‘Germania omnis a Gallis Raetisque et Pannoniis Rheno et Danuvio fluminibus, a Sarmatis Dacisque mutuo metu aut montibus separatur: cetera oceanus lambit.’ Certainly Tacitus did not subscribe to the theory that the real or imagined bellicosity of the German nation was occasioned by its lack of natural frontiers, as was later to be said of the Germany of Bismarck. For Tacitus, Germany was contained to the north, west and south by natural elements: sea, mountains and rivers, and only to the east did other elements such as racial aloofness (‘mutuo metu’) provide a boundary between Germans and non-Germans. However the body of Tacitus’ *Germania* itself corroborates evidence from other sources that the opening statement of Tacitus’ work is a gross oversimplification in that Germans had settled west of the Rhine, most probably in considerable racial admixture with Celts, thus giving the lie to the aloofness and ethnic purity which both Tacitus and Caesar ascribe to those whom they describe as *Germani*. Tacitus’ inaccuracy in this matter typifies his aprioristic and Procrustean attitude towards geography as a whole, and his ethnography suffers accordingly, as was already becoming apparent in his own day. Caesar is more thorough in his method, but his interests lay in tripartite Gaul, and although *pars Belgica* was acknowledged to have a Germanic strain (see below), he did not closely concern himself with Germany as such.

Roman acquaintance with Germanic peoples very largely concerns those west of the Rhine, which was the area of greatest Germano-Roman contact in the late republic and empire, and the present article is an attempt to explore that contact and its impact upon the ethnic and political concept of Germany as it developed in history.

Caesar, like Tacitus, locates the Germans across the Rhine with such consistency that ‘qui trans Rhenum incolunt’ is almost an otiose epithet in his mention of *Germani* in *De Bello Gallico* (see I.1.3, I.28.4, I.31.5, I.37.3, II.35.1 et al.) He, like Tacitus after him, works on the basis that the Rhine divides the *Germani* from the *Belgae*, who are assumed to be Celts on the grounds that Belgica is one of the three Gauls. The Rhine-Danube boundary seems to have worked as a psychological frontier as well as a physical one, marking the edge of the civilised world and denoting those beyond it as a race apart. A century before Caesar the Cimbri and Teutones had
been recognised as non-Gallic peoples, earning the distinction of being ὄντερος ὁμοίοι (Plutarch, *Marius* 15). It was a corollary that any Germanic intrusions across the Rhine comprised a breach of natural justice, a seizure of other peoples’ *Lebensraum*, and they are so regarded by both Caesar and Tacitus, both of whom also expatiate on the Germans’ love of fighting and methods of war. These attitudes notwithstanding, it is nonetheless possible to see from both our authors that Germans had actually settled west of the Rhine consequent upon defeating and expelling the original inhabitants. Planned immigration is suggested by Caesar (*de B.G.* 1.31.5) and the same author notes that many Belgae are of Germanic stock and that their ancestors were attracted by the greater agricultural productivity of northern Gaul to migrate thither and displace the ethnic Gauls, presumably not without commingling of stock, (II.4.1). The process of ‘lay waste and displace’ is specifically mentioned as the most favoured policy in the conduct of war (VI.23.1-3), and war methods and bellicose disposition figure as major ingredients in Caesar’s contrast of Germans with Gauls (VI.11.ff) Tacitus’ picture complements Caesar’s in such matters; the German cannot be expected to prefer farm labour to the labour of war — ‘Pigrum quin immo et iners videtur sudore acquirere quod possis sanguine parari’. (*Germ.* 14).

