Ancient Germanic Warriors

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TO ANTHONY BIRLEY IN FRIENDSHIP

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PREFACE

Iron Age warriors, shapers of Europe, first came to my mind on a cold winter day in 1948 when my twin brother and I crossed frozen Lake Greifensee in Switzerland. As we came through the fog to the far shore, the ruins of Fort Irgenhausen rose before us. The walls, so a sign said, were Roman. We gasped at the depth of time, wondering about Romans who had lived in heated buildings and banished the frost that bit our fingers. We wondered too about the Alamanni outside the fort, shivering and howling in the woods—*ferum ululantes et lugubre,* as Ammianus gives to understand—but who in their turn became lords of the land.

My scholarly interest in ancient warrior styles awoke years later when I saw that the reliefs in scene 36 of Trajan's Column show the men nearest the emperor to be bare-chested and barefooted, followed by club-wielders, wolf- and bear-warriors, and wearers of crossband helmets—all representing Germanic, not Roman, warrior styles. Trying to understand these warrior styles, to trace them in the ancient sources, and to see them in the context of world history, took ten years of work.

War is anguish and must not be idealized. Yet it also leads to some of mankind's most intense outbursts of life—it is hard not to be stirred by the daring and ecstasy of Iron Age warriors.

Mt. Tantalus and Maleakahana,
Honolulu, Summer 2003

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Ever-generous Idus Newby, Professor Emeritus and former Chair of the History Department at the University of Hawaii, turned my phrases as he did with *Riding for Caesar*. Gisela, my wife, shared in this as in all my quests; we traveled together in search of sources to the far corners of the earth from Iceland to Fireland, and in countless conversations and manuscript readings she straightened the lines of reasoning.

INTRODUCTION

Ancient warrior styles

Archaic warriors everywhere re-enacted in masked dances the deeds of gods and ancestors. They did so to gain the divine ecstasy of "the beginning of time." Germanic warriors too danced in this way. In battle, when it mattered most to live in mythical time, warriors bodied forth gods and ancestors by fighting in their style.[1]

Batavi going to battle sang of "Hercules," their ancestral, club-wielding hero. As the hero inspired them, one may assume that some among them fought with clubs in the hero's style. Gods and hero-ancestors no doubt were models also for wolf-warriors, long-hairs, ghost warriors, *barritus*-dancers, and naked berserks. New finds may one day tell us of the mythic models of other warrior styles as well.

Such styles upheld tribal traditions, culture, and identity. They also heartened the individual warrior: becoming greater than himself, a part of the tribe's past and future, he rose above whatever might befall him in battle. He fulfilled his role by fighting as his forefathers had done and as those after him would do.

Arising from beliefs and states of mind as well as from weapons, warrior styles manifest themselves in dress, weaponry, and fighting technique. Therein lies their fascination. As a battle leader dons a "mask of command," so warriors, in the words of Wallace Stevens, don "an inhuman person, a mask, a spirit, an accoutrement," which captures well the link between outfit and outlook that underlies warrior styles.[2]

"Styles" are a flexible, inclusive concept: some are narrowly technical, others idea-bound, and all shade into others: wolf-warriors might go berserk, shield warriors wield clubs, and long-hairs fight as horse-stabbers. It is nevertheless helpful to focus on specific styles, for it brings into view something of the looks, mind-set, and fighting techniques—and perhaps the essence—of each style.

Warrior styles have much to offer our understanding of history. They tell us how long ago, when war was still welcome, fighting men reached the state of ecstasy that led them to do astounding things.[3] They lead us into the heart of Vedic Indian, Homeric, Celtic, and Germanic civilizations, where fighting prowess was the measure of a man.[4] They link the Bronze, Iron, and Middle Ages—two thousand years of history seldom seen as belonging together. They often turned the wheel of events during these many years: wolf-warriors founded Rome in 753 BC, enthroned Emperor Constantine in AD 306, and united Norway in the battle of Hafrsfjord in AD 872; and horse-stabbers won the battle of Pharsalus in 48 BC that turned Rome from a republic into a monarchy.

Found during the Bronze Age almost everywhere in Europe and West Asia, these styles gave way among classical Greeks and Romans to "rational" warfare. In middle and northern Europe, however, warriors followed the old styles throughout the Iron Age and early Middle Ages. There one can study them in detail and trace their history.

Not that scholars have ignored these styles. Good work has been done, above all, on Indo-European warriors. But no one has treated Indo-European or Germanic warrior

styles as a whole. Though modern surveys overlook them, they are well worth studying for their great role in history and for the light they shed on the minds of men who lived so long ago.[5] Much that is offered here is new, and our study carries the risks of pioneering endeavor. Yet chances are good of winning fresh insights from a thorough reading of both Roman and Germanic evidence. Roman evidence is trustworthier than is often acknowledged—ancient writers and sculptors knew their times better than modern critics.[6] Besides, Roman evidence keeps growing: new archaeological and epigraphic sources come to light every year, widening and deepening our knowledge of Germanic warriors during the first five centuries of our era.

Germanic evidence too has grown greatly over the last decades. New embossed metal foils with seventh-century warrior images have been found, and almost a thousand bracteate (gold-leaf) amulets from the fifth and sixth centuries are now accessible in splendid photographs and drawings. These sources prove that warriors worshiped Woden and told his myths much earlier than hitherto thought; some fighting styles are thus best understood in the light of Woden worship. Ancient Germanic warrior names, authentic evidence from before the beginning of our era, underpin our knowledge of warrior styles, and since Wilhelm Grimm first treated them in 1865, new collections and studies have made them more useful still.[7] Luckily, from eighth-century *Beowulf* to thirteenth-century Icelandic sagas (and Saxo Grammaticus of Denmark), northern literary works enliven the documentary evidence.

