

## EUROPE OF NATIONS OR THE NATION OF EUROPE Origin Myths Past and Present

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**Abstract:** This article begins by outlining long-standard myths of the re-orientation of European spaces brought about by the migration of Germanic peoples attendant upon the break-up of the Roman Empire. The subsequent accretion of identity myths around the spaces occupied has been increasingly debated. Where once myths of spatial origin prevailed in national stories, over time these moved towards being myths of national or ethnic essences, myths which still possess much traction in such places as Flanders, Catalonia or parts of former Eastern Europe. Nowadays, however, we witness calls in Europe for identity stories that transcend ethnicity, although the question remains as to how European history might be rewritten to emphasize unity over ethnic specificity. The very legitimacy of such a revisionary approach is also unclear. What can be done, for example, with Europe's Christian heritage, when Europe is arguably now post-Christian in many ways? In any event, the myths that would set in place a European identity do not yet exist. Apart from anything else, European references are constantly widening, including at the very least a degree of Americanization and the presence of Islam. These are all things Europe will have to come to terms with before hypothetical pan-European identity myths can be said to exist, let alone exhibit validity in the lives of its citizens.

**Key-words:** Europe, Myths of Origin, Middle Ages, Ethnicity, Identity Myths

In 1555 Wolfgang Laz, a Viennese court historian, humanist, and cartographer, set out to describe the origins of the “Franks, Alemans, Suebs, Marcomanni, Boii, Carni, Taurisci, Celts, and the Galatians,” all of whose descendants he counted among the inhabitants of the Habsburg lands.<sup>1</sup> The result was his monumental *De gentium migrationibus*, the first comprehensive attempt to assign the origins of European peoples to a complex series of migrations. Although writing in Latin, Laz's term *migrationes gentium*, was soon translated into German as *Völkerwanderung* or Migration of Peoples. In subsequent German language scholarship, this term would continue through the centuries to gather new ideological importance, especially in the history of European nations and national discourse, providing powerful origin myths to the populations of Europe. In time, the image of Germanic peoples, moving south from Scandinavia or the shores of the Baltic before arriving at the frontiers of the Roman empire, from which they then streamed into the Roman world, creating the kingdoms of the Alans, Suevi and Visigoths in the Iberian peninsula, the Ostrogothic and later Longobard kingdoms in Italy, the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of Britain, and most enduringly the Frankish kingdom in Gall, became a major causal explanation for the disappearance of the Roman Empire in the west. The notion that between the later

fourth and the seventh centuries Europe was transformed by the migrations of peoples, especially Germanic peoples, who destroyed the Roman Empire and created the new national communities that were the ancestors of modern nation states became widely accepted by scholars and general public alike. This was true even if in Romance speaking regions, although there these movements of peoples were described less as migrations or Wanderungen, than *Las invasiones bárbaras*, *invasions barbares*, *invasioni barbariche*, or *Invasões bárbaras*. Whether positively understood as pacific migrations or negatively seen as invasions, these population movements from the ends of Europe or beyond into the former Roman world were understood to have been the primary event of the age, a phenomenon that created the moment of primary acquisition of ancestral homelands. As European peoples completed their migrations, they acquired once and for all their sacred territories, territories that they would henceforth occupy and where they would build their national states. Even those that disappeared, the Goths, Suebi, or Alans, had nevertheless helped create the new Europe of nations; their successors would complete the task and periodically their memories would be recalled by subsequent polities, most notably the Goths in post-medieval Spain and today the Longobardi in the Lega nord of Umberto Bossi in Italy. For other, more successful peoples, the Anglo-Saxons, Franks, Lombards, as well as such Slavic peoples as the Serbs and Croats, and the unique nation of Hungarians, they would trace their uninterrupted history from this moment to the present.

