply a fighting force which entered the provinces in 376: they brought their womenfolk and their children with them.

And yet in their third-century raids, which presumably were planned with some care, the later stages of an expedition might see the Goths starving, and the men and pack-animals dying off from hunger or succumbing a little later to plague and sickness. It may be doubted whether many German invasions of the Roman Empire were preceded by two years of preparation and by a deliberate and planned extension of the area under crops, like the Helvetic movement in 58 B.C. And when we turn to the other accounts of the invasions we find that although the case of the Visigoths in 376 was extreme it was not qualitatively different from the general experience. When Gaul was invaded by the Alamanni in the middle of the fourth century the invaders had chosen their own time for the attack. Their
homes were close in their rear. Their economy produced a surplus of food over and above the bare essentials needed to keep them alive, so that in theory at any rate it might have been possible to organise a commissariat: and since in 354 and 355 there was little or no organised Roman opposition — the Roman generals in the neighbourhood, according to one authority, had chosen to fall asleep — any supply trains that the Alamanni could have put on the roads would for the most part have reached their warriors in Gaul practically unmolested. Yet in spite of all these advantages the fate of the Alamannic invaders was not very different from that of the Visigoths in 376. Soon after Julian's arrival in Gaul at the end of 355 he found that the invaders were desperate for food. They were not living on what they had brought from their homes but on whatever food they could collect from the countryside which they were invading. They made for the flocks and herds of the provincials without any regard for their own safety, so great was their hunger. But this food was soon gone, and in many cases Julian actually found that they were dying of hunger before they could collect more. When a district had often been ravaged thus, as in 354-5, it was reduced to a wilderness, and practically no food at all could be extracted from it either by invader or by native Roman: the crops could not be sown or reaped. Hence, again and again in the Alamannic invasions, at any rate after the initial stages, the warriors divided up into a number of mere "plundering bands" living off the country; they were no longer one united and centrally directed army. This was generally the case throughout Julian's years in Gaul, and again during the reign of Valentinian I, the two periods for which detailed information exists. As for the numbers of men in such bands, Julian considered that several parties of Franks, amounting in all to 600 warriors, formed very strong companies. It is no wonder that a military writer of the sixth century A.D., when discussing the best tactics to use against the Lombards and the Franks, states that it is essential to delay joining battle with them: time must be wasted by opening sham negotiations with them, for then their courage and enthusiasm will be sapped by the failure of their supplies and by their exposure to the severe climate of the South.

The position of the invaders, broken up into a multiplicity of small parties, was not in all respects one of weakness. When the Roman defensive was totally disorganised, as it was in Gaul in 355, these bands of Alamanni, roving over enormous areas of the province, penetrating everywhere, and making their appearance at unexpected places without warning, could reduce a countryside to chaos. We are
told that the inhabitants would shrink away at the very mention of the barbarians; and a contemporary writer refers to the raids as "an Iliad of misfortunes". It was exceedingly difficult for the Romans to move small detachments of their troops with any feeling of security, for in the general confusion they could not foresee at what moment the troops might be surprised and cut to pieces, when every road and every bridge might conceal an ambush. Thus, during his first campaign in Gaul in June 356, Julian set out from Vienne to Autun "intending to attack the barbarians, who were wandering over various districts, wherever chance should give him an opportunity". And the events of his march showed that he had no idea whatever of where the barbarian bands lay, except that they were lurking in the woods close beside him. Such ignorance of the enemy's whereabouts and of the character of his forces might cause a serious waste not only of time but also of food and weapons. Again, just before his victory at Strasbourg in 357 Julian was reluctant to join battle with the Alamanni because his own men were tired after a long march. But when he suggested postponing the engagement, his men protested on the ground that the enemy were now before their eyes. Julian's staff officers, while recognising the risks of an immediate battle, urged the Caesar to attack at once when the Alamanni were concentrated. They declared that the troops might well mutiny if the barbarians were permitted to disperse again, and the Romans were faced with the hazardous and endless task of rounding up innumerable elusive parties of the foe. Even under the strong rule of Valentinian I, an able Imperial general named Dagalaifus long refrained from trying to repel the Alamannic invasion of 365: he pleaded that it was impossible for him to attack the enemy while they were scattered in small bands over a wide area. He was less enterprising, however, than his successor Jovinus, who early in 366 managed to surprise the three main bodies of the enemy who had daunted Dagalaifus. Jovinus caught and dispersed one of these bodies after they had plundered some of the villas in the Moselle valley and were now resting in their latrocinia castra beside the river. Some were bathing, some drinking, some dying their hair red, when the Romans burst out of the shelter of some neighbouring trees and fell upon them. It is difficult, then, to avoid the impression that Chonodomarius made a grave mistake in assembling all his forces at Strasbourg and in risking a general engagement with the Imperial army in 357, even though he outnumbered it. He was doubtless encouraged to risk open battle by his earlier success against Barbatio and a Roman army of 25,000 men, but he forgot that that victory
was due to surprise. The curious fact in late Roman history is not that the Romans lost or won so few pitched battles, but rather that the barbarians allowed large-scale battles to take place at all. But even when the enemy had dispersed, the Romans often found little difficulty in working out methods of eliminating their lightly equipped raiding parties. A fourth-century author says that one Emperor, when marching against the Germans, "brought with him Eastern auxiliaries chiefly for the reason that no troops are more effective against Germans than light-armed archers", and the truth of this opinion was widely recognised in the days when Germanic levies consisted mainly of unmounted warriors. If the Imperial forces could not simply starve the enemy into surrender (p. 21 above), their best course was to lay ambushes continuously for the scattered bands of the enemy, to make lightening sallies, to cut off their supplies, and to score a very quick succession of victories over their foraging parties. This was what Sebastian did in the year or two preceding the battle of Adrianople. This was how Charietto helped Julian to overwhelm the Chamavian Franks in 358. This procedure was useful when the enemy could not be brought to a general engagement or when the barbarians had a decisive advantage in numbers or when the terrain made it impossible to attack them in any other way. It is not unfair to conclude that in a campaign against the Romans (as distinct from a battle) a Germanic chief could only hope to win if he were, like Caratacus, "astu locorum fraude prior" even though "vi militum inferior", or if the Roman commander was as incompetent as Quintilius Varus or Valens.