It is perhaps a tribute to the efficacy of these policies that half a century after the imposition of Roman *imperium* the Germanic territories west of the Rhine were constituted the sub-provinces of Upper and Lower Germany, thus attesting their effective Germanisation. Upper Germany comprised what is now approximately Alsace-Lorraine, while Lower Germany included the Eifel, the Ardennes and the southern part of the Netherlands. These are territories whose ‘Germanness’ has been the subject of many disputes and wars, particularly in the present century. Trier however (Augusta Treverorum) was included in neither of these provinces, being a part of Belgica proper; for Caesar its inhabitants could only be Gauls, while Tacitus, writing somewhat more than a century later, records the ambition of the Treveri to be considered as of Germanic origin and therefore distinct from the Gauls, with the suggestion that the claim is in fact overstated (*Germ.* 28). In any case Trier is acclaimed by the present-day Germans as ‘the first German city’, whatever that is meant to mean, and is beyond any doubt the most Romanised part of all Germany. The famous Porta Nigra, the amphitheatre, and the many mosaics, inscriptions, sculptures and other finds in the Trierer Landesmuseum testify to the importance
of this town in Germano-Roman relations. If the Treveri were in fact of mixed stock, it matters above all that they were thought of, and thought of themselves, as Germans — a principle of self-determination is at work here. Work on Roman Trier is voluminous and cannot be added to here, but some other parts of Roman Germany call for comment.

Romans first met Germans of an ethnic group in the hilly country north of Trier, viz. the Eifel and the High Venn. According to Tacitus, it was in this area that the first Germanic incursion across the Rhine took place, and the Romans gave to the whole ethnic group the name of the particular tribe they found in occupation, viz. Germani (Germ. 2). Caesar had also located certain cisrhenane tribes in this region, among them the Condresi and Eburones, and it is to these tribes that he applies the collective name Germani (de B.G.II.4.10). Whereas Caesar assumes this as a gens name, Tacitus specifically says it is not so, but that of a single natio, which Romans now know as the Tungri. In any case, it is clear that the name Germani was taken certainly from a local region, viz. the Eifel, if not from a single tribe, and later generalised, the region being that in which Romans met Germans for the first time.

The matter is of interest in that the Franco-Hispanic name for the Germans, and also the common Slavic name, have similar origins, (resp. Alemanni and Nemetes), both being tribal names at the point of culture-contact — though the case of the Nemetes is more complicated, (See below). In addition the Germans’ name for themselves, viz. ‘Deutsch’, is itself not a Germanic name at all, but a name of Latin, Roman origin in ‘theodiscus’ — a form traceable also in Italian and in Swedish. This multiplicity of names points to the evident fact that the Germans prior to Roman contact had no concept of themselves as a nation, as an ethnic unity, and hence had no generic name for themselves at all. Consequently Tacitus’ (and Caesar’s) claims for ethnic exclusiveness and purity are all the more difficult to believe, and it is in fact probable that some at least of the Germani originating from the Eifel and High Venn were Celtified to a certain extent, just as some of the Belgae were Germanised. It is well known that Hitler misused the ‘Germania’ for propaganda purposes, but the extent to which the truth was distorted has not always been recognised — German nationhood is in fact not a Teutonic notion at all, but an idea born of and fostered by contact with the Roman world, the Greco-Roman civilisation, the lands west of the Rhine and south of the Danube. That is why a Blut und Boden
philosophy of the Hitlerian type can only be a rejection of that civilisation, a civilisation that was mediated to Germany as a whole over the territory west of the Rhine that was Germany to the Roman administration.

Even in the territories east of the Rhine the Germans were not free from association with Gallic peoples. Caesar records the previous incursions of Gauls eastwards across the Rhine for the same reasons as the Germans later came westwards, viz. the search for space and arable land (de B.G. VI.24.1). Tacitus endorses these remarks, acknowledging their Caesarian authorship (Germ.28) and mentioning in particular the examples of the Helvetii and the Boii. These groups are interesting in that the Helvetii, if indeed the forefathers of the German-Swiss are intended, took the language of the Germans while disowning their nationality, while the Boii were a Celtic tribe who migrated from Alsace-Lorraine and the Pfalz, where the local German tribe was called the Nemetes, right across Bavaria to the mountain-enclosed diamond-shaped area to which they gave their name: ‘Manet adhuc Boihaemi nomen significatque loci veterem memoriam, quamvis mutatis cultoribus’. (Germ. 28). Already by Tacitus’ time the Boii had been displaced and Bohemia occupied by the Germanic tribe of Marcomannii, later to be followed by Goths, Huns and Slavs, and later still by ethnic Germans (Sudetendeutsche) of the Holy Roman Empire. The last-named were displaced after World War II but the present Slav population, viz. the Czechs, called the Germans Němci and the name has spread to the Slav peoples further east and to the Hungarians. Thus a tribal name from cisrhenane Germany has come to be used to denote Germans by people from quite the other side of the German world. On the subject of nomenclature it is well to recall that the English, like most other groups, also became guilty of name-confusion; they used the generic Dutch (Deutsch, Theodisk) to refer to the Germanic people of the sea-coast nearest England, but once these had established their national identity and separateness from the Germans, the English resorted to using the Latin term to designate non-Dutch Germans, with the result that English-speakers must now use Germans to indicate both die Deutschen and die Germanen, though the distinction is retained adjectivally between German and Germanic. It is not only a verbal distinction that is lost, as the growth of national consciousness correlates closely with identity-awareness as Deutsch rather than as Germanisch. It is a point that English-speakers should keep continually in mind.