What are these peoples of Europe understood to be? Within the general field of contemporary nationalism studies, one might rely on the three criteria enumerated by the Dutch scholar of national myths Joep Leerssen.<sup>2</sup> As Leerssen suggests, modern definitions of the nation combine images of cultural, linguistic, and ethnic unity. He continues to point out that contemporary national thought assumes

1. “that the nation is the most natural, organic collective aggregate of humans, and the most natural and organic subdivision of humanity; and that, as such the nation’s claim to loyalty overrides all other allegiances.
2. “that the nation state derives its mandate and sovereignty from its incorporation of a constituent nation, so that civic loyalty to the state is a natural extension of ‘national (cultural, linguistic, ethnic) solidarity;
3. “that territorially and socio-politically, the most natural and organic division of humankind into states runs along ‘national’ (cultural, linguistic, ethnic) lines, so that ideally there is a seamless overlap between the outlines of the state and of its constituent nation.”<sup>3</sup>

As Leerssen is quick to point out, none of these characteristics bear close scrutiny. There is nothing “natural” about the natural right to sovereignty based on common culture, nor indeed are common language, custom and culture actually common: all are abstractions, the result, as Benedict Anderson puts it, of a community not so much experienced as imagined.<sup>4</sup> Nor do such communities correspond to neat territorial boundaries: ethnicity does not map geographically, unless such coincidence is the result of ethnic cleansing. Nevertheless these characteristics of national thought continue to cast a powerful spell over much of humanity, even in the new Europe of the twenty-first century.

These same principles are not foreign to pre-modern definitions of *nationes* or *populi*. *Natio*, with its etymology from *nascor*, to be born, suggests common descent. As Cassiodorus, the Roman senator in the service of the Gothic ruler Theoderic the Great, suggested, “the term nation excludes foreigners and includes only those of the same blood.”<sup>5</sup> In the well-known phrase of the tenth century churchman and chronicler Regino of Prüm, Diverse nations of peoples are distinguished by birth, custom, language, and laws.<sup>6</sup> Such definitions imply a natural, objective identity that can be recognized both by members of a nation and by foreigners, indeed an identity that cannot be escaped but must be embraced.

And yet the objective existence of nations is exactly what has become a much debated issue, not only in the present but perhaps especially in the past. Laz had to develop elaborate arguments, drawn from biblical and classical sources as well as from his attempts at comparative philology to develop his theories of the migration of peoples, theories that he recognized would be rejected by many. Likewise today the so-called peoples of Europe past and present disappear into a contradictory discursive tradition. In recent decades the image of barbarian peoples steaming across the Rhine, the Alps, and the Pyrenees, of Slavic bands emerging from Northern Ukraine to conquer the northern regions of the Roman Empire as well as to fill those lands abandoned by Germanic migrations, destroying in the process an ancient civilization (or, in the alternative version, renewing with “fresh blood” a tired and debilitated Roman world) has been called into question by historians. The first, tentative revision of this centuries-old image began with Reinhold Wenskus, a German medievalist also trained in anthropology, who ventured that perhaps rather than imagining the migrations as whole peoples, the actual migrants were but a small elite who carried with them a “kernel of tradition” around which new communities could be created.<sup>7</sup> More radically, Walter Goffart, an historian of late Antiquity, has rejected the idea of migrations altogether, arguing that the motif of migration from an ancestral homeland in the north

is a literary fiction.<sup>8</sup> Moreover he is equally dismissive of the image of vast barbarian hordes overrunning the Roman frontiers and carving out new kingdoms and territories in the heart of the empire. Instead, he sees the process as one by which relatively small numbers of barbarian warriors, for the most part members of the Roman military, were settled within the Roman world according to a careful allotment not of land but of tax revenues, resulting in little significant social or political change within the world of the late Empire. At the other end of the chronological spectrum, we are today encouraged to minimize not only the ancient past of Europe's peoples but their present: increasingly the citizens of the European union are being evoked as a different imagined community: as Europeans, an identity perhaps as problematic as the particularist national identities it is intended to replace.

Did Europe's peoples emerge at the beginning of the Middle Ages as a result of the Barbarian migrations? This debate would remain the realm of historical discussion, akin to heated but academic debates about the arrival of the agricultural revolution in Europe or the nature of the settlement of North America across the Bering strait, were it not that since the time of Laz, the significance of Germanic, and later Slavic and other migrations (or lack thereof) has become a central issue not only in Academe, but in the self-understanding of European nations, not in the distant past, but in the present and the future. If the emergence of Europe's nations took place during the migration period, then the claims to identity, claims to rights and to land, continue to be tied to the way that the *migrationes gentium* are understood to have taken place. If they did not, then is there perhaps a single, enduring European people, a European nation, that transcends not only time but centuries of often bitter competition and violence?