If we are asked how the barbarians ever managed to overthrow the Western Empire, we may reply that the question implies two misunderstandings. In the first place, it assumes that the fall of the Empire was essentially a military defeat: but in fact it is impossible to point to a series of military conflicts and say that these led to the destruction of the Empire. The process was less cataclysmic than that. Second, the objection assumes that wars are won simply by the superiority of weapons, armour and reserves. But this is not so. The morale of the combatants counts for much, and so does the administrative capacity to bring the right number of men to the right place at the right time. But in these pages nothing is said of the political agreements of the Romans with the barbarians or of the Roman morale or the Roman administration. It would be superficial to look for the causes of the fall of the Western Empire simply in military techniques.
NOTES


2 See esp. BG ii. 30 f. Note also i. 13. 2 (bridge-building), ii. 12. 5 (siege engines), iv. 25. 1 f. (warships and tormenta dismay the Britons, cf. Tacitus, Agric. xxv. 2), vii. 29. 2 (siege warfare), A. Hirtius, BG viii. 43. 4 f.

3 Caesar, BG iii. 21. 3, vii. 22. 1-3, 23. 5, 29. 7, 30. 4, Diodorus Siculus, v. 31. 1 ταῖς δὲ διανοιαλυσὶς δέξις καὶ πρᾶξις μάχησιν ὅθεν ἀφαίρεται. Not very long after Caesar’s wars in Gaul the Romans were experimenting with a Celtic type of shield boss: M. Jahn, Die Bewaffnung der Germanen in der älteren Eisenzeit, Mannusbibliothek xvi, (Leipzig, 1916), 40 f., 47 f.

4 Caesar, BG v. 42. 1-3, 5 (cf. 52. 2), vii. 22. 1-3, 30. 4.

5 Ibid. vii. 29. 2.

6 See Dio Cassius, lxvii. 7. 4, lxviii. 9. 3 and 5, cf. Petrus Patricius, frag. 5.

7 See E. A. Thompson, Attila and the Huns, (Oxford, 1948), 172 f., 180, and add references to Theophylactus Simocatta, ii. 16. 10 f., and to Theophanes, a.m. 6305 (p. 498, ed. de Boor), and for the high value which the Indian kings put on Roman technicians, including the makers of siege engines, see M. P. Charlesworth, “Roman Trade with India: A Re-survey”, apud P. R. Coleman-Norton (ed.), Studies in Roman Economic and Social History, (Princeton, 1951), 131-43, at 133, R. E. M. Wheeler, Rome Beyond the Imperial Frontiers, (London, 1954), 133 et al. For an attempt to prevent the art of ship-building from reaching barbarians who were still unfamiliar with it see Cod. Theod. ix. 40. 24.