Early cultures around the world provide further insight. In the Americas as well as Africa, warrior societies dominated archaic cultures as much as they did in Europe. Germanic warrior customs such as masked dances, and styles like berserks or wolf-warriors, find astonishing parallels world-wide that sharpen our perception and help explain otherwise little-understood customs. They also put Germanic warrior styles into the world-historical framework that is essential for understanding history in the twenty-first century.[8]

Indo-European forerunners and parallels shed an even brighter light on Germanic warrior styles. If Greeks and Vedic Indians separated as late as 1600 BC, as they may well have done, then the time gap for comparing such eastern and western Indo-Europeans as Vedic Indians and Germans is not as huge and forbidding as once feared. Indo-European history and culture are now lively fields of research. What we know of Indo-European language, myths, ideals, concepts, and institutions suggests that most Iron Age warrior styles throve already in the Bronze Age of the third millennium BC when Indo-European nations still lived together. Scholars like George Dumézil and Mircea Eliade have underpinned this view with persuasive explanations.[9] Though non-Indo-Europeans often had similar customs, language family is linked with myth, and myth with warrior styles,[10] which gives IndoEuropean parallels a particular weight. Our study of each warrior style thus begins with an outline of its Indo-European history.

The old Indo-European warrior styles lived longest and are best documented among Germanic nations of northern Europe. As neighbors, with a common language and religion, Germanic peoples shared one culture. Looking at them, as we will, from 200 BC, the date at which on current understanding Germanic culture began, to AD 1000 when Christianity transformed it, one can draw on rich sources within a strong historical frame, well-grounded in time and space.[11]

Our study focuses mainly on the first seven centuries of our era. Moreover, the bulk of the evidence bears on western and northern Germani from the Rhine and upper Danube to Denmark and Sweden. These are the peoples least changed by migration, which may explain why the picture found in the sources and offered here is so even and unitary.

Having striven to use all major Roman and Germanic sources, made my own translations, and traveled to see with my own eyes the artefacts from the Codex Regius in Reykjavik to Theodosius' Obelisk in Constantinople, I am yet aware that this study stands on how well it interprets works of art like Trajan's Column, the Gutenstein scabbard, and the Gerulata gravestone. I nevertheless trust that the wealth of literary sources gathered here gives a proper voice to the silent pictures and that my findings reflect what truly happened.

The emperor's strike force on Trajan's Column

Trajan's Column, Rome's largest and most spectacular work of art, is also our best source for ancient warrior styles. Standing 100 feet tall on level space carved out of the Esquiline Hill, the Column celebrates the conquest of Dacia, Rome's last major expansion in Europe: spiral reliefs wind up the shaft to show the world how Trajan in AD 101–106 won the new province.[12] His fighting men were not only legionaries, but also auxiliaries and allies from the borderlands, among them tribal troops from both sides of the Rhine. Portraying these men, the Column offers the most detailed images of Germanic warrior styles we have from antiquity.

The reliefs tell the story of the Dacian wars in a straightforward sequence of events. As the scenes unfold, the emperor and his army cross the Danube in the summer of 101 and march north toward the Dacian capital of Sarmizegethusa, in what is now Romanian Transylvania. There the advance stalls. Worse, to take pressure off their heartland, the Dacians and their Sarmatian allies undertake a daring counter-thrust southward, deep into the Roman province of Lower Moesia.

Learning of this, Trajan gathers his fastest troops, mainly auxiliaries and tribal troops, and rushes with them to the new theater of war. As Figure 0.1 shows, they race to the river, sail downstream, and by hurried marches come upon the enemy in Lower Moesia. There they catch and overwhelm roving, plundering bands of Dacians and Sarmatians. Then, joined by legionaries, Trajan's strike force wins the decisive battle at Adamklissi, marked to this day by the huge Tropaeum Traiani monument.

The emperor's strike force hastening to meet the enemy in Lower Moesia appears in scene 36 of the Column (Figure 0.2).[13]

In the lower part of the scene, the horsemen following the emperor wear auxiliary mailshirts, neckerchiefs, and helmets. They must be the imperial horse guard, the Equites Singulares Augusti, for emperors always took the field with their horse guard nearby. The troopers further behind may form a group of their own and be regular cavalry, unless they too are part of the horse guard. Only the emperor rides. All other horsemen have alighted and are walking—a graphic device to stress the speed of the advance, for cavalry horses on forced marches must be spelled.[14]

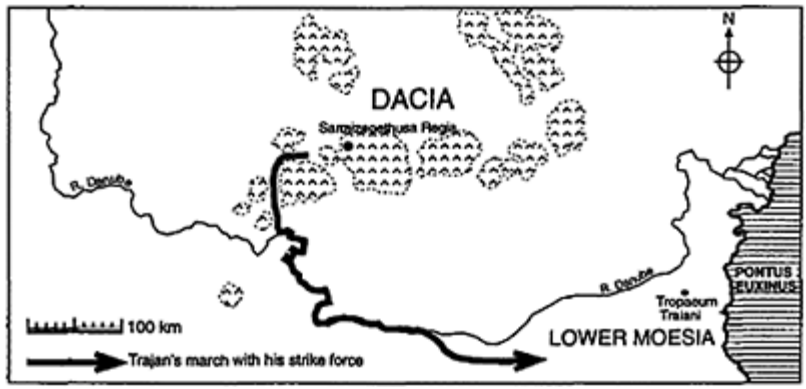

Figure 0.1 Trajan's marching route with his strike force in AD 101.

