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THE AUTHOR

The Norwegian GEIR FELLING ANDERSEN (born 1963) is a psychotherapist, artist, advertising man and a passionate hobby historian. In the years 1990 to 2002 he was the copywriter and publisher of the Café Guide to Oslo.

Ever since childhood, Felling Andersen has had a special interest in the time of THE EUROPEAN MIGRATIONS. FROM ROMAN TO KNIGHT is his first book.

The author inside THE TEMPIETTO, the 1300 years old Lombardian church in Cividale del Friuli.

«FROM ROMAN TO KNIGHT» presents 500 years of European history, 10 colourful maps from 300/395 to 843 AD, more than 100 historical names, 20 historical destinations, and lots of old and new illustrations. The reader is invited to immerse into an exciting epoque of history.

EPILOGUE

"FROM ROMAN TO KNIGHT" has been a 128-page journey through 500 years of European history. No one will contest the fact that the term "European Migrations" even to this day, 1600 years later, refer to this era. But the Europeans did not stop moving after 843. They have done so in every century since, and will continue to do so. The great exodus to America, 100 to 150 years ago, is just an example. Sun seeking northerners to the Mediterranean and Atlantic beaches another.

What makes the migration period special, are the movements of entire peoples from a hostile north (and east) to a rich and fertile south (and west). But also the fact that this led to the disintegration of a homogeneous and centralized empire, which for too long had been preoccupied with itself. And shut out the others.

The era (300 - 800 AD) led to major changes. The foundation of national character, way of life and the patchwork of European states that we see today, was laid during this time.

In 2010 once again Europe is united, we do not call it an empire, but a union. Power is centralized, the population increasingly homogeneous, and the boundaries between nations erased. However, all boundaries are not abolished. While Europe is uniting within its outer borders, my thoughts go to a Mediterranean empire which was divided in 395. And existentially threatened in 410. At that time, the pressure came from the north. Destitute and frozen people wanted to enter the southern richness and warmth. Like the Romans, today's Europe also has its "Limes". Whether it is called Gran Canaria, Gibraltar, Lampedusa (Sicily), Peloponnese, Kiev or Kirkenes. It may sound hackneyed, but "history repeats itself".

Come 2010 and the continent is yet again changing. 1600 years after Alaric people are wandering. But in a completely different direction. And the walls of Europe are again erected. But this time in the south . . .

G F A
Like THE SLEEPING FAUN in the Munich Glyptothek one can say the Romans lived in a dream world.
More or less exactly 1600 years ago, on the night before August 24th 410 AD, the barbaric lord, king Alaric, and his Visigoths had arrived and encircled the then centre of the world – the eternal city – the Emperor’s Rome. For the first time in 800 years an enemy knocked on the city’s gates. The all powerful Rome was shaken to its core, and its coming fall and crumbling was soon to leave a complete new Europe.

With this incident in 410 as a backdrop, the looting and humiliation of Rome and the start of the Roman Empire’s fall, «FROM ROMAN TO KNIGHT» has been made. This book is meant to give a glimpse into early middle age, an often forgotten, yet important part of Europe’s history. «FROM ROMAN TO KNIGHT» is not about Rome or the Roman Empire, but of the time that followed its fall. This was the time of the European (often called the Germanic) folk migration, and it took place between 300 – 800 A.D. This was the epoch which ended Roman Power and led to the knights and crusades in the name of God. Because it was during the migration age that Christianity really spread and got a strong hold on our continent. And it was during these centuries that the basis for the individual European nations’ cultural aspects like traditions, languages, myths and legends, appeared. The 1800’s romantic nationalism often found inspiration in these times.

It was the Romans’ widespread use of Germanic (barbarian) mercenaries, along with a widespread apartheid directed towards the same protectors that eventually became the start of the fall of the Roman Empire. It should not be left out that the Romans’ arrogance, their superior and sometimes racist attitudes mirrored their indifference to what happened outside their city walls. As the «sleeping faun» in their own mythology, one can say they lived in a dream world. The Romans did not wake up until it was too late and the folk migration was underway. «FROM ROMAN TO KNIGHT» is a chronological walk through a time unknown to many. Feel free to call it a teaching book for readers of all ages. The tale is inspired by Carl Grimberg’s eminent presentation of the same topic in part 7 of «Life and history of Mankind». My journey started there and continued with homemade lectures for fellow students in 5th. grade in primary school, triggered by a never-ending fascination for complex maps and names of mystical, «extinct» races. The lecture was retrieved after 35 years, updated, verified and presented to my daughter and her fellow students in 7th grade last year. Then the idea sprung to make a coffee table book, decorated with Susanne Grenness’ oil illustrations. On August 24th 410 Alaric put the first nail in the coffin of the Roman Empire. It is 1600 years ago this year, and here follows my contribution to the anniversary.
The two thousand year old ROMAN ROAD, here beautifully presented by the Italian photographer Giancarlo Gasponi.