The purpose of this essay is not to enter into the debates about the reality, size, effects, and processes of barbarian migrations. This is an important debate but one best left for another time and place.<sup>9</sup> Rather I wish to explore the stories that have been told and that continue to be told about these peoples and the nations that claim, to a greater or lesser extent, to derive from them. These origin myths continue to exercise a powerful attraction, regardless of whether they have any basis in historical events. As the great French historian Marc Bloch emphasized, myths of origin are never about beginnings, they are about essences, and thus European origin myths, present and past, continue to play a vital if often unconscious role in identity politics of the present.<sup>10</sup>

Thus it is appropriate, from the outset, to remember that Wolfgang Laz was by no means attempting to explain the fall of the Roman Empire through his accounts of migrations. His interests were, as was fitting a humanist in the Habsburg court, primarily dynastic and even genealogical: it was to describe the origins of a new *gens*,

the *gens Austriadum*. In so doing, his goal was to combat an alternative past: as he states in his conclusion, he was certain that his account of migrations would find many critics, especially because, as he says, “in these days no one is satisfied if he cannot trace his ancestry back to Troy.”<sup>11</sup>

The myth of Trojan origins, both in the Virgilian version and, as retold since at least the seventh century as an account of the origins of the Franks, had long given a sense of common origin and shared civilization to Europe’s population, whether Germanic or Romance speaking.<sup>12</sup> Along with Christianity, the common classicizing myth provided the underpinning for a common culture. Laz represents an early attempt to move away from this past, to replace the powerful unifying myth of Trojan origins with alternative antiquities, antiquities that could lead to new understandings of identity and national origins and destiny. Thus the new myths of national origin were posed to replace, or at least compete with, older origin myths.

The Trojan origin was one pan-European origin myth; the other, still powerful in the sixteenth century, was the biblical account of the disbursal of peoples after the Flood and especially after the destruction of the Tower of Babel.<sup>13</sup> Together these two traditions, the classical and the Biblical, represented the primary ways of understanding, classifying peoples throughout the Middle Ages.

The Trojan origins was but one of the most enduring of the Classical traditions. Greek and subsequently Roman historians and geographers held complex and dichotomous understandings of peoples, both of themselves and those that they encountered.

The fundamental ethnographic division in the classical world was between Hellenes, or later Romans, and Barbarians. Classical authors were cognizant of the complexity, the historicity, of their own civilized communities. The Romans, in particular, understood that the *Populus Romanus* had been an amalgam of many different communities, bound together by law and constitution. Barbarians, the *gentes*, however, were understood more as part of the natural than the historical world. For Greek ethnographers beginning with Herodotus, such foreign peoples are eternal, and the origins of specific peoples were to be found either in autochthony or migration. In his celebrated juxtaposition of the Egyptians and the Scythes, he considers the former, along with the Phrygians as among the most ancient of peoples, and moreover a people that had never left their place of origin, although they had expanded outward from it: Reviewing the possible origins of the Egyptians, he states “I hold rather that the Egyptians did not come into being with the making of that which Ionians call the Delta: they ever existed since men were first made.”<sup>14</sup>

Herodotus reports, by contrast, that the Scythians were among the youngest of peoples. He provided three accounts for their origins, one he reports to be that of the Scythians themselves; one of the Pontic Greeks, and one that he does not credit to any source but which he nonetheless prefers. The Scythian origin myth is one of autochthony:

In the first, a certain Targitaus, son of Jove and a daughter of the Borysthenes, was the first man who ever lived in their country. He begat three sons, Leipoxais, Arpoxais, and Colaxais, who was the youngest born of the three. While they still ruled the land, there fell from the sky four implements, all of gold- a plough, a yoke, a battle-axe, and a drinking-cup. Each brother in turn attempted to pick up the objects, but only the youngest brother succeeded, whereupon his elder brothers agreed that he should rule the kingdom. From each of the three descended the various divisions of the Scythians.<sup>15</sup>

This famous account and much-commented narrative presents a classic schema that transcends the Scyths: It is in the first instance an account of the origins of the royal family, but also of a people. A first human with semi-divine origins becomes the father of an entire people, while divisions among the different members of this people are explained as descendants of the various sons of the founder. We will see the model frequently in the future.