8 See e.g. Herodian, iii. 4. 8 f.

9 Marcellinus Comes, s.a. 499 (Chronica Minora ii, 95).

10 Caesar, BG vi. 1. 3, 4 fin., though note iii. 5. 1, A. Hirtius, BG viii. i. 2.


13 Tacitus, Ann. ii. 14. 4, Germ. vi. 1 (which is confirmed by the archaeological evidence), Plutarch, Marius xxv. 7 (though the iron breastplates of that passage are sometimes thought to have been booty taken from the Gauls). The great length of the Germanic spear is emphasized by Tacitus, Ann. i. 64. 3, ii. 14. 3, 21. 1, Hist. v. 18, cf. Amm. Marc. xvii. 12. 2 (Sarmatians and Quadi). On some relevant representations in Roman art see P. G. Hamberg, Acta Archaeologica, vii (1936), 21-49, and esp. Jahn, op. cit.

14 Tacitus, Germ. vi. 2, Hist. v. 17, SHA. Claudius viii. 5.

15 Tacitus, Germ. vi. 1.

16 So Jahn, op. cit. The Caledonians, too, had reason to know that a long sword without a point was of little use in close hand-to-hand encounters with the Romans: Tacitus, Agric. xxxvi. 1, where it is to be noted that the Caledonians’ enemies are Germans.

17 Ibid., Germ. vi. 2, Hist. ii. 22, cf. Dio Cassius, xxxviii. 45. 4, Herodian, vi. 7. 8. Even in the sixth century the Frankish and Herul warriors fought naked from the waist up: Agathias, Hist. ii. 5, Paulus Diaconus, Hist. Langob. i. 20 (though the Heruls in Procopius, BP ii. 25. 27, wear a short cloak). This of course, was not a German peculiarity, cf. Livy, xxii. 46. 6 (Gauls), Procopius, BG vii. 14. 26 (Slavs and Antae), &c.

18 Tacitus, Germ. vi. 3. According to Hamberg, art. cit. 24, in the whole of Roman Triumphalkunst not a single German (apart from some in Roman service) is represented as wearing helmet or armour.

19 Jahn, op. cit. 152 ff. For a vivid representation see Hamberg, art. cit. 30,
PAST AND PRESENT


10 Jahn, op. cit. 164 f., 182, 201 ff., Hamberg, art. cit. 28.

11 Agathias, loc. cit.


13 Caesar, BG i. 52. 3, but the Romans charged simultaneously.

14 Caesar, BG ii. 23. 1, iii. 19. 1. It was a tactic to induce the enemy to do this: idem., BC iii. 92. 5.

15 Tacitus, loc. cit. colligent.

16 Caesar, BG i. 46. 1, Tacitus, Hist. v. 17.

17 Procopius, BG viii. 35. 20 ff.

18 See Tacitus, Ann. i. 63. 1 ff., ii. 11. 3 (Cheruscan tactics against Chariovalda's Batavians), 16. 1 ff., 19. 3, Frontinus, Stratag. i. 3. 10 (which probably refers, however, to the strategy of German raids rather than to the tactics of the Germans in battle), ii. 3. 23, SHA. Aurelian xxi. 2. f., Herodian, vii. 2. 5 f. In Tacitus, Ann. ii. 14. 3, Germanicus tells his men that "non campos modo militi Romano ad proelium bonos, sed si ratio adsit, silvas et saltus", but cf. i. 64. 3, ii. 5. 3, Hist. v. 17 (marshes).

21 Caesar, BG iv. 12, Tacitus, Hist. iv. 20. Note also Plutarch, Otho xii, Dio Cassius, iv. 24. 7. On German cavalry and a typically Roman use of it, see Herodian, vii. 1. 3. Cf. Delbrück, op. cit. ii, 432 ff.

22 Those who will, may follow A. Alfoldi, Cambridge Ancient History, xii (1939), 159, in supposing that "there is probably no great exaggeration" in the statement of Dexippus, 100 F 6 § 4 (Jacoby), that the Iuthungi could put 40,000 horse into the field. But Dexippus does not suggest that the Iuthungi were an essentially cavalry power.

23 Jahn, op. cit. 57, 87. J. Werner, "Pfeilspitzen aus Silber und Bronze in germanischen Adelsgräbern der Kaiserzeit", Historisches Jahrbuch, lxiv (1955), 38-41, at 40, suggests that the use of the bow may have become customary among the Germans after the wars with M. Aurelius: the Germans would have noted the effectiveness of the Sarmatian and Iazygian archers. I am not sure that this is convincing, but can suggest nothing better.