THE ROMAN EMPIRE

In the year 180 A.D., at the peak of its power, THE ROMAN EMPIRE extended from the North Sea to the Middle East. All roads up and down the widespread empire led to the capital city, ROME.

Around Rome lay Italy, or the Apennine Peninsula, which is what the «boot» has been called since the days of the ancient ETRUSCANS.

This book will take a good look at Italy’s fate and how the Romans, who had ruled here since the time of ROMULUS and REMUS around 750 B.C., were on the verge of losing the capital (and with it the centre of the empire) to the BARBARIANS 1000 years later.

The Roman Empire was by far the antiquity’s largest and most powerful empire. The story of Rome and the Empire’s growth, expansion and cultural blossoming have been described in plenty since the born of Christ.
THE GOTHs

Nevertheless, there is one group of people I would like to pay particular attention to: a tribe from the far north of Europe who played a key role in the fate of Rome and Italy.

It is the GOTHs.

Gothenburg, the Isle of Gothland, geatish «GÖTALAND».

The Goths originated from these parts of Scandinavia and Sweden. It is believed that their kingdom originally extended as far as the eastern part of Norway. However, in the middle of the Bronze Age, great natural catastrophes sent these hard-nosed people southwards: across the Baltic Sea, into Poland and down to the province of DACIA, a province risky established by the Romans north of Danube.
The Gothic chieftain BERIG is thought to have started the whole sequence of events with coastal raid and the establishment of GOTHISCANDZA (Scandza of the Goths) around the estuary of the WIZLA river (Vistula in Poland) as early as 1490 B.C. This was claimed by the Gothic history writer JORDANES in his work «GETICA» in the 500s A.D. Getica was, however, based on the Roman CASSIODORUS’ previous collections of Gothic histories and tales. Then by year 268 A.D., the Goths had arrived in such large numbers into Dacia (present day Romania) that the Romans were forced to give up the province. Moreover, the Romans had conquered the Dacians’ land with such cruelty 150 years earlier (in Emperor TRAJAN’s Day, 106 A.D.) that nothing had been spared, neither human life nor buildings. Dacia was razed to the ground, the Romans moved in, and even to this day, the people there speak a Latin language, Romanian.
THE VANDALS
After several years as Stilicho’s foederati in the province of RHAETIA (Switzerland), the Vandals were among the 300,000 who managed to cross a frozen Rhine on New Year’s Eve 406.
The Spanish area of Catalonia (with Barcelona) has its own language today (Catalan), and is named after the Visigoths, GOTHALANIA. There the Visigoths suppressed the Vandals, who gave the name to Andalucía (VANDALUCIA) in the south. These brutal Vandals had not been as considerate in their treatment of the cultural cities as the Visigoths had. Their name is the origin of the word vandal or vandalism, which is used today to describe people who destroy something valuable – almost for the sake of being destructive.

The Vandals came from the black forests in the north east (present day Poland) and, like the Goths, they split into two groups; the ASDINGI and the SILINGI. RAPTUS and RHAUS (200’s) were their ancestors. Together with other Germanic tribes, the Vandals were among the 300 000 who managed to cross a frozen Rhine on New Year’s Eve 406. It must have been a rare sight that met the inhabitants of the border town of Mainz that winter.

Rightfully, they had the Huns coming after them, but it was the fertile land in the south and west they were after, the Vandals, Burgundians and Goths (with origin in Scandinavia), SUEBES (from Seuvia), Quadi (from Bohemia), Marcomanni (from Bavaria), Thuringii and others under the collective name ALEMANS (a confederation of all Germanic men) and Franks (free men) from mid-Germany. As previously mentioned, the barbarians had over time gotten many relatives among mercenary soldiers. They were told about all the treasures, not to mention the wine and fruit that could be found in the empire they themselves were involved in protecting. The Barbarians too, wanted to be supported by the rich Romans. The strongest among them were the Franks. After battling them, the Vandals and their rescuing allies, the Alani, were «forced» to loot their way through present-day FRANCE. GODIGISEL, the chieftain of the Vandals, led on until he fell. In 409 they crossed the Pyrenees and descended into the Roman province of HISPANIA.
The Romans were playing with fire. The cultural differences were enormous and what they did not know, was that Attila was a sly fox with legions of other people from the east to back him up: SLAVS, AVARS, GEPIDS and BULGARS. All of whom were simply waiting for the opportunity to take possession of the riches to be found in the ancient Roman Empire. Attila, King of the Huns, was described by the contemporary writers Jordanes and Cassiodorus, as «a small, powerful and broad-shouldered Mongol with a flat nose, small eyes and a swarthy complexion. A participant in an Eastern Roman mission to the fearful monarch has left us with an interesting description of his court », the writers continue. «Ambassadors from both far and near were invited to a feast at Attila’s «palace», a large, timber-built hall. There sat his majesty in an elevated position centred near the rear wall, while guests were seated according to rank and position on both sides or immediately in front of him. 

