

Chapter 12: Scythian, Parthian, & Gothic Tribes

The Forgotten Empire—Scythians in Old Persia

Is it possible to not even know the name by which Rome's deadliest competitor called itself? The answer is yes! Yet for practically 300 years of its 500 year existence that unknown empire repeatedly crushed or drove out numerous Roman armies, proving itself the sole neighbouring power able to resist the deadly Latin embrace.

This one fact of history has been the main reason that what we call the "Parthian Empire" has not slipped into complete oblivion. The word "Parthian" is etymologically thought to be derived from the word "exile." The Parthian Empire (238 BC-226 AD) was the true counterbalance to both Greek Seleucid as well as Roman power in the east. At its height it stretched from the Indus valley in northwest India all the way to Armenia in the west.



Parthian Empire 247 BC - 224 AD

https://www.crystalinks.com/Parthian_Empire.html

As geographical middlemen between Chinese and Roman empires, the major source of riches to the Parthians, besides domestic agriculture, was their control of the Silk Road and other trade routes over which passed a remarkable commerce in luxury goods. The geopolitical value of this trade could only be compared to the modern equivalent of the control of vital oil pipelines connecting reserves to customers. This explains the repeated Roman attempts to subjugate Parthia. Consequently, for both economic and military reasons, a critical geopolitical key to Parthian power was the control of the Caspian Gates, also known as the Pass of Girduni Sudurrah. This gateway among the Iranian mountains south of the Caspian Sea was the only practical route between the Parthian domains of Armenia, Babylonia, Media and Persia in the west, and Afghanistan, Khorassan and Turkistan in the east.

Who were the Parthians and their ruling Arsacid dynasty? They were not Persians!¹ The classical writers uniformly held them to be the descendants of the Parni (or Aparni) who were one of three Scythian tribes in the Dahae confederacy. The Dahae occupied the east side of the Caspian Sea. For much of the history of the Parthian Empire Scythian tribes continued to be deeply involved in Parthian affairs for both good and ill.²

While Scythian tribesmen regularly played a major supporting role to the Parthian military, Parthia's real military strength was due to their own innovation.



Parthian Armoured Horse

[Graffiti from private houses, Dura Europos, Earlier third century A.D. (After M. Rostovzeff, *Caravan Cities*, figs. 2-3)]

A new weapon appears, and one that armies from Asia to northern Europe eventually had to adopt in order to survive: heavy cavalry, horse and rider armored like tanks. Its genesis lay in the steppes [Scythians]. When [Scythian] nomads like the Parni settled for the first time, their best horses could be stall-fed from grain crops instead of living, winter and summer, in the open on whatever food could be grazed. As a result, a new breed of horse was developed. It was larger, and had more stamina. It could outlast the fleetier nomadic horse and, given the armor, become devastating. This innovation was called the *cataphract*, meaning “bulwarked.” In the eighth century, Europe was to be saved for Christendom by the timely adoption of the [Parthian] cataphract, to stem the Arab armies.³

In comparison to its power politics, however, Parthian social institutions received relatively little coverage by Greek or Roman writers. We know remarkably little about Parthia because there just aren't many preserved official Parthian records. It seems they were deliberately destroyed.

¹ John C. Ridpath, *Ridpath's History of the World*, “Parthia,” The Jones Bros. Publishing Co., 1901, p. 378.

² “In the earlier second century BC an attack by the Hsiung-nu [Huns] upon the Yueh-chih [Yuezhi], probably the Tochari [Tokharians] of Western sources, in turn forced the... Saca nomads, westwards towards Ta-hsia [Bactria]. The main bulk of the invaders, mostly Sacaraucae and Massagetae, struck at north-eastern Parthia about 130 BC.... Chinese reports based largely on information gathered by the ambassador Ch-ang Ch-ien [Zhang Qian], who had himself visited Bactria c. 129. credit [the Parthian king] Mithradates with sovereignty over the steppes east of the Caspian, including the oasis of Merv and the Massagetae tribesmen.” But by about 70 BC, “Parthian overlordship of the Massagetae of the Caspian steppes was gone. Worse, Sacastene and Arachosia had been lost, and formed into an independent Indo-Scythian kingdom” Colledge, pp. 31, 35.

³ Clive Irving, *Crossroads of Civilization*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1979, p. 71.

