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# Crocus, 'King of the Alamanni'

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ABSTRACT

*Crocus was an authentic historical figure. His influence at the court of Constantius I may be explained in a number of ways, the most plausible being that he provided significant military assistance as leader of an unusually large force of warriors from the interior of Germania, not local Alamanni.*

Constantius I died in York on 25 July 306, after Septimius Severus the second Roman emperor to perish in that city.[1] Recent events had made it inevitable that his eldest son, Constantine, present at his side, would take his place as leader in the West. But, since many powerful figures in the Empire were bound to regard this as a violation of the established political order, there was tension in the air. For a short while the succession hung fire, and then Constantine openly assumed power. The sources on Constantine's accession are poor, but in one summary account of the event there is an unexpected detail:

> Quo [Constantio] mortuo, cunctis qui aderant annitentibus, sed praecipue Croco, Alamannorum rege, auxilii gratia Constantium comitato, [Constantinus] imperium capit.[2]

This has commonly been translated along the lines of:

> On Constantius' death, at the urging of all his entourage, but especially of Crocus, a king of the Alamanni, whom Constantius had brought along for military support, Constantine takes power.

In other words, Crocus steps into the light of history as a recognised Alamannic leader, who had put himself and his warriors at the service of the Empire and, as a result, found himself exercising great influence at the imperial court.[3]

What were his precise identity, function, and significance? These questions are hard to answer; and an immediate problem is that there is a case for treating *auxilia gratia* wholly differently: as referring not to Crocus' *giving* help to Constantius but rather to his *asking* for it.[4] Since the construction *gratia* + genitive occurs nowhere else in this text, the issue is incapable of direct resolution. Here I retain the traditional interpretation. My reasons are grammatical and

1 Constantius I: Kienast 1996, 280; Septimius Severus: Kienast 1996, 156–7.

2 *Epitome* 41.3 (ed. Festy 1999).

3 In anglophone scholarship, this can be traced back at least as far as Edward Gibbon: '… a barbarian king, who assisted the Roman arms with an independent body of his own subjects' (*Decline and Fall*, ch. 14, n. 15 [1862 edn, 2.111]). In germanophone, see e.g. Bang 1906, 62: 'das heißt wohl als Führer eines von seinem Stamme gestellten Hilfskorps'. More recently: Jones 1964, 2.612: 'an Alamannic chieftain, commanding a body of his countrymen in Britain'; Castritius 2004: 'Kommandant einer in Britannien stationerten wohl sich überwiegend aus Alamannen rekrutierenden Truppe'. Crocus: Waas 1971, 82; *PLRE* 1.233. For a complementary (broader and generally more cautious, but still essentially traditional) assessment of Crocus, see Wood 2006 (and as cited below p. 189).

4 Made forcefully by Professor Timothy Barnes in discussion at the York conference.

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linguistic. In brief, a dictionary search reveals that elsewhere the rare *auxilii gratia* and even the more common cognate *auxilii causa* are clearly used in the sense of providing assistance.[5] And if the writer concerned had wished to specify Crocus' asking for assistance he had only to employ the standard construction *auxilii petendi causa*, in which the introduction of *petere*, 'to seek', makes perfectly plain what is going on.[6] Thus, it would seem, for the first, but not the last time, a powerful barbarian general is found playing a key role in the proclamation of a Roman emperor.[7]

This is so portentous that some, suspecting interpolation, have doubted whether Crocus ever existed or, even if he did, whether he took so prominent a part in events. Caution is necessary since our Crocus is mentioned in only this one source: the so-called *Epitome*, written by an anonymous 'Epitomator', which is relatively late (late fourth, perhaps even early fifth, century) and notoriously quirky.[8] Here the Epitomator is clearly elaborating on a version of events that also occurs in Aurelius Victor's *Caesares*, and probably ultimately derived from a lost source used by both Victor and the 'Epitomator', now known as the 'Imperial History'.[9] Some modern historians have interpreted the Epitomator's embellishment of the core story as covert criticism of Constantine. The Epitomator was pagan.[10] Constantine was the first Christian emperor. It may have suited a much later pagan writer to draw attention to the fact that Constantine's reign began in an improper, un-Roman, fashion, dependent on a barbarian war-leader, the first of a run of Germanic kingmakers.[11] Where did the Epitomator obtain so damaging a detail? It has been proposed that he may have got it from the equally pagan 'Imperial History',[12] or that he followed a second, later, also tendentiously pagan writer such as Nicomachus Flavianus or Eunapius.[13] Or, there remains the suspicion, he simply invented it. In this regard, it may be noted that Gregory of Tours and a difficult, seventh-century, author, the so-called 'Fredegarius', mention an Alamannic king Crocus raiding deep into Gaul in the mid-third century.[14] The historical and historiographic relationship between the two 'Croci' is obscure, but the name 'Crocus' may have become attached to Alamannic 'bogeymen' in general, and so inspired the Epitomator's creation.[15] In short, Constantine's proclamation was, as it had to be, and as Zosimus tells us it was, essentially a military affair: the work of the 'court soldiers'.[16] But the Epitomator maliciously emphasised the fact or fiction that it involved the wrong sort of court soldier.

