

Herwig Wolfram, *The Roman Empire and its Germanic Peoples*, trans. Thomas Dunlap, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997. xx + 361 pp.

'It is a commonplace today that western Europe was not overrun by barbarians in the fifth century, that the barbarian states were freely installed by the Roman government, and that the barbarian groups were not peoples or tribes, but motley collections of soldiers under the military leadership of a king'.¹ That such a view is shared nowadays by most, if not all, scholars is in many respects due to Herwig Wolfram. For more than three decades Wolfram has written with sustained intelligence, opening up new subjects and contributing, through lucid and illuminating analysis, to our understanding of the barbarians and their settlement within the territory of the Roman empire.

The book under review here is an English translation of *Das Reich und die Germanen. Zwischen Antike und Mittelalter*, published in Berlin in 1990, and it is the second of Wolfram's books to be translated into English.² As in many of Wolfram's previous works, the history of the so-called Germanic migrations and the rise of the post-Roman kingdoms are viewed in this book through the distinctive prism of ethnogenesis. While in the past any analysis of the Germanic/Barbarian question began with the assumption that barbarian groups were ethnic entities, Wolfram and his followers have argued that the barbarian groups of late antiquity were not originally ethnic tribes. They emerged from political and professional groups — armies at the service of the Roman empire — and only gradually were transformed into nascent *gentes* which considered themselves ethnic groups.³ This brief summary of the ethnogenesis theory is, of course, a drastic simplification of a much more complicated and refined theory, masterfully and clearly explained by Wolfram in the first chapter of *The Roman Empire and its Germanic Peoples*.

In the next three chapters Wolfram discusses the political, social and economic background to the rise of the barbarian kingdoms. Chapter 2 surveys the relation between Barbarians and Romans from the Marcomannic wars to the end of the third century. Chapter 3 focuses on the organisation and the social structure of both the Roman empire and the Germanic peoples during the fourth century. And chapter 4 analyses the perception of kingship among the Barbarians, as well as 'the techniques of accommodation' through which Barbarians were settled on Roman soil.

The remaining chapters examine the ethnogenesis and history of the different Germanic groups, that is, the Huns (chapter 5), the Visigoths (chapters 6 and 13), the

¹ Patrick Amory, 'The meaning and purpose of ethnic terminology in the Burgundian laws', *Early Medieval Europe* 2 (1993), pp. 1-28, at p. 1.

² The first one is Herwig Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, trans. Thomas Dunlap, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1988 (originally published as *Die Goten. Von den Anfängen bis zur Mitte des 6. Jahrhunderts*, Munich, 1979).

³ For some fuller discussions of the ethnogenesis theory, see Reinhard Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung. Das Werden des frühmittelalterlichen Gentes*, 2nd ed., Köln, 1977; Herwig Wolfram and Walter Pohl, eds., *Typen der Ethnogenese unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Bayern*, 2 vols., Vienna, 1990; Karl Brunner and Brigitte Merta eds., *Ethnogenese und Überlieferung. Angewandte Methoden der Frühmittelalterlicherforschung*, Vienna and Munich, 1994, especially the paper by Walter Pohl, 'Tradition, Ethnogenese und literarische Gestaltung: eine Zwischenbilanz', pp. 9-26.

Vandals (chapter 7), the Ostrogoths (chapters 8, 9 and 10), the Franks (chapter 9), the Anglo-Saxons (chapter 11), the Burgundians (chapter 12), and the Lombards (chapter 14). In a short chapter, entitled 'the transformation of the Roman world', Wolfram looks at other outside forces which brought about the end of late antiquity, namely the Arabs, the Slavs, the Avars and the Persians. The clear conclusion which emerges from Wolfram's panoramic survey is that 'the Germanic people neither destroyed the Roman world nor restored it; instead, they made a home for themselves within it, just as the Spaniards, Gauls and Illyrians had done before them' (p. 313).

Although *The Roman Empire and its Germanic Peoples* is not a textbook, both students and educated lay people will find it extremely useful. Wolfram's succinct and lucid discussions turn this book into a handy and much-needed general survey of the Germanic people in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. One should only lament the fact that the lavish illustrations of the original German edition were omitted by the publisher of the English version.

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