ONE

THE GREAT DIVIDE

Ethnicity and identity have formed a major focus in late antique and early medieval archaeology and history. Wide-ranging debates between the so-called Vienna and Toronto Schools have had massive impacts beyond early medieval history, as has the famous project, *The Transformation of the Roman World*.[1] Here, a new paradigm emerged, slowly substituting the previous 'decline-and-fall' ideas of the antique world with that of 'transformation'. The study of late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages in the Roman West is thus very much entangled with research on identity, ethnicity, and grand narratives, such as transformation or decline, 'Germanic' or barbarian invasions. These influential concepts and ideas should not be underestimated in the study of art and visual culture as they too frame the historical scenes in which art history is set. Since the mid-2000s, there have been new debates, mostly (but not solely) triggered by Heather, Ward-Perkins, and Halsall.[2] The question of

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[1] On the project, see Ian Wood, s.v. "Transformation of the Roman World," in Johannes Hoops, ed., *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, 2nd ed., vol. 31 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1973–2007), 132–34.

[2] Peter J. Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: Macmillan, 2005); Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Guy Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376–568* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Peter J. Heather, *Empires and Barbarians: The Fall of Rome and the Birth of Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

the extent to which ethnicity has played a significant role in the use of material culture, and to which it can thereby be identified in the archaeological record, has been widely, and often intensely, debated across late antique and medieval archaeology.[3] The research on art and visual culture, however, embarked on a different tangent. Largely ignoring recent debates in history and archaeology, most scholars still emphasise the function of early medieval art and images as fostering perceptions of 'Germanic' identity, ethnicity, or religion.[4] But why does the 'Germanic' remain such a pervasive terminology?

Germani *in Antique Historiography*

The development of the now ubiquitous term *Germani*, alongside its changes in meaning since the first century BCE, and its use in scholarship and historiography have been profound areas of discussion over the last three decades, predominantly in German-speaking regions.[5] The next sections will therefore address crucial elements of the so-called Germanic early Middle Ages, commonly perceived as referring to central and north-western Europe from the fifth and sixth centuries onwards but also encompassing parts of Italy and Spain, and so incorporating those regions of Europe where barbarian *regna* were established in the course of the disintegration of the Roman Empire in the West. First, I will discuss the terms 'Germanic' and *Germani* as they were used since the first century BCE; however, I will focus on late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages for obvious reasons. Anticipating the core argument, I will firmly argue the need to disestablish the use of 'Germanic' when exploring and investigating the early Middle Ages and its visual culture in the future.

The first detailed descriptions of *Germani* or *Germanoi* are those of Posidonius of Apameia in the first half of the first century BCE, who identified

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[3] To name only a few (shortened citations): Brather, "Ethnische Identitäten als Konstrukte," 139–77; Brather, *Ethnische Interpretationen*; Brather, "Ethnizität und Mittelalterarchäologie," 161–72; Curta, "Medieval Archaeology and Ethnicity," 537–48; Curta, "Elephant in the Room," 165–76; Fazioli, "Rethinking Ethnicity," 20–39; Gillett, *On Barbarian Identity*; Halsall, "Ethnicity and Early Medieval Cemeteries," 15–27; Harland, "*Rethinking Ethnicity and 'Otherness',*" 113–42; Lucy, *Cemeteries of East Yorkshire*; von Rummel, *Habitus barbarus*; von Rummel, "Gotisch, barbarisch oder römisch?" 51–77; Siegmund, *Alemannen und Franken*.

[4] E.g. Lotte Hedeager, *Iron Age Myth and Materiality: An Archaeology of Scandinavia, AD 400–1000* (London: Routledge, 2011); Wilhelm Heizmann and Sigmund Oehrl, eds., *Bilddenkmäler zur germanischen Götter- und Heldensage* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015); Alexandra Pesch, *Die Kraft der Tiere: Völkerwanderungszeitliche Goldhalskragen und die Grundsätze germanischer Kunst* (Mainz: Verlag RGZM, 2015).

[5] E.g. (shortened citations), Beck, *Germanenprobleme in heutiger Sicht*; Springer, "Grundlagen der Germanenforschung," 169–77; Ehringhaus, *Germanenmythos*; Beck, Steuer, and Timpe, *Germanen, Germania, Germanische Altertumskunde*; Jarnut, "Germanisch," 107–13; Pohl, *Germanen*; Wiwjorra, *Germanenmythos*; Fehr, *Germanen und Romanen*.

them as a subset of the Celts and not as an ethnos in their own right.[6] Roman ethnography distinguished two levels of ethnic ascriptions: on a large general-ised scale, those who ranged widely across swathes of territory such as the Scythians, Celts, Libyans, and Thracians; and smaller units such as the Suebi, Hermunduri, and other groups mentioned in Tacitus' *Germania*. The way ancient historians and ethnographers comprehended their ethnic nomenclature can be described as heterogeneous: drawing on either language, origin, kin-ship, geography, manner of life, or organisation.[7] In this classification, *Germani* belonged to the first category, and perceptions of them in antiquity saw them as yet another of these large, generalised *ethnē*, located between Celts and Scythians. This was based largely on Caesar's *Commentarii de Bello Gallico*'s labelling of the people east of the Rhine (granting only few exceptions summed up as *Germani cisrhenani*).[8] The term was not thought to allude to 'Germanic' languages, as the term is often understood today, but rather in geographical terms: it was those living in the *Germania* who were *Germani*.

Caesar established the Rhine and the Danube as the western and southern borders of *Germania*. The eastern frontier was not as clearly identifiable, yet it is generally accepted as lying within the vicinity of the Vistula in Poland.[9] In northern Europe, Scandinavia was not included within the term, which ironically excluded north-Germanic languages from *Germania*.[10]

With this, the difficulties of disparate *Germanenbegriffe* come into play: following Caesar, the antique ethnography of *Germani* was based largely on locating *gentes* in order to label them 'Germanic', while modern scholars frequently use languages as the defining criteria – often with blurred and vague results, mixing and matching geography, ethnicity, and language into a 'Germanic' amalgamation: Pesch, for example, defines the 'Germanic' world 'as a region (also known more generally as "Germania") where groups of Barbarians lived that are defined by their related Germanic language'.[11]

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[6] Dieter Timpe, "Geschichte (§1–§5): Germanen, historisch," in Beck, Steuer, and Timpe, *Germanen, Germania, Germanische Altertumskunde*, 2–4; Roland Steinacher, "Rome and Its Created Northeners," in Friedrich and Harland, *Interrogating the 'Germanic'*, 35.

[7] Dieter Timpe, "Ethnologische Begriffsbildung in der Antike," in Beck, *Germanenprobleme in heutiger Sicht*, 33–37; Timpe, "Geschichte (§1–§5)," 7–8.

[8] Timpe, "Geschichte (§1–§5)," 4–10; Fehr, *Germanen und Romanen*, 27.

[9] Beck, Steuer, and Timpe, *Germanen, Germania, Germanische Altertumskunde*, 188–89; Pohl, *Germanen*, 3.

[10] Cf. Allan A. Lund, "Die Erfindung Germaniens und die Entdeckung Skandinaviens in Antike und Mittelalter," in *Ultima Thule: Bilder des Nordens von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Annelore Engel-Braunschmidt et al. (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2001), 29–46.

[11] Alexandra Pesch, "The Impact of 'Wyrms': Germanic Snakes, Drakes, Saurians and Worms in the First Millennium AD," in Brieske, Dickers, and Rind, *Tiere und Tierdarstellungen*, 247, n1.

Still, according to the terms of classical ethnography, the Goths, who spoke an early Germanic language, were Scythians, not *Germani*.[12]

Called 'a most dangerous book' by Krebs,[13] Publius Cornelius Tacitus' *Germania* has been *the* source most exploited by historians, archaeologists, philologists, and politicians alike when aiming to implement the *Germanenbegriff* for particular aims. Conversely, Kulikowski has recently described *Germania* as

> a most boring book. ... the Germania is a static, sometimes laborious ethnography in which very little happens. ... But what the Germania lacks in excitement, it makes up for with names; hundreds of them, of tribes and peoples, *gentes* and *nationes*. These precious clues to an otherwise barely known past have set scholars on their trail for centuries, ever since the ancient treatise was rediscovered in the middle of the fifteenth century.[14]

Whether dangerous or boring, the ascension of *Germanische Altertumskunde* in the nineteenth century could not have taken place without Tacitus' momentous work and its recognition and adoption in the Renaissance by Italian and German humanists.[15] Tacitus' *Germania* is composed of two parts: one describing the common ground shared by all *Germani*; the other elaborating on features idiosyncratic to specific *gentes*.[16] But why is this late first-century work considered significant for studies that examine art and imagery from the fifth century onwards? Because the alleged common traits shared by all *Germani*, about which Tacitus purports to tell us, are perceived as compelling source

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[12] Cf. Fehr, *Germanen und Romanen*, 29, n43. On the 'Wulfila' Bible, see Carla Falluomini, *The Gothic Version of the Gospels and Pauline Epistles: Cultural Background, Transmission and Character* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 1–24.

[13] Christopher B. Krebs, *A Most Dangerous Book: Tacitus's Germania from the Roman Empire to the Third Reich* (New York: Norton, 2011).

[14] Michael Kulikowski, "The Marriage of Philology and Race: The 'Germanic' Construct and Its Legacies," in Friedrich and Harland, *Interrogating the 'Germanic'*, 19.

[15] On the subject, see: Donald R. Kelley, "*Tacitus noster*: The *Germania* in the Renaissance and Reformation," in *Tacitus and the Tacitean Tradition*, ed. T. J. Luce and A. J. Woodman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 152–200; Hans Kloft, "Die Idee einer deutschen Nation zu Beginn der frühen Neuzeit: Überlegungen zur 'Germania' des Tacitus und zum 'Arminius' Ulrichs von Hutten," in *Arminius und die Varusschlacht: Geschichte, Mythos, Literatur*, ed. Rainer Wiegels and Winfried Woesler, 3rd ed. (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2003), 197–210; Dieter Mertens, "Die Instrumentalisierung der 'Germania des Tacitus durch die deutschen Humanisten," in *Zur Geschichte der Gleichung 'germanisch-deutsch': Sprache und Namen, Geschichte und Institutionen*, ed. Heinrich Beck et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004), 37–101; Christopher B. Krebs, *Negotiatio Germaniae: Tacitus' Germania und Enea Silvio Piccolomini, Giannantonio Campano, Conrad Celtis und Heinrich Bebel* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005).