ATTILA WITH GUESTS. Birney Lettick presented Jordanes’ report to the December issue of National Geographic. 1962.
The Ostrogoths had become the new masters in Italy, and they mixed with, and lived side by side the Romans for several centuries. Theoderic, with the nickname «THE GREAT», quickly became civilized and began the construction of Italy as a state. He reinstated Roman values such as the monetary system and started restoring the wartorn Rome, which he referred to with great veneration as «a great and unique wonder».

Theoderic assumed a leading position throughout the Germanic world and formed bonds of kinship with the Frank, Visigoth and Burgundy dynasties. At his most powerful, he also controlled the Visigothic Kingdom. But when he died in 526, it became difficult to unite the Romans and Ostrogoths in one kingdom. Here history has repeated itself a number of times. It was the Frankish king CLOVIS who was to become the new powerful lord in western Europe. He was a SALIAN (coast living) Frank, and had fought and dislodged the RIPURIAN (river living) Franks (481), «the last Roman Gaul» Syagrius (486), the Allemannis (496) and last, but not least, the Visigoths at the battle of VOUILLE in Aquitaine in 507. Thuringia and Burgundy fell later, in 534. The Alemannis let themselves under Ostrogoth protection after being crushed by Clovis at TOLBIAC in 496.

Clovis built Paris and was an ideal for the nation builder CHARLEMAGNE.

But in the south, along the coast of Africa, time stood still. Apart from their piracy, the Vandals would increasingly resemble the ancient Romans at their worst. They ceaselessly enjoyed decadent «pleasures of the table». Some historians believe they can trace their roots back to Hallingdal in Norway.
The fabled Brunhilda had appetite for both men and power.

«THE MEROVINGIAN LEGEND»

Under cover of the many dramatic events on and around the Apennine peninsula (Italy), it was in the northwest that a hard-nosed tribe, through mutual conflict and long experience of war, built themselves up to become a European factor of power. As we know, the mightiest of their leaders, Clovis, had gathered together his Frankish men in 486 and rolled into northern Gaul. Ten years later, under the influence of his queen, he agreed to be christened. Yet, following Clovis’ death in 511, his young Frankish MEROVINGIAN dynasty also broke up. The kingdom was divided among his four grandsons (CHILPERIC, CHARIBERT, SIGIBERT and GUNTRAM) and, with time (567), became three Frankish kingdoms; NEUSTRIA in the north and west, AUSTRIASIA in the east and BURGUNDY in the south.
Fredegunda was also cruel. Here she tries to murder her daughter Rigundis.

Unfortunately, the death of the ambitious Clovis resulted in more than a century of blood vengeance, terrible cunning and power struggles – where it seemed no one was spared. The legendary story of the queens and rivals Brunhilda of Austrasia and Fredegunda of Neustria, and their battle over positions, is so eventful it requires a book of its own. They were both women with a huge appetite for men and power. Briefly, the whole series of events started when the king of Neustria’s mistress, Fredegunda, murdered the sister of Brunhilda, queen Galswintha (of Neustria), in order to become a queen herself.

Queen Brunhilda swore a revenge that should continue for fifty years and involve several generations of sovereign and nobilities. Galswintha of Neustria (new kingdom) and the sister Brunhilda of Austrasia (east kingdom) were both married off, visigothic princesses and daughters of the visigothic coup initiator from 554, King Athanagild.

Brunhilda of Austrasia became one of the most powerful and controversial women in the Merovingian royal family. She controlled not only her own realm, but also Burgundy, as regent for her son, her two grandsons and even her grandson’s son. In 613 Brunhilda was forced to surrender to her arch enemy King Chlotaire II of Neustria. She had to answer to the murder of ten dukes, among them her husband, sons and grandsons, and underwent the most hideous torture and death. Tied between four horses, the evil old lady was finally torn to death.