What can we make of this? Without further evidence we can never be certain of anything about Crocus. However, it is probable that scepticism can be carried too far and that the man existed and played a part in the events of July 306, i.e. the Epitomator's account is 'not incredible'.[17] To support this claim I make five observations:

5 See especially *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* 2.2, 162670. Another example is Celsus 3.12.1. I owe this and the following point to Dr Andrew Drummond.

6 e.g. Caes., *BG* 6.12.5; Val. Max. 2.10.4, 5.1.1; Aul. Gell., *Noct. Att.* 11.9.1.

7 Gwatkin 1924, 3.

8 Schlumberger 1974, 245–6; Festy 1999, vii–viii, xii, l–lii, lvi.

9 Aur. Vict., *Caes.* 40.4: 'Quo [Constantio] mortuo, cunctis qui aderant annitentibus, [Constantinus] imperium capit'. Schlumberger 1974, 196, 234; Festy 1999, 185 (cf. Barnes 1970, 26).

10 Schlumberger 1974, 238; Festy 1999, xlviii.

11 Festy 1999, 186; Bleckmann 2006, 27.

12 Bleckmann 2006, 27.

13 Schlumberger 1974, 240–5; Festy 1999, xv–xxx, 185–6; Barnes 1981, 298 n. 121. Kulikowski (2006b and pers. comm.) favours a lost Greek source, used by Peter the Patrician.

14 Greg. Tur., *Hist. Franc.* 1.32; Fredeg., *Chron.* 2.40, 60.

15 For details see Wood 2006, 77–8; Drinkwater 2007, 146.

16 Zosimus 2.9.1: *hoi peri tēn aulēn stratiōtai*.

17 Schlumberger 1974, 196 n. 57 ('Diese Nachricht geht über Victor hinaus, ja ist sogar ganz singulär, aber trotzdem nicht unglaubwürdig').

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1. The *Epitome*'s hostility to Constantine, or even to Christianity, is not consistent:[18] therefore its mention of Crocus should not necessarily be viewed as malevolent.
2. The final western pagan reaction against Christianity, in A.D. 392–394, would have been impossible without the Germanic general Arbogast's creating the usurper Eugenius: therefore for a pagan writer *Germani* were not necessarily to be disparaged.
3. Late though it is, the *Epitome* appears to have been written before the most notorious run of Germanic kingmakers in the fifth century (beginning in A.D. 411 with the elevation of Jovinus at Mainz by Goar of the Alans and Guntiarius of the Burgundians): the Epitomator cannot have seen Crocus as its harbinger.
4. By the time the *Epitome* was written, Franks had replaced Alamanni as the principal perceived barbarian threat in the West:[19] a pagan seeking simply to vilify Constantine would have done better to invent a Frankish patron, helped by the fact that Constantine probably used Frankish troops against Maxentius.[20]
5. Constantius I had made close contact with Alamanni both as a general and as emperor: as a general, when, probably in A.D. 287, he accompanied Maximian on a major campaign into Alamannia;[21] and as Caesar, when he fought Alamanni in Gaul.[22] He would have had plenty of opportunity to meet, assess, and, in the best Roman fashion, recruit the services of an able Alamannic leader.

So, more confident that, in Bleckmann's words, 'we are dealing with an authentic detail',[23] let us go a little further into who Crocus, king of the Alamanni, is likely to have been, beginning with 'the Alamanni'.