[16] Allan A. Lund, "Zum Germanenbegriff bei Tacitus," in Beck, *Germanenprobleme in heutiger Sicht*, 53–54; Reinhard Wolters, s.v. "Tacitus," in Hoops, *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, 30:263–64.

material for a 'Germanic' mentality and way of life, and are thereby deemed useful for examining the 'Germanic' *gentes* of the Migration Period and the early Middle Ages. However, and in all probability, conventional wisdom tells us that people termed *Germani* by Caesar and later writers such as Tacitus had no shared all-embracing 'Germanic' identity. This was, after all, an extrinsic attribution, sometimes thought to have been initially fabricated by Caesar as a means to fulfil his own political objectives.[17]

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There are three main *Germanenbegriffe*: historical, linguistic, and archaeological. While the historical view of the 'Germanic' is mostly based on the textual evidence from classical Antiquity, the linguistic concept encompasses 'Germanic' languages broadly defined by consonant shifts. Their 'Germanic' labelling does not stem from linguistic characteristics as such but follows the historical view that they were initially spoken by 'Germanic' peoples as defined by historical studies. The same holds true for 'Germanic' material culture: the part of the archaeological record normally described by the term is commonly thought to be those remains left by the historical *Germani*. It is almost impossible to recount every study that has relied on the 'Germanic' in its understanding or interpretation of early medieval art and archaeology – such studies are vast in number. What is feasible, however, is to lay bare the main modes of interpretation that have established generalised characteristics of all 'Germanic' societies. The most prevalent attributes are those associated with the terms *Heilsbild* ('healing image'), *Gefolgschaft* (retinue), *Sakralkönigtum* (sacral kingship), and shamanism – in the context of the Old Norse term *sejd* (magic).[18] While shamanism is a more recent area of interest (re)pursued since the early 2000s in Scandinavian and British archaeology and literary studies,[19] *Heilsbild*, retinue, and sacral kingship have their roots in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century scholarship.

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[17] Cf. Springer, "Grundlagen der Germanenforschung," 170–71; Norbert Wagner, "Der völkerwanderungszeitliche Germanenbegriff," in Beck, *Germanenprobleme in heutiger Sicht*, 149; Pohl, *Germanen*, 50–51; Jarnut, "Germanisch," 107; Guy Halsall, "Two Worlds Become One: A 'Counter-Intuitive' View of the Roman Empire and 'Germanic' Migration," *German History* 32, no. 4 (2014): 520.

[18] On magic and *sejd/seiðr* in Old Norse literature, see Christina Kunstmann, *Magie und Liminalität: seiðr in der altnordischen Überlieferung* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020).

[19] Prompted by Neil Price, *The Viking Way: Religion and War in Late Iron Age Scandinavia* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2002). Also: Clive Tolley, *Shamanism in Norse Myth and Magic* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 2009). More sceptical are Oliver Haid and François-Xavier Dillmann, s.v. "Zauber," in Hoops, *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, 35:863–64, arguing that recent accounts of shamanism largely bank on the debatable work by Dag Strömbäck, *Sejd: Textstudier i nordisk religionshistoria* (Stockholm: Gebers, 1935).

Heilsbild

The term *Heilsbild* was coined by Hans Zeiss in his work, *Das Heilsbild in der germanischen Kunst des frühen Mittelalters*.[20] Zeiss was the deputy director of the *Römisch-Germanische Kommission* in Frankfurt from 1931, and he became full professor in Munich in 1935, and was part of the editorial committee of the antisemitic and racist journal *Volk und Rasse* until 1944, the year he was killed in Romania during World War II.[21] Among his students was Joachim Werner, who largely set the agenda of German early medieval archaeology after 1945 and whose work was primarily informed by Zeiss.[22] While the ethnic interpretation of the archaeological record – based on his influential studies on early medieval burials in Visigothic Spain[23] – has been subject to intensive debates in the context of ethnicity, Zeiss' account of *Heilsbild* and its implications has been mostly untouched by these critiques and is still ubiquitous in studies of early medieval art and archaeology.[24] But there are terminological and methodological pitfalls that need to be addressed and that question the relevance of *Heilsbild* for modern research. Zeiss' definition of *Heilsbild* (insufficiently translated as 'healing image') is as follows:

> It is often referred to holy, sacral, or cultic images suggesting a deeper meaning and for which, here, the umbrella term *Heilsbild* is applied. This notion is also found is the pejorative term of apotropaic magic; as the

[20] Hans Zeiss, *Das Heilsbild in der germanischen Kunst des frühen Mittelalters* (Munich: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1941).

[21] For biographic details, see Hubert Fehr, "Hans Zeiss, Joachim Werner und die archäologischen Forschungen zur Merowingerzeit," in *Eine hervorragend nationale Wissenschaft: Deutsche Prähistoriker zwischen 1900 und 1995*, ed. Heiko Steuer (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001), 316–30.

[22] Cf. ibid., 331–32; Volker Bierbrauer, s.v. "Werner, Joachim," in Hoops, *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, 33:473–85, here 474.

[23] Hans Zeiss, *Die Grabfunde aus dem spanischen Westgotenreich* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1934).

[24] To name only a few (shortened citations arranged in alphabetical order): Arwidsson, *Valsgärde III*, 116, 125; Beck, "Torslunda," 247; Behr, "Forschungsgeschichte," 189; Böhner, "Silberphaleren aus Eschwege," 741; Elbern, "Lindau Book Cover," 332; Ellmers, "Archäologische Quellen," 106–7; Fingerlin, "Die ältesten christlichen Bilder (2012)," 19; Flowers, "Shifting Shapes," 162; Hauck, "Alemannische Denkmäler," 35; Karl Hauck, s.v. "Brakteatenikonologie," in Hoops, *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, 3:396; Hauck, "Altuppsalas Polytheismus," 216; Hauck, "Machttaten Odins," 3; Heinrich-Tamaska, "Deutung und Bedeutung von Salins Tierstil II," 292; Klein-Pfeuffer, "Pressblechscheiben von Eschwege-Niederhone," 283; Nowotny, "Ornamentik der Zaumzeugbeschläge," 314; Odenweller, "Goldmünze und Goldblattkreuz," 130–35; Padberg, "Reaktionsformen des Polytheismus," 630, n128; Pesch, "Charismatisches Königtum," 70; Pesch, "Fragment einer Weltanschauung," 381, n22; Pesch, "Fallstricke und Glatteis," 683; Pesch, "Tiere, Götter, Wirkungsmacht," 136; Speidel, *Ancient Germanic Warriors*, 25; Speidel, "Göttertanz und Unheil-Schlangen," 552; Wamers, "Io triumphe!" 926–27; Wamers, "Salins Stil II," 33, n2; Werner, "Tiergestaltige Heilsbilder," 377–83; Werner, *Aufkommen von Bild und Schrift*, 3–4.

> protection against harm and damage is also a *Heilswirkung* it is appropriate to suggest this more positive terminology.[25] (translation: M. F.)

Objects and images referenced by the term by Zeiss – gold bracteates, Scandinavian picture stones, and die-impressed sheets – are thus thought to invoke the holy and the sacred in a pagan setting. As Steuer has pointed out in his lemma on *Heilsbild* in the *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, Zeiss' efforts to prioritise the function of art in ritual and 'cult' over formalist approaches and identifying meaning can be seen as a methodological crossroads in the study of 'Germanic' art, at least in Germany.[26] Unfortunately, the controversial details of Zeiss' account, including his reliance on Nazi vocabulary, are often glossed over.[27] The key strictures of *Heilsbild* lie within its limitation of art solely and exclusively in the light of religious and sacral features. This also explains its increased popularity in the second half of the twentieth century, first and foremost in the context of studies on Scandinavian gold bracteates conducted by the medievalist Karl Hauck and his students.

The notion of *Heilsbild* is the cornerstone of this branch of research, one of the main arguments of which is that such gold bracteates represent the religion of Odin (*Odinsreligion*) as the *Götterfürst*.[28] This assumes the presence of the sacred on a *prima facie* basis and thus merely alludes to Norse religion, rather than demonstrates actual evidence of its relevance for early medieval art. The second often neglected problem of *Heilsbild* is the employment of Nazi jargon. Though Zeiss' ideology is only glimpsed in his work, his binary view of Norse ('Germanic') and southern ('Roman') art was largely informed by the art historian Heinrich Wölfflin.[29] The notion of a distinctive national art, equating 'Germanic' with German,[30] has had a significant impact on Zeiss' work. For example, when discussing the seventh-century Pliezhausen disc, he notes:

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[25] Zeiss, *Heilsbild*, 6. Original German quote: 'Um den tieferen Gehalt anzudeuten, wird gerne von heiligen, sakralen oder kultischen Bildern gesprochen, für welche Bezeichnungen hier der Sammelbegriff Heilsbild angewendet wird. Er findet sich bisweilen mit dem bekannten negativen Begriff Apotropaion ausgedrückt; da die Abwehr von Schaden ebenfalls eine Heilswirkung bedeutet, ist es berechtigt, hierfür den positiven Ausdruck einzusetzen.'

[26] Heiko Steuer, s.v. "Heilsbild," in Hoops, *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, 14: 233–34.

[27] As argued by Helmbrecht, *Wirkmächtige Kommunikationsmedien*, 61–62.

[28] For literature, see note 24.

[29] Fehr, "Hans Zeiss, Joachim Werner," 377–79; cf. Hans Belting, *Die Deutschen und ihre Kunst: Ein schwieriges Erbe* (Munich: Beck, 1992), 23–27. Heinrich Wölfflin (1864–1945) was professor of art history in Basel, Berlin, Munich, and Zurich and is best known for his formalist methodology: Heinrich Wölfflin, *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Das Problem der Stilentwicklung in der neueren Kunst* (Munich: Bruckmann, 1915). For biographical details, see *Dictionary of Art Historians*, s.v. "Wölfflin, Heinrich," accessed 24 April 2019, www.arthistorians .info/wolfflinh.

[30] See Heinrich Beck et al., eds., *Zur Geschichte der Gleichung "germanisch-deutsch": Sprache und Namen, Geschichte und Institutionen* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004).

> Here, the formalist adaptation is less important than the observation that the bracteate master did not content himself with an exact copy, but made the group [depicting riders] accessible to Germanic taste [*germanisches Empfinden*] by letting the fallen enemy pierce the victor's horse with his sword.[31] (translation: M. F.)

