



Comment

# Historicizing Migration and Displacement: Learning from the Early Roman Empire in the Time of the Nation-State. Response to Lachenicht, Susanne. Learning from Past Displacements? The History of Migrations between Historical Specificity, Presentism and Fractured Continuities. *Humanities* 2018, 7, 36

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**Abstract:** My response to Susanne Lachenicht's thought-provoking article is a brief attempt to take up her call to write histories that lead not to absolute certainties but to more understanding of the complexities of the past. I focus on documentation, border control, and citizenship in the Early Roman Empire to illustrate some of the radically different ways these were conceptualized and practiced in a premodern multiethnic empire like Rome than in a contemporary nation-state today. Passports, for example, and border control as we know it, did not exist, and migration was not tied to citizenship status. But the account I offer is deliberately tentative and full of qualifications to emphasize the real methodological challenges the study of this subject poses on account of fragmentary literary and material records and the numerous difficulties of interpreting these. I conclude by pointing out both the benefits and the limitations of framing history as a discipline from which one can learn. On the one hand, understanding how seemingly universal categories such as 'citizen' and 'migrant' are dynamic and constructed rather than static and natural can nuance public debates in nation-states which receive high numbers of migrants (like Germany, Lachenicht's starting point) by countering ahistorical narratives of a monolithic and sedentary identity. On the other hand, knowledge of the past does not necessarily lead to moral edification.

**Keywords:** Early Roman Empire; mobility; displacement; passports; border control; migration; citizenship; documentation; nation-state

In her contribution to this volume, Susanne Lachenicht takes as her starting point discussions across German society about migration following the migrant 'wave' of 2015, and asks what we can learn from past migrations.<sup>1</sup> She draws from her own area of expertise, Early Modern Europe, to illustrate the complexities of looking to past migrations as a means of understanding contemporary phenomena. As a demonstrative exercise, she highlights some of the reasons for human movement in the past: political, social, economic, religious, and environmental, which she points out are all also causes for movement today. In so doing, she rightly cautions against easy equivalencies despite apparent parallels, and she warns against presentist historiography. One of her forceful conclusions is

<sup>1</sup> "... can we understand present migrations through their historical 'making'? Can we compare present migrations with other, past migrations? And what can we learn from this?" (Lachenicht 2018, p. 1). On the salience of aquatic metaphors and their implications, see (Jewell 2019) in this volume.

a call for critical, nuanced, and self-reflexive historical inquiries that do not necessarily lead to absolute certainties, but that lead to *more* understanding about the complexities of migration and to what is specific and what is universal (Lachenicht 2018, p. 9).

My response to Lachenicht will focus on my own area of knowledge, the early Roman empire, and will concentrate on three *differences* between the Roman and modern worlds:—to documentation, to border control, and to citizenship—to illustrate the fact that these very concepts (and the attitudes towards them) are *not* universal but rather historically specific, and are thus subject to change.<sup>2</sup> This knowledge, I argue, empowers us to play an active role in their transformation. At the same time, I will emphasize the challenges the study of ancient mobility poses and conclude by underscoring the difficulties (and indeed dangers) of framing history as a didactic discipline that is morally edifying or from which we can learn anything at all.

There is now a general consensus that mobility in Ancient Rome was a historical fact.<sup>3</sup> Still, defining migration, establishing precisely who moved and in what numbers, and determining the distances people tended to migrate in the early empire are all difficult tasks and the subject of heated scholarly debate.<sup>4</sup> The primary literary evidence spans multiple genres from satiric poetry to legal texts, while the material evidence ranges from epigraphy to bio-archaeology, and every form of evidence presents unique challenges to the scholar, who ideally must have mastery over all. Moreover, as Lachenicht herself points out, the very language, concepts, and categories that we use are anachronistic: ‘migration’, ‘mobility’, and ‘displacement’, although all Latinate, have a different semantic range today to their Latin analogues. Thus, any treatment of the subject should be sensitive to the actual vocabulary of human movement used during the period of study—in my case that of the early Roman empire—especially because this will more accurately reflect conceptions, attitudes, and experiences than our own presentist language.<sup>5</sup>