The question of the origins and development of these people has recently attracted attention. They are no longer seen as a 'tribe', old or new, that migrated westwards. They are now generally explained as the amalgamation, over time, of many distinct bands of raiders from the 'Elbe-Germanic triangle',[24] who passed through, then settled in the area east of the Rhine and north of the Danube evacuated by Rome *c.* A.D. 260 (FIG. 1).[25] We do not know what, if anything, they called themselves as a group. *Alamanni* as a generic, and *Alamannia* as the area where these people were to be found, were probably Roman labellings:[26] not the first instance of Roman shaping of Germanic identity.[27] Around A.D. 300 we find Elbe-*Germani* living close to the Empire, on the lower Main and the lower Neckar — so close, in fact, that they must have been permitted to do so, perhaps in order to create a barrier against more distant raiders and to enable Rome to continue to exploit the natural resources (timber, iron, stone, salt) of their territories.[28] By the mid-fourth century, as we can see in Ammianus Marcellinus and has been confirmed through archaeology, such settlement had developed and expanded, creating a high degree of stability in the region. We find distinct communities, run from permanent centres (in particular,

18 Schlumberger 1974, 239; Wood 2006, 78.
19 Drinkwater 2007, 318.
20 Kulikowski 2006a, 357.
21 *Pan.Lat.* 2(10).7.2–3; *Pan.Lat.* 4(8).2.1. Drinkwater 2007, 181.
22 Fighting as Caesar: see below p. 192.
23 Bleckmann 2006, 27.
24 Drinkwater 2007, 45–6.
25 Drinkwater 2007, 43–4.
26 Drinkwater 2007, 44–6, 68–9.
27 Drinkwater 2007, 2. Cf. Geary 1988, vi.
28 Drinkwater 2007, 81–2.

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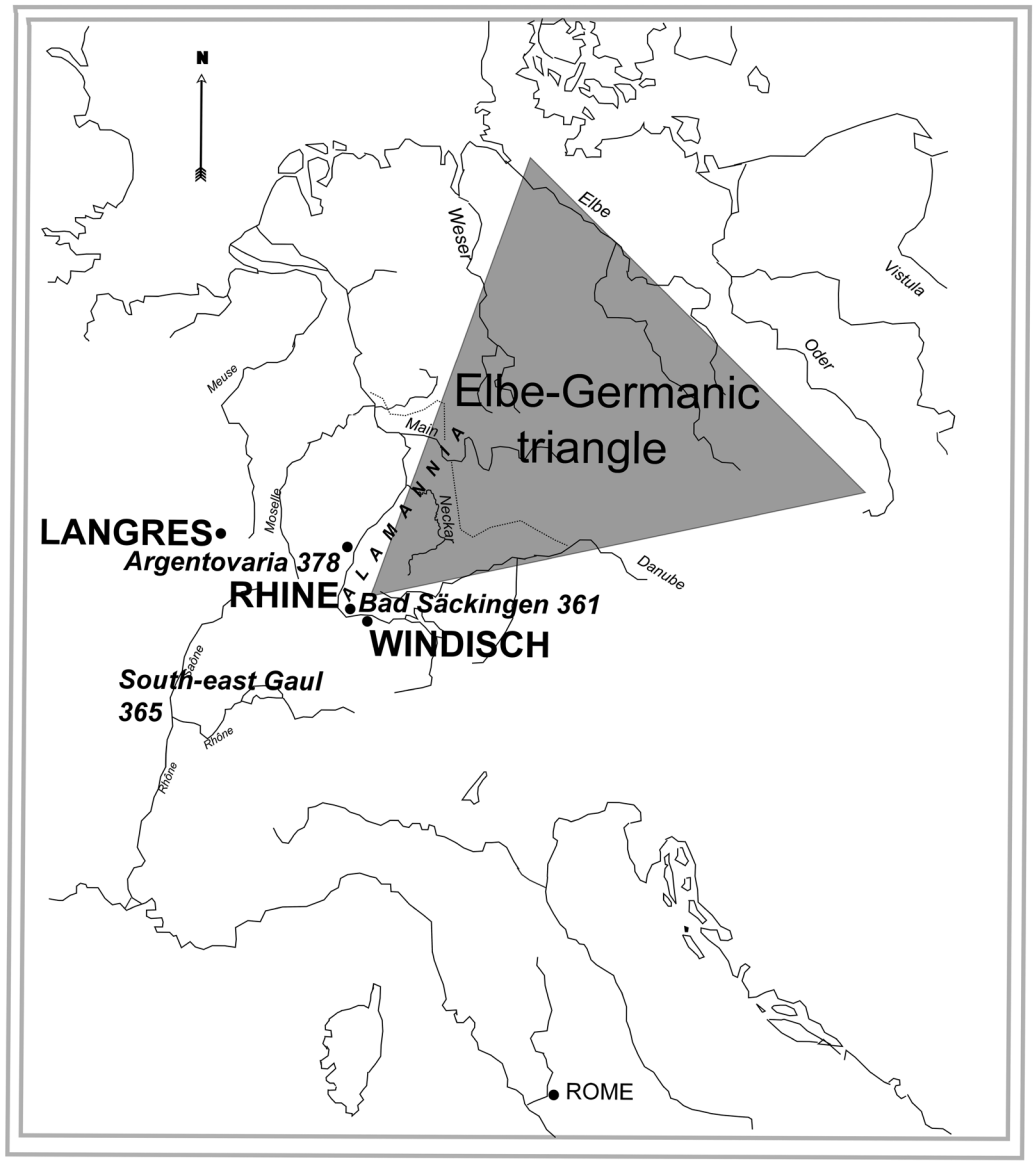