The argument that 'Germanic' works of art resemble Roman prototypes, that then transfers them into a 'Germanic' essence, and, moreover, proposes that this is the ideal of such art, is essential to Zeiss' nationalist agenda and understanding.[32] This is what he calls *germanisches Empfinden*, translatable as 'Germanic' sensitivity, feeling, or taste. In this line of thought, the 'Germanic' did not only encompass the historical perspective as we comprehend it today, but more or less openly implied a direct link to the modern German nation. Given these circumstances, it seems rather surprising to encounter similar vocabulary, albeit in inverted commas, in Blankenfeldt's recent article on 'Germanic' art in the Roman Iron Age; here, she elaborates on Roman prototypes and their vernacular interpretations:

> Even if Roman roots lie within Germanic motifs as a stimulus, from the very beginning the adaptation and transformation of external influences were rendered according to a Germanic "taste" [*germanisches "Empfinden"*].[33] (translation: M. F.)

Zeiss' account of *Heilsbild* is pivotal to Blankenfeldt's understanding,[34] and with it, perhaps unconsciously, come the nationalist concepts attached to the term. But Blankenfeldt is not alone in this: Pesch, for example, sees the presence of a 'Germanic' taste (*germanischer Geschmack*) in early medieval animal art,[35] while Klein-Pfeuffer identifies a 'Germanic' sense of style (*germanisches Stilempfinden*),[36] and for Voß a sense of style (*eigenes Stilempfinden*) was

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[31] Zeiss, *Heilsbild*, 34. Original German quote: 'Indessen ist in unserem Zusammenhang die formale Ableitung weniger wichtig als die Beobachtung, daß der Brakteatenmeister sich jedenfalls nicht, wie andere, mit einer mehr oder minder getreuen Nachbildung begnügt, sondern die Gruppe dadurch dem germanischen Empfinden näher gebracht hat, daß er den gefallenen Gegner mit letzter Kraft das Schwert dem Pferd des Siegers in die Brust stoßen läßt.'
[32] Fehr, "Hans Zeiss, Joachim Werner," 378–80.
[33] Ruth Blankenfeldt, "Fünfzig Jahre nach Joachim Werner: Überlegungen zur kaiserzeitlichen Kunst," in Heizmann and Oehrl, *Bilddenkmäler*, 14. Original German quote: 'Wenn auch römische Wurzeln für die germanischen Motive deutlich als ein Impulsgeber hervortreten, so geschahen Übernahme und Umgestaltung fremder Anregungen bereits von Beginn an nach einem germanischem "Empfinden".'
[34] Ibid., 9–10.   [35] Pesch, "Fallstricke und Glatteis," 649.
[36] Klein-Pfeuffer, "Pressblechscheiben von Eschwege-Niederhone," 274.

articulated by 'Germanic' elites in the Roman Iron Age.[37] On the face of it, these few (random) examples demonstrate that Roman prototypes were perceived not just as 'copies' or 'imitations' (as Zeiss previously argued) but were adapted to fit the needs of local societies, above all, to express 'Germanic' identities. Focussing excessively, and often solely, on distinctive 'Germanic' or vernacular styles, or the idea of a distinctive taste or sensitivity thereto, has deep roots in nationalist thought.

The overall agenda of some aspects of modern German scholarship – art constituting and staging 'Germanic' identity and its allegedly idiosyncratic 'Germanic' *Empfinden* – has thus changed little since Zeiss' argument for the notion of *Heilsbild* in the early 1940s. Of course, the methodologies and arguments have become more nuanced and elaborate, but the main objective has remained the same, albeit cloaked in the disguise of terminology current within the humanities, be it identity, iconography, or semiotics. Furthermore, the label *Heilsbild* does not evidence or substantiate in any way the claim that 'Germanic' art is primarily or exclusively linked to the sacred and the holy; the situation is rather quite the reverse: the concept presupposes and determines this interpretation. The notion of *Heilsbild* is considered a truism, but in fact it is an axiom, not an empirical outcome or result of research. I do not intend to deprive art and images of their significance for rituals and belief systems, or for religion in general. But the presumption of ritual, sacral, or religious functions as given facts, no matter the context, is not a viable approach. Rather, more effort should be put into pursuing the question of if, how, and why a specific body of art possesses ritual or religious functions, and especially of how we establish this. The notion of *Heilsbild* is distracting terminology at best; at worst, it bends the understanding of early medieval art towards 'Germanic' and Norse paganism.

Sacral kingship

While the notion of *Heilsbild* is mostly limited to German archaeology, the concept of *Sakralkönigtum* (sacral kingship) has also informed Scandinavian and British scholarship. *Sakralkönigtum* defines the idea that kingship was sustained and legitimised through religion, or more broadly, the 'sacred'. This leads to the assumption that the most determinant factor of early medieval 'Germanic' kingship and its characteristics is religion, be it Christian or pagan. The problem I see in the term is not its religious or sacral components but, again, the axiomatic assumption of religion as the main or even exclusive

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[37] Hans-Ulrich Voss, Joachim Lutz, and Peter Hammer, "Römische und germanische Bunt- und Edelmetallfunde im Vergleich: Archäometallurgische Untersuchungen ausgehend von elbgermanischen Körpergräbern," *Bericht der Römisch-Germanischen Kommission* 79 (1998): 307.

backbone of a putative 'Germanic' rulership ideology. It is this stricture that brings about problematic interpretations, as will later become evident.

The term itself was shaped by Vilhelm Grønbech,[38] and in particular, Otto Höfler,[39] and has been debated ever since – as exemplified by the extensive lemma in the *Reallexikon für Germanische Altertumskunde,* enumerating over 700 bibliographic references.[40] Here, von Padberg, a student of Hauck, underlines that scholarship still disagrees about whether there was indeed something that can be defined as 'Germanic' sacral kingship, but affirms that despite these disputes it would be too judgemental to discard the term entirely: 'Whatever we make of the problem, it is undeniable that rulership and authority have always and everywhere been associated with sacral characteristics' (translation: M. F.).[41] This, again, is simply treated as a truism; it seems there is no need to substantiate the claim: authority has simply (according to von Padberg) always and everywhere been informed by the sacred. Of course, sacral and religious elements are frequently found in early medieval kingship, but this neither justifies applying the term to each and every form of rulership without substantial evidence, nor does it give sufficient reason for the existence of an all-embracing and established ideology of 'sacral kingship'. Yet this fundamental view is deeply engrained and often used uncritically in the study of material and visual culture of the so-called Germanic Middle Ages. While historical surveys on *Sakralkönigtum,* and 'Germanic' kingship in general,[42] have pointed out both weaknesses and strengths of the concept,[43] recent archaeological and literary studies seem to push these obstacles aside, arguing for a 'rediscovery' of the term.

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[38] Vilhelm Peter Grønbech, *The Culture of the Teutons* (London: Oxford University Press, 1931); Wilhelm Grönbech, *Kultur und Religion der Germanen,* 2 vols. (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1937–1939).

[39] Otto Höfler, "Der Sakralcharakter des germanischen Königtums," in *Das Königtum: Seine geistigen und rechtlichen Grundlagen*, ed. Theodor Mayer (Lindau: Thorbecke, 1956).

[40] Cf. Ulrich Köhler et al., s.v. "Sakralkönigtum," in Hoops, *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, 26:179–305.

[41] Köhler et al., s.v. "Sakralkönigtum," 26:180. Original German quote: 'Denn wie immer man auch die Problematik einschätzen mag, ist doch unbestreitbar, daß stets und überall Herrschaft mit sakralen Elementen in Verbindung gebracht worden ist'.

[42] Stefanie Dick, *Der Mythos vom 'germanischen' Königtum: Studien zur Herrschaftsorganisation bei den germanischsprachigen Barbaren bis zum Beginn der Völkerwanderungszeit* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008).

[43] Klaus von See, *Kontinuitätstheorie und Sakraltheorie in der Germanenforschung: Antwort an Otto Höfler* (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1972); Eve Picard, *Germanisches Sakralkönigtum? Quellenkritische Studien zur Germania des Tacitus und zur altnordischen Überlieferung* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1991); Franz-Reiner Erkens, "Sakralkönigtum und sakrales Königtum: Anmerkungen und Hinweise," in Erkens, *Frühmittelalterliches Königtum*, 1–8; Alois Wolf, "Germanisches Sakralkönigtum? Zum Befund volkssprachlicher Dichtungen des Mittelalters," in Erkens, *Frühmittelalterliches Königtum*, 141–60.

A current example of this tendency is the effort of Price and Mortimer in their article 'An Eye for Odin?', claiming to re-examine the 'issue of sacral kingship from a purely archaeological perspective'.[44] Yet, there seems to be an unbridgeable gap between scholarly aspiration and methodology: there can be no 'purely archaeological' perspective on sacral kingship – the concept itself stems from sundry historical and literary evidence in nexus with a focus on the 'Germanic'. It is not viable to substantiate kingship 'merely' from an archaeological point of view, let alone a sacral one. Accordingly, the reasoning presented by Price and Mortimer is highly permeated by notions of the 'Germanic', limiting their study on 'the wider Germanic world', the 'Germanic North', or the 'Germanic culture area'.[45] Noteworthy is the conclusion that 'in Scandinavia by contrast, after generally being dismissed for much of the twentieth century, a broad consensus in *support* of sacral kingship has emerged in the last twenty years'.[46] Here, Price and Mortimer focus on studies by Sundqvist that are, however, more sceptical about the concept than intimated by their citation.[47] In fact, Sundqvist rejects sacral kingship rather than promotes it:

> In the view of the present author, the image of ancient rulership . . . cannot be accepted, since it leans too much on the sacral kingship pattern for which the empirical basis is weak in the Germanic material. . . . The sacral kingship theory is afflicted by methodological problems, of which the problem of definition is only one example.[48]

Or, more bluntly:

> In my opinion, this paradigm implies a number of methodological difficulties. By proceeding from a universal concept and applying it to Scandinavian sources, many specific cultural and historical contexts are disregarded. This method also leads to a too narrow analysis, where only the religious dimension of the authority is taken under consideration.[49]

Accordingly, there is no consensus in support of sacral kingship theory as implied by Price and Mortimer. Sundqvist, however, does not reject the presence of religious or sacral elements in Scandinavian ruler ideology, as he

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[44] Neil Price and Paul Mortimer, "An Eye for Odin? Divine Role-Playing in the Age of Sutton Hoo," *European Journal of Archaeology* 17, no. 3 (2014): 519.

[45] Ibid., 518, 522.   [46] Ibid., 518.