Figure 0.2 The emperor with his strike force. Trajan's Column, scene 36. Photo: Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Rome, Inst. Neg. 90250.

In the upper part of the scene, foot soldiers hurry along in two groups of eight men each. Those to the left wear standard mailshirts like regular auxiliaries. Some of them wear open crossband helmets, others bearskins or wolfskins. Those to the right, led by the emperor himself, are barefooted, bare-chested youths, followed by a man in a sleeveless shirt and a club-man. The nearness of these men to the emperor, their tribal battle dress and strange weapons catch the eye.[15] They are all fast attack troops.

Further on, scenes 37–42 (see Figures 5.2, 5.3, 7.2) show the progress and aftermath of the Lower Moesian campaign: a cavalry skirmish against Sarmatians, a night attack against booty-laden Dacians, the crucial battle at Tropaeum Traiani, and Trajan's speech to the victorious troops. The emperor's youthful, barefooted followers appear three times in these scenes but nowhere else on the Column: in scene 36 they march; in scene 40 they fight; in scene 42 they are praised. Their presence in this sequence only, hitherto overlooked, proves that scenes 36–42 belong together and depict a specific campaign, surely the one that freed Lower Moesia from invaders.[16]

The coherence of these scenes is a good reason to trust their portrayal of warriors. Even Karl Lehmann-Hartleben, the scholar who argued most strongly against historical accuracy in the reliefs, noted that scene 42, with the emperor's speech at the end of the campaign, pays greater heed to the sundry branches of the army than any other such scene on the Column. The artist, he believed, had been told to make clear which troops had won this, the bloodiest and most decisive battle of the war. One may add that scene 36, leading up to the battle, depicts even more units and in yet greater detail. The call to make clear which troops had fought at Tropaeum Traiani thus applied to all scenes from 36 through 42, from the setting out for the battle to its aftermath. Detailed, coherent, and true in their depiction of events, scenes 36–42 are a well-grounded basis for the study of tribal warrior styles.[17]

How far do the reliefs reflect the true appearance of the soldiers? Aside from a few inadvertent mistakes, the reliefs stray somewhat from historical accuracy in that for the sake of clarity they depict all legionaries in strip armor and all auxiliaries in mailshirts, while in reality some legionaries also wore mailshirts or scale armor. Likewise, in reality, Dacians often wore armor and rode on horseback, but, being enemies, are rarely thus shown on the reliefs.[18]

These are not telling inaccuracies, however, for unlike some other works of Roman triumphal art Trajan's Column, greatly to its credit, does not invent dress or equipment, nor does it change them to make them look "classical." Above all, it portrays outlandish troops in careful, realistic detail. Caftan-clad oriental bowmen as well as bare-back riding, curly haired Mauri are shown with great accuracy. Even scale-armored Sarmatians are portrayed with some correctness. The same is therefore likely to be true of Trajan's outlandish troops in scene 36.[19]

Nor does the Column indulge in the exotic. Tradition demanded that the artists depict a colorful array, eager to fight. Bhagavad Gita and Homer give a rousing roll-call of the warriors who came to the great war. Herodotus does the same for the army Xerxes led into Greece. Vergil vies with Homer and Herodotus in portraying the warriors who fought Aeneas' war in Latium. And Saxo Grammaticus lists with relish the troops who battled at Bråvalla. As for Trajan's Column, to give epic scope to the narrative of the Dacian wars, it too had to portray far-fetched, colorful tribesmen. To do so it used the agreed-upon view of northern tribesmen: tall, half-naked, long-haired, eager to fight. But

the time-worn view was also true to life, as borne out by the mass of evidence offered in the following chapters. Besides, the Roman army not only hired men who fit its stereotypes, but equipped, used, and rewarded them accordingly. In that sense, too, myth is reality.[20] Hence while the Column's exotic bias may unduly highlight some features, by and large the warriors of Trajan's strike force must have looked like the Column portrays them.

Indeed, criticism of the Column's accuracy can prove risky. Scholars have faulted the reliefs for giving horsemen oval rather than six-cornered shields, but a survey of horsemen carved on gravestones (whose reliefs are rather close to reality in such matters) shows that most of their shields were oval, just as the Column portrays them.[21] For good reasons the reliefs of Trajan's Column are our main source.