The Parthian rulers of Iran are mostly shadowy figures.... In many spheres they appear to have shown an admirable [religious and ethnic] tolerance, which was due no doubt to indifference, but which saved their subjects nevertheless from much persecution and oppression [which was to follow later under the succeeding Sasanid Persian dynasty]... But the real achievements of the Parthian monarchs have been obscured by inadequate records and by the Sasanian *damnatio memoriae* [destruction of records].⁴

Nevertheless, a certain amount of information has been preserved. The Parthian language was called Pehlevi or Pahlavi. It is classified as an Indo-European language, a northern dialect of Middle Persian with archaic features having both Semitic Aramaic and Old Persian influences. The Roman writer Justin described it as “a mixture of Scythian and Median.” Parthian was written using Aramaic script with some Parthian endings:

In the Avroman parchment [a rare Parthian document], the script and the majority of the words are Aramaic, but the remaining words and a termination are Parthian.⁵

In their social characteristics the Parthians shared many similarities with their Indo-European relatives. Parthian aristocracy are often depicted wearing torcs around their necks like the Celts. And like the Yuezhi-Tokharians further east, the Parthians were relatively hairy, wearing big moustaches and beards with their hair falling to the shoulders. They were polygamous like most Scythians. Hunting on horseback and banqueting were favorite Parthian forms of sport and entertainment. Such pastimes were evidently taken very seriously by the Parthians. There are several recorded instances of the Parthian aristocracy actually deposing a monarch because he didn't share his people's common passion for horses and the hunt!

Such dethronements were possible due to the nature of Parthian “constitutional” monarchy. While any unblemished male from any branch of the numerous Arsacid dynasty was a potential king, he could only assume power if elected to the throne by the “Megistanes.” This political body, like the medieval British House of Lords, had a membership composed of powerful nobles and the clergy (the Magi: members of the Zoroastrian priesthood). The Megistanes could make and unmake a king. Members of the royal line were formally part of the Domestic or Privy Council. This group was supposed to help advise and serve the king. But in actual practice Privy Council members were more of a source of fratricidal competition. As a group, the Arsacid dynasty lacked a sense of working for the common good and a feeling of family kinship that might have suppressed the lust for power. This weakness is comparable to the rivalry found among the sons of Israel's King David. Me-firstism was also a Parthian disease.

Civil contention had tended powerfully to weaken the monarchy. The method of mutual assassination among the Arsacid princes had prevailed so long as to become a precedent of political action.⁶

While the Parthian Empire embraced multiculturalism in a way that would make some moderns envious, their social organization was strictly feudal. According to Justin and Plutarch, Parthian society had a small number of freemen and a large number of dependents—that is, serfs bound to the land. The freemen were the nobles, the royal officials and their families. Such feudalism

⁴ Malcolm A. R. Colledge, *The Parthians*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1967, p. 176.

⁵ Colledge, pp. 70

⁶ Ridpath, p 438.

extended to the army and local government. Authority was based on hereditary rights. Parthian aristocrats maintained their own courts modelled on a reduced scale after the king of kings. They trained and maintained their own personal armies loyal to themselves. When war broke out, Parthia's king of kings would call his vassals to personally join him with their quota of troops, and then fight under the royal master's banner.⁷ Feudal Europe seems to be essentially an outgrowth of feudal Parthia!

The noble's panoplies were always elaborate, and **it is fascinating to watch the growth of heraldry in the later Parthian period. The various insignia of the aristocrats are plainly represented** on the great rock relief of Firuzabad, carved to commemorate the triumph of the Sasanian Ardashir over the last Parthian monarch.⁸

Parthia was a remarkable mixture of old and new customs. Many Parthians professed a certain degree of belief in Zoroastrianism's doctrine of the struggle between the *Ahura-Mazdao*, the one who was the fountain of all good, and *Ahriman*, the one who was the source of all evil. But as a group they seemed to be rather more pragmatic, syncretistic, and materialistic than true believing Zoroastrians. After all, the Parthians continued to bury their dead rather than exposing the dead bodies of loved ones to excarnation by buzzards or dogs as was the Zoroastrian practice.

The Sun became the principal object of Parthian worship. After him the Moon was adored as the divinity of night. We might almost transfer and adapt in this connection the celebrated chapter of the Sixth Book of the *Cesarean Commentaries*, wherein Julius describes the religion of the Teutonic nations.... **The [Parthian] system in its last estate was not essentially different from that of the Pagan nations of Europe.**⁹



Rock Relief of Firuzabad
Eugène Flandin, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

⁷ Ridpath, p. 386.

⁸ Colledge, p. 94.