[47] See, Olof Sundqvist, *Freyr's Offspring: Rulers and Religion in Ancient Svea Society* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2002), esp. 18–38; Sundqvist, "Aspects of Rulership Ideology in Early Scandinavia: With Particular References to the Skaldic Poem Ynglingatal," in Erkens, *Frühmittelalterliches Königtum*, 87–124; Sundqvist, "Religious Ruler Ideology in Pre-Christian Scandinavia: A Contextual Approach," in *More Than Mythology: Narratives, Ritual Practices and Regional Distribution in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religions*, ed. Catharina Raudvere and Jens P. Schjødt (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2012), 225–61.

[48] Sundqvist, *Freyr's Offspring*, 37.   [49] Sundqvist, "Aspects of Rulership Ideology," 120.

1.1 Helmet from Sutton Hoo, England. © The Trustees of the British Museum

calls it; indeed, the contrary seems to be the case: he examines the 'religious dimension' in early medieval (Late Iron Age) Scandinavia mostly through literary or runic evidence, again informed by the 'Germanic' paradigm,[50] which inevitably undermines his presentation of sacral kingship.

Another problem with Price's and Mortimer's effort to substantiate sacral kingship is the archaeological evidence on which, so they claim, their whole case rests. Their main focus is the Sutton Hoo helmet and the garnet cloisonné of its eyebrows (Figure 1.1). According to Price and Mortimer, one particular detail, though previously noted,[51] has not been duly acknowledged: the cloisonné of the proper left eyebrow seems to lack the gold foils beneath the garnets, which is found in the proper right eyebrow of the helmet.[52] Imagining

[50] See, for example, the work on Runic inscriptions, 'ritual specialists', and 'the religious condition among Germanic people': Olof Sundqvist, "Contributions of the Oldest Runic Inscriptions to the Reconstruction of Ancient Scandinavian Religion: Some Methodological Reflections with Reference to an Example of the Phenomenological Category of 'Ritual Specialists'," in *Archäologie und Runen: Fallstudien zu Inschriften im älteren Futhark*, ed. Oliver Grimm and Alexandra Pesch (Schleswig: ZBSA, 2015), 121–43, here 121.

[51] Rupert Bruce-Mitford, *The Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial 2: Arms, Armour and Regalia* (London: British Museum Publications, 1978), 169, 228–30; Sonja Marzinzik, *The Sutton Hoo Helmet* (London: British Museum Press, 2007), 29–30.

[52] Price and Mortimer, "An Eye for Odin?" 519–21.

the helmet and its wearer in bright daylight or in a dimly lit hall, say Price and Mortimer, the cloisonné of the right eyebrow would reflect the light, or shimmer in the dark of the hall, while the left would grow dark and remain unseen. It is not the visual aesthetics of the helmet that are of interest here but the assumption that the wearer of the Sutton Hoo helmet could therefore appear to be one-eyed and thus associated with Odin.

Accepting such 'poetic imagination'[53] ignores some important details. Marzinzik, for example, has suggested a possible repair by which the differences between the two eyebrows might be explained,[54] yet Price and Mortimer dismiss this idea as speculation without further clarification.[55] But even *if* the gold foil was 'missing' in the original piece, it does not necessarily follow that this was deliberately done to evoke visual effect (or more importantly, the association it implies with Odin). Price and Mortimer argue that the

> phenomenon has been confirmed by re-enactors wearing helmet replicas in reconstructed hall buildings; ideally we wished to include an image of this, but a moving light source on a moving object, producing a moving effect in general dimness, is regrettably impossible to capture clearly in still photography.[56]

From my own observations of the helmet in the British Museum – after having read the paper by Price and Mortimer – I cannot substantiate this claim (cf. Plate 1). The small *c.* 3 mm thick garnets form a thin single-stone line that has only limited capacity to reflect light with discernible visual effects. The conditions in which the Sutton Hoo helmet is currently presented are dimly lit, and from my (quite literal) point of view, the phenomenon in question has only very limited effects. When lit under an electric torch, the gold foil underneath the garnets of the right eyebrow come clearly to light. But both eyebrows demonstrate an equal ability to reflect light depending on the side from which they are illuminated and viewed; there may be technical differences, but the visual outcome is almost the same. Given these observations, the 'one-eyedness' of the wearer of the Sutton Hoo helmet is debatable at best; at worst, it is a speculation based on slender evidence. Only detailed technical analyses and research into the restoration of the helmet made after its excavation can shed new light on this problem.

Price and Mortimer do not stop at Sutton Hoo, however, and further investigate the putative presence of 'one-eyedness' in the archaeological record for the 'Germanic' world – which is again problematic because 'one-eye symbolism' is not only limited to this area alone, as they themselves admit.[57] Looking mostly at Scandinavian material, they reference the well-known

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[53] Ibid., 522.   [54] Marzinzik, *Sutton Hoo Helmet*, 29–30.
[55] Price and Mortimer, "An Eye for Odin?" 520.   [56] Ibid., 522.   [57] Ibid., 532.

a   b
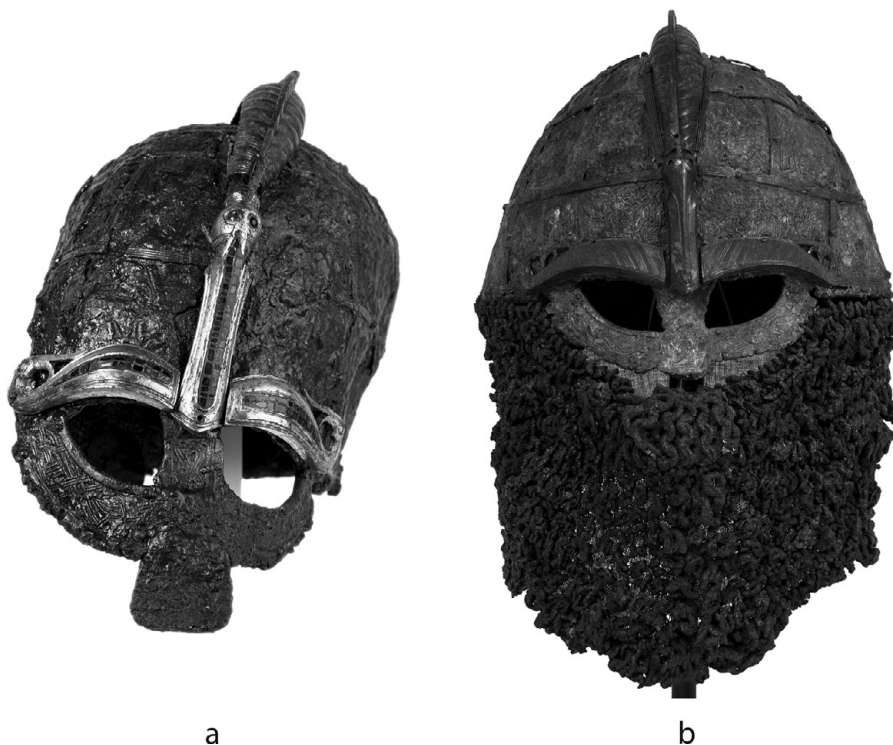
1.2 Helmets from Valsgärde, Sweden. a: Grave 7. b: Grave 8. Courtesy of Gustavianum, Uppsala University Museum. Photos: John Worley

Vendel and Valsgärde helmets (Figure 1.2).[58] There are three main types of early medieval helmets: *Spangenhelme* of the Baldenheim type, *Lamellenhelme*, and the Vendel helmets (*nordische Kammhelme*), prevalent in southern Scandinavia and Britain. The most discussed finds were uncovered from the burial sites at Vendel and Valsgärde in Sweden, and at Sutton Hoo. Their significance to scholarship results from their early excavation, which shaped much discussion in the mid-twentieth century; but first and foremost, it is their imagery that has attracted the attention of both academia and the public, with many but not all finds sporting die-impressed sheets depicting warriors and riders.

Price and Mortimer emphasise the different colours of the garnet eyes on the animal head that forms the end of the helmet's crest from Valsgärde 7 (Figure 1.2a), arguing that this is similar to the Sutton Hoo crest, where one

[58] For the original catalogues and past and current research on Vendel and Valsgärde, see Greta Arwidsson, *Die Gräberfunde von Valsgärde I: Valsgärde 6* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1942); Arwidsson, *Die Gräberfunde von Valsgärde II: Valsgärde 8* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1954); Arwidsson, *Valsgärde III*; Svante Norr, ed., *Valsgärde Studies: The Place and Its People, Past and Present* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2008); Hjalmar Stolpe, *Graffältet vid Vendel* (Stockholm: Beckmans, 1912).

garnet seems to miss the gold foil backing.[59] Another missing gold foil can be examined in an animal head on a shield from Vendel 12. Again, it is debatable whether the missing gold foil would in fact have been noticed, but according to Price and Mortimer, for observers to actually see the 'absence' of an eye may not have been necessary, because mere knowledge of said absence would have sufficed.[60] This, of course, is mere conjecture: the only actual evidence and link to Sutton Hoo, where the differing visual appearance of the eyes is concerned, can be found on the animal head from the Valsgärde 7 helmet with one bright and one dark garnet. But something entirely different could have been intended by the differing colours of the garnets. The change in colour provides aesthetic and visual variety and fits perfectly well with the overall arrangement of the helmets and other contemporary works of art, which are characterised by visual ambiguity and variation. As this latter point is the focus of this book, I will return to this in the subsequent chapters in detail.

But for now, our concern is with the Scandinavian material that scholars leverage in support of applying the notion of sacral kingship to the Sutton Hoo burial, where further methodological problems occur. Price and Mortimer highlight a single eyebrow (originally part of a helmet), which was found in Uppåkra as part of a weapon deposit, and claim that 'the eyebrow must represent a deliberate deposit and was likely removed from its helmet for that purpose'.[61] The same claim is invoked for a single helmet eye from Gevninge in Denmark. Although the piece was retrieved by metal detectorists, Price and Mortimer observe that:

> Although it is uncertain whether the find is part of an as-yet unexcavated larger assemblage that may contain other pieces of the helmet, the excavators argue that it represents a deliberate deposition, and in any case it is striking that only the eye has been found.[62]

The 'deliberate sacrifice' of an eye is also the explanation offered by the authors for the Roman cavalry mask from Hellvi in Gotland, again uncovered by a metal detectorist, which lacks one of its eyes.[63] Probably of second-century date, it was deposited in Scandinavian soil in the middle of the sixth century.