The Pontic Greeks offered a different but also typical origin myth: They credit the origins of the Scyths to the Greek hero Hercules, who wandered into the region of Scythia with his horses which disappeared in a blizzard. He discovered them in the hands of a monster, half woman half serpent, who demanded that he sleep with her in order to regain his animals. This he did and the result was the birth of three sons. Only one, Scythes, was able to succeed in a test of strength that his father had left for the boys and from him descended the kings of the Scyths.<sup>16</sup>

The final story, preferred by Herodotus himself, is more prosaic. According to this account, the Scythians had once lived in Asia but were driven out by the Massagetae. They came to the lands of the Cimmeria. Faced with invasion, some of the Cimmerians chose to depart; others remained to fight and were destroyed by the Scyths who then occupied their lands.<sup>17</sup>

One sees immediately that this is no origin myth at all in the sense of the origin of the people: they are preexisting but without a land. It is rather an account of their acquisition of Scythia, a *Landnahme* as German scholarship would later describe the moment of primary acquisition of a territory. The assumption in such an account is that all prior claims to the land (as in this case those of the Cimmerians) were extinguished;

likewise all subsequent attempts to wrest the land from the Scythians would be illegitimate.

These accounts of peoples as descendants of a common, often semi-divine ancestor, or as a result of migration from some otherwise ill-defined location, are common to European origin myths across the millennia. When, around the end of the first century Cornelius Tacitus set out to record the origins of the Germani, he too spoke of one Mannus, son of the god Tuisto, who like the Scythian Targitaos, had three sons from whom descended the three divisions of the Germani.<sup>18</sup> Many other origin myths, such as that of the Croats or the Bulgars, would likewise attribute the origins of peoples to the descendants of their first royal families. Nor do they differ in nature from the biblical myths found in Genesis: Genesis 10 recounts that like Targitaos and Mannus, Noah had three sons: Sem, Cham and Japheth. Their descendants are then assigned the origins of the known peoples, and the chapter concludes “by these were the nations divided on the earth after the flood.”

A characteristic of these early accounts of origin myths was that they tended to place the movements of peoples in some primordial past and quickly attach them to specific geography: The names of peoples first identified by Greek or Biblical histories as dwelling in a specific location tended to adhere to the populations of these regions thereafter. To return to the Scyths, for example, Pliny, writing four centuries after Herodotus, continues to label all of the peoples north of the Danube as Scyths:

“From here on All *gentes* are Scythian,” he writes, although he distinguishes among the Scyths the Getae, Sarmats, Aorsi, the Alani, and the Rhoxolani.<sup>19</sup> And these are, he assures his readers, all Scythians although they don’t use the term: “The name of the Scythians has spread in every direction, as far as the *Sarmatae* and the *Germani*, but this old designation has not continued for any except the most outlying sections of these *gentes*, living almost unknown to the rest of mankind.”<sup>20</sup> And three centuries later the Roman general Ammianus Marcellinus (325/330–after 391) continues to include all of the peoples north of the Danube as Scyths “innumerable peoples of the Scyths whose lands stretch to no known limit, of whom the smaller part lives from grain, but the rest wanders through vast emptinesses.”<sup>21</sup>

From the third century, Christian universal chroniclers, writing under the twin influences of Classical ethnography and Biblical history, sought to place the new barbarian peoples with whom they came into contact within these inherited schemas. Thus, for example, the Goths became the Getae, while other peoples such as the Huns, were identified with the descendants of Gog and Megog. New variations on these