What emerges from a survey of primary and secondary scholarship on mobility and displacement in Rome is that, unlike modern nation-states, there were no systematic, uniform, universally-enforced laws governing human circulation, and any laws or norms that did exist were not static.<sup>6</sup> There were a variety of rules and regulations and documents, but these were inconsistently enforced, often on an *ad hoc* basis when the need arose. Moreover, unlike today, it was not only the state who controlled or regulated mobility; social networks and social institutions (‘private’ or ‘civilian’ people and groups) played an important role.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Our own conceptions are sourced in assumptions linked with realities exerted by the nation-state, ideas simply not applicable to a pre-modern empire like Rome (Moatti 2004; Moatti and Kaiser 2007).

<sup>3</sup> As opposed to older models of a geographically limited, purely ‘face-to-face’ society. Horden and Purcell’s (2000) ideas of connectivity are the pillars of this debate; de Ligt and Tacoma’s (2016) introduction surveys the history of the study of migration especially with respect to Rome, and includes discussions of demographic data. Also valuable are the introduction and second chapter in (Isayev 2017a) (especially for ancient Italy); (de Ligt and Tacoma 2016), who trace and outline the scholarly interest in migration studies over the last 25 years; and (Lo Cascio et al. 2017). Outside of Classics, see (Lucassen and Lucassen 2005; Hoerder et al. 2007; Lucassen et al. 2010). Otherwise, the work of Claudia Moatti is indispensable, especially for the study of ancient mobility and documentation.

<sup>4</sup> Difficulties include theorizing different categories and definitions of migration; determining and interpreting demographic data (e.g., the numbers of people on the move as well as their gender, ethnic, economic, and other identities); determining the reasons and nature of movement; and understanding the distances involved (regional vs. long distance movement). For a full discussion see (Tacoma 2016; Woolf 2016). For demographic data, see especially (Scheidel 2004, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> (Lachenicht 2018, p. 6) where she cautions against the dangers of presentism in historical inquiry. She points out the negative flavor of *Wirtschaftsmigrant* (‘economic migrant’) in German (‘fortune seeker’), and the differing attitudes in 1930s and 1940s Canada to ‘refugee’ (negative) versus ‘migrant’ (positive). As for the importance of studying Latin terminology, see especially (Moatti 2015), where she identifies key lexical items (e.g., *peregrinatio*, *hospes*, *viator*), discusses their definitions, and tracks their evolution as Rome transitioned from Republic to Empire. Isayev’s (2017b) study of the language of outsiders (e.g., *peregrinus*, *hospes*, *alienus* and *ignotus*) in the comedies of Plautus similarly illuminates our understanding of Roman conceptions of identity at an early stage in Roman literature. One of her observations is that “... in the same way that there is no generic term for ‘migrant’ in Republican Latin, there is also no equivalent to the English term ‘local’” (p. 142).

<sup>6</sup> (Moatti 2000, p. 928) “... aucune source, nous l’avons dit, ne suggère l’existence d’un contrôle global de la mobilité”.

<sup>7</sup> (Moatti 2013, p. 6).

Thus, for example, consider passports. In the Roman empire, there was no lexical or institutional equivalent for a single state-issued document that established a citizen's identity, proved their citizenship, and permitted them to travel, as passports do today. This does not mean that no documentation to prove identity (or citizenship) existed, only that there were multiple different ways to do so, both 'official' (or 'state-issued') and 'unofficial' (designated by one's social-network), and the documents themselves did not necessarily constitute proof.<sup>8</sup> Sherwin-White, for example, mentions the requirement for Roman citizens to register their children at birth, upon which they received a wooden diptych as a certificate of citizenship. But this law was introduced by Augustus as late as 4 CE, and both Sherwin-White and Gardner's work underscore the unreliability of such documents.<sup>9</sup> Similarly with movement: there was no *one* specific document that 'permitted' a free person from within the empire to move in the empire, although there were a variety of documents that might be used depending on the identity of the person and the nature of their travel.<sup>10</sup>