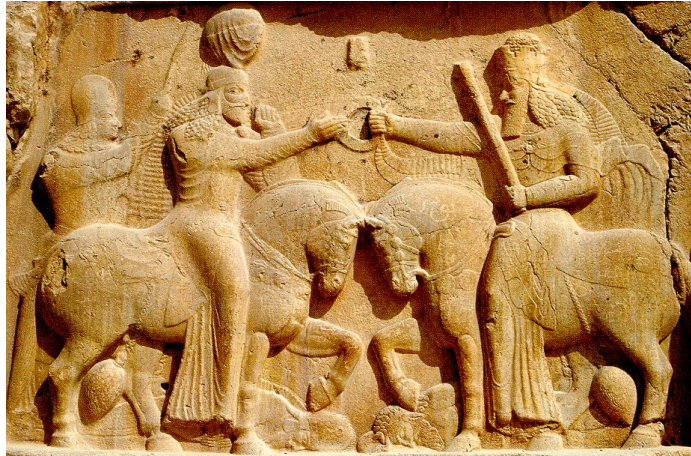
⁹ Ridpath, p. 385.

Parthia's government was secular, and there was strict separation between state and religion. No group was favoured above any other. This, of course, frustrated and angered the corrupt Zoroastrian priesthood of the Magi who, toward the end of the empire, threw their support to the Sasanian Persian usurper Ardashir.

It would appear that during the last 85 years of its existence the Parthian Empire slowly disintegrated under the accumulated strain of three destructive Roman invasions. These were only turned back at great cost. Exhausted, the Parthians were defeated and their king killed in 226 AD during an opportunistic revolt by the sub-king Ardashir of the province of Persis. Ardashir believed himself the rightful claimant to the Achaemenid Persian throne. He also saw himself as a defender of orthodox Zoroastrianism. Ardashir established an aggressive, fundamentalist church-state regime that was both intolerant and dictatorial. This Sasanid government enforced loyalty to both Zoroastrianism¹⁰ and the king. Believing terror and arbitrary justice would serve his ends, Ardashir set up a system of spies and informers.¹¹ Their work was to harry out of his kingdom the supporters of the hated Parthians, and destroy the physical reminders of an empire that had lasted half a millennium.

Did the modern Persian ayatollahs study their history and use Ardashir as their example?

A small lingering remnant of the Parthian Empire and the Arsacid dynasty held-on to power in Armenia into the fifth century AD, providing an island of religious toleration for Christians fleeing persecutions from pagan Romans, and later, intolerant Byzantines. But small Armenia couldn't hope to shelter all the displaced Parthian elite and their supporters. Where did they go?



Cliff relief at Naqsh-e Rostam with Ardeshir I and Ahura Mazda. This relief depicts Ardashir I's Coronation scene; Ardashir the first king of the Sasanian dynasty receives the ribboned diadem (cydaris), the symbol of kingship, from the spirit of Darius I of the Achaemenid dynasty. Under the horse of King Ardashir lies the last of the Parthian Kings, Artabanus. Under the horse of King Darius lies Gaumata the usurper, a Magian. The relief of Ardashir is therefore, the legitimization of the new Sasanian dynasty by the Achaemenid dynasty. The inscription in Persian, Parthian, and Greek, reads: This is the image of the Hormizd-worshipping Malest

http://realhistoryww.com/world_history/ancient/Elam_Iran_3.htm

The Appearance of a “New” Scythian People

About this same time, the beginning of the third century AD, a new people began forming on the northern shore of the Black Sea. This was a region in ferment with many new migrant groups arriving from both Eastern Europe, the north, and the Eurasian steppes. There was a great deal of merging, striving, and coalition building between newly arrived tribes and previously established populations. Such ethnogenesis

¹⁰ “During the era of the martyrs, the Syriac-speaking missionaries had moved from Edessa eastward into the realm of the Sasanids. The power of the new dynasty and of a revived nationalistic Zoroastrianism made further progress of Christianity in that area hazardous and difficult.... It is estimated that the martyrs of the persecution in the reign of [Sasanid] Sapor II (310-379 AD) numbered 16,000,” Raymond Edman, *The Light in Dark Ages*, Wheaton, Illinois, 1949, p. 95.

¹¹ Irving, pp. 77, 82.

eventually produced a new, dynamic people to whom, at first, the old Scythian name seemed the most appropriate in the eyes of the Greco-Roman world. After all, this “new people” lived in the traditional Scythian lands and their language and lifestyle seemed like the Scythians described by Herodotus some 700 years earlier. Even the shamans of this “new people” indulged in the famous Scythian “cannibis saunas.”¹²

In one generation from 238-269 AD, this newly arrived Scythian people launched ten astounding raids by land and sea on the Roman Empire,¹³ devastating many of its eastern provinces. The raids took immense spoils, including grain, silver, gold, silks, linen, cattle, and captives—some of whom were Christians from the Asia Minor churches, thus planting a seed that would eventually transform the religious identity of this people. The Mediterranean world was shaken by the force as well as by the wide-ranging nature of these incursions.