FIG. 1. The 'Elbe-Germanic triangle' and proposed sites of Roman conflicts with long-distance raiders (upper case: Constantius I; lower case: Julian-Gratian).

hill-sites) by kings and aristocrats in close political and economic contact with the Empire.[29] The process of Romanization that this encouraged was consolidated and further promoted by leading male Alamanni spending time in their youth as hostages within the Empire, and as

[29] Drinkwater 2007, 83, 93–106, 117–18.

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adults serving as officers in the imperial army. Under Constantius I's grandson, Constantius II, Alamanni such as Latinus, Agilo, and Scudilo operated at the highest level of Roman politics (as *comes domesticorum*, *magister militum*, and *tribunus scutariorum* respectively).[30] Like Silvanus, their Frankish contemporary, or Bauto, a Frank of the next generation, some of these may have been born in the Empire, been raised as Christians, married Romans, and have produced children who were fully part of the imperial aristocracy and 'completely assimilated into Roman civilisation'.[31]

How does Crocus fit into this development? From the outset it is important not to see him as too sophisticated a figure. As Wood observes, Crocus comes a good two generations earlier than the Alamanni of Ammianus.[32] His career was at its height when the Romano-Alamannic relationship was still in its infancy. He is unlikely to have spent his youth as a hostage in the Empire, or to have had a high-born Roman wife and Roman children. So what was he? Again, given the state of the evidence, it is hardly likely that we shall ever know this for certain. All that we can do is to assemble and assess a range of plausible options.

Though the *communis opinio* is to see Crocus as a significant piece on the contemporary politico-military chessboard, we should begin by conceding that he may have been a figure of little or no real strength. Wood, for example, resolves what he calls 'the Crocus conundrum' by accepting Crocus' existence but minimising his role in the events of July 306.[33] He proposes that Crocus was either 'a pro-Roman kinglet, who had joined the retinue of Constantius while the emperor was engaged in his war against other Alaman rulers' or 'a defeated ruler who had been taken hostage'. He concludes that in neither case would Crocus have been in a position to ensure the elevation of Constantine: 'It is perhaps safer to doubt that he held a post of any significance.'[34] In the circumstances of the day 'kinglet' and 'hostage' are certainly possibilities. Let us consider them both, in reverse order.

Constantius' conflict with Alamanni on the upper Rhine and upper Danube *c.* A.D. 300 could have led to the capture of a local leader and, instead of his execution, to his accommodation at court as a trophy, and to guarantee the compliance of his followers at home.[35] This would mark the beginning of the process of Alamannic aristocratic integration outlined above. If Crocus was a hostage, he would not, indeed, have held any powerful Roman post. However, his proximity to Constantius and his possession of an agreeable personality might well have won him an assured place in the imperial entourage. His acceptance as a companion and counsellor (i.e. offering 'help' in the form of advice, not armed might) would have given him influence far beyond his official status. 'Client kings' had long played such a role in imperial life. M. Iulius ('Herod') Agrippa famously enjoyed authority under Gaius and Claudius, including a major role in the accession of the latter. At a later date, the Persian prince, Hormisdas, was close to Constantius I's grandson, Constantius II.[36] (Emperors may have found such people, as disinterested third parties and, if they were willing to stretch a point, social equals, easier to talk to than Roman companions.) In addition, given traditional Roman adulation of military success, what has been

30 Drinkwater 2007, 146–55, especially 146–8.

31 Silvanus: Aurelius Victor, *Caes.* 42.15; Amm. Marc. 15.5.31. Bauto: *PLRE* 1.159–60, 2.410; Waas 1971, 77–8. Cf. Bury 1923, 1.108: that Eudoxia's mother 'had doubtless been a Roman'. Assimilation: Festy 1999, 203 (of Silvanus: 'la complète assimilation … à la civilisation romaine').

32 Wood 2006, 79–80.

33 Wood 2006, 79: 'whether one can go further and see the introduction of Crocus into the account of the *Epitome* as a fiction is an open question. Perhaps the best one can do is to say that there is something unsettling in the role given to Crocus by the epitomator.'