25 No more than this can be safely deduced from Amm. Marc. xxxi. 5. 7, 7. 13, 8. 10, Zosimus, iv. 22. 1, cf. Olympiodorus, frag. 26, Claudian, In Rufin. ii. 80, vi cons. Hon. 225 f., 240, 284, BG 192, 216 f.

26 Orosius, vii. 34. 5, Zosimus, iv. 22. 1-3. German horses had been unimpressive in the early Roman period, too: Caesar, BG iv. 2. 2, Tacitus, Germ. vi. 3. But in the sixth century German horses began to win some renown: see R. Much on Tacitus, loc. cit.

27 Amm. Marc. xxxi. 5. 9, 7. 12, 13. 1, Orosius, vii. 33. 14 contis, cf. SHA. Claud. viii. 5. For Jordanes, Get. 1. 261, conti were the characteristic weapons of the Goths (though he is thinking of Ostrogoths).

28 Amm. Marc. xxxi. 7. 12, 13. 3. At the battle of Hastings some of the English were armed with lignis imposita sa,ra, William of Poitiers, ii. 17 (p. 188, ed. Foreville).

29 Amm. Marc. xxxi. 13. 1, cf. Orosius, vii. 33. 14 nubius sagittarum, Claudian, In Rufin. ii. 80, i cons. Stil. 111, Vegetius, i. 20. King Thedoric II was a good Bowman, Sidonius, Ep. i. 2. 5. Gundel, op. cit. 28, seems to overemphasize the importance of the bow to the East German cavalrymen of the fourth century.
Visigothic swords are mentioned in Amm. Marc. xxxi. 5, 9, 7, 12-3, Orosius, vii. 33, 14, cf. SHA. Claud. viii. 5. On the Gothic sword see esp. E. Behmer, Das zweischneidige Schwert der germanischen Völkerwanderungszeit, Stockholm, 1939, 17 ff., 69 ff. But the only Visigothic (as distinct from Ostrogothic) sword known to archaeology, so far as I am aware, is a two-edged one with a blade of 72 cm. and a handle of 10 cm. which was found at Santana de Mures before the systematic excavations began there; see I. Kovacs, Dolgozatok: Travaux de la section numismatique et archéologique du musée national de Transylvanie à Kolozsvár, iii (1912), 250-367, at 361, with Figure 104 no. 3, p. 324.

Amm. Marc. xxxi. 12, 12, 17, mentions only Ostrogothic and Alanic cavalry, and Orosius, vii. 33, 13 f., confirms that their rôle was a decisive one.

Amm. Marc. xxxi. 3, 7. Observe that this wall differed from the walls or embankments which were constructed by some of the Germans of the first century A.D.; the latter were intended to be permanent structures designed as definitive boundary lines between the various peoples' lands, whereas the Visigoths built their wall in 376 in the middle of a campaign so as to meet the special circumstances of the Huns' attack. It was an ad hoc construction of purely tactical value.

cf. Tacitus, Germ. xxxii. 2 ff. on the Tencteri.

cf. Amm. Marc. xvi. 12, 34. There is no valid reason for doubting the incident recounted there by Ammianus: contra, Delbrück, op. cit. ii, 280, followed by Gundel, op. cit. 59.

Eunapius, frag. 42 (p. 238, 13 and 28, ed. Dindorf), cf. Claudian, BG 533 ff. The view that they did not surrender their weapons (Jerome, Chron. s.a. 3381, Orosius, vii. 33, 10) was in my opinion designed to account for their success at Adrianople. It was true only in so far as some Visigoths bribed the Romans to permit them to keep their arms (cf. Eunapius, frag. 42, p. 239, 8, Zosimus, iv. 20, 6).

Claudian, loc. cit.

Amm. Marc. xxxi. 5, 9, 6, 3, 15, 11, cf. Orosius, vii. 34, 5. For a case where a Roman force had to arm itself from the barbarians see Eugippius, Vita S. Severini iv. 2-4.

Zosimus, i. 34, 3.

Tacitus, Ann. ii. 45, 4, Hist. iv. 17.

Thompson, op. cit. 172, 180.

Tacitus, Hist. i. 57, 64, 66, ii. 19, 52, 82, 84, iii. 36.