This does not mean there was an absence of regulation or control; only that its reasons and modes differed from those today. Thus, although free people were able to move reasonably freely within the empire without ever having to produce 'documentation' such as passports or 'migration papers', nevertheless there were restrictions, and the exceptions tell us something important about the Roman world. The four most controlled categories of people in terms of movement were the elite, whose movement was regarded by the imperial government with suspicion, if not trepidation;<sup>11</sup> the military, who went where it was ordered; merchants, whose movement the government had a special interest in regulating to guarantee receiving taxes and customs,<sup>12</sup> and enslaved peoples, whose status meant that they were considered goods to be circulated at the will of their owners rather than humans with volition and agency. The elite and soldiers were by definition citizens; slaves, of course, were not. Merchants could be either.<sup>13</sup>

This list highlights the fact that in the Roman political system, control of movement was not divided along a binary axis of citizen and alien (as is the case in (and between) nation-states today): rather, control was contingent on *status*. In this light it is from our perspective ironic that non-elites, provided they originated from within the confines of the empire and were not soldiers, slaves, or merchants, could in principle move throughout the empire without molestation, controls, obstacles, or surveillance. Freedom of movement was thus not restricted by nationality, ethnicity, religious belief, or linguistic group, but by social status and financial limitations or logistical factors.<sup>14</sup> Conversely, this also meant

<sup>8</sup> Examples of 'private' documentation linked with one's social network: private letters of recommendation; tokens between parties that identify one another (the *tesserae hospitalis*, in Greek called *σύμβολα*); business contracts; and an oral declaration (the *professio*). Identity could also be determined by distinctive external clues such as clothes or jewelry (Moatti 2000, p. 929). For birth certificates, see (Schulz 1942).

<sup>9</sup> (Sherwin-White 1973, p. 316; Gardner 1988). Gardner argues that documents themselves did not constitute the contract or proof, only evidence that a contract had been made; thus, the importance of witnesses (again, in a social-network) who can vouch for the validity of whatever a particular document might contain. Moreover, documentation was mostly important for the elite because of the public consequences (e.g., the financial or political implications) at stake in inheritance or in running for office; there was little incentive for non-elites to register or to obtain documents, and some presumably did not even know their age or citizen status. Nor is this an exclusive feature of the ancient world; my grandparents, peasants, illiterate, born in the remote highlands of Lebanon, do not know their date of birth, only the season they were born in, deduced by their parents from the flowers then in bloom.

<sup>10</sup> Tokens for travel included the *legatio libera*, a *commeatus*, or a *diploma* (for Roman officials), or a *permissum* for foreigners. See (Moatti 2000, especially pp. 938–53).

<sup>11</sup> Imperial control over elite movement was designed to minimize opportunities for the latter to conspire against the government. For the regulation of the elite, see (Drogula 2011), but also (Moatti 2000, p. 938ff); and (Tacoma 2016, p. 88).

<sup>12</sup> (Moatti 2000, p. 945ff). Outside of customs and tax, one reason merchants were regulated was to prevent disturbances that may arise in connection with the exchange of goods (Moatti 2013, p. 9): "Finances, security, and the freedom to circulate were closely linked". See also (Moatti 2006, p. 124).

<sup>13</sup> Different rules would have obtained for merchants from within versus from outside the empire, the latter who would have been subject to trade treaties between their state and Rome. On foreigners and movement in Rome, see (Moatti 2007).

<sup>14</sup> No small point: the expenses of traveling may have been prohibitive and could have effectively served as a barrier on travel.

that the elite, military, and slaves can be meaningfully grouped together as categories subject to displacement—although the quality and degree of this differs significantly.<sup>15</sup>

This brings us to the next and related point: borders. Traditionally, Roman historians believed borders served a security function—keeping ‘barbarians’ and other enemies out; recently, however, some have come to view their purpose as chiefly one of economic control.<sup>16</sup> Whichever view one adopts, it is clear that there was no uniform ‘border policy’ across the empire, and there was no administrative equivalent to border control or border police. For the most part, entry and exit into and out of cities—including Rome—was unrestricted;<sup>17</sup> within the empire itself there were no borders between provinces to supervise, police, or restrict movement<sup>18</sup> (Egypt, and port-cities, being an exception);<sup>19</sup> while the nature of the imperial frontiers depended on the particular relationship with the border-people. But even these were often soft and porous, sporadic military installations notwithstanding.<sup>20</sup> A fair characterization of the reality on the ground is that the government of the early Roman empire had controls, but these were primarily concerned with collecting taxes and preventing acts of banditry and open warfare than policing migration.