Classical origin myths also appeared as thoroughly Romanized and Christianized authors, some claiming descent from the new-old peoples that had entered the empire in the fourth through seventh centuries, began to attempt to understand their heritage within their Classical Christian cultural tradition. Thus Jordanes, a descendant of Goths residing in sixth-century Constantinople, provided a pre-history to the Goths/Getae, recording that the Goths had first issues forth from the island of Scandia, frequently thereafter identified with Scandinavia, an origin eventually also claimed for Vandals, Burgundians, Gepids, Herules, and Lombards.<sup>22</sup> Franks, less certain of their origins attached themselves by the seventh century to King Priam of Troy, claiming that following their expulsion from Troy one portion of their people became the Macedonians while the other, taking the name of their king Francio, became the Franks.

This claim to Trojan origins made the Franks both the brothers of the Romans, who also descended from a Trojan hero, if a lesser one than Priam, and also of the Macedonians and in particular Alexander the Great, who remained throughout the Middle Ages a universally acclaimed hero and conqueror. This origin myth, much more than legends of Scandinavian origins, appealed to medieval and much of early modern society because it established the close connection between Frankish elites and Roman civilization. Today the debate goes on about whether the barbarians destroyed the Roman world, but to the Franks, Goths, Lombards, and others, their perspective was that they had in fact saved and restored it.

Christian Europeans, at least from the ninth century, had no doubt of which origin they preferred: between Romans and Barbarians, their identity was closely connected to that of the Romans, while barbarian was increasingly displaced from the successor states of Post-Roman Europe to the Pagan or Muslim societies on the fringes of this rapidly expanding world. Particular nationalities and nations were certainly recognized and even at times celebrated (or attacked), but origin myths such as that attacked by Laz of the common origins of Franks (by now understood as European nobles) and Romans were widely held. Moreover, the various *nationes* were increasingly understood to be but subgroups of the larger *populus christianus*, the Christian people, which in Roman ecclesiastical perspective was to be lead by Rome. Indeed, this had been the real import of Regino of Prüm's description of diverse nations divided by origin, custom, language, and law: What was essential, he argued, were not these differences but rather that they were all united by one faith, even if local customs differed.<sup>23</sup> What ultimately mattered to Europe's elite was their unity, not their diversity.



But Laz and his German intellectual contemporaries were beginning a process of transformation, a new way of understanding identity, or imagining community--one that would overturn Europe's belief in a common Roman origin myth as well as, ultimately, in the unity of the *populus Christianus*. The process began in the late fifteenth century and, as Caspar Hirschi has argued, pitted northern, German humanists in the service of Habsburg rulers in competition with Italian humanists.<sup>24</sup> Northern humanists began a process of re-differentiation of nations, not only as contemporary states but as peoples with their individual, non-Roman histories. Crucial in the process was the rediscovery of Tacitus' *Germania*, which was of incalculable importance to German-speaking intellectuals, but so too were traditions of erudition such as that of Laz which sought to distinguish the many peoples of Europe according to criteria of origin and language. Laz was convinced that the major languages of Europe, including those of the "Hispani, Galii, belgae, Itali, and Longobardi" were actually derived from what he called Teutonic, (a loose designation originally applied to the Frankish vernacular)<sup>25</sup> thus giving precedence to those migrations of Teutonic peoples. At the same time, he argued that the essential character of peoples did not change over time such that "It is necessary to know the migrations of peoples, not only for a better understanding of history, but, truly, in order to expose the origins of these peoples, which, from the succession of so many centuries, are very much unaffected by customs and language."<sup>26</sup>

The result of this movement, which intensified in the Reformation, led to the increasing search for alternative antiquities, other ways of understanding origins of the nations and peoples of Europe. Old national origin myths such as those of the Longobardi and Goths were revived, while new myths, largely focusing on the so-called "age of Migrations," were generated. The upheavals of the French Revolution contributed to the politization of this search, both as a reaction to French imperialism in German speaking regions and as a means to assert political rights among minority groups in the Russian, Habsburg, and Ottoman empires.<sup>27</sup> Soon, across Europe, scientific, philologically based history in the service of the nation was generating national myths, myths that emphasized not simply the origins but the essences of Europe's peoples, and the number of these peoples began to increase without cease.