In the areas mentioned, German names of Roman origin are a
continuing reminder of Roman outposts along the Rhine, and of strategic points inland, along the Roman roads that spread out from Trier like the spokes of a wheel. Starting at Lake Constance the Rhine outposts are Brigantium/Bregenz, Constantia/Konstanz, Basilia/Basel, Argentorate/Strasbourg, Noviomagus/Speyer, Borbeto-magus/Worms, Moguntiacum/Mainz, Bingum/Bingen, Confluentes/Koblenz — i.e. the confluence of the Rhine and Moselle rivers - Bonna/Bonn, Colonia Agrrippina/Cologne, Novaesium/Neuss, Noviomagus/Nijmegen. Inland we may mention, apart from Trier, Noviomagus/Neumagen in the Moselle valley, Divodurum/Metz in Lorraine, and Aquae/Aachen over the High Venn, as well as Castra Regina/Regensburg, Augusta Vindelicorum/Augsburg, Castra Batava/Passau, and Cambodunum/Kempten in Raetia, i.e. southern Bavaria, and Aquae/Baden-Baden in the Dekumatland. The last-named territory was a buffer zone enclosed by the *limes* between the upper reaches of Rhine and Danube, it was not settled or even effectively controlled by the bearers of Roman civilisation.

Further west, and outside the territory of present-day Germany, the city-state of Luxembourg and the Belgian towns of Arlon and Bastogne also have a history of Roman foundation. These and other towns were staging-posts, some of them fortress-towns, *castella*, on the Roman roads linking the main settlements. For instance, the road from Trier to Köln (Cologne) ran over the middle of the Eifel, including such stops as Vicus Beda/Bitburg, Ausave/Oos, and Icorigium/Jünkerath. Each of these towns has a stock of local lore relating to Roman times, often more legendary than historical. The remains of the Roman fort at Jünkerath have been built over with a medieval castle which is now itself a ruin, and the townspeople speak of the two indiscriminately as the Jünkerather Schloss. Three very large inscriptions have been removed from Bitburg to the museum in Trier; one of them, 80 x 60 cm. in size, records that in the year 198 A.D. one L. Amniatus Gamburio made a bequest of 50,000 sesterces for the construction of a stage and gallery, and for annual performances to take place at the end of April. It seems that Vicus Beda was not merely a roadside town but also a place of Roman colonial settlement, with a Roman sophistication about it. The remaining inscriptions are even larger in size and some fifty years later in date; they concern other buildings, including a massive fire-signalling tower. As Bitburg stands in the hollow of an open plain, this would have had considerable range. Three miles north of the town there are extensive remains of a lavish villa at Weilerbusch,
otherwise called Otrang. Several mosaics in good repair, a large bathhouse, and a well-preserved calefactory system are the most interesting features. Detailed reconstructed models are on view both in situ and in Trier, and a fair idea of the grandeur of the original can be obtained. Other, less extensive, finds occur elsewhere in the Eifel, but little systematic work has been done on most of them. The Prussian monarchy, which ruled the Eifel prior to 1871, patronised local excavations to some extent, and the German Imperial Government did the same, establishing in 1901 a Roman-German Commission within the Imperial Archaeological Institute. But most of the literature is in almost inaccessible journals, including the Korrespondenzblatt of the Commission first issued in 1908 and in 1917 renamed Germania.