Germanic tribesmen in Roman armies

The emperor's strike force in scene 36 of Trajan's Column consists mainly of Trajan's horse guard, the Equites Singulares Augusti, his most highly trained elite troops. Trajan raised the unit himself, mainly from the Batavi and other Germanic tribes in the Roman Empire. Since his horse guard bore the name *Batavi,* as did Augustus' horse guard before them, Trajan, like Augustus, must have considered the Batavi to be what Tacitus called them: the manliest Germani. Chosen from horsemen who served in the alae, they stood above the horsemen of the cohorts in height, weaponry, skill, and prestige. Some of the horsemen in scene 36 may be meant to represent regular cavalry alae, but there is no telling to which of the many alae they belonged.[22]

It is even harder to know the units of the foot soldiers, for first-century Germanic auxiliaries of the cohorts are hard to distinguish from tribal irregulars. Scholars were right to take the men on the upper left of scene 36 to be soldiers of regular auxiliary cohorts as they wear standard mailshirts. Judged by their wolf-hoods alone, these men could be either Germani or free Celts from northern Britain. Yet by the end of the first century AD most of the allies and auxiliaries who fought Rome's battles in Europe were Germani rather than Celts. Moreover, as we will see, bear-warriors were a Germanic rather than a Celtic style, and four warriors in this scene wear crossband helmets that are related to Germanic Vendel helmets, while the bare-chested troops further to the right wear typically Germanic dress. Being warriors in bear- and wolf-hoods, yet wearing Roman cuirasses, the men could belong to such elite units as cohort I and II milliaria Batavorum. The altar at Adamklissi, on which the fallen of this campaign are listed, names the latter unit.[23]

With mixed Roman and Germanic battle gear, Trajan's soldiers in scene 36 match archaeological finds in the Roman province of Lower Germany, where forts and graves with mixed Roman and Germanic weaponry—and drinking horns—have come to light. Auxiliaries of Lower Germany were recruited on both sides of the Rhine, as shown by names like Assuarius and Halucus that derive from the tribal names Chassuarii and Chauci.[24] Although they kept some of their tribal battle gear, the men in the upper left of scene 36 are thus nevertheless likely to be regular Roman auxiliaries.[25]

Further proof of the trustworthiness of scene 36 is the portrayal of warriors wearing wolf-pelts with narrow paws as different from others wearing bear-pelts with broad paws.

Nowhere else in antiquity do we hear of wolf-warriors and bear-warriors fighting together. But in AD 872, Thorbjorn Hornklofi depicts Germanic wolf- and bear-warriors fighting side by side: they line the flagship of King Harald Fairhair of Norway in the battle of Hafrsfjord. It is astonishing to find in a work of Roman art the same two kinds of animal warriors that 800 years later stalk through a skaldic poem as *úlfheðnar* (wolf-hood wearers) and *berserkir* (bear-shirt wearers; later: any furious warrior). Hornklofi's poem shows that these two warrior styles existed together and that in this the Column portrays them accurately.[26]

To judge from their bare chests, the tribesmen in the upper right of scene 36 are likewise Germanic.[27] The foot soldiers in the middle are trousered clubmen, and a wearer of a sleeveless shirt of whom we know for certain that he is a German, for the ambassador of the Buri alliance in scene 9 of the Column wears the same kind of shirt. Both therefore belong to the same nation, no doubt the Armilausi ("The Sleeveless"), so named after their battle garb.[28]

The presence of such tribesmen does not surprise, for Germanic tribal warriors often joined imperial field armies.[29] Those depicted here were drawn from the expeditionary army of Trajan's summer campaign in Transylvania, which had just ended. This is certain for the club-men whom scene 24 shows fighting in that campaign, and it is likely for the others as well.[30]

Wearing different dress, the club-man and the man in the sleeveless shirt of scene 36 belong to different tribes. Putting sundry tribes next to each other was good tactics, for men from different tribes fighting side by side strove to outdo each other. Besides, they could fight well alongside as they shared similar warrior styles.[31]

Yet other men are the nearly naked foot soldiers farthest to the right and nearest the emperor. They seem to be Trajan's Pedites Singulares, guardsmen he had when he was governor of Roman Germany, as we will argue in the chapter on berserks.

Scene 36 underscores the light weapons, the breakneck speed, and fierceness of the troops Trajan mustered to meet the threat to Roman Moesia. The troops around him had to fight the bloodiest battle of the war. How did he choose them? He needed fast, keen, well-trained men. Caesar and Tacitus, like Trajan, considered Germanic warriors the fastest, keenest, most skillful fighters to be had.[32] And their huge frames and fierce looks cast dread into the enemy.[33] These, surely, are the reasons why Trajan chose so many Germanic troops for his strike force. The slower legionaries and praetorians, who accompanied him on the river journey and reappear for the final battle at Tropaeum Traiani in scene 40, are by design missing in the hurried overland march depicted in scene 36.[34]

The make-up of Trajan's strike force is traditional in that Romans often brigaded regular Germanic auxiliaries with irregular troops as fast and firstwave shock troops. They did this in AD 28 against the Frisians, when they sent their speediest troops, the horsemen of ala Canninefatium and irregular Germani foot, to hit the foe first, and again in AD 50 against the plundering Chatti, and again in the civil war of AD 69–70, when Batavian cohorts served as shock troops alongside tribesmen from beyond the Rhine. Batavi brigaded with other tribesmen were thus a tried and trusted combination. Even Lucanus' poetic scare of Caesar's army overrunning Rome lists "barbarian" cavalry auxilia and tribesmen from beyond the Rhine among the invader's forces.[35] There is no way of knowing how many tribesmen were in Trajan's strike force, but it would take at

least a thousand regulars and another thousand irregulars each to have operational impact or warrant the emperor himself leading the force to a new theater of war. The horse guard too was a thousand strong.[36]

The presence of Germanic guards, auxilia, and tribesmen in the emperor's strike force gives one pause. Trajan's reign marks the high point of the Empire, by which time long peace had broken the warlike spirit of the Roman heartland and even the provinces. Crack troops had thus to be raised in lands at or beyond the borders, where men were still warlike. Though Tacitus put the claim that foreigners are the only strength of Roman armies into the mouth of an enemy of Rome, the composition of Trajan's army at the height of the Empire nevertheless bears that claim out and foreshadows Rome's fall, which came when her field armies were overwhelmingly tribal. The history of the Empire depended on where it raised its troops.[37]