The last difference I wish to highlight pertains to citizenship.<sup>21</sup> I have mentioned above that free non-citizens could move within the empire. This is another reminder that the meaning and scope of citizenship and its privileges differ over time, and just because citizenship, migration, and displacement are linked today does not mean that this was the case in the past (or indeed that it is inevitable for this to be the case in the present). It is undeniably true that Roman citizenship was highly valuable: even when the political meaningfulness and the prestige of citizenship began to wane, citizenship nevertheless offered vital rights, including the right to due process, the right not to be tortured, and access to the grain dole.<sup>22</sup> Still, it is also important to remember that mobility was *not* contingent on citizenship—only on one’s status along the lines I outlined above. This meant that even people who were not full Roman citizens, for example those with Latin Rights, could generally move freely within the empire.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, although there were sometimes expulsions—i.e. displacements—of groups of people from Rome, and although these could be underpinned by ethnic prejudice, they were rare and not usually linked with citizenship or ‘immigration status’.<sup>24</sup> Quite the contrary: during the Republic

<sup>15</sup> The provincial elite, for example, were pressured to reside in Rome and to give up property outside of Italy, especially in their home provinces.

<sup>16</sup> For a recent return back to a more martial model, see (Symonds 2018); Moatti is a proponent for the economic control model. See (Whittaker 2004) for a variety of rich essays on the topic and (Breeze 2011) for a good overview of the debate; see also (Hirt 2019, pp. 2–3) in this volume.

<sup>17</sup> Philostratus, *Ap. T.* 4.39 tells us that there were sentries, but these did not necessarily grant or deny access to the city; quoted by (Moatti 2007, pp. 82–83); see also (Stevens 2017).

<sup>18</sup> Some border-towns had garrisons, but these were not universal and Trajan refuses Pliny’s request for a garrison (Pliny *Ep.* 10.77–8).

<sup>19</sup> cf. Tacitus *Annals* 2.59, Cassius Dio 51.17, and Strabo 2.3.5 on restrictions for entry into and exit from Egypt; also (Lewis 1983, p. 16; Sidebotham, pp. 79–81; Moatti 2000; Tacoma 2016, pp. 88–90).

<sup>20</sup> For the border as depending on the relationship with the people, see (Moatti 2006, pp. 122–24; Moatti 2013, p. 9) on the Hermunduri (who could enter Roman territory without ‘guardians’) and the Quadi (who could not), mentioned by Tacitus *Germania* 41 and Cassius Dio 72.11, 73.2.4, respectively. (Whittaker 1989, p. 104) argues that frontiers were free.

<sup>21</sup> For a classic treatment of Roman citizenship, see (Sherwin-White 1973). See also (Peralta 2019; Gray 2018) in this volume.

<sup>22</sup> By ‘political meaningfulness’ I mean the capacity to participate in political life and to meaningfully vote on, or shape, policy—necessarily restricted in a monarchic (versus a republican) system. Access to the grain dole could be one motivation for people to move to Rome and to acquire (or indeed fake) Roman citizenship, and the contingency of citizenship for receiving the dole meant that some registration must have been necessary, but it is unclear how exactly that would have functioned (Tacoma 2016, pp. 85–91). Such a (‘welfare’) benefit is one aspect of Roman citizenship that might resonate with the exclusive advantages that citizenship confers today.

<sup>23</sup> (Kremer 2006; Sherwin-White 1973, p. 329ff; López Barja de Quiroga 1998).