Many of the invasions of the Roman Empire were certainly large-scale plundering campaigns and attempts to establish settlements, admittedly without coordinated planning or leadership. Thus, according to the exaggerated [?] details of ancient historians, **a giant column of 320,000 persons—warriors and their families, complete with wagons and herds of livestock—advanced southwards** from the Dniester in 269/70 CE. Although this land force was allegedly supported by a fleet of 2,000 vessels, only modest successes were achieved.¹⁴



Coins: Kings of Parthia. Osroes II (AD 190-208)

<https://www.vcoins.com>

Where had this multitude come from? Did the ancient historians really exaggerate the size of that nomadic column? If not, what could be the origin of this new “Scythian” people who could vigorously take on and plunder the Roman Empire? Curiously, archaeology has discovered Parthian coins spread over a wide area stretching from north of modern Iran to southern Russia. Parthian ivory carvings have been found at Olbia on the Black Sea.¹⁵

Could this be evidence of exiled Parthians, or merely the result of trade? It is known that Parthian society characteristically did not have a fixed capital. The seat of government moved regularly from place to place at the discretion of the king. By its nature the Parthian establishment was mobile:

¹² Wolfram, p. 103.

¹³ Edman, p. 89.

¹⁴ Diesner, pp. 93-94.

¹⁵ Colledge, p. 78.

In time of war, not only the king, but his court, his government, went into the field. **The State was encamped with the army.** An immense retinue of non-combatants [the wives, concubines and children] followed in the wake of the expedition. **A caravan of camels carried not only the military equipage, but a half-citiful of articles.... The royal society removed from place to place with only the cavalry interposed between itself and the enemy.**¹⁶



Parthian Camel Caravan

https://2.bp.blogspot.com/-NJPbZOydrVA/VB7hKoVHL9I/AAAAAAAAAILw/-pjXZLTcOua/s1600/The_Camel_Train.jpg

Could the defeated Parthian elite have slipped across the Caucasus into southern Russian and the Black Sea region? Armenia was controlled by members of the Arsacid dynasty, so that door was open. One could also exit north through the original Parthian tribal homelands and slip around the east side of Caspian Sea. The Parthians were a mobile people, who after their loss to the Sasanids needed both new territory and cash. Consequently they had the motivation to launch raids. Besides we know historically that the Parthians had conducted many successful raids on Roman territory in previous centuries.

There are significant clues to suggest that exiled Parthians merged with the East Germanic-Celtic Gutones and others on the Black Sea steppes to create from diverse, but mostly related, Scythic and Germanic groups a new people called Goths. Again, it should be emphasized that the ancient writers did not commonly call this newly appeared people “Goths” until a little less than 100 years after Synesius of Cyrene’s explanation in the fourth century AD to the Emperor

Arcadius. He wrote that new barbarians groups continually sprang forth from the same basic stock of the Germani-Scythians.¹⁷ Interestingly, the first recorded mention of “Goths” in history is as enemies of the Sasanid Persians! This would make sense if the Goths were exiled Parthians.

In 262 Shapur I “the Great” [a Sasanid] had the famous trilingual inscription carved, and in it there appear *Germanic and Gothic* peoples among the Roman troops he had defeated in 245. From the year 269 comes the oldest Latin Roman evidence for the Gothic name... The same period also witnessed the appearance of the first Greek text mentioning the Goths.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ridpath, p. 415.

¹⁷ Wolfram, p. 11.

¹⁸ Wolfram, p. 20.

According to ethnographer Ludwig Schmidt, all the East Germanic peoples in the first centuries of our era, as well as, the non-Germanic Alans were Gothic peoples—who all “profess the same heretical religion.”¹⁹ Of course, as already quoted, the Parthians and the Germani held practically identical religious beliefs. The East Germanic Gutones, who were a major component in the construction of the Goths, left relatives in southern Scandinavia and various islands in the Baltic Sea. Cassiodorus, a sixth century Roman in the service of the Gothic kings of Italy, labeled these northern people “Gauthigoths.” Swedish names like *Götaälv*, a river named for the Scandinavian Gutí-Gauts people, testify of their presence. Ancient ethnographers understood that the Gutí-Gauts, Goths, Alans and Scythians had much in common:



Parthian Horseman

https://dailyhistory.org/Why_Was_the_Parthian_Empire_So_Powerful

Procopius, who is the first to speak of the Gauts in Thule, knows about their veneration of Ares [the Lord of War]. He writes about it as if he is speaking of the Scythians, Thracians, Getae, or even of the Goths themselves....

The Gothic land is...called Tyrfingr (“the Tervingian”), the same name that is given to the mythical hereditary sword of the Goths. This presupposes that the Thraco-Scythian Ares-Mars, who was seen as the incarnation of the people and the land, who also manifested himself in the shape of a sword, had been accepted as a Gothic god.²⁰

Modern scholars call the Goths a “polyethnic” people. They certainly acted in concert with groups like Celtic Bastarnians, Germanic Vandals, Gothic Burgundians, Scythian Alani and others. The ethnogenesis of the Gothic people was an open process that is often hard for the modern person to understand. They were a people having an army rather than a native country in common.

The glue of Gothic identity lay in their common language, the commonly held *lex Gothica*—the Gothic community of law—as well as the belief in the divine descent of the people and their royal clan.²¹ Scholars readily admit that among the groups creating the Goths there were also “Iranians.”²² These Iranians (Parthians) eventually united with the European Gutones, whose culture reflected much Celtic influence in their “Germanic” identity.²³

¹⁹ Wolfram, p. 11.

²⁰ Wolfram, pp. 21, 27.

²¹ Wolfram, pp. 16-17.

²² Wolfram, p. 7.

²³ Wolfram, p. 37.

We should speak of the Goths only after the Gutonic immigrants had become “Scythians” at the Black Sea.²⁴

Despite eventually being considered one group, the different backgrounds of the tribes making up the Goths continued to express themselves by their two main sub-identities—Visigothic and Ostrogothic—which remained distinct from the late third century AD.²⁵ Essentially, it shouldn't be considered surprising that the differences in traditions and customs among the Goths simply continued to reflect either a group where the majority had a strong Germanic-Celtic background, or an Iranian (Parthian) one. But whatever their background, those who took the Gothic identity shared, mingled and, on occasion, cooperated.

The name “Vesi” that the Visigoths called themselves meant “the Good,” or “the Noble.” While “Ostrogoth,” the actual name that this group called themselves, meant “Goths of the Rising Sun,” or “the Shining, Splendid Goths.” Both Visigoths and Ostrogoths had nicknames for each other. The Visigoths called the Ostrogoths: “Greutungi,” meaning “dwellers of the steppes and pebbly coasts.” The Ostrogothic nickname for the Visigoths was “Tervingi,” which meant “forest people.” Again, these two groups during the early third century AD brought together an amalgamation of different ideas, and customs.

It can be shown that the military democracy of the Goths in southern Russia soon experienced a vigorous development which proceeded side-by-side with the emergence of the kingship idea.... The free Gothic peasants—who only occasionally took part in warlike campaigns—remained as such but the hereditary and warrior nobility acquired a superior social status which became increasingly more marked.

Art reflected the fusion of the peasant element based on a settled life and peaceful cults such as that of Nerthus [the great goddess] together with the bellicose lifestyle deriving largely from the mounted nomads. There is clear evidence that weapons were adopted from the Iranian [Parthian] and Turkish people [i.e. the Alani Hunnic bows]. The Goths introduced the cavalry lance (contus) and adopted from the East side-piece helmets and chain-mail [Parthian]. Whereas the Goths in the Vistula area [N.E. Europe] at the time of Tacitus fought with the short sword [like the Royal Scyths of Herodotus' day] in southern Russia they used a long sword developed from a type of weapon used by Sarmatians and Alans [Eastern Scythians]. The mounted warriors also used the lasso while the infantry forces, which were otherwise declining in importance, were equipped with the bow.²⁶

Up to the end of the fourth century AD, the Visigoths fought primarily as infantry. For over one hundred years after 271 AD, the Vesi ran an agricultural-farming society in the abandoned Roman province of Dacia (modern Romania) extending east to the Dniester River. They had no monarchic kingship. Instead, there were clans run by chieftains who would meet in a tribal council. To deal with threats to their commonwealth, the Visigoth-Tervingi would elect a judge with limited authority like the Celts in Gaul of Julius Caesar's time.

²⁴ Wolfram, p. 44.

²⁵ Wolfram, p. 92.

²⁶ Diesner, p. 93.



Pietroasa Sacrificial Bowl

https://www.wikiwand.com/hr/Germanska_umjetnost

The Ostrogoths ran a very different show, and they were much more numerous than the Visigoths. The “Shining” Goths were renowned for their heavily armored cavalry lancers—and their strong monarchy. Their warriors were equipped with a coat of chain mail and other armor, two types of swords, lance, shield, helmet, and lasso. **The famous sacrificial bowl found at Pietroasa (Romania), which had been made in an eastern style, shows Gothic warriors wearing Iranian-style caftan cuirass armor!**

With such power and leadership the Ostrogoths-Greutungi created for themselves an enormous kingdom stretching northwards to the Volga’s

Finnish peoples and east to the Urals. These areas were as much as 1200 miles distant from the Ostrogothic heartland! Archaeology has confirmed that the Ostrogothic people (the Cherniakhov culture) had both the military and the logistical capacity to enforce their will over such a vast area!²⁷

The Ostrogoths weren’t democratically minded peasant farmers like the Vesi, or most other Germanic tribes with their councils of leading men, general assembly of all warriors and appointed judges. The Ostrogoths were feudal overlords who were called the long-haired or curly haired, wearing their hair tied in three knots in the same fashion as the later Vandal and Merovingian royal families. **The Ostrogothic kings hunted with falcons, and wore Iranian-style (Parthian) royal clothing!** “In short, the lifestyle of the Iranian-Turkish peoples of the steppe became part of the Gothic world.”²⁸ These feudal lords reaped tribute from their vassal dependencies, while their subjects enriched themselves by trading in valuable merchandise such as gold, furs, honey, and wax. The Ostrogothic kingdom carefully secured its key trade routes like the Volga River.

After [King] Ermanaric had attached many peoples of Finnish-Caucasian stock to his Gothic kingdom, **the Baltic Aesti [who traded in amber] apparently also fell under his sway.** The *Origo Gothica* [an ancient history of the Goths] reports that **the king ruled over “all peoples of Scythia and Germania as if they were his own.”**²⁹

²⁷ Wolfram, p. 87.

²⁸ Wolfram, p. 115.

²⁹ Wolfram, p. 88.

Does Gothic Art Imitate Real Life?

Certainly the art of any people reflects its taste. But art also speaks volumes about the ethnic-cultural currents that mold and shape the face of a society. Here in British Columbia we have a base population of Amerindian First Nations overlaid by many recent immigrants from the Far East and the Indian sub-continent. The majority of our population, however, is composed of an older immigrant group, the British-Caucasians.

Now imagine two thousand years pass. Should a future archaeologist have just a few preserved textual fragments to go by due to the ravages of time and war, how would he reconstruct the nature and influences of our society? The fusion and mix of peoples living in British Columbia would be clearly evident from our artifacts, our art. Archaeologically speaking, a totem pole speaks something quite different from a statue of Captain Cook with an inscription written in English and French, a Chinese dragon boat, or a Sikh temple. In the same way, since the Goths buried their dead in graves closely resembling the classic Scythian kurgans or burial mounds of a much earlier time, archaeology has been able to recover a considerable number of artifacts that allow us to see who they were.

Gothic barbarian art is a fusion, a mixture of the Celtic-Germanic peasant sensitivities based on the settled life with the nomadic, and the warlike horsemen of the steppes in a region adjacent to the Roman Empire. Gothic art does indeed speak of different groups and cultural influences. Greco-Roman influence is one. Another was Germanic-Celtic with its aesthetic appreciation for complex intertwined line patterns. The third was just the latest wave of “animal art” from the Eurasian steppe nomads, plus the newer development of a sophisticated polychrome jewelry originating with the Iranians—basically either Scythian or Parthian at its core.

The fine gold and silver jewelry of the [late Roman Iron age] period is distinguished by its predilection for polychromy achieved through the highly skillful use of precious and semi-precious stones and enamel of different colors, glass and paste, combined with filigree braid work, a trend which dates from the end of the third century BC, when it was prevalent throughout the classical East, the Iranian world, Transcaucasia...central Asia and west Siberia [Pazyryk Scythia]. As adapted by Bosphoran craftsmen [a region under Ostrogothic control] it combined local tradition and technical skill going back to Scythian times with new elements introduced by...newcomers from the steppes of Asia. **This style was later adopted and modified further by the Goths, spreading westwards during the Migration Period, and becoming the basis of the early medieval style in western Europe.**

Gothic art supplied the style, motifs, and techniques that endured throughout much of western Europe for the following seven centuries. Many scholars say the high level of artistic achievement realized by the Migration Period craftsman (fourth-sixth centuries AD) was not surpassed until the Renaissance!

After the animal styles, the most distinctive feature of fine Germanic metalwork is the use of precious stones, especially garnets, set in gold. **Like the decorative styles this did not originate in the north. The Goths settled in the Black Sea hinterland first learnt the technique from their nomadic neighbors and carried it westward. Some of the nomads themselves...brought this exciting metalwork to the west...**

These contacts between Germans and nomads brought westerners into touch [a third time] with art traditions which had grown up far to the east. Now and again this contact with the Orient is made explicit by the objects

themselves. **On the back of a gold amulet set with small garnets found at Wolfsheim in Rheinhessen there is in Persian script the name of the Sasanid king Ardashir (226-41 AD),** who had been dead more than two centuries when the object finally accompanied a Gothic...warrior into his grave.

The techniques employed in the decorated jewelry and weapon ornaments of the north were all of great antiquity... How they were drawn into the manufacture of lavish ornaments during the late Roman Iron Age is still unexplained. But German craftsmen became masters of them all.³⁰



Fig. 2. Grave assemblage of the warrior burial from Wolfsheim, dating to the early fifth century. Among the finds are a garnet decorated buckle and strap clasp, as well as a pectoral-pendant, which was a reused antique.

Parthian Amulet in Gothic Europe

"the pectoral pendant from Wolfsheim (Rheinhessen, DE)54 buried around AD 410–440. In this case, a Sasanian bracelet, which was at least 100 years old when it was deposited, was reused as a pendant (Fig. 2)55. Here, a gold plate with round and square perforations overlays the garnets," Quast 1999, 705–718. — Alexandra Hilgner

Why would a Goth family carry around for 200 years a souvenir probably taken from the body of a dead Sasanid Persian functionary? During the revolution that overthrew the Parthian Empire, the Parthians and Sasanids fought three major battles, and then innumerable diehard skirmishes that lasted about 10 years after the Parthian king had been killed by the Sasanid king Ardashir. In my family's experience, we at the turn of the millennium still carry around souvenirs from the American Civil War, which ended some 140 years previously. As the saying goes in some parts of the United States, "The South will rise again!" Perhaps a similar Gothic sentiment explains the eventual timing and location of the burial of that Sasanid gold amulet.

Nevertheless, the point is, the spread of this Gothic art with its remarkable metalwork of animal motifs and polychrome cloisonné, reflecting the fusion of Germanic peasant farmer, Parthian aristocrat, and Scythian steppe nomad, was spread into northwestern Europe. It was spread during the migrations of the Goths who wore it or used it to decorate their weapons and horses.

³⁰ Todd, p. 159.

Once Again — Driven West

In 375 AD the Huns destroyed the Ostrogothic kingdom and began to attack the Visigoths. Hard pressed, the Visigoths appealed to the Eastern Roman emperor Valens for permission to cross the Danube, and settle in parts of Thrace in exchange for providing recruits for the Imperial army. The Romans agreed, but unfortunately, they were not prepared for the flood of starving refugees that streamed across the border. The Roman officials proved to be both incompetent and corrupt in their dealings with the Visigoths creating a rising tide of resentment. To escort the Visigothic refugees to their resettlement areas, the Imperial commander of Thrace cannibalized his units patrolling the Danube, rendering the border porous. The Ostrogoths, who had been denied entry by the Romans, took advantage of the situation. They made rafts and sneaked across the river.

Valens had promised to provide grain supplies to tide the Visigoths over until they could get a harvest in. But what food showed up was inadequate. Roman merchants gouged the refugees, selling even dogs for food. Many desperate Goth families were forced to sell themselves into slavery to avoid starvation. Anger grew, but the Romans misjudged the volatility of the situation and underestimated the Goths. At a reconciliation feast arranged to discuss food supply problems at the Thracian headquarters of the Roman army, a quarrel broke out. The Romans drew their swords and killed most of the complaining Gothic delegation. But a key Visigoth prince escaped in the confusion and he led his people in a desperate revolt for survival.



Gothic War — Battle of Adrianople 378 CE

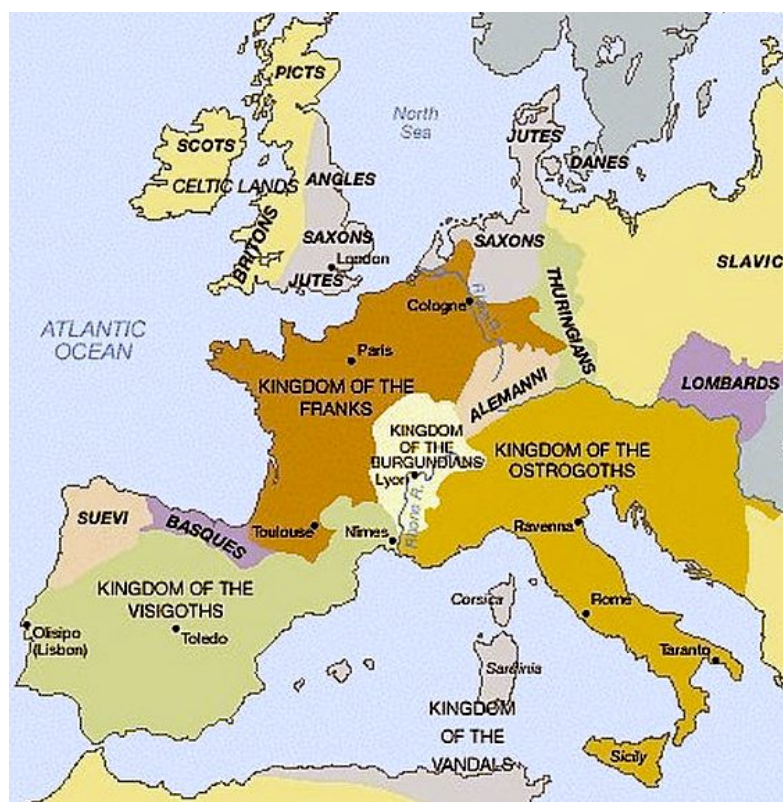
<https://warfarehistorynetwork.com/2015/10/05/the-gothic-wars-battle-of-adrianople/>

Aided by a Roman Gothic auxiliary unit that changed sides, as well as, many runaway slaves, both Gothic and non-Gothic, the Visigoth rebels wiped out the regional Roman command. The Eastern Roman emperor Valens entered Thrace in 378 with his grand Imperial army to crush the ragtag Visigoths once and for all. The two sides met at Andrianople. Again, the Romans miscalculated. Expecting they would only be fighting a Visigothic infantry trying to protect their families at their usual defensive circle of wagons, Valens and his generals were shocked when a strong force of Ostrogothic heavy cavalry unexpectedly appeared and struck hard at their flanks.

At the charge of the Ostrogoths, the Visigoths rushed from their defensive positions to attack the Roman front. The force of Ostrogothic charge rolled up the flanks while the Visigoths beat at the front. Emperor Valens and most of his grand Imperial army perished that day in a battle that many scholars have felt marked the beginning of a new era for Europe.

Proud Rome was weakened. No longer could the “barbarians” be driven out or subdued. Heavily armored cavalry became the ascendant military force. The transition to the feudal Europe of the Middle Ages had begun. Rome itself would be sacked by the Goths in 410 CE. A year later the Burgundians and Alans cracked the Roman border and formed a kingdom on the left bank of the Rhine. Forty years after Adrianople the Romans would have to agree to allow the Visigoths to settle in Aquatain, France, creating the Kingdom of Toulouse (418-507 CE).

At this same time in the second decade of the fifth century the Vandals and their Alan allies established themselves in Spain, capturing a fleet of ships in Spanish harbours. In 429 CE the North African breadbasket of the Roman Empire fell to the sea-borne attacks of the Vandals and Alans who established a kingdom there that endured until 533 CE. With this sea power the Vandal tribal confederation dominated the western Mediterranean. In 451 CE all the peoples of Gaul—Rhenish Franks, Visigoths, Bretons, Sarmatians, Burgundians, Gallic Saxons and Alans—would unite to stop the Huns. The western coalition was successful and within two years the Hunnish empire collapsed and its remaining forces retreated to the east. In 455 CE the Vandals and Alans from North Africa sacked Rome.



Gothic Europe 500 CE

<https://sangreality.weebly.com/links--maps.html>

The final remnants of the western Roman Empire faded away with a whimper in 476 CE. Ostrogothic Theodoric the Great established his Kingdom of Italy (497-555 CE). The Visigoths established another kingdom in Spain at Toledo (568-711 CE), which lasted until the Arab invasion.

While all these southern kingdoms of the Goths and associated peoples did not have a long lasting influence in the Mediterranean world—beyond shattering Roman power in the west—their impact, however, on Northwestern and Nordic Europe would be more permanent and profound.