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[59] Price and Mortimer, "An Eye for Odin?" 521.   [60] Ibid., 523–24.   [61] Ibid., 532.
[62] Ibid., 524.
[63] For a recent technological analysis of Roman cavalry masks, see Michaël Vannesse and Sébastien Clerbois, "Les casques à visage (»Gesichtshelme«) romains: Nouvelles perspectives scientifiques," *Archäologische Informationen* 43, no. 3 (2013): 377–96. On cavalry masks in general: H. Russell Robinson, *The Armour of Imperial Rome* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1975), 107–35; Jochen Garbsch, *Römische Paraderüstungen* (Munich: Beck, 1978), 4–7 (with catalogue and plate numbers); cf. Ernst Künzl, *Unter den goldenen Adlern: Der Waffenschmuck des römischen Imperiums* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2008), 111–29.

New excavations at the presumed find spot revealed dwelling structures and the missing eye of the mask.[64] From this, Price and Mortimer conclude:

> In our opinion, and that of the excavator, the singular fact that only the eye was found more likely suggests that it was deliberately removed. The obvious inference is that the 'eyeless' Roman mask had been given two new eyes, presumably after its arrival in Sweden. After this was done, one of the eyes had then been removed, making the mask one-eyed. The relative sequence is impossible to determine, but it seems likely that the mask was nailed to the roof-supporting post in the Hellvi building and the extracted eye buried in the floor below.[65]

This demonstrates just how speculative the archaeological evidence is for the circumstantial offering of one eye. It is generally argued that such instances are 'impossible to see . . . as coincidental', 'probably not coincidental', or 'unlikely to be coincidence'.[66] But coincidences, however unlikely, do occur. That said, Price and Mortimer's overall conclusion about the Sutton Hoo helmet and its wearer is not unexpected: 'In seeking a parallel for the one-eyed ruler figure in the traditional stories of this region, there is a single individual that springs instantly to mind: the Æsir god Odin'.[67]

In addition to 'Germanic' sacral kingship and debatable evaluations of the archaeological evidence, a third, very common quandary is here brought into play: Norse literature, mostly from thirteenth-century Iceland. The story of Odin offering one of his eyes to gain wisdom from Mimir's well is told in the *Gylfaginning*, part of the early thirteenth-century *Edda* by Snorri Sturluson;[68] this narrative is frequently invoked in reference to putative one-eyed figures from early medieval contexts, such as the Torslunda plates from Öland, Sweden.[69] While the gap in time and space – between seventh-century England and thirteenth-century Iceland – is frequently mentioned, it is generally seen to pose no problems, and the controversial equation of Odin with Woden is left untouched (it is only Odin to whom the offering of an eye is attributed). Often, the names are used synonymously, or in conjunction as Odin–Woden.[70] While the name Woden is first mentioned in an inscription from the mid- or late sixth-century bow brooch from Nordendorf and is

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[64] Cf. Price and Mortimer, "An Eye for Odin?" 525–28.   [65] Ibid., 528.

[66] Ibid., 521, 528, 533.   [67] Ibid., 532.

[68] Rudolf Simek, *Lexikon der germanischen Mythologie*, 3rd ed. (Stuttgart: Kröner, 2006), 162–63, 389–90.

[69] E.g. Michaela Helmbrecht, "Bild und Bildträger während der Vendelzeit: Probleme und Möglichkeiten der Deutung von Bildern aus einer Kultur mit mündlicher Überlieferung," in Heizmann and Oehrl, *Bilddenkmäler*, 207–8.

[70] For a comprehensive rebuttal of the equation of Odin with Woden, see Philip A. Shaw, "Uses of Wodan: The Development of His Cult and of Medieval Literary Responses to It" (PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 2002).

attested in further early medieval textual evidence from the Continent and England, Odin is limited to Scandinavia and appears slightly later – in the early eighth century.[71] The argument that Odin and Woden are different names for the same deity sharing the same genesis and stories stems mostly from the so-called theophoric week meaning that deities are eponymous for the names of the days of week (for example, Wednesday is Woden's day in English,[72] while *onsdag* is Odin's day in Swedish).[73] The assertion that the 'wearer of the helmet was seen as both war leader and war god, a literal personification of Odin',[74] is thus a tenuous house of cards built largely on assumptions about sacral kingship, the existence of a 'Germanic' culture area, Norse mythology, the names of the days of the week, and fragile archaeological reasoning; all of these concepts are highly problematic, both methodologically and empirically. With many similar interpretations being found in numerous studies of the period,[75] the paper discussed here presents the mere tip of the scholarly iceberg.

Retinue

The third main concept within the 'Germanic' paradigm is that of the *Gefolgschaft* or retinue. A specific notion, the *comitatus* – often translated as *Gefolgschaft* in German[76] – has been in the focus of scholarship, particularly in Germany.

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[71] Cf. Anders Hultgård, "Wotan-Odin," in Hoops, *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, 35:759–60.

[72] A claim first made by the scholar Richard Verstegen in the early seventeenth century; for discussion, see Rolf H. Bremmer, Jr., "The Anglo-Saxon Pantheon According to Richard Verstegen (1605)," in *The Recovery of Old English: Anglo-Saxon Studies in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. Timothy Graham (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 2000), 141–72, esp. 153–55.

[73] In General: Peter Ernst, "Woche und Wochentagsnamen," in Hoops, *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, 34:169–72. For discussion, see also Philip Shaw, "The Origins of the Theophoric Week in the Germanic Languages," *Early Medieval Europe* 15, no. 4 (2007): 386–401; Lasse C. A. Sonne, "The Origin of the Seven-Day Week in Scandinavia: Part 1: The Theophoric Day-Names," *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 10 (2014): 187–209; cf. Pesch, *Kraft der Tiere*, 437. See also the dispute between Ludwig Rübekeil, "Wodan und andere forschungsgeschichtliche Leichen, exhumiert," *Beiträge zur Namensforschung, Neue Folge* 38 (2003): 25–42, and Norbert Wagner, "Zu einer Namensdeutung für Wodan," *Beiträge zur Namensforschung, Neue Folge* 38 (2003): 429–33.

[74] Price and Mortimer, "An Eye for Odin?" 517.

[75] Recently, e.g., Johan A. Nicolay, "Odin in Friesland: Scandinavian Influences in the Southern North Sea Area during the Migration and Early Merovingian Periods," in *Interaktion ohne Grenzen: Beispiele archäologischer Forschungen am Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts (Festschrift Claus von Carnap-Bornheim)*, ed. Berit V. Eriksen et al. (Schleswig: Stiftung Schleswig-Holsteinische Landesmuseen, 2017), 499–514; Alexandra Pesch, "Facing Faces: The Head Motif in Migration-Period Archaeology," *Medieval Archaeology* 61, no. 1 (2017): 41–68.

[76] Heiko Steuer, "Interpretationsmöglichkeiten archäologischer Quellen zum Gefolgschaftsproblem," in *Beiträge zum Verständnis der Germania des Tacitus: Bericht über die*

In contrast to retinue in English or *entourage* in French, *Gefolgschaft* is fraught with ideological and nationalist problems and notions.[77] Yet Tacitus' *comitatus* plays a significant role in modern research, not only in Germany but also and especially in Britain, shaping and staging the perception of 'Anglo-Saxon' England.[78] To illustrate the point, I will briefly discuss the influential article 'Helm und Ringschwert' by Steuer.[79] This article, published more than thirty years ago and deeply influenced by the notion of 'Germanic' *Gefolgschaft*, has informed much of today's understanding of early medieval material culture from central and north-west Europe.[80] Just like Price and Mortimer, Steuer references the Vendel helmets as key pieces drawing mostly on the 'warrior' processions but also takes into account details such as the early medieval ring swords depicted on the die-impressed sheets covering the helmets.[81] There is, Steuer argues, nothing more 'Germanic' than these helmets and their emblematic imagery.

Steuer argues that the interlaced rings on the hilt of the ring swords represent a bond between warriors, a 'Waffensohnschaft, Waffenbrüderschaft, Schwert-brüderschaft, Schwurbrüderschaft', or the membership of a 'secret society' (*Geheimbund*).[82] Just as with sacral kingship, the popularity of 'Germanic' *Geheimbünde*, *Männerbünde*, or *Kriegerbünde* can be traced back to Höfler.[83]

Kolloquien der Kommission für die Altertumskunde Nord- und Mitteleuropas im Jahre 1986 und 1987, ed. Günter Neumann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), 203–57; Christoph Landolt, Dieter Timpe, and Steuer, "Gefolgschaft," in Hoops, *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, 10: 533–54; cf. Jos Bazelmans, "Conceptualising Early Germanic Political Structure: A Review of the Use of the Concept of Gefolgschaft," in Roymans and Theuws, *Images of the Past*, 91–129.

[77] On early medieval images and retinue, see Michel Summer, "Early Medieval 'Warrior' Images and the Concept of *Gefolgschaft*," in *Early Medieval Militarisation*, ed. Ellora Bennett et al. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 314–30.

[78] Stephen S. Evans, *The Lords of Battle: Image and Reality of the Comitatus in Dark-Age Britain* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998); sceptical, Jane M. Toswell, "Quid Tacitus. . .? The Germania and the Study of Anglo-Saxon England," *Florilegium* 27 (2010): 27–62.

[79] Heiko Steuer, "Helm und Ringschwert: Prunkbewaffnung und Rangabzeichen germanischer Krieger: Eine Übersicht," *Studien zur Sachsenforschung* 6 (1987): 190–236.

[80] E.g., Jos Bazelmans, *By Weapons Made Worthy: Lords, Retainers and Their Relationship in Beowulf* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999), 151; Anna Gannon, *The Iconography of Early Anglo-Saxon Coinage: Sixth to Eighth Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 54; Speidel, *Ancient Germanic Warriors*, passim; Hedeager, *Iron Age Myth and Materiality*, 156; Laury Sarti, "Eine Militärelite im merowingerzeitlichen Gallien? Versuch einer Eingrenzung, Zuordnung und Definition," *Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 124, no. 2 (2016): 293.

[81] See, Vera I. Evison, "Sword Rings and Beads," *Archaeologia* 105 (1976): 303–15; Wilfried Menghin, *Das Schwert im Frühen Mittelalter: Chronologisch-typologische Untersuchungen zu Langschwertern aus germanischen Gräbern des 5. bis 7. Jahrhunderts n. Chr.* (Stuttgart: Theiss, 1983), 142–45; Heiko Steuer, "Ringschwerter," in Hoops, *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, 25: 22–24.

[82] Steuer, "Helm und Ringschwert," 203–5.

[83] Otto Höfler, *Kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen* (Frankfurt: Diesterweg, 1934).