<sup>24</sup> Religious groups could be targeted, especially Jews and Egyptians, but these were sometimes citizens rather than immigrants (thus problematizing for us the categories of ‘Roman’ and ‘Other’). (Tacoma 2016, pp. 101–2) gives a list of the people who were sometimes expelled: “... a rather odd collection: Jews, worshippers of Isis, astrologers, philosophers, magicians, gladiators, slaves for sale, male prostitutes ...”. He concludes that “Expulsions were not directed at migration as a phenomenon, nor targeted at specific migrant groups” (104). See also the chapter on expulsion in (Noy 2000, pp. 37–47). But cf. Suetonius, who reports that Augustus set limits on the bestowal of Roman citizenship and on manumission ‘to keep the Roman people undefiled by any mixture with the filth of arrivants [*peregrini*] and of slavish blood’ (*ab omni colluvione*

and afterwards in the empire, Rome was known for having inclusive citizenship laws (certainly when compared to other ancient polities), with several instances of mass enfranchisement, culminating in the *Constitutio Antoniniana* of 212 CE, which gave full Roman citizenship to all free men in the empire, and gave free women equal rights to Roman women.<sup>25</sup>

The differences I have highlighted between early imperial Rome and the modern world should serve as a reminder of some of the ways that the very terms of the debate—the categories, structures, processes, and definitions such as citizenship, foreigner, migrant, border, displacement, traveler, tourist—that seem natural, self-evident, or inevitable today are not: they are historical, and these evolve and transform over time.

They are also cultural. Given that even the very language we use betrays the systems in which we are embedded, and that even proximate, European, Latinate languages and traditions vary wildly in the semantic range of equivalent lexical items such as ‘migrant’, it is imperative that we recognize the profound and fundamental Eurocentricity of our entire vocabulary and the framework that it reflects, and so begin to interrogate even our most basic assumptions about mobility and displacement (itself a strange euphemism). This observation in turn opens up the possibility of exciting comparative work; of exploring how non-European traditions and languages have formulated related ideas and to ask whether they even had them at all. What does membership look like in Muslim communities—especially in transnational, Muslim cosmopolitanism?<sup>26</sup> How do (or did) pastoral-nomadic societies in Central Asia or the indigenous peoples of the Americas conceptualize borders?<sup>27</sup> And how about citizenship and community for those whom contemporary systems forget, ignore, marginalize, or erase: the stateless, the interned, and those who live in the limbo of ‘camps’, within the nation-state but excluded from it?<sup>28</sup>

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*peregrini ac servilis sanguinis incorruptum servare populum*, *Life of Augustus* 40.3). Such statements reveal the prejudice towards outsiders that can be found throughout Roman literature, but my suspicion is that this policy here reflects specific Augustan ideology and should be seen in the broader context of his ‘conservative’ moral agenda that included regulating marriage and enforcing sumptuary laws.

<sup>25</sup> Scholars (ancient and contemporary) have debated the motives behind this; Cassius Dio 78.9 saw it as a cynical move to raise the number of taxable people. Besson (2017) has recently addressed some of these scholarly debates, and Lavan (2016) explores the numbers of enfranchisement with a sensitivity to the difficult nature of the evidence. As for the rights of citizen women, as always, these depended on social status and time period. In general, citizen women had a diminished form of citizenship and were afforded what today we might call private rather than public rights. Their ability to participate in political or civic life, whether in the Republic or Empire, was restricted; they were never allowed, for example, to vote or hold office, but they could perform (important) religious functions, some of which had political implications (for example the Vestal Virgins). Women were also not entitled access to the grain dole, given that this was restricted to citizen men. On the other hand, they were permitted (independent) legal action, could own property, conduct business, and travel. For the rights of women, see especially the first and fourth chapters in (Gardner 1993).

<sup>26</sup> The irony of using the Classical term ‘cosmopolitan’ here is not lost on me. Examples of productive avenues of exploration are the concept of the ‘*ummah*’ (sometimes translated as ‘nation’, but really the Muslim community)—whether in the Quran or Muslim theorists like Al-Farabi—and to consider its interface with the nation-state here (Orwin 2017) is especially rich. On Muslim cosmopolitanisms, see (Maclean and Ahmed 2012); for a subtle historiography about Islamic cosmopolitanism (particularly contact between the Indian subcontinent and Central and West Asia), see (Alavi 2015); for Southeast Asian Muslim Cosmopolitanism, see (Aljunied 2017).