Dio Cassius, lxixii. 3. 1. Note that before the war of 52 B.C. Vercingetorix prescribed the quantity of arms which each civitas should make in preparation for the forthcoming campaign: Caesar, BG vii. 4. 8. It may be doubted whether many Germanic chieftains in the first two centuries A.D. had sufficient personal power to rise to this height of organisation.

In Caesar alone see BG i. 27, 3, ii. 13, 1, 15, 2, esp. 31, 3 f. with 32, 1; iii. 21, 3, vii. 11, 2, 12, 2, 89, 4. cf. Dio Cassius, liv. 31, 3, lxxii. 2, 2 f., &c.

BG v. 27, 15. cf. BG v. 27, 27 f.

Dio Cassius, xi. 22. 9, vi. 5, 14, vii. 4, 21. The view that Witigis' army consisted of 150,000 horse and foot, most of them θείοπορκασμενοι, at the beginning of the war (Procopius, BG v. 16, 11, 24, 3, vii. 21, 4) is fantastic: see J. B. Bury, History of the Later Roman Empire, (London, 1923), ii, 181 n. 2.

Procopius, BP i. 1, 15, is a trustworthy eye-witness and his evidence cannot be doubted with Delbrück, op. cit. ii, 370 f., merely on the grounds of what Dio Cassius, xi. 22, had said 300 years earlier. The speed with which the Persians could fire their arrows is mentioned more than once by Mauricius, Strateg. xi. 2.

Procopius, BP i. 1, 11 ff., 18. 32-4, cf. BG viii. 8, 34.

E. Darko, "Influences touraniennes sur l'évolution de l'art militaire des grecs, des romains et des byzantins", Byzantion, x (1935), 443-69, xii (1937), 119-47, at xii, 142. Observe that Vegetius, i. 20, explicitly says that the arms of Roman cavalry benefited from study of those of the Goths, Alans, and Huns.

Procopius, BG v. 28. 22 ff., cf. vi. 1. 2, viii. 8. 16.

ibid. viii. 32. 17.

ibid. 7.

idem., BV iii. 8. 27. Vandal cavalry is mentioned by Sidonius, carm. v. 398 f., 413, 423, and frequently in Procopius. On their lack of defensive armour see L. Schmidt, Geschichte d. Wandalen1, (Munich, 1942), 165 n. 4. There is no valid reason for doubting Procopius' statement that the Vandals did not use the bow effectively: Procopius was an eye-witness, and weapons and tactics were matters which interested him. Contra, C. Courtois, Les Vandales et l'Afrique, (Paris, 1955), 231 n. 8.

Procopius, BV iv. 3. 9, 14.

Dem., BG viii. 32. 6 ff.

ibid. 10. The Ostrogothic cavalry was peculiarly ineffective against Roman infantry even when the latter was not equipped with bows and arrows: cf. their ignominious defeat in BG viii. 29. 16 ff.


On the type of army which this regulation implies see E. Oldenburg, Die Kriegsverfassung der Westgoten, Diss. Berlin, 1909, 50 f.

See Du Cange s. vv. zaba, zava, and add to his references Mauricius, Strateg. xi. 2, xii. 23.


Excavation in Spain has revealed disappointingly little about Visigothic weapons: it was characteristic of the Visigoths throughout the whole of their history not to bury weapons with their dead. Only a couple of swords, some spears, and a few scavae have been found: see H. Zeiss, Die Grabfunde aus dem spanischen Westgotenreich, Germanische Denkmäler der Volkerwanderungszeit, Bd. ii, (Berlin and Leipzig, 1934), 64-6, but according to Sánchez-Albornoz, art. cit. 102, some horse-trappings have also been found. The coins throw some light on the Visigothic helmet, which was very expensive and can only have been worn by the king and the nobles: see W. Reinhart, "Germanische Helme in westgotischen Münzbildern", Jahrbuch für Numismatik und Geldgeschichte, ii (1950-1), 43-6.

On this date see Stein, op. cit. ii, 820 f.

M. Rostovtzeff, Iranians and Greeks in Southern Russia, (Oxford, 1922), 216 et al., believes that the speedy conquest of the shores of the Black Sea by the Goths was facilitated by the fact that the Dnieper basin had been gradually occupied by German tribes in the first century B.C. and the first two centuries A.D. But even allowing this early German occupation of the Dnieper area (which seems very doubtful), it still remains to show (a) how those early Germans overcame the nomads of the steppe, and (b) how the Goths overcame Germans who had been strong enough to conquer the nomads. Incidentally, in spite of W. Ensslin, Theoderich der Grosse, (Munich, 1947), 9, and others, there is neither evidence nor likelihood that Ermanaric's empire stretched to the Volga: its boundary was the Don.