Could Trajan marshal motley groups of outlanders into an effective fighting force? It had been done before: in 48 BC Labienus welded Gallic and Germanic horsemen into such a force, arming, mounting, and training them himself. They responded with skill, dauntlessness, and loyalty as long as there was hope of winning. Caesar's Germanic horse guard, hired on the spot in Gaul, must have been more foreign than Roman in equipment, tactics, and morale. Trajan's bare-chested warriors and club-wielders, even though truly tribal, were commanded by Roman officers, as was customary during the High Empire. His barefooted berserks, if indeed Singulares guards of Roman Germany, combined Roman discipline with their own, older ethos of keeping faith. It was this ethos that allowed Trajan to lead a Germanic strike force of mixed origin that must have been harder to keep in order than regular auxiliary troops. Besides, being chosen by the emperor for this mission must have swelled the warriors' pride and strengthened their bond with him.[38]

If that was not enough, the regulars of Trajan's horse guard of the Equites Singulares Augusti gave him means to stiffen the discipline of his tribal forces. The combination of imperial guard and irregulars was a winner: Caracalla relied on it, as did Aurelian; and Constantine added to his regular guard, the schola Scutariorum, a tribal counterpart, the schola Gentilium. Theodosius too kept discipline among tribal warriors with the help of his horse guard, and King Harald of Norway in AD 872 likewise had a regular bodyguard besides his berserks.[39]

Trajan had further reason to recruit tribesmen from beyond the Rhine. When he set out for the Dacian war, he had but a weak garrison to leave on the Rhine frontier. The best way for him to keep tribes beyond the river from raiding the weakened provinces was to take the tribes' finest warriors along. Some of Trajan's club-men and naked berserks may thus have been Chatti and Mattiaci from beyond the Rhine, known for their fighting prowess.

As Germanic tribesmen were essential to Roman field armies before and after Trajan, their presence in scene 36 of the Column is to be expected, even though the scene is often overlooked in studies of Germanic troops in the Roman army. We will return to it again and again for the rich insights it offers on ancient Germanic warriors.[40]

Part 1
ANIMAL WARRIORS

1
WOLVES

Wolf-warriors howled and shook weapons.
Thorbjorn Hornklofi, *Haraldskvæði*

Indo-European wolf-warriors

The idea of changing into an animal gripped the imagination of early man the world over—Agamemnon, Plato says, wanted to become an eagle, Ajax a lion, Orpheus a swan—and it works its metaphoric magic even today. Stone Age hunters felt the spell of animal sympathy and the altered state of mind that comes with it: in Aurignacian cave-wall paintings of 60,000 years ago, men wear animal masks not only to stalk prey but to identify with their ancestors in dances. A cave-dweller in southern Germany 34,000 years ago carved a lion-headed human figure in ivory. E.O.Wilson said: "We are not just afraid of predators, we are transfixed by them, prone to weave stories and fables and chatter endlessly about them, because fascination creates preparedness, and preparedness, survival. In a deeply tribal sense, we love our monsters."[1] With such animal sympathy he who "was" a predator was a keener warrior.

Warriors world-wide found their symbols in awesome aspects of nature: thunder, storm, and lightning, steadiness of mountain roots, rip of rivers, sturdiness of trees, and flight of birds.[2] Yet they liked toothed animals best, for unlike other thrills of nature, animals could be more than symbols: one could identify with them. Libyans had belted dog-warriors; Black Africans had lion-, leopard-, and panther-warriors; Aztecs puma-, jaguar-, and wolf-warriors; Caribs and Chinese had tiger-warriors; Romans lion-guards. As late as the twentieth century, Austro-Hungarian guard officers wore leopard skins.[3] Identifying with such animals not only gave a rich, transforming experience, but the very origin of war and male pride has been traced to mankind's mesolithic change from prey to predator.[4]

Indo-European warriors, from Vedic Indians and Iranians to Celts and Germani, were greatly given to animal identities. Homer often describes the fighting excellence and character of a hero by likening him to a lion, a boar, or an eagle, much as the poetry of island Celts expresses their warrior spirit in terms of the animal world. Classical Greeks and Romans held on to some of this spirit: to characterize the armies of Alexander the Great or Julius Caesar as the keenest of warriors, Arrian could do no better than say they fought like wild animals. Clearly, Indo-Europeans (and not only they) kept some of their former roles as they moved from primitive to archaic, and, in the case of Greece and Rome, to "civilized" warfare.[5]

Wolves played a great role as warrior models throughout Eurasia and North America: wolf-warriors appear among Indo-Europeans, Turks, Mongols, and American Indians.