And again, as with sacral kingship, the concept has been subject to debate ever since,[84] debate that has offered much reason to question the idea of 'Germanic' *Männerbünde* or *Geheimbünde*. Steuer concludes that the bearers of ring swords were high-status members of the war bands (*Gefolgschaftskrieger*) that formed part of the retinue of kings or other rulers.[85] Here, he relies for his evidence on the warrior processions depicted on the Vendel helmets as proof of 'kingly' warrior bands from the Nordic kingdoms. Steuer concludes his argument as follows:

> Across Christian and pagan kingdoms, the aristocratic way of life, being a warrior, and retinue's bonds characterise Germanic society in the sixth and seventh centuries from Italy to Sweden. Just as Germanic heroic poetry, the richly furnished burials – signified through helmets and ring swords – reflect a distinctive 'Germanic' way of life between Antiquity and the Carolingian Empire.[86] (translation: M. F.)

This brief summary encompasses most of the characteristics with which scholars continue to define 'Germanic' societies in the early Middle Ages.[87] First, that they possessed distinctive social characteristics beyond political and religious boundaries, that is, those of the retinue and sacral kingship; second, that they drew on an elite warrior ideology based on 'Germanic' heroic poetry, religion, and mythology. This set of characteristics results in the notion of a pan-Germanic phenomenon phrased as the 'Germanic' way of life or 'Germanic' identity.

The mere assertion of the 'Germanic' is the adhesive that holds the paradigm together; yet its individual components have been repeatedly challenged or even deconstructed in the last two to three decades, and have thus become a series of loose ends. While this has not resulted in the abandonment of the 'Germanic' paradigm, it is now often treated as a merely technical, descriptive term. The scrutiny under which it was placed has sometimes fostered the view,

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[84] For discussion, Allan A. Lund and Anna S. Mateeva, "Gibt es in der Taciteischen 'Germania' Beweise für kultische Männerbünde der frühen Germanen?" *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 49, no. 3 (1997): 208–16; Dieter Timpe, Georg Scheibelreiter, and Christoph Daxelmüller, "Geheimbünde," in Hoops, *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, 10: 558–65; Mischa Meier, "Zum Problem der Existenz kultischer Geheimbünde bei den frühen Germanen," *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 51, no. 4 (1999): 322–41; Meier, "Männerbund," in Hoops, *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, 19: 105–10.

[85] Steuer, "Helm und Ringschwert," 205.

[86] Ibid., 223–24. Original German quote: "Aristokratischer Lebensstil, Kriegertum und Gefolgschaftsbindung kennzeichnen über christliche und heidnische Reiche hinweg die germanische Gesellschaft des 6. und 7. Jahrhunderts von Italien nach Schweden. Wie die Verbreitung germanischer Heldendichtung, so spiegeln Prunkbestattungen – für die Helme und Ringschwerter stehen – eigenständigen germanischen Lebensstil zwischen Antike und Karolingerreich."

[87] In his recent work, Steuer reinforces his views about a pan-Germanic identity from the Roman to the Viking period, with a particlar reference to 'Germanic' art styles: Heiko Steuer, *'Germanen' aus Sicht der Archäologie: Neue Thesen zu einem alten Thema* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 1276–78.

often only expressed in private conversation, that there has been enough dismantling and critique of the 'Germanic': often, the 'pan-Germanic' notion is critiqued in the introductions of scholarly works but soon forgotten when said works turn to reviewing the archaeological evidence. For example, Helmbrecht notes that we need to be very careful when linking the *Edda* and other texts to seventh-century imagery from Sweden, while arguing only a couple of pages later that the Torslunda die-plate D is perhaps to be understood in the context of the one-eyed Odin as mentioned in the *Gylfaginning*.[88] In the introduction to her recent work on the human figure in 'Anglo-Saxon' art, Brundle scrutinises ethnicity in early medieval archaeology, noting that 'the term Germanic is . . . problematic',[89] while later repeating traditional scholarly narratives of 'Germanic art and . . . *Interpretatio Germanica*',[90] or 'pagan metalwork' in contrast to 'Christian manuscripts and stone sculptures'.[91]

If, however, we want to view things differently and engage with the early medieval West (and North) in new ways, we need to steer clear of such obsolete categories, which precondition the way we think about the archaeological and textual record. 'Germanic' is not a neutral descriptive term – it carries the connotations of long-established national thought and different academic disciplines. As Taranu has recently put it, it is a balloon that will not burst: rather it 'keeps getting bigger and bigger with each new meaning that is stuck inside it, never allowing any to escape'.[92]

To summarise: the notion of the *Germani* as an influential category was shaped by Caesar and defined barbarians who lived beyond the Rhine and the Danube. The Germanic–Roman dichotomy certainly existed, if only in the context of Roman ethnography, but this does not allow the term to be applied to such peoples in the early Middle Ages generally and certainly not to those who lay beyond the geographical area of *Germania*: from the third century onwards, the 'Germanic' had ceased to function as the barbarian counterpart to the 'civilised' Roman world. The modern use of the term, invoked in reference to the early Middle Ages, was largely informed by the rediscovery of Tacitus' *Germania* by Renaissance humanists in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but came to gain its position of precedence only as a result of national(ist) thought in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[93]

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[88] Cf. Helmbrecht, "Bild und Bildträger," 191, 208.   [89] Brundle, *Image and Performance*, 12.
[90] Ibid., 21.   [91] Ibid., 135.
[92] Catalin Taranu, "The Balloon that wouldn't Burst: A Genealogy of "Germanic"," in Friedrich and Harland, *Interrogating the 'Germanic'*, 99.
[93] Cf. Stefan Donecker, "Re-inventing the 'Germanic' in the Early Modern Era: *Omnes Germani sunt, contra fabulas quorundam*," in Friedrich and Harland, *Interrogating the 'Germanic'*, 67–88.

ROMANS AND BARBARIANS

If we discard the 'Germanic' for research on late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, as Jarnut has suggested,[94] how should we name those societies or groups of people from these regions that are non-Roman, or are at least seen as such in historiography? The obvious answer would presumably be to simply name them 'barbarians', since this was the term used in late antique textual sources to describe non-Romans.[95] However, if a more precise description or attribution was required, Roman historians also made use of contemporary ethnic or political labels, such as Franks, Alamanni, Goths, or Huns. There is thus no need for the 'Germanic'; we already have the terminology at hand. Yet, even in late antique literature, the Roman–barbarian binary had begun to fade from use during the fifth and sixth centuries.[96] By that time, Christianity had had a significant impact on shaping first Roman and then Frankish identities,[97] and as a result pagans became the new barbarians, the new 'other' in the Christian early Middle Ages.

All such binaries, of course, depend on the question: what does it mean to be one of the two entities; what does it mean, in this case, to be 'Roman'? And, just like any other category, 'Romanness' has many different connotations and meanings, and is, just like 'barbarian', ambiguous.[98] In contrast to *Germani*, however, *Romani* or *Romanitas* are still terms employed in textual evidence from late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages,[99] but have become even more ambiguous as recent research on Romanness in the early Middle Ages has shown.[100] Von Rummel, for example, has argued that dress was a

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[94] Jarnut, "Germanisch," 107–13; Jarnut, "Zum 'Germanen' Begriff der Historiker," in Beck, Geuenich, and Steuer, *Altertumskunde, Altertumswissenschaft, Kulturwissenschaft*, 391–400. Cf. Walter Pohl, "Vom Nutzen des Germanenbegriffes zwischen Antike und Mittelalter: Eine forschungsgeschichtliche Perspektive," in *Akkulturation: Probleme einer germanisch-romanischen Kultursynthese in Spätantike und frühem Mittelalter*, ed. Dieter Hägermann, Wolfgang Haubrichs, and Jörg Jarnut (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004), 18–34.

[95] Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, 24. The Greek term *barbaroi* originally defined those people who did not speek the Greek language.

[96] Philipp von Rummel, "The Fading Power of Images: Romans, Barbarians, and the Uses of a Dichotomy in Early Medieval Archaeology," in Pohl and Heydemann, *Post-Roman Transitions*, 365–406.

[97] On the erratic development of Frankish identity in the early Middle Ages, see Helmut Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity and the Framing of Western Ethnicity, 550–850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[98] Walter Pohl, "Romanness: A Multiple Identity and Its Changes," *Early Medieval Europe* 22, no. 4 (2014): 406–18.

[99] Fehr, *Germanen und Romanen*, 21–173; Laury Sarti, "Frankish Romanness and Charlemagne's Empire," *Speculum* 91, no. 4 (2016): 1040–58.

[100] Cf. Walter Pohl, Ingrid Hartl, and Wolfgang Haubrichs, eds., *Walchen, Romani und Latini: Variationen einer nachrömischen Gruppenbezeichnung zwischen Britannien und dem Balkan* (Vienna: VÖAW, 2017); Pohl et al., eds., *Transformations of Romanness: Early Medieval Regions and Identities* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018).

distinctive signifier of 'Roman' and 'barbarian' identities in the late antique Roman West, albeit only in an ethnographically stereotypical sense.[101] The military elite, Roman or barbarian,[102] had adopted a *habitus barbarus*, expressed through weapons, long hair, beards, and trousers (shown on the Monza diptych, for example). The urban senatorial elites of Rome, on the other hand, seized on traditional mores, such as the toga,[103] to emphasise their long-established Romanness in contrast to the newly established barbarian parvenus. In this way, dress was caught up in conflicts and renegotiations of Roman and barbarian identities. The local military elite in late antique Africa, Spain, Gaul, or Britain could have seen itself as Roman but might have been easily discarded as barbarian by the traditional urban elites. This was not so much an ethnic but rather a political conflict, which stemmed from the struggle between new emerging military leaders: the alleged barbarians and an old civil elite of senators, the actual 'Romans', who wished to maintain their power and influence. There was thus no straightforward definition of what it meant to be 'Roman'. The term, despite or even because of its fluctuating frames of reference, its ambiguity, continued to be a political, religious, cultural, or ethnical category invoked in early medieval historiography (in contrast to the 'Germanic').

But what about its application in archaeology? Is 'Roman' an appropriate label for material or visual culture in late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages? The answer is yes, and no. As 'Roman' is an ambiguous term relating to many different identities, it is important to be clear as to which Romanness is meant when talking about a Roman helmet, brooch, sword, or even house or villa (this list could be easily extended). What is clear is that those things denoted by the term are thought to be related to the Roman Empire. Late antique weapons, such as swords and helmets, were likely to be manufactured in *fabricae* linked to the Roman army.[104] In this way, at least, such items are clearly 'Roman'. But this tells us little about the possible identities of the persons in whose graves these valuable items were found.