Procopius, BG vi. 25. 2-4, cf. 12. The Franks in Agathias, Hist. i. 14 f., have swords, spears, and axes: so, too, ibid. ii. 5. Libanius, Or. lix. 131,
mentions their sop*rla. Battle-axes were not wholly unknown among the Goths: Amm. Marc. xxxi. 13. 3, Agathias, Hist. i. 9 (154. 10, ed. Dindorf), and perhaps Procopius, BP ii. 21. 7. The western sources bearing on Frankish warfare are cited in O. M. Dalton, The History of the Franks by Gregory of Tours, (Oxford, 1927), 225-34, though his citation of the Byzantines is incomplete. On Frankish weapons see above all E. Salin, La Civilisation mérovingienne, iii. (Paris, 1957).

87 Agathias, Hist. i. 21 fin.
89 Procopius, BG vi. 28. 10, cf. Agathias, i. 7 (152. 13 ff., Dindorf).
80 See esp. Agathias, i. 21 f., ii. 8 f.
81 Agathias, ii. 5, who confirms Procopius’ description of Frankish warfare. He differs from him only in saying that the Frankish warrior carried a spear or argo with a barb on either side of the blade, i. 21 fin., ii. 5. A similar general picture is given by Mauricius, Strateg. xi. 4 (260 f., ed. Scheffer), who, like Agathias, i. 21 f., mentions their cavalry as well as their infantry.
82 Studies of this important battle have been devoted to the site rather than the character of the struggle, as e.g. A. F. Lièvre, “Le lieu de la rencontre des Francs et des Wisigoths sur les bords du Clain en 507”, Revue historique, lxvi (1898), 90-104, G. Kurth, “La bataille de Vouillé en 507”, Revue des questions historiques, N.S. xx (1898), 172-80.
83 See e.g. John of Biclaro, s.a. 585 (Chronica Minora, ii, 217), Julianus, Hist. Wambaëv viii, Vitas S. Patr. Emeret. v. 12. 3.
84 Procopius, BG viii. 20. 31.
86 C. Oman, A History of the Art of War, (London, 1898), 42, suggests that “all the tribes which had their original habitat in the plains beyond the Danube and north of the Euxine seem to have learned horsemanship . . . The races, on the other hand, which had started from the marshes of the Lower Rhine or the moors of North Germany and Scandinavia were essentially foot-soldiers”.
87 Procopius, BP ii. 18. 24.
88 Tacitus, Hist. i. 59, 64, ii. 27 f., 66, 69. On their political relations with Rome see J. Klose, Roms Klientel-Randstaaten am Rhein und an der Donau, (Breslau, 1934), 17-26.
89 Tacitus, Ann. ii. 8, 3, 11. 3, shows them serving with the Imperial forces in A.D. 16.
90 idem., Hist. iv. 30.
91 Tacitus, Ann. i. 57. 1, xii. 29. 4. Germans besieged by Romans: Amm. Marc. xvi. 2, Priscus of Panium, frag. 1 a, and the vivid picture on section liv. of the Column of M. Aurelius (now reproduced in C. Caprino and others, La Colonna di Marco Aurelio, (Rome, 1955), Plate xxxiv, fig. 68), where the German defenders of a fort throw swords (!), torches, and a jar of an unspecified liquid at a Roman testudo.
92 Dio Cassius, lvi. 22. 2, (= Zonaras, x. 37), Amm. Marc. xvii. 6. 1, xxix. 6. 12, &c. The Romans rarely admit that any barbarian people was efficient at siege-warfare.
93 See e.g. Tacitus, Hist. iii. 20. 94 ibid. ii. 22. 95 Tacitus, Hist. iv. 23. 96 id., cf. 30 ini. 97 ibid. iv. 28. 98 Eusebius, 101 F 2 § 2 (Jacoby).
100 Dexippus, 100 F. 27 (Jacoby).
101 Dexippus, 100 F. 29 (Jacoby). They had made wooden towers at Philippopolis also, idem., F 27 § 5, but they had been burned by the defenders. Other towers which were burned, are mentioned in Eusebius, 101 F 2 § 5 (Jacoby), as belonging to the Franks or Alamanni.
102 Dexippus, F 27 §§ 7-11.
PAST AND PRESENT