National revivals in Scandinavia generated anti-German myths in Denmark and anti-Danish myths in Norway, both drawing on Icelandic Saga material for their particularist interpretations of their national origins;<sup>28</sup> In Bohemia, Czech philologists and nationalists revived the eleventh century foundation myths contained in Cosmas of Prague's chronicle, going so far as to forge new, vernacular texts about the mythical

founderess of the Bohemian nation, Lebusa.<sup>29</sup> Hungarian nationalists, excited by the discovery of the relationship between the Hungarian language and Finnish, debated whether the origins of the Magyars was to be found in the warriors of Attila the Hun or among the fishermen of the Baltic Sea.<sup>30</sup> Romanians sought national origins in the legionaries of the Roman Emperor Trajan who defeated the Dacians whose kingdom, centered in modern Transylvania, also made this disputed Hungarian region the mythic heart of the Romanian nation. In Bulgaria, a strong identification with pan-Slavic origins promoted by historians such as Marin Drinov dominated national discourse until the beginning of the twentieth century when attention began to shift toward the “Old Bulgars” as descendants of the “race” of Skythians and Sarmatians.<sup>31</sup> In England, racial Anglo-Saxonists argued that the Anglo-Saxon invasions of the fifth century had expelled into Wales or else completely eradicated the Celtic-British population, leaving England a pure Anglo-Saxon nation.<sup>32</sup> And of course in Germany, myths of German purity and virtue derived from Tacitus contributed to the creation of a united Germany under Prussian command before spiraling in the twentieth century into the worst of racial nationalist violence.

It is difficult, from the perspective of the twenty-first century, to see the fruit of such particularist national mythologizing as having exercised a positive influence on Europe. Nevertheless, since the collapse of the Soviet Empire two decades ago in East and West nationalist populist leaders have found that harkening to these old myths of an heroic past, national origin, primary acquisition, and unified culture have the power to motivate masses. This is true in Eastern Europe, but it is also true in parts of “old Europe,” such as Belgium, where Flemish ethnic identity has largely destroyed any lingering national identity, or in Catalonia, where Catalan identity has separated this region from Spain in all but law.

Partly as a reaction to such movements, and partly in response to fears of new *Völkerwanderungen*, new migrations, now from Africa and Asia Minor, we are hearing voices that seem to be appropriating something of the earlier, pre-modern calls to a common identity that transcends the ethnic nation. What are the new national myths on which a European national identity might be based? What might be the dangers of such a new identity?

A shared history is a powerful element in such a creation, but how can the history of Europe be written and believed in such a way that it leads to unity rather than to the rekindling of ancient antagonisms, wars, and perceived wrongs? Indeed, such projects are currently underway, and some historians believe, in the words of Jürgen Elwert, that “Just as national histories of the nineteenth century had provided essential

elements on which national identities were based, modern European historical research must contribute towards supporting the European integration process by providing accompanying arguments.”<sup>33</sup> But is replacing instrumentalist myths of national history with instrumentalist myths of European integration any more legitimate? Does this not carry its own perils? Consider the speech delivered on 25 March 2011 by Geert Wilders, in which the leader of the third largest political party in the Netherlands explicitly compared the barbarian invasions of the sixth century with the current migrations from the Islamic world, only to conclude that the latter are more dangerous than were the former to the existence of Europe.

Is there indeed a shared European identity? Are there, for example, “lieux de mémoire” of Europe? The Centre européen Robert Schuman has indeed attempted to envision just such a series. But As Gerard Bossuat, when invited to write an article entitled « Des lieux de memoire pour l'europe unie, » has suggested « Les lieux de memoire de l'Europe unie sont moins nombreux que ceux de l'Europe desunie. »<sup>34</sup>

If a European national identity is not to be found in a common past, should one turn, as in the Middle Ages, to the notion of a *populus Christianus*? This is indeed an idea that is growing in popularity as fears of the Islamization of Europe increase. But the notion of a shared Christian heritage has its problems: quite apart from the bloody historical divides between Catholic and Protestant, still visible in Northern Ireland, or between orthodox and Catholic in the Balkans, there is the undeniable reality that Christianity in Europe was through much of its history the ideological source for exactly the kind of intolerance, repression of women and minorities, and illiberal politics that today Europeans criticize in Islam. Moreover, Europe has never been entirely Christian: its Muslim and Jewish populations have always been a reality, and the treatment of these communities has always been part of Europe’s darkest shame. Finally, there is the reality that Christianity, for the majority of Europeans, is largely a folkloric tradition: Rather than looking to a Christian identity, Europe might more honestly speak of a post-Christian identity. Today Christian Europe is increasingly as much a myth as the Trojan origins of the Franks.

Where does this leave us? The myths that created the nations of Europe are, if not gone, undermined and increasingly rendered passé; the myths that would create a European identity do not yet exist. Is the only possible source of a European national identity to be found in opposition to a common perceived threat, either to the American empire or to an expanding Islam? But the Americanization of Europe is surely already here, for better or often for worse; and Islam is deeply rooted in Europe as its most dynamic

religious tradition. A new European nation will have to come to terms with these new if troubling realities.

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<sup>1</sup> Wolfgang Lazius, *De gentium aliquot migrationibus : sedibus fixis, reliquis, linguarumque initiis & immutationibus ac dialectis, libri XII ...* (Basel : Johannes Oporinus, 1557). On Laz or Lazius see Herwig Wolfram, “Gothic History and Historical Ethnography,” *Journal of Medieval History* 7 (1981): 311-12; Arno Strohmeier, “Geschichtsbilder im Kulturtransfer: Die Hofhistoriographie in Wien im Zeitalter des Humanismus als Rezipient und Multiplikator,” in *Metropolen und Kulturtransfer im 15./16. Jahrhundert. Prag–Krakau–Danzig–Wien*, ed. Andrea Langer and Georg Michels (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2001), 65–84; Kristoffer Neville, „Gothicism and Early Modern Historical Ethnography,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 70 (2009): 213-234, esp. pp. 224-225; and Walter Goffart, *Rome’s Fall and After* (London: 1989), 122.

<sup>2</sup> Joep Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe: A Cultural History* (Amsterdam, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (London:1991). Anderson understands “imagined” in a very particular sense. Since members of even small nations can never know all of their fellow-members, they imagine themselves part of a larger community that they could never fully encounter. But in opposition to those who would argue that because the nation is invented it is somehow false, he means that imagining the nation is the process by which a very real community is created.

<sup>5</sup> On the distinction made by Cassiodorus, between *gens* and *natio* see Verena Postel, *Die Ursprünge Europas. Migration und Integration im frühen Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: 2004), p. 60. Cassiodorus explains the difference thusly: “A *gens* can include some foreign members, and when we speak of *natio*, we do not include those who have entered into it but the term *natio* excludes foreigners and includes only those of the same blood.” (Gens enim aliquos potest habere peregrinos, et dum natio dicitur, non advenas complectimur, sed tantumgentem unius sanguinis indicamus). Cassiodorus *Exp. In psalmum XCV* v. 7 PL 70:679.

<sup>6</sup> *Diversae nationes populorum inter se discrepant genere moribus lingua legibus.* Regino of Prüm, *De synodalibus causis* ed. F. Kurze, MGH SS rer. Germ. 1890. xix f.

<sup>7</sup> Reinhard Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung; Das Werden der frühmittelalterlichen Gentes.* (Cologne: 1961).

<sup>8</sup> Goffart has developed this argument across numerous polemical publications. See most recently his *Barbarian Tides: The Migration Age and the Late Roman Empire* (Philadelphia, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> For a balanced and perceptive discussion of these issues see Guy Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West 376-568* (Cambridge:2007).

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<sup>10</sup> March Bloch, *Apologie pour l'histoire ou métier d'historien*. Paris, 6th edition, 1967) pp. 5-6.

<sup>11</sup> "Quando iam nemo non Troiana sibi antiquitate atque origine placet." Lazius, *De gentium aliquot migrationibus* p. 675.