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[101] Von Rummel, *Habitus barbarus*, 405–6.
[102] Cf. Philipp von Rummel, "Unrömische Römer und römische Barbaren: Die Fluidität vermeintlich präziser Leitbegriffe der Forschung zum spätantiken Gallien," in *Gallien in Spätantike und Frühmittelalter: Kulturgeschichte einer Region*, ed. Steffen Diefenbach and Gernot M. Müller (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 277–96.
[103] Cf. Ursula Rothe, *The Toga and Roman Identity* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).
[104] Simon James, "The Fabricae: State Arms Factories of the Later Roman Empire," in *Military Equipment and the Identity of Roman Soldiers: Proceedings of the Fourth Roman Military Equipment Conference*, ed. J. C. Coulston (Oxford: BAR, 1988), 257–322; on the problem of linking archaeological evidence to fabricae, see Norbert Hanel, "Fabricae, Werkstätten und handwerkliche Tätigkeiten des Militärs in den Nordprovinzen des Römischen Reichs," in *Arqueología Militar romana en Hispania II: Producción y abastecimiento en el ámbito militar*, ed. Ángel Morillo Cerdán (León: Univ. de León Secretariado de Publ., 2006), 19–32.

Let us take the so-called Baldenheim helmets as an example. They were, as far as we know, produced in the Eastern Roman Empire and frequently appear in richly furnished graves from the fifth and sixth centuries across central and western Europe.[105] The burial from Planig near Mainz, dating from the mid-sixth century, contained a *Spangenhelm*, alongside a full set of weapons including a sword, a seax, arrows, a spear, an ango, an axe, and a shield.[106] This type of rich burial is associated with local rulers and authorities, and usually placed in a Merovingian-Frankish context.[107] Labelling the helmet 'Roman' or 'Byzantine' helps to clarify its provenance in the eastern Mediterranean and emphasise the direct or indirect networks necessary for the buried to have received such an item. But this tells us little about the identity, ethnicity, or religion of the person buried in Planig, nor does it help us to identify the significance or 'meaning' associated with their weaponry. In this instance, it does not matter if the helmet was Roman – or barbarian for that matter. The society that had buried the person in Planig might not even have thought these dichotomies to be relevant, or even have thought that these binaries existed at all.

Thus, dividing material and visual culture into Roman and non-Roman categories only makes sense in cases clearly related to Roman imperial authority and its military; and even in this context such attribution can be ambiguous. For this reason, I make only limited use of the term 'Roman' in this study. The term is here understood to relate to works of art, images, and iconographies associated with the Roman Empire, east and west, including Byzantium; it is thus the imperial aspects of Romanness that define this use of terminology. The imagery on coinage, gravestones, and diptychs, all connected with the Roman Empire, profoundly informed the art and archaeology of the early Middle Ages and are thus essential to our understanding of the period. But when talking of 'Roman' imperial iconography, it is less Romanness but rather the imperial – powerful – aspects of this iconography that account for their popularity and creative transformations in the early medieval West (see Chapter 2). Otherwise, labels such as Roman, barbarian, and 'Germanic'

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[105] For *Spangenhelme* in general, see Mahand Vogt, *Spangenhelme: Baldenheim und verwandte Typen* (Mainz: Verlag RGZM, 2006).

[106] Alexandra Hilgner, "Das Prunkgrab von Planig: Neubearbeitung eines Altfundes," *Mainzer Zeitschrift* 105 (2010): 65–69, suggests that the Planig burial dates at the end of the first quarter of the sixth century, between Böhner Phase II and III. This chronology, however, seems to be too precise. Admittedly, the grave features several finds that relate to earlier types from the late fifth century; yet, a whole range of types, first and foremost the so-called *Schilddornschnalle* and its shield-shaped pins, allow setting the grave roughly within the mid-sixth century; cf. Matthias Friedrich, *Archäologische Chronologie und historische Interpretation: Die Merowingerzeit in Süddeutschland* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 136–37.

[107] Barbara Theune-Großkopf, "Die Kontrolle der Verkehrswege: Ein Schlüssel zur fränkischen Herrschaftssicherung," in Fuchs, *Alamannen*, 237–42; cf. Friedrich, *Archäologische Chronologie*, 38–43.

are largely negligible in their relevance to the study of art and archaeology in both early medieval western and northern Europe. It makes little sense to enunciate and juxtapose the 'Germanic' and 'Roman' in the early medieval West – this simply was what it was: early medieval (or late antique if one prefers the concept of a 'long' late Antiquity).[108]

PAGANS ARE THE NEW BARBARIANS

As noted, pagans were the new barbarians of the early Middle Ages.[109] The Christianisation of early medieval Europe has been subject to extensive debate in recent decades, both in history and archaeology, and much scholarly attention has been devoted to its visual and material manifestations, such as crosses, ecclesiastical items, and biblical iconography. In the same way, 'pagan' iconography has been explored as a marker of the extent to which early medieval communities had in fact internalised Christianity or adhered to traditional 'pre-Christian' habits. Most studies concerned with the issue, however, lack deliberations on paganism and fail to define how we might comprehend pagan visual culture, perceiving it largely through the absence of Christian symbols and iconography. That said, there has been little agreement on what early medieval 'paganism' was, just as there is little on what pagan visual culture might be or represent (apart from its lacking Christian characteristics).

The point is surely, however, whether we should apply the dichotomy of Christian and pagan to our analyses of imagery, or whether this dichotomy is even a useful category with which to explore early medieval art. Although the concept of 'paganism' is occasionally problematised in archaeology and art history,[110] few studies have engaged with the pattern lying behind this scheme when applied to imagery. Generally, when considering the visual, scholars

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[108] Based on the seminal work by Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity: From Marcus Aurelius to Muhammad* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1971). In the volume by G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar, eds., *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), ix, late Antiquity is defined as 'the period between around 250 and 800 as [a] destinctive and quite decisive period of history that stand on its own'. For discussion, see note 2.

[109] On paganism and otherness, see James T. Palmer, "Defining Paganism in the Carolingian World," *Early Medieval Europe* 15, no. 4 (2007): 402–25; Palmer, "The Otherness of Non-Christians in the Early Middle Ages," *Studies in Church History* 51 (2015): 33–52; Ian Wood, "The Pagans and the Other: Varying Presentations in the Early Middle Ages," *Networks and Neighbours* 1 (2013): 1–22.

[110] E.g., Sebastian Brather, "Pagan or Christian? Early Medieval Grave Furnishings in Central Europe," in *Rome, Constantinople and Newly-Converted Europe: Archaeological and Historical Evidence*, ed. Maciej Salamon et al. (Kraków: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2012), 333–49; Melissa Herman, "Something More than 'Man': Re-examining the Human Figure in Early Anglo-Saxon Art," in Boulton, Hawkes, and Herman, *Art, Literature and Material Culture*, 278–92; Michael Odenweller, *Studien zum christlichen Einfluss auf die materielle Kultur der Merowingerzeit* (Rahden/Westf.: Marie Leidorf, 2019), 18–25.

have tended to debate the role of Old Norse literature – the *Edda* above all else – in efforts to identify 'Germanic' religion, myths, and legends as putatively embodied in early medieval pagan visual culture.[111]

On the face of it, the issue seems quite straightforward: just as barbarians were non-Roman, pagans were non-Christian.[112] But here simplicity ceases: what exactly does it mean to be Christian? Because the term 'pagan' depends complementarily on being, or rather not-being, Christian, this question is of considerable significance. Yet, it is often pushed aside in discussion: perhaps because the definition of being Christian in the early Middle Ages was just as ambiguous as being Roman was in late Antiquity.[113] For early medieval northern Europe, Pluskowski has summarised how:

> In the fourth century, Christians invented the term *paganismus* to collectively define and singularize the beliefs of non-Christians. ... This of course concealed an incredible diversity of beliefs and practices, and until relative recently, scholars have accepted this polar opposition. ... But the term 'pagan' continues to be useful for understanding processes of religious conversion in northern Europe.[114]

This suggests that a more critical encounter with paganism has emerged in recent years, and instead of paganism being a single entity, the diversity of non-Christian beliefs is emphasised. Such a development is, of course, a welcome change in the scholarship and needs to be fostered in future research. But I have doubts about the view that 'the term "pagan" continues to be useful', especially from an emic point of view. Paganism is first and foremost an expedient concept for exploring Christian societies in relation to a presumed 'pagan' other and because of this it might tell us more about Christian views than about the so-called pagans to which the Christian textual sources relate,[115]

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[111] E.g. Speidel, *Ancient Germanic Warriors*; Michael P. Speidel and Markus O. Speidel, "Germanische Götter auf wisigotischen Gürtelschnallen," *Germania* 89 (2011/13): 277–304; Lilla Kopár, *Gods and Settlers: The Iconography of Norse Mythology in Anglo-Scandinavian Sculpture* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012); Price and Mortimer, "An Eye for Odin?" 517–38; Heizmann and Oehrl, *Bilddenkmäler*; Pesch, *Kraft der Tiere*.

[112] Ken Dowden, *European Paganism: The Realities of Cult from Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2000), 4; cf. David Petts, *Pagan and Christian: Religious Change in Early Medieval Europe* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2011), 73–96; Walter Pohl, "Christian and Barbarian Identities in the Early Medieval West: Introduction," in Pohl and Heydemann, *Post-Roman Transitions*, 1–46; Neil Christie, "Becoming Christian, Being Christian in Early Medieval Europe," in Boulton, Hawkes, and Herman, *Art, Literature and Material Culture*, 59–79.

[113] Cf. Marios Costambeys, Matthew Innes and Simon MacLean, *The Carolingian World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 81–93.

[114] Aleks Pluskowski, "The Archaeology of Paganism," in Hamerow, Hinton and Crawford, *Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, 764.

[115] For a brief and critical summary on textual evidence on pagan belief systems, see: Ian Wood, "Pagan Religions and Superstitions East of the Rhine from the Fifth to the Ninth Century," in *After Empire: Towards an Ethnology of Europe's Barbarians*, ed. Giorgio Ausenda (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995), 253–68.

or as Wood has put it: 'the Pagan Other in the early Middle Ages is an ambiguous category, and not a clear demarcation of difference'.[116] Discussing Symmachus' dispute with Ambrose of Milan over the Altar of Victory in the late fourth century, Brown has observed that Symmachus was not one of the 'last' but in fact the 'first' pagan of Rome,[117] because prior to Christian categorisation such entities did not exist.