104 cf. Procopius, BG vii. 24, 22.
105 Dexippus, 100 F 25 (Jacoby).
106 Amm. Marc. xxxi. 6. 4 "hominis ignaros ossidendi", 8. 1 "haec et similia machinari penitus ignorantes", cf. 16. 3. The cities which survived the Visigothic invasions were in general the cities that were walled: Eunapius, frag. 42 (240. 21, Dindorf).
107 Ibid. Dexippus, I00 F 25 (Jacoby)
108 "haec et similia machinari penitus ignorantes", cf. I6. 3. The cities which survived the Visigothic invasions were in general the cities that were walled: Eunapius, frag. 42 (240. 21, Dindorf).
109 After they had besieged Julian in Sens for 30 days in 356, according to Amm. Marc. xvi. 4. 2, "the barbarians went sadly away, grumbling about how silly it was to attempt sieges".
110 The siege of Clermont is well characterized by C. E. Stevens, Sidonius Apollinaris and His Age, (Oxford, 1933), 145 ff., where the evidence is cited and discussed.
111 Classical Quarterly, xxxix (1945), 92-4.
112 Zosimus, i. 26. 1. 33. 2. 43. 2. v. 19. 6, Syncellus, p. 382 Bonn.
113 e.g. Amm. Marc. xv. 8. 19, Zosimus, i. 43. 1 (barbarian siege engines), Jordanes, Get. xvi. 92, xvii. 94, xviii. 103, &c. For unsuccessful sieges see Zosimus, i. 29. 2. 32. 1. &c.
114 See e.g. Tacitus, Hist. iv. 33, Dexippus, 100 F 28 § 5 (Jacoby), Zosimus, i. 33. 2. 34. 3. 35. 1. &c.
115 cf. Procopius, v. 21. 3 ff. Observe Witigis' four great battering rams which were also mounted on wheels and moved by 50 men.
116 ibid. 22. 8 f.
118 ibid., vi. 12. 1-13, 24 f. 
119 idem., BV iii. 5. 8. 15. 9, though note 16. 9. Striking confirmation of the historian has been found at Tipasa, where the city walls were systematically destroyed and the towers overturned: see J. Baradez, Tipasa: Ville antique de Maurétanie, (Algiers, 1952), 69, with Plate 42. The African cities were re-fortified by Solomon in 539-40: Procopius, BV iv. 19. 3. 20. 29. Among other works Solomon built an extraordinarily impressive fort a short distance south of Timgad: C. Courttois, Timgad: Antique Thamugadi, (Algiers, 1951), 60-5.
120 Isidore, Etymol. xv. i. 67.
121 Procopius, BG vii. 11. 32. 25. 7.
122 ibid. vii. 6. 1. 25. 11 (Beneventum), 8. 10 (Naples), 23. 3 (S豹letium), 24. 32 f. (Tibur), cf. 24. 29.
123 ibid., 22. 6 ff.; 19; 24. 3. 9, 27.
124 ibid., viii. 35. 9.
126 Tacitus, Ann. xii. 45. 4. He never ascribes bows and arrows as weapons of war to the Germans.
127 Julian, Ep. ad Athen. 286 B.
128 Tacitus, Germ. xxx. 3 copis. Sometimes women would accompany German warriors so as to serve food, ibid. vii. 4.
130 Note Caesar, BG ii. 10. 4.
131 See e.g. Amm. Marc. xviii. 7. 3 f., xxxi. 8. 1, Vegetius, iv. 7, Libanius, Or, xxiv. 38, Zosimus, i. 43. 2 fn., 48. 1, v. 19. 6 f. (cf. 21. 2), Eugippius, Vita S. Severini xxx. 1 (where note statim).
132 Caesar, BG vi. 10. 2, Paneg. Lat. x (ii). 5. 2 (cf. SHA. Claud. xi. 3), Amm. Marc. xxxi. 7. 3. 8. 1.
133 Caesar, BG vi. 10. 2, Paneg. Lat. x (ii). 5. 2 (cf. SHA. Claud. xi. 3), Amm. Marc. xxxi. 7. 3. 8. 1.
134 Dexippus, 100 F 7 § 3 (Jacoby), cf. F 6 § 14.
135 ibid., F 6 § 5, cf. Caesar BG i. 34. 3.
136 Amm. Marc. xxxi. 7. 6. 8 necessitas. Their small bands are mentioned repeatedly: ibid. 5. 8, 6. 5, 7. 7, 9. 3. 10. 21. 11. 4. 5, cf. SHA. Aurel. xviii.
EARLY GERMANIC WARFARE

6, Claudian, *In Rufin.* ii. 124 f., and many similar phrases.