<sup>27</sup> The sedentary~nomadic binary itself is an artificial, often rhetorical framework formulated by the ‘sedentary’ to describe and define ‘Other’ societies, despite the fact that sedentary civilizations too are fundamentally characterized by migration and movement (one need only think of merchants—or, today, academics). Still, this binary persists in historical and ethnographic texts from around the pre-modern world; in Herodotus’ *Histories*, the Scythians in Book 4 are highlighted (and Othered) for their nomadism—despite the fact that he himself was famously itinerant. In the medieval Arabic world, Ibn Khaldun’s theory of civilization is constructed along a similar sedentary~bedouin binary, and he too does not see himself as ‘nomadic’ despite the fact that he moved throughout the Islamic world from Spain, throughout North Africa, and in the Levant. On Ancient China and its Northern ‘barbarians’ (especially the nomadic Xiongnu), see Sima Qian’s *Shi Ji* 110 and (Di Cosmo 2002). As an example of Comanche borders and empire, see (Hämäläinen 2008, pp. 3–4) (thanks to Adam Spry for this reference).

<sup>28</sup> For the notion of ‘campzanship’, see (Sigona 2015), with bibliography. On Palestinian camps, see (Dalal 2017; Maqusi 2017) in this special issue. According to the (UNRWA 2019), as of 1 January 2019, there are 475,075 registered Palestine refugees in Lebanon, half of whom live in camps—many since their expulsion from their homeland in 1948. Because they are not legally recognized citizens of any state, their rights in Lebanon are hugely restricted, including the right to own property or to work in a profession of their choice (<https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon>). In Bangladesh, over 900,000 Rohingya, a Muslim ethnic minority expelled from their homeland of Myanmar, are now stateless and live in camps, including the world’s largest (UNHCR 2019). More recently, the removal in Assam of almost 1.9 million people from the National Register



In dispossessing ourselves of the illusion that the contemporary configuration is the only possibility, and in realizing that the categories we think in are features of a very specific world—*our* world, the world of the nation-state—we are forced to recognize that because all of these are historical, *all* are subject to transformation. We thus become free to study, analyze, and dream up other possibilities, and to take active, conscious part in determining how these concepts and frameworks can evolve. History thus can inspire us to imagine, and empower us to work toward, an alternative world, one that is informed by our understanding of the past.

This is especially crucial at a moment when the future of the nation-state is unclear: what looked like a clear trajectory towards globalization and transnationalism in the 90s has now been replaced with anxieties at the resurgence of ethno-nationalism and alarm at its implications for ethnic minorities and migrants the world over. In the context of Lachenicht's circumscribed framing (debates about migration in German society, which stemmed chiefly from anxieties about Muslim and African migrants), the study of Roman history can inform attitudes and indeed policies towards the EU, Schengen, and migration by challenging narratives that wish to draw cultural or migratory boundaries around Europe, since movement and exchange between Europe, North Africa, and West Asia—in *all* directions—have been ancient, continuous, and integral.<sup>29</sup>

Tacitus' *Germania*, for example, provides us with a perspective that challenges contemporary assumptions about any innate qualities that make Germany a desirable target for migrants by scoffing at the idea that anyone from Italy, North Africa or the Middle East would ever move there: "Furthermore, apart from the danger of the terrifying and unknown sea, who would have left behind Asia or Africa or Italy to seek Germany, hideous in its lands, harsh in its climate, depressing to cultivate and to look at—unless it is one's homeland?"<sup>30</sup>