The political history of this territory can be known only in fragments, but it seems that the only events of significance were the uprising of the Treveri in 29 B.C. and the revolt of the Batavi in 69-70 A.D. in the Rhine delta, before the Roman peace which lasted unbroken for nearly 200 years. From Tacitus’ mention (Germ. 29) it seems that the Batavi had never taken kindly to Roman overlordship, and the discontent resulted in a war that Mommsen could describe as one of the strangest and most horrible of all time. However the Batavi seem to be the only Germanic group to have rebelled against Roman imperium once established, and once the revolt had been put down the ensuing Pax Romana was scarcely even disturbed for Germanic subjects of the Empire by the breakaway Gallic empire of M. Cassianus Latinius Postumus, proclaimed ‘Restitutor Galliarum’ in 259 A.D. Postumus’ empire, though supposedly an anti-German Gallic league, was really rather an anti-Roman Gallic nationalist movement, and Postumus too wooed German support – hence ‘Germanicus maximus’ appears on his coins. Trier was the capital of the Gallic empire, which extended as far as Köln and Mainz. Postumus died in 269, and a later successor, Tetricus, returned to the suzerainty of Rome, now governed by the Emperor Aurelian, in 274. Shortly after, Gaul was overrun by Germani, and we see the beginnings of the unrest that in the late fourth century caused Roman control to be lost in the turmoil of the great Germanic Volker-wanderungen. It is remarkable that whereas, as stated, Germano-Celtic racial interpenetration took place, neither ethnic group was greatly affected by Roman admixture, as far as we can judge.

Yet the Roman civilisation persisted, leaving its mark in, among
other things, language and religion. In the modern German language, as well as the obvious and undisguised borrowings from the classical tongues, many seemingly native vocabulary items are in fact of Latin derivation, such as Fenster/fenestra, Wagen/vehiculum and Strasse/stratum. Also, the place-name ending -weiler, which derives from the late Latin villaris-e, an adjectival formation from villa, is found in just those areas where there was Roman settlement, viz. around Trier, and in a cluster in mid-Eifel, e.g. Kirchweiler, Hinterweiler, Dockweiler, Oberscheidweiler and the previously mentioned Weilerbusch. In religion, it is undeniable that it was a Roman form of Christianity that came to Germany, and further that ‘Ohne die Mittlerrolle des grossen römischen Weltreiches hätte das Christentum hier niemals Fuss fassen können’ (H.W. Werner). To say that the Roman idea of Empire was the mediator of Christianity is not to put the case too strongly, as German, as distinct from Germanic, national feeling began with the Holy Roman Empire, which Germans often prefer to know as ‘das heilige römische Reich deutscher Nation’. It was holy in that it was Christian (Though these do not always mean the same thing), and though an empire in only the broadest sense, it gave to Germanic peoples a sense of political identity dictated by a Roman pattern, thus making them Germans in the sense of Deutsch rather than Germanisch. This, plus the tradition of Christianity itself, seem to comprise Rome’s greatest influence in the formation of the idea of Germany. And it may be no coincidence that to this day the most Catholic, and thus in a sense the most Roman, parts of Germany remain the Eifel and the district of Trier, and rural Bavaria — areas most directly exposed to Roman settlement and influence.

‘The idea of Germany’ may seem to some a dangerous phrase. It has twice this century proven a most dangerous idea. Yet a multiplicity of German states is possible, cf. not only the present division of Germany but also the undeniably German state of Austria. And it is still possible to be Germanic without being German, cf. the German-Belgians, Luxemburgers, Alsatians, Lothringer and the German-Swiss. It is a simple lesson of history that ethnic, cultural and political frontiers need not, and often do not, coincide.
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Works on the subject of German ethnic history published between 1933 and 1945 should be treated with reserve in view of the political distortions of that period. Norden, however, is an exception. Though his later work was published at a difficult time, it was the outcome of earlier philological researches; the author strove to be scholarly and objective.