<sup>12</sup> Among the numerous studies on the Trojan origins of the Franks and other European nations, see Andrea Giardina, "Le origini troiane dall'impero alla nazione," in *Morfologie sociali e culturali in Europa fra Tarda Antiquità e Alto Medioevo*, Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 45 (1998) 177-209; and Richard Waswo, "Our ancestors, the Trojans: inventing cultural identity in the Middle Ages," *Exemplaria: A Journal of Theory in Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 7:2 (1995) 269-290.

<sup>13</sup> The classic study of the biblical narrative in the Middle Ages remains Arno Borst, *Der Turmbau von Babel; Geschichte der Meinungen über Ursprung und Vielfalt der Sprachen und Völker* 4 vols. (Stuttgart, A. Hiersemann, 1957-63).

<sup>14</sup> Herodotus, *Histories*, Bk. II, 15. Tr. G. P. Gold, Loeb Classical Library 117 (Cambridge, Ma.:1920), p. 293.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* Bk. IV, 5-6.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* Bk. IV, 8-10.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* Bk. IV, 11.

<sup>18</sup> Tacitus, *Germania*, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Pliny, *Naturalis historia*, Bk. IV, 80.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, Bk. IV, 82.

<sup>21</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum gestarum libri*, 22, 8, 42.

<sup>22</sup> On these origin legends see Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History: Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton, 1988), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Notre Dame, In. 2005) for the more extreme view that rejects the possibility that these medieval narratives contain any information about barbarian societies before they entered the Roman world.

<sup>23</sup> ita sancta universalis aecclesia toto orbe terrarum diffusa, quamvis in unitate fidei coniungatur, tamen consuetudinibus aecclesiasticis ab invicem differt. *Ibid.*, p. xx.

<sup>24</sup> Caspar Hirschi, *Wettkampf der Nationen: Konstruktionen einer deutschen Ehrsgemeinschaft an der Wende vom Mittelalter zur Neuzeit* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> Hirschi, 146-47.

<sup>26</sup> Lazius, *De gentium aliquot migrationibus*, p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> On the complex issue of nationalism and medievalism in the nineteenth century see among other studies Joep Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe: A Cultural History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006; and Patrick J. Geary and Gábor Klaniczay, eds. *Manufacturing Middle Ages: Entangled History of Medievalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Leiden: Brill, in Press).

<sup>28</sup> Sverre Bagge, “Oehlenschlaeger and Ibsen: National Revival in Drama and History in Denmark and Norway c. 1800-1860” in Geary and Klaniczay, *Manufacturing Middle Ages*.

<sup>29</sup> Pavilina Rychterova, “The Manuscripts of Grünberg and Königinhof: Romantic lies about the glorious past of the Czech nation,” in *Authenticity and Forgery in Nineteenth Century Medievalism*, Ed. János Bak, Patrick Geary and Gábor Klaniczay, (Leiden: Brill, in Press).

<sup>30</sup> On Hungarian origin myths and the “Ugric-Turkic war” see Gábor Klaniczay, “The Myth of Scythian Origin and the Cult of Attila in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Multiple Antiquities-Multiple Modernities: Ancient Histories in Nineteenth Century European Cultures* Ed. Gábor Klaniczay, Michael Werner, and Ottó Fecser (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 201), 185-211.

<sup>31</sup> Stefan Detchev, *Between Slavs and Old Bulgars: “Ancestors”, “Race” and Identity in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Bulgaria*,” in Geary and Klaniczay, *Manufacturing Middle Ages*.

<sup>32</sup> Patrick J. Geary, “Teutonische Rassenideologie im Amerika des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts,” in *Zur Geschichte der Gleichung 'germanisch – deutsch: Sprache und Namen, Geschichte und Institutionen* ed. H. Beck, D. Geuenich, H. Steuer, (Berlin: 2004), 343-356.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Konrad Hugo Jarausch, Thomas Lindenberger, *Conflicted Memories: Europeanizing Contemporary Histories* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007). p. 2. Elvert’s text is accessible on line as “Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Nationalhistorie für Europa,” <http://www.heidelberger-lese-zeiten-verlag.de/archiv/online-archiv/elvert.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire* No. 61, Jan. - Mar., 1999.

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