Roman history also teaches us that *everybody* is a migrant, and that nobody is exempt from anti-migrant rhetoric: once upon a time, Germanic tribes, too, were considered barbarians, roving migrants at the gates of civilized Rome—and long held by scholars to have been the cause of its fall. Later, in the medieval period, came the *Ostsiedlung*: the settling of Eastern and Central Europe, from Estonia to Romania, by Germanic-speaking peoples from the Holy Roman Empire. Ideally, this kind of historical knowledge—indeed, historical consciousness—should favorably inflect attitudes to migrants today and temper vitriolic rhetoric against us.<sup>31</sup>

But although it is tempting to look to the past for help navigating contemporary problems, and although history can help us understand the differences between the specific and the general,

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of Citizens of India (on the pretext of not having the requisite documentation proving citizenship) has rendered them effectively stateless. These examples illustrate the limits of associating identity with citizenship and invite us to consider how the stateless and those living in the limbo of camps might define membership.

<sup>29</sup> Here I draw from (Lachenicht 2018, pp. 6–7) ideas about fractured continuities—specifically the ways people relate themselves to the past and re-inscribe themselves into its scripts, and am proposing a critical approach to narratives that frame Germans as sedentary non-migrants, or that view contemporary boundaries around Europe as monolithic, self-evident, or historical.

<sup>30</sup> *Quis porro, praeter periculum horridi et ignoti maris, Asia aut Africa aut Italia relictæ Germaniam peteret, informem terris, asperam caelo, tristem cultu adspectuque, nisi si patria sit?* Tacitus, *Germania* 2. 'Cultu' here can refer to agriculture (as I have translated it), but also to culture proper (the distinctive ideas, customs, and behavior of a people; see OED 7a). From Tacitus' Roman senatorial perspective, both are pathetic. Although I speak of *Germania* as 'Germany', note that we should be wary of equating the two, in part because this conflation gives the false impression of a cohesive people or a continuous, unified nation. See (Goffart 2006; Krebs 2011), cited below.

<sup>31</sup> For Germanic tribes and the fall of Rome, see for example (Ward-Perkins 2005). I am thinking here of the *Völkerwanderung* (the 'Migration Period'); the Visigothic sack of Rome in 410 under Alaric I; and the Vandal migration to North Africa (pointedly, a reversal of the directionality of migration today). For an overview, see (Halsell 2007); on the complexities of Roman (and Vandal) identities in the aftermath of the fall of Rome (Conant 2012); on the representation of Barbarian kings and kingdoms (Ford 2020). Our literary evidence comes almost exclusively from classical sources such as Tacitus and Procopius; the study of Roman history thus teaches us how to evaluate these literary portraits as constructs that reflect the specific rhetorical strategies of their authors and their cultural prejudices. Sensitive analysis of these sources in general is important in light of their (mis)use in the construction of national narratives at the dawn of the nation-state, and especially so for their centrality to German nationalism and, later on, Nazi ideology, for which see (Goffart 2006; Krebs 2011) respectively (the latter especially for the reception of Tacitus' *Germania*).

the conceptualization of history as a didactic enterprise is highly problematic. I have already indicated above just how difficult it is to speak with any certainty about so many aspects of ancient mobility, and have tried by means of my hedging, cautious language, my qualifications, and my long footnotes to drive home this point. In so doing, I have tried to issue a warning against cavalier statements about historical facts and thus to draw attention to how complicated it can be even for professional historians to derive any lessons from them.

But even when historical facts are *not* in dispute, serious questions about their utility remain. Whether to climate change or to migrancy, contemporary attitudes have shown us that people will accept whatever ‘facts’ suit their prejudices, regardless what professional historians or climate scientists assert—a salutary reminder that neither facts nor the experts who labor to share these necessarily have the power to persuade. Nor is knowledge of the past necessarily synonymous with moral edification: ‘lessons’ from history can easily be deployed by anyone also toward malignant ends. Thus, an understanding of the history of displacement does not then mean avoiding the actions that lead to it nor is it a guarantor of commitment to humane, liberal values or to social justice.<sup>32</sup> In fact, the opposite is equally possible: history, after all, has been instrumentalized to commit heinous crimes in the past, and is increasingly deployed by supremacists to justify their racist, nativist views today.

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<sup>32</sup> This applies to migrant groups who themselves are anti-migrant.

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