137 Libanius, *Or.* xxiv. 40.

138 Claudian, *loc. cit.*

139 Amm. Marc. xxx. 10. 3.

140 *idem.,* xxxi. 11. 2-5, Eunapius, frag. 47, Zosimus, iv. 23.

141 Zosimus, iv. 25. 2-3 f., *cf.* 23. 4, Amm. Marc. xxxi. 11. 4.


143 Zosimus, i. 45. 1, 46. 1, SHA. *Claud.* xi. 3, xii. 1. On their scattered bands see Dexippus, 100 F 26 § 3, 28 § 1.

144 Caesar, *BG* i. 3. 1 f.

145 Amm. Marc. xv. 8. 1, xvi. 12. 5, Libanius, *Or.* xviii. 42. So, too, there seems to have been little organized opposition to the Visigoths when Theodosius became Emperor at the beginning of 379: Themistius, *Or.* xvi. 207 AB.

146 Amm. Marc. xvi. 5. 17. For a third-century Alamannic parallel see Dexippus, 100 F 6 § 14, and for the fifth century Eugippius, *Vita S.* Severini xxi. 4.

147 Amm. Marc. xvi. 4. 4, *Paneg. Lat.* xi (iii). 15. 3, Zosimus, iii. 5. 1.

148 Amm. Marc. xvi. 2. 2 “per diversa palantes barbaros”, 7 “diffusae multitudinis barbarae”, 11. 3 “vagantesque fusius”, 12. 4, xxi. 3. 1, xxvii. 1. 1, 2. 1-2, 10. 4, *cf.* Libanius, *Or.* xiii. 24. So also the Alamannic Lentienses in 378, Amm. Marc. xxxi. 10. 4. Julian expected the Alamanni to begin the campaign of 358 in one compact army (Amm. Marc. xvii. 8. 1 “Alamannos . . . nondum in unum coactos”), but doubtless they would have divided up according to rule (and necessity) after a very few days.

149 *idem.,* xvii. 2. 1. An inferior authority (Libanius, *Or.* xviii. 70) speaks of 1,000 Franks on that same occasion. In 457 the Alamanni operating near Bellinzona numbered 900, Sidonius, *carm.* v. 377. But one of the Alamannic bands raiding Gaul in 366 is said to have consisted of at least 10,000 warriors (Amm. Marc. xxvii. 2. 7), though of course the figures of enemy killed and wounded are frequently exaggerated.


151 Zosimus, iii. 3. 2.

152 Libanius, *Or.* lix. 136. The phrase, which is proverbial (cf. Demosthenes, *Or.* xix. 148, &c.), is used by Themistius, *Or.* xvi. 206 D, of the Visigothic raids after 376.

153 Amm. Marc. xvi. 2. 11. See xvi. 2, and Libanius, *Or.* xviii. 35, for vivid pictures of the disorganisation of Gaul in 355 and the difficulties of fighting in such conditions.

154 Amm. Marc. xvi. 2. 2.

155 SHA. *Aurel.* xi. 6.


157 Amm. Marc. xxvii. 2. 1-3.

158 *idem.,* xv. 4. 8. For a similar mistake see xxvii. 2. 4 ff.

159 In the opinion of Strabo, iv. 4. 2, the reason why the Gauls, unlike the Iberians, had been crushed so quickly by Rome was the fact that they concentrated their forces and fought pitched battles. The Germans would have done well to ponder Livy, iii. 2. 12 f.

160 SHA. *Maximian.* xi. 8, *cf.* *Aurel.* xi. 3, Herodian vi. 7. 8, vii. 2. 2, John of Antioch, frag. 141.1, Eunapius, frag. 42 (p. 240. 29), Zosimus, iv. 22. 1-3; and the criticism of Julian in Amm. Marc. xvi. 2. 6. Moors were similarly used by Belisarius, Procopius, *BG* v. 29. 22, cf. 25. 9, vi. 23. 36.

161 Zosimus, iv. 23. 4. Note also Dexippus, 100 F 28 § 1 (Jacoby), Amm. Marc. xxxi. 7. 3.

162 Zosimus, iii. 7. 1-3, Eunapius, frag. 11, *cf.* Amm. Marc. xvii. 10. 5, xxvii. 1.

163 *idem.,* xxxi. 7. 2, Eunapius, frag. 46.

164 Tacitus, *Ann.* xii. 33. 2.