34 Wood 2006, 82.

35 Fighting as Caesar: see below p. 192.

36 Agrippa: Jos., *Ant.Iud.* 18.289–97; 19.238, 265. Hormisdas: Amm. Marc. 16.10.16.

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termed 'the ideology of victory',[37] the presence of a submissive foreigner would have added lustre to the ruling dynasty, and the more so when it came to an imperial succession. In other words, whether or not 'Crocus the hostage' offered valuable assistance in the form of advice, his very presence at the hand-over of power may have been remembered, even advertised, as highly symbolic: Constantius' leadership, confirmed as legitimate by his god-given victories over imperial enemies, now passed legitimately, because sanctioned by one of these defeated enemies, to his son.[38]

As far as 'kinglet' is concerned, there is certainly a case for regarding Crocus as a minor border prince, the son of a king, or a noble, who brought a band of his own warriors to fight for Constantius. 'Prince' is preferable to 'king' here because it is improbable that such a Crocus was a king of the Alamanni, at least as we find the term used in our principal fourth-century sources, Julian, Libanius and Ammianus. In these authors 'king' denotes individuals in permanent control of specific territories. Such men might lead raiding parties, and fight to defend their homelands. However, it is unlikely that Rome ever fell into the habit of routinely recruiting them for distant, long-term imperial campaigns such as Constantius I's Pictish war, in which, in the 'military' explanation of his influence, Crocus and his men are generally accepted to have fought.[39] The Empire needed stable border societies. Alamannic society was highly competitive.[40] The routine removal of chiefs and large numbers of fighting men would have opened the way for local internal disputes and created power-vacuums drawing in long-distance raiders: the very people whom Rome, by tolerating permanent Alamannic settlement close to the frontier, aimed to keep out. In Crocus' case, therefore, 'king' may be interpreted as an honorific title, generated to some degree, perhaps, by Roman insensitivity: *rex* was what Romans called all prominent barbarian military leaders, whatever their domestic status. A command consisting of a small (compared to the size of Roman forces) number of men follows from the preceding and from what may be deduced of Alamannic military strength in general. The largest army a border *rex* could field in the relatively stable and prosperous conditions of the mid-fourth century consisted probably of *c*. 1,000 men.[41] Fifty years earlier, with Alamannic communities fewer and smaller, this must have been significantly less, reducing what could prudently be removed for foreign service by a king's son or a noble to a few hundreds.[42] But size need not have been crucial: again, as in the case of 'Crocus the hostage', through his proximity, personality, and, in addition, military abilities, 'Crocus the kinglet' could well have enjoyed an intimacy with Constantius I and Constantine that belied his actual strength and rank.

But it is surely possible to push beyond Wood's modest categories, to give Crocus 'a post of … significance' more in line with the *communis opinio*. Crocus was certainly no classic court-*Germanus*, but if we accept the *Epitome*'s word for his existence, we should be prepared to believe its suggestion that he was a figure to be reckoned with, not a captive or a lesser supporter of the imperial family.

We may, for example, envisage him as leading a large composite force of Alamanni. When, after serious conflict, Constantine I first made peace with Gothic Tervingi in A.D. 332, he won a

37 Lee 2007, 37.

38 I owe this point, and the preceding appreciation of the importance of hostages, to the anonymous referee, who noted other instances of Late Roman exploitation of foreigners, such as Themistius' highly contrived (not to say dishonest) projection of Persian fear at, and so divine approval of, the army's choice of Jovian as emperor in A.D. 363: Them., *Orat.* 5.66a; cf. Heather and Moncur 2001, 150.

39 Wood 2006, 77.

40 Drinkwater 2007, 121–2.

41 Drinkwater 2007, 238. Cf. Caesar, *BG* 4.1: each Suebic *pagus* had to provide 1,000 men each year for the general army.

42 cf. Drinkwater 2007, 163, 190.

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promise of Gothic contribution of military aid to the Empire under certain circumstances. Though the details of this agreement are very unclear, it appears to have been renewed by successive emperors down to the later fourth century, and to have been activated on at least four occasions. In A.D. 365, it resulted in the arrival of 3,000 men to help Procopius.[43] These were presumably under a single Gothic commander. Crocus might well have been such a commander of Alamanni — perhaps, indeed, the model for Constantine's agreement with the Goths. In other words, in A.D. 306 'Crocus the federate' led a fairly substantial band (say, again bearing in mind a low settled population, *c.* 1,500 strong), drawn from the available military manpower of a handful of frontier *reges*. The occasion for such an agreement could again have been Constantius' victories of *c.* A.D. 300, assuming that these involved border chiