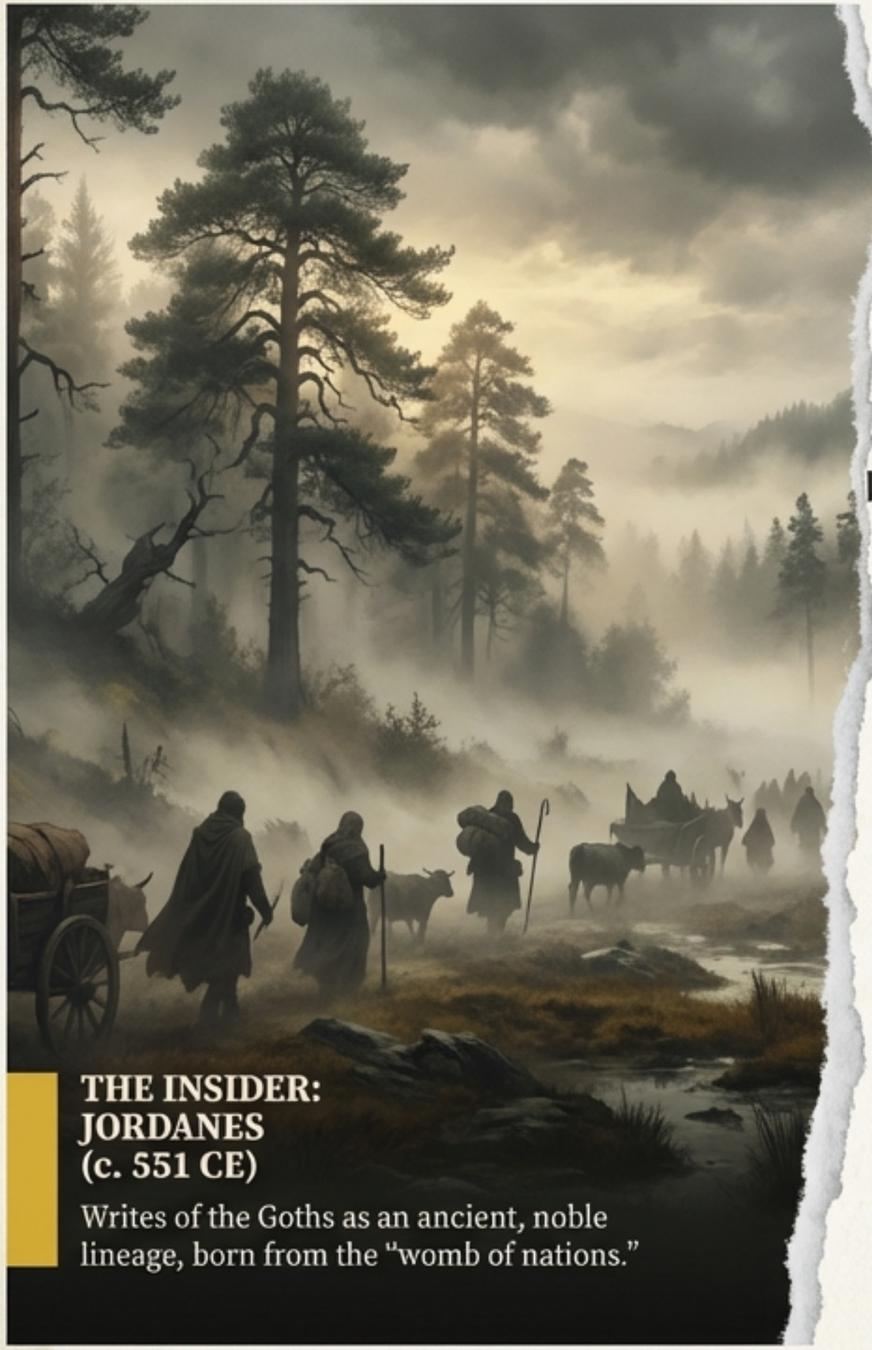


THE INSIDER: JORDANES (c. 551 CE)

Writes of the Goths as an ancient, noble lineage, born from the "womb of nations."

THE STORM AT THE DANUBE

How the Goths Broke Rome:
A collision of myth, migration, and military catastrophe (376–378 AD)

How the Goths Broke Rome:
A collision of myth, migration, and military catastrophe (376–378 AD)



THE OUTSIDER: AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS (c. 390 CE)

Writes of the Goths as a terrifying refugee crisis and the "wrath of Mars" that shattered the frontier.

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Scandza: The Womb of Nations

Source: Jordanes, *Getica*

THE ORIGIN

From the island of Scandza, described by Jordanes as a "hive of races or a womb of nations," the Goths burst forth like a swarm of bees.

THE JOURNEY

Led by King Berig, they migrated from the Arctic north—where the sun appears for 40 days in summer—to the rich lands of Scythia.

THE SEPARATION

Upon entering the land of Oium, the bridge collapsed behind the vanguard. Half the army was stranded, separated by quaking bogs, forever splitting the people.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

Jordanes claims they were "wiser than other barbarians," taught philosophy, logic, and astronomy by learned men like Zeuta and Dicineus.



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The Blood of Heroes: Amali and Balthi

The Royal Lines of the Divided Goths.

THE ANCIENT STOCK

THE AMALI (Ostrogoths)

The Eastern Goths. Renowned for noble birth and empire-building.

Hermanaric
("The Alesander of the North")

Valamir

Theodoric
(Future King of Italy)

THE BALTHI (Visigoths)

The Western Goths. "Baltha" means "The Bold." Known for daring valor.

Fritigern
(Leader of the Thervingi)

Alaric
(Future sacker of Rome)

> *"They string Armenian bows with Getic cords."*
>
> — Lucan (cited by Jordanes)

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The Scourge of God: Arrival of the Huns



THE MYTH

Born from Gothic witches (Haliurunnae) exiled to the wilderness, mating with unclean spirits to spawn a "stunted, foul and puny tribe."

THE REALITY

Ammianus describes "two-legged beasts" with shapeless lumps for heads.



Tactics: Fighting from a distance with bone-tipped missiles, using lassoes to entangle enemies at close range.

Lifestyle: No buildings, no cooked food, an infinite thirst for gold.

IMPACT: The "Wrath of Mars"—a force moving not for settlement, but for pure plunder.

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The Great Displacement

The Domino Effect of the Hunnic Advance

THE THERVINGI (Visigoths)

Ruled by Athanaric.

Athanaric attempts a defensive wall but is outflanked. He retreats to the highlands. The majority of the populace flees south.

THE GREUTHUNGI (Ostrogoths)

Ruled by Hermanaric.

Unable to face the "sudden storm," King Hermanaric commits suicide. The tribe retreats to the Dniester.

THE ALANI

Nomadic people near the Don. Defeated and co-opted.

Huns



Dniester

Don River

Danube River

THE ALANI

Nomadic people near the Don. Defeated and co-opted.

THE DANUBE BORDER

Starving and terrified, the Gothic mass arrives at the Roman frontier.



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The Crossing: Rome Opens the Gates (376 AD)

Phase 1
The Petition



Leaders Fritigern and Alavivus petition Emperor Valens. They promise auxiliary soldiers in exchange for land in Thrace.

Phase 2
The Calculation



Valens sees a goldmine:

1. New recruits to fight Persia.
2. Gold revenue from landowners paying tax instead of providing levies.

Phase 3
The Disaster



The river is swollen from rains. Ammianus compares the uncountable multitude to “sparks from Aetna.” Officials try to count them and fail. Many drown in the panic.

CRITICAL ERROR

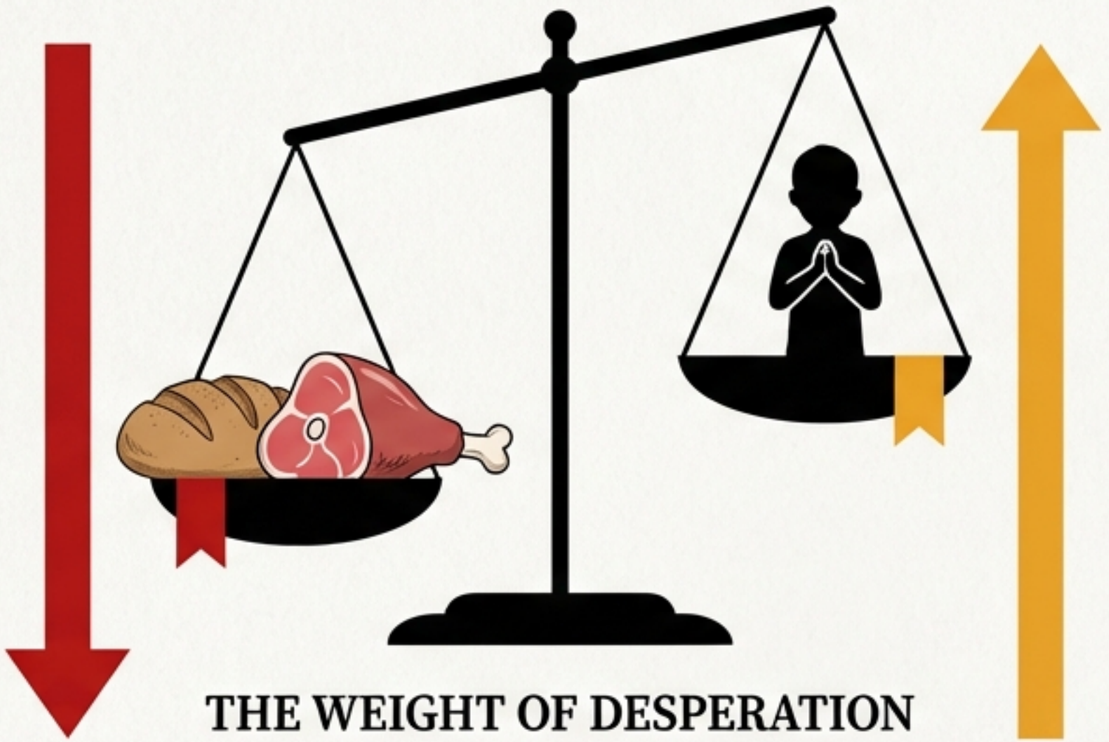
The Greuthungi (under Alatheus and Saphrax) are refused entry, but secretly cross on rafts while the Romans are distracted.

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A Dog for a Slave: The Economics of Betrayal

THE VILLIANS

Roman commanders Lupicinus and Maximus. Ammianus writes: “Treacherous greed was the source of all our evils.”



THE WEIGHT OF DESPERATION

THE EXCHANGE RATE

Romans cornered the market, selling dog meat for Gothic children.

- Price: One slave (a son or daughter) for one loaf of bread or ten pounds of meat.

“Better to lose liberty than life.” — Jordanes

The Goths are no longer “strangers and pilgrims” but a starving army inside the walls.

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The Banquet at Marcianopolis

The Spark of Rebellion

THE TRAP

Lupicinus invites Gothic leaders Fritigern and Alavivus to a feast. Outside, starving Goths are barred from the market.

THE MASSACRE

A riot starts outside. Lupicinus orders the Gothic honor guard slaughtered inside the palace.



THE ESCAPE

Fritigern draws his sword to “calm the mob” and rides away to his army.

THE DECLARATION

Peace with walls, war with the land.

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The Fire Spreads Through Thrace

Total War and the Coalition of the Oppressed



THE CARRAGO
(Wagon City)

THE COALITION GROWS

- The Goths are joined by the marginalized of Rome:
  - Escaped slaves;
  - Gold miners unable to pay taxes;
  - Starving peasants acting as guides

TACTICS



- Battle of Ad Salices (The Willows): A bloody stalemate. Romans use tortoise formation; Goths use fire-hardened clubs. The field is left covered in “bones of the slain.”



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The Hubris of Valens



VALENS (EAST)

THE RIVALRY:

Gratian has just won a glorious victory in the West. Valens is "consumed with envy" and desperate for his own triumph.



GRATIAN (WEST)

THE INTEL FAILURE

Roman scouts report the Gothic force is only 10,000 strong. A gross underestimation.

THE FATAL DECISION

Gratian sends a letter: "Wait for me. I am coming." Valens' courtiers urge immediate attack to claim sole glory.

August 9, 378 AD. Valens marches from Hadrianopolis.

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August 9: The Gathering Storm

The Physical Conditions of the Battlefield



THE MARCH

The Roman army marches 8 miles in blazing summer sun.



THE THIRST

Soldiers are exhausted and dehydrated before the battle begins.



THE BLUNDER

Roman skirmishers launch an unauthorized, premature attack while Fritigern plays for time, waiting for his cavalry.

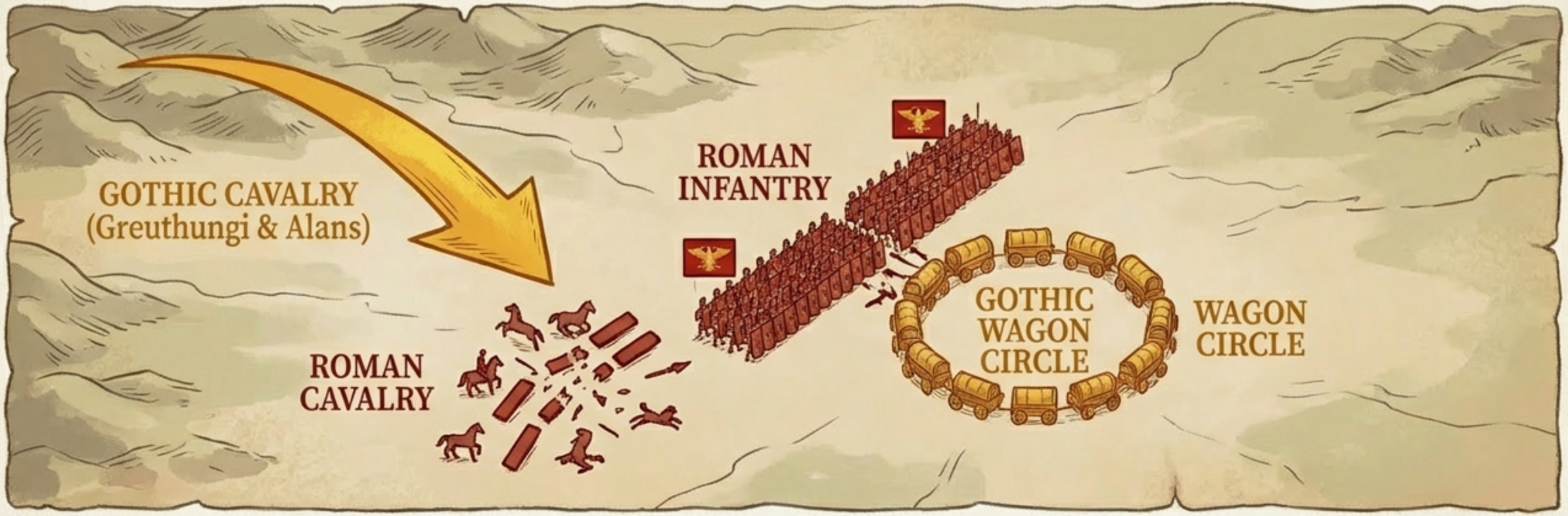


THE SMOKE

Goths light fires in the fields to choke the Romans and obscure visibility.

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The Thunderbolt: Alatheus and Saphrax Arrive



THE SURPRISE

Just as the infantry engages, the Greuthungi cavalry returns from foraging.

THE METAPHOR

Ammianus: “Descending like a thunderbolt near high mountains.”

THE IMPACT

The Gothic cavalry smashes into the Roman left wing. The Roman cavalry is swept away, exposing the infantry flank.

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The Killing Field



THE CRUSH

Soldiers are pressed so tightly they “could not pull out their swords or draw back their arms.”

THE CARNAGE

Spears shatter. Men fight with broken weapons. The ground is slippery with blood.

THE VERDICT

Ammianus records “no such massacre” since the Battle of Cannae.

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The Death of an Emperor



THE IRONY

Valens, who had “burned” the Goths with false promises and greed, perishes in flames.



THE TOLL

35 Tribunes, the commanders Trajanus and Sebastianus, and two-thirds of the Eastern field army dead.

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Epilogue: The New Masters of Italy



Hadrianopolis. The Goths roam the empire at will.

Alaric (Balthi) sacks Rome.

Theodoric (Amali) becomes King of Italy.

The ‘Womb of Nations’ had birthed the end of the Classical World. The Goths had proven Jordanes’ claim: a noble, martial race that Rome could not enslave, only succumb to.

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