If we briefly look into the development of Christianity in the early medieval West, especially central and north-west Europe, we see that Gaul, and the Moselle area, as well as parts of the northern Rhineland looked back to long-established and prospering Christian communities, enabling the Merovingian aristocracy to draw on pre-existing Christian structures.[118] In Britain, as well as southern Germany, the responses were different: Roman Britain was to a great extent Christianised as part of the late antique world, but as soon as Roman political structures disappeared in the early fifth century, even if we concede a few decades of regression, it cannot be assumed that many Christian structures survived in use in post-imperial Britain, especially in the eastern part of the island where new 'Anglo-Saxon' kingdoms came to be established. Yet, there is also reason to believe that not all inhabitants ruled by Saxon kings were 'pagans'.[119]

A similar situation can be proposed for south-western Germany: the *Alamannia* conquered by Clovis around the year 500 was, as a result, integrated into the *regna* of a Christian king.[120] The Alamanni of the sixth and seventh centuries could thus be considered Christian: the archaeological record clearly shows that there were almost certainly individuals or groups that perceived themselves to be Christian. The huge number of gold foil crosses (*Goldblattkreuze*) cannot be otherwise explained in a sufficiently convincing manner.[121] Yet, there is only thin evidence that Christianity was practised

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[116] Wood, "Pagans and the Other," 18.
[117] Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350–550 AD* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 101.
[118] See, Sebastian Ristow, "Frühes Christentum in Gallien und Germanien: Nachhaltige und unterbrochene Christianisierung in Spätantike und Frühmittelalter," in *Christianisierung Europas: Entstehung, Entwicklung und Konsolidierung im archäologischen Befund*, ed. Orsolya Heinrich-Tamaska, Niklot Krohn, and Sebastian Ristow (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2012), 93–94.
[119] Guy Halsall, *Worlds of Arthur: Facts and Fictions of the Dark Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 278–81.
[120] For the conflict between Franks and Alamanni in the decades around AD 500, see Dieter Geuenich, *Die Geschichte der Alemannen*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2005), 78–91; John F. Drinkwater, *The Alamanni and Rome: 213–496 (Caracalla to Clovis)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 344–47.
[121] On gold foil crosses, see Martina Terp-Schunter, *In signo crucis: Eine vergleichende Studie zu den alamannischen und langobardischen Goldblattkreuzen*, 2 vols. (Büchenbach: Dr. Faustus, 2018); more briefly, Ellen Riemer, "Im Zeichen des Kreuzes: Goldblattkreuze und andere Funde mit christlichem Symbolgehalt," in Fuchs, *Alamannen*, 447–54; Odenweller, "Goldmünze und Goldblattkreuz," 121–54.

institutionally before the eighth century, although some churches may have been built in the course of the seventh century.[122]

Again, Scandinavia and northern Germany developed along different lines, at least with regard to the process of Christianisation. Northern Germany was primarily exposed to Christianity in the aftermath of Charlemagne's war against the Saxons in the final decades of the eighth century;[123] modern Denmark and Sweden were Christianised even later, in the ninth and tenth centuries.[124] Thus, we might regard Scandinavia as fully 'pagan', but this tells us little about actual religious beliefs, or their potential rituals and traditions, except that these were not Christian.

This being the case, this study is concerned with religiously quite diverse regions: on the one hand, Gaul, with its Christian communities established from the very early centuries of the first millennium; on the other hand, 'Anglo-Saxon' England and southern Germany, which enjoyed varying forms of Christianity that evolved during the period. Finally, there is Scandinavia, which possessed little or no trace of Christianity between the fifth and eighth centuries.

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'Pagan' was, then, a category prevalent in late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, but just as the 'Germanic' has been an etic attribution derived from Roman historiography, paganism functions as the external other of Christianity. One can identify 'pagan' belief systems, or at least peoples who could be labelled with such a term, yet this tells us little about the actual societies, religions, beliefs, or rituals of said peoples, except that they had been perceived as non-Christian. If we then add the material and visual record to the picture things becomes even more obscure. How, in the archaeological record, can one possibly hope to trace etic attributions made by early medieval Christian authors who were members of the clergy? Should the early medieval

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[122] The archaeological evidence is often scarce and it is difficult to determine if timber structures are in fact ecclesiastical predecessors of later stone-built churches. Cf. Barbara Scholkmann, "Kultbau und Glaube: Die frühen Kirchen," in Fuchs, *Alamannen*, 457–59; Scholkmann, "Frühmittelalterliche Kirchen im alemannischen Raum: Verbreitung, Bauform und Funktion," in *Die Alemannen und das Christentum: Zeugnisse eines kulturellen Umbruchs*, ed. Sönke Lorenz and Barbara Scholkmann (Leinfelden-Echterdingen: DRW-Verlag, 2003), 125–52.

[123] Ian Wood, *The Missionary Life: Saints and the Evangelisation of Europe, 400–1050* (Harlow: Longman, 2001), 10–11; Costambeys, Innes, and MacLean, *Carolingian World*, 104–5.

[124] Briefly summarising the key aspects of Scandinavia and Christinisation: Stefan Brink, "Die Christianisierung Skandinaviens," in *Credo: Christianisierung Europas im Mittelalter*, ed. Christoph Stiegemann and Christiane Ruhmann (Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2013), 250–60.

and modern scholarly gulf between pagans and Christians play a role in analysing, categorising, and interpreting archaeological data – I argue that this divide has been over-emphasised in recent research. Can one speak of a 'pagan' helmet with 'pagan' motifs attached to it? Why must images depicting warriors be 'pagan' in the first place? What is this supposed to mean, if we cannot even clearly define paganism(s) in the early Middle Ages, or even identify specific modes of behaviour and rituals described as such? The aspects of the archaeological record that are brought forward as putative evidence of paganism are, we have seen, mostly circumstantial.

On the other hand, it is also important to review general methodological issues regarding the potential means of identifying Christian frames of reference in archaeological material. In this respect, the classification put forward by Ristow, regarding the means of identifying 'Christianity' in late antique art, is useful. Distinguishing between three main categories, his approach enables the evaluation of the likelihood of a certain work having been made or used in a Christian context.

The first category describes images positively identifiable as Christian with biblical, theological, or ecclesiastical backgrounds, and unambiguous Christian signs or inscriptions. Ristow's second category includes images potentially identifiable as Christian, which entail ambiguous motifs (e.g., fish or shepherds), putative Christian symbols, and inscriptions also found in other religious frameworks. The third category invokes findings that were often understood as Christian in modern scholarship but which were also used otherwise in their contemporary context: such as 'traditional' antique images, symbols, or signs.[125]

Most of the phenomena characterised by these three categories occur in late Antiquity, a period of various religions (Roman 'paganism', Judaism, Christianity, Mithraism), with a large corpus of 'secular' art objects (consular diptychs, vessels of precious metal, frescoes and mosaics in villas). However, in the (later) early Middle Ages some of the critical aspects regarding an unquestionable Christian interpretation of art and artefacts matter to a lesser degree, as Christianity of whatever variety was the only religion in western Europe to produce specific artwork for religious and secular purposes in large quantities. Yet, some doubts remain, especially regarding images beyond ecclesiastical contexts. Furthermore, while Ristow's approach makes allowances for 'either/or' explanations, it does not take account of situations where greater

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[125] The preceding paragraph is a loose and partial translation and summary from Sebastian Ristow, "Christliches im archäologischen Befund: Terminologie, Erkennbarkeit, Diskussionswürdigkeit," in *Wechsel der Religionen, Religion des Wechsels: Tagungsbeiträge der Arbeitsgemeinschaft Spätantike und Frühmittelalter: 5. Religion im archäologischen Befund*, ed. Niklot Krohn and Sebastian Ristow (Hamburg: Kovač, 2012), 21–22.

complexity might have operated, and indeed where ambiguity may have been deliberately intended in a 'both-and' possibility.

In sum, 'Christian' can be a useful category but is often applied somewhat incoherently to the archaeological record. 'Paganism', on the other hand, is only apt in rare and specific instances as a term through which to explore the material and visual record of the early Middle Ages. It is a largely inadequate and insufficiently defined term. However, the limited archaeological potential to identify paganism should not be read as 'no archaeological evidence'. As von Rummel argued for the Sack of Rome in 410 CE, the looting and violence of Alaric and his troops has left few if any archaeological traces. While this might imply that archaeology cannot contribute to the understanding of the intensity of the Sack of Rome, it can equally be understood to indicate that no vast destruction took place nor demolition of the city's architectural infrastructure. Thus, von Rummel observes: 'We have a clear answer to an archaeological problem, an answer disappointing only if a different one was expected' (translation: M. F.).[126]

In the case of paganism, the few archaeological hints of non-Christian beliefs cannot be taken as *proof* that there were no pagans, but it offers proof that paganism left only scant traces in the material record – or suggests that we are not able, from a methodological point of view, to develop well-defined characteristics that would enable us to identify such traces (perhaps because paganism is so loose and ambiguous a concept). So, the question of whether artefacts, works of art, images, or more generally, things, are 'pagan' is perhaps the wrong question, because being pagan is not a quality inherent in things. Accordingly, we should not carelessly jump to conclusions about past objects being pagan or Christian – or even transitional – but accept that in many cases they can, and perhaps were, intended to be multivalent, yet not in a syncretic way; rather, their iconography could be understood by both 'pagans' and Christians. But for all that, paganism as set against Christianity is not a heuristic category expedient to comprehensively explore and engage with early medieval visual and material culture, however ubiquitously it may be relied on in scholarship. Thus, my intention here is to allow for ambiguity; or as Christie has put it: 'we need, as scholars, to see things much less in black and white'.[127] Germanic and Roman, pagan and Christian,

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[126] Philipp von Rummel, "Ereignis und Narrativ: Erzählung der Plünderung Roms im August 410 zwischen Textüberlieferung und Archäologie," in *The Sack of Rome in 410 AD: The Event, Its Context and Its Impact*, ed. Johannes Lipps, Carlos Machado, and Philipp von Rummel (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2013), 26. Original German quote: 'Wir haben so eine klare Antwort auf ein archäologisches Problem, eine Antwort, die nur dann enttäuschend ist, wenn eine andere Antwort erwartet wurde'.

[127] Christie, "Becoming Christian, Being Christian," 79.

Northern and Southern – we should allow for more subtle nuances of meaning to be present in the archaeological record and our understanding of it than is implied by these binaries, however deceptively persuasive they may seem. It is easy to pigeonhole things and allow the categories do the rest of the analytical work. But if we critique our terminology, we might find ourselves asking new questions instead of repeatedly revisiting the old ones.