New World Indians brought from Siberia not only shamanism and wolf-ancestor myths, but, it seems, also wolf-, bear-, bird-, and big-cat warriordom.[6] They sent forth wolf-warriors as scouts, and even patterned their warfare on wolflike spying:

> It is interesting to note that Wolf in one form or another was the patron spirit of war all over the Plains. He was primarily the genius of the intelligence service, the ruthless, crafty, cautious hunter. This may well be taken as symbolic of all Plains, or of all American Indian warfare. Its prototype was the shrewd stalker and, as Wolf's depredations depended upon intelligence, the Indians hunted men in the same manner. The service of intelligence was the one branch of their art of war which was perfectly developed.[7]

The best way to identify with an animal is to don its pelt: a mid-sixteenth-century drawing shows a Mexican Cuetlachtli warrior wearing a wolf-hood, much like Indo-European wolf-warriors. Since wearing the animal's skin is essential to animal-warrior styles, it is of great interest to see this done in the New World no less than in the Old. Both American and European folk tales speak of people being changed into wolves by wearing wolfskins, and of being freed from shape-shifting by burning the skins.[8]

Animals, especially wolves, offered much to the warrior bent on going beyond the bounds of his humanity: he could walk, jump, or run as the chosen animals did; also hide, creep, lurk, scream, bray, and howl as they did—wolves often howl in triumph at a kill—and in all he could frighten the enemy while venting his own fear. He could take on an animal's rage, dread, or pride and thus free himself of cultural constraints or conscience (much as modern warriors do when they focus on technology). Moreover, with their power to change into animals and travel to other worlds, shamans gave wolf- and bear-warriordom a cosmic dimension.[9]

Wolves and hyenas, almost alone among animals, fight in packs—as if going to war. Fiercely baring their teeth, with eyes flashing danger, howling dreadfully, and biting through their prey's windpipe, they are the most gripping warrior animals.[10]

From wolves warriors learned stealth. As a wolf-man of our own time puts it:

> The wolves moved deftly and silently in the woods and in trying to imitate them I came to walk more quietly and to freeze at the sign of slight movement. At first this imitation gave me no advantage, but after several weeks I realized I was becoming far more attuned to the environment we moved through. I heard more, for one thing, and my senses now constantly alert, I occasionally saw a deer mouse or a grouse before they did… I could attune myself better to the woods by behaving as they did—minutely inspecting certain things, seeking vantage points, always sniffing at the air. I did, and felt vigorous, charged with alertness.[11]

Good camouflage, wolfskins allowed scouts to hide. Homer tells of the Trojan night-spy Dolon hiding under a wolfskin, and Euripides embellishes the tale:

I will draw a wolf skin over my back,
put the beast's gaping jaws around my head,
fasten the forelegs to my hands
its legs to mine, and mimic the four-footed
wolf-gait, hard to spot for the foes.

Euripides, whose Dolon walks on all fours like a wolf, stresses the stealth that the wolfskin grants. In Greek, Etruscan, and Gallic myths, a wolf-hood makes one invisible.[12]

Speed is another astounding quality of wolves. They trot unflaggingly, lightly, and quickly—easily 50 miles a day. Homer's wolf-warrior Dolon was a fast runner. Young and swift, wolf-warriors often served as scouts and skirmishers.[13] Wolves, moreover, far outdo man in fieldcraft: they are the easy masters of the woods, the wild, the winter, and the night, all frightening and uncanny to man.

Of all wild animals, wolves are closest to man in social instincts. They respect rank, delight in each other's company, and are so dedicated to the pack that the Hittite king Hattusilis told his assembly, "May your clan be one, like that of the wolves!" As dogs they are eager and faithful beyond words. Wild wolves have even suckled and raised human children. No other animal engages man's feelings so strongly. It has rightly been said that what links men who love wolves with those who loathe them is the intensity of their feelings.[14]

Wolf-warriors are the best-documented Indo-European warrior style, originating long before and lasting long after the Indo-European dispersal. They are found far more often than bear-, boar-, buck-, marten-, horse- or any other animal-warriors. In the second millennium BC, when our sources begin to flow, wolf-warriors are already well attested. A Hittite army leader bore the name Lupakku ("Wolf"), and since Indo-European animal names bespoke strength and luck, he very likely was a wolf-warrior. Likewise the name of the Hittite Luvians means "Wolf-People": Hittite texts call them LU-MESH UR-BAR-RA, "Men-Dog-Outside."[13]

Vedic India too had skin-clad wolf-warriors: Rudra, with his wolves Bhava and Śarva and with a warband of eleven long-haired Rudriyas, haunted the woods. Other early wolf-warriors are the *mairyo* youths of ancient Iran: as a warrior band they were called "wolves" and fought in a frenzy, though it is not known whether they wore wolfskins. Scythians also fought as wolf-warriors, some of their youths being "valiant dogs."[16]

Mycenaeans very likely had wolf-warriors. A painted *krater* from Tiryns of about 1200 BC shows four warriors on foot, two before a chariot and two behind it. All four are armed with small round shields and javelins much like Egyptian Shardana chariot runners of the time. "The pointed crests on their heads," it is said, "may represent a cap-helmet of some kind"; the tails between their legs are very likely tails of an animal skin. The men have been taken for tiger-warriors, but there were no tigers in ancient Greece. Indo-European parallels and Homeric wolf-sympathy suggest that they are wolf-warriors. If so, wolf-warriors may have played a role in the chariot-based Indo-European expansion of the mid-second millennium BC. Chariot crews needed runners beside them to capture or

finish off enemy charioteers. Fleet-footed young wolf-warriors could have played this tactical role. Some Mycenaeans seem to have had wolf-names.[17]

Homer too tells of wolf-warriors. He sees heroes such as Hector, Diomedes, and Achilles as at times overcome by fighting madness; that is, in the throes of "wolfishness," a state akin to berserk recklessness. Speed, stealth, and fighting madness characterized Greek wolf-warriors, but Achilles' captains flaunted wolfishness also as a leadership quality:

> Hungry as wolves that rend and bolt raw flesh,
> hearts filled with battle-frenzy that never dies—
> off on the cliffs, ripping apart some big antlered stag
> they gorge on the kill till all their jaws drip red with blood,
> then down in a pack they lope to a pooling, dark spring,
> their lean sharp tongues lapping the water's surface,
> belching bloody meat, but the fury, never shaken,
> builds inside their chests though their glutted bellies burst—
> so wild the Myrmidon captains…

In Sparta, warrior training was the work of Lykurgos, the "Wolf-Worker." Lykurgos laid down a law that for a year (the "Krypteia") young warriors must hide and live outside society, fending for themselves as naked, lone wolves. Elsewhere in Greece, Apollo the Wolf-God presided over the training of young warriors.[18]

Indo-European tribesmen brought the wolf-warrior style to Italy as well as Greece. Vergil says that the warriors who founded Praeneste wore wolf-hoods and fought with the left foot bare—a sign of skill, toughness, and recklessness. The Hirpi Sorani wolf-warriors from north of Rome, like later berserks, could not be hurt by fire: very likely they fought in a trance of ecstacy that made them woundproof.[19]

The wolf-warriors of Romulus founded Rome, and centuries later in the battles against Hannibal the legions still had in their ranks *velites,* young men who fought in the forefront and wore wolfskins.[20] As the sight of a wolf was an omen of victory to later Germanic warriors, so it was to early Romans: when a wolf ran through their battle line at Sentinum in 295 BC, Roman warriors welcomed it with shouts as the winning wolf of Mars. By the time of Marius, however, Rome had lost her wolf-warriors.

Among Celts in Gaul, wolves, and dogs bred from wolves, enthralled warriors. Celtic names like Cunopennus, Cunocennus, and Cunobarrus all mean "dog-head" or "wolf-head"; that is, men who fought with dog or wolf-skins over their heads. Very likely they looked like the Germanic wolf-warriors portrayed on Trajan's Column.[21]

Wolf-warriors on Trajan's Column

The oldest known Germanic wolf-warriors are depicted in scene 36 of Trajan's Column. Surprisingly, no twentieth-century archaeologist, historian, or student of Germanic

antiquities knew them, even though in 1896 Cichorius in his outstanding commentary on Trajan's Column identified the warriors in scene 36 as Germanic.[22] Yet they are plain to see (Figure 1.1).

On the relief, eight soldiers of the emperor's strike force wear Roman auxiliary uniforms: knee-breeches, tunics, mailshirts, and neckerchiefs. Their weapon of attack is the sword, with which Batavi tribesmen were wont to fight and with which, when they closed in for the shock attack, they stabbed their foes.[23] Unlike other regular auxiliaries on the Column, however, these men sport strange headgear: four wear openwork crossband helmets, two wear broad-pawed bearskins, two others narrow-pawed wolfskins. Most of them are bearded, while most regular soldiers on the Column are clean-shaven.

The wolfskins and bearskins seen here cover head and shoulders, leaving the arms free, but one cannot see how far the skins reached down the back, nor whether they still had tails as did those of Mycenaean and medieval wolf-warriors. Like Herakles, the warriors on the Column fasten their skins over the chest by crossing and knotting the animal's forelegs, whereas wolf-warriors of the Middle Ages wore their wolfskins as jackets with openings for the arms. It is hard to say whether here the Column artist modified Germanic reality to fit the classical model or whether Germanic auxiliaries,

Figure 1.1 Warriors on Trajan's Column wearing wolfskins, bearskins and crossband helmets (detail of Figure 0.2). Photo: Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Rome, Inst. Neg. 71.2685.

when donning mailshirts, changed their wolf-hood jackets to wolf-hoods with crossed paws.

Scholars have taken the wolfskin and bearskin wearers in scene 36 for Roman standard-bearers, since these, too, wore animal skins and mailshirts. Yet the four warriors are not in the lead and hold no standards but drawn swords. They are not standard-bearers. Wearing mailshirts, they are not legionaries either. Nor, lacking strip armor, are they *antesignani,* who sometimes wore bearskin hoods. Their weapons, as we have seen, mark them as regulars in Roman service, while their wolf- and bear-hoods mark them as Germani. Being near the emperor, they are, tactically speaking, shock troops in the emperor's entourage and could even be part of his guard.[24]

As ancient warrior styles were mythological, the wolf-warriors on Trajan's Column, together with the bear-warriors, club-wielders, helmet-wearers, and naked berserks of this scene, are an outstanding addition to our knowledge of Germanic mythology. They stock up what has been called the "relatively bare shelves of German heathen myth proper" compared to the Icelandic tradition,[25] and thus, for their part, show ancient continental Germanic mythology as the link between earlier Indo-European and later Icelandic mythology.

Wolf-warriors of northern Europe have also left traces in wolf-standards and wolf-shields, seized by their Roman foes and enshrined as tokens of victory in the Flavian *armilustrium* in Rome. Moreover, the famous Gundestrup cauldron, Germanic if it belongs to the third century AD, otherwise Celtic, pictures a wolf presiding over a warrior initiation; in either case, the cauldron bespeaks the warriors' wolf-spirit and nearness to the gods.[26]

The wolf- and bear-warriors on Trajan's Column had forerunners in Emperor Vitellius' army thirty years earlier, when pelt-wearing auxiliaries spearheaded the emperor's strike force during his march on Rome in AD 69-Racing ahead of the army, the auxiliaries surged through the streets of the city, scaring people. "A wild show, frightening with animal skins and huge weapons," as Tacitus calls it.[27] It was mid-July when no one wears fur in Rome—unless bound to do so. Vitellius' warriors could have worn linen, for the art of weaving flourished in their homeland. Instead they wore warrior-style furs, no doubt wolfskins and bearskins.[28]

In ancient times the whole youth of a tribe or a chosen outcast group may have been wolf-warriors. Under the more settled conditions of the early Middle Ages, however, wolf- and bear-warriors were individual champions, often no more than twelve men, at times in the service of a king.[29] Were the wolf-warriors on Trajan's Column youthful tribal troops or individual champions? The Column portrays them wearing mailshirts and fighting with swords, as they did in the early Middle Ages. Since mailshirts slow men down, such men would have shared with wolves not so much speed but fierceness, and Trajan's wolf-warriors may already have made the transition from youthful tribal warriors to elite champions.

On the other hand, being troops close to the emperor and on the same level with other units, Trajan's wolf-warriors are likely to have been a battlefield force rather than a handful of champions. Ancient battle descriptions mention no wolf-warriors: the most that we hear is that Germani bore animal standards into battle. Perhaps animal-warriors were always few, leading others. Yet Greek and Roman authors so rarely describe northern troops that here the argument from silence counts for little. There is no telling, then, how many wolf-warriors took the field with Trajan.

Firsthand evidence of wolf sympathy among Germanic tribes of Trajan's time also comes from names. The earliest known Germanic wolf name, one Ulfenus, appears on a Trajanic inscription from Rimburg near Aachen, followed by one Ulfus, also from Roman Germany. Some have wondered about the widespread use in Lower Germany of the Latin name Ulpius, which to German ears sounded like "wolf." Ulpius is, of course, Trajan's name, and for that reason alone would have been widely used in Lower Germany. But Ulpius also meant "wolf" in older Latin, and the punning name Ulpius Lupio suggests that the original meaning of Trajan's name was still understood. Beyond the Empire's borders, a second-century runic inscription from Himlingøje in Denmark names a Widuhu[n]daR (Woodhound—Wolf). Indo-European twin-root names such as this were aristocratic wish-names: parents hoped their sons would be "wolves." As with dragons, people feared wolves, yet stood in awe of them and wanted to be like them.[30]

Wilderness, with its animals, is the great background for, and shaper of, human feelings, giving fulfillment that the twenty-first century seems to be losing. Wolf-warriors, fighting beside Trajan in the Dacian war, imperial Rome's greatest military undertaking, are thus a striking instance of "biophilia," reminding us of the hold that wildlife has on the human mind and from which our spirit is woven.[31]

Wolf-warriors in the later Roman army

Since we know from Trajan's Column that Germanic wolf-warriors fought in the Roman army in the first century AD, we may look for them also in the Roman army of the fourth century, when many of its recruits came from Germanic lands beyond the Rhine and the Danube. Indeed, wolf-warriors turn up in AD 361. In that year Emperor Julian raised troops among the Franks and Alamanni: six new Auxilia Palatina units in three pairs. He named one pair "Tubantes-Salii," after two Frankish tribes. To the other two pairs he gave non-tribal names: "Grati-Augustei" and "Felices-Invicti." Of these latter pairs, three units, and perhaps originally all four, bore images of bucks or wolves on their shields, as seen in the late-Roman government handbook the *Notitia Dignitatum* (Figure 1.2).[32]

The last two badges of the second row in Figure 1.2 (Grati, Felices), and the last badge of the third row (Augustei) show wolves or hounds. Such shield badges proclaimed the units to be wolf- or hound-warriors. By allowing these shield badges, Julian welcomed wolf-warriors among Rome's elite troops. Like Trajan, he must have valued their fighting skills and wanted them to strengthen his army. He may not have known or cared whether they were warg-wolf outlaws, the youths of a tribe, or the warband of a king:[33] as wolf-warriors, flaunting wolf-shield badges, they cast dread into the hearts of foes and strength into their own, for both Romans and Germani knew the fierceness of animal-warriors.[34] Here, as with Trajan's wolf-warriors, a large number of men was needed: no less than a thousand men to form three or more Auxilia Palatina units. Perhaps only the leaders were true wolf-warriors in the medieval sense of champions.

Some of the shield badges in Figure 1.2 may portray hounds rather than wolves, but the meaning is almost the same. Discipline and loyalty made hounds particularly useful in fighting. Thracians and Celts bred fighting dogs, war-hounds defended the laager of the Cimbri, and Pliny the Elder called dogs "the most faithful allies even without pay." Like wolves, hounds were symbolic warrior animals and are found as such among Indo-

Europeans. Several Greek and Celtic warriors wore hound-topped helmets. The tribal name of the Dacians means “Wolves” or “Hounds”; and, like Sarmatians, they followed hound-dragon standards. Among Germanic nations at the beginning of our era the fiercest Longobards fought as mad hounds, and aristocratic Lombard hound-warriors are still known in the Middle Ages. Hence

Figure 1.2 Shield badges of Auxilia Palatina units in the Notitia Dignitatum. Drawing after Seeck, *Notitia* 1876, 116 (Oc.V).

if some of the shield badges in Figure 1.2 portray hounds, the symbolism is nearly the same as that of wolves.[35] Shared animal sympathy gave wolf- or hound-warriors a bond among each other, making them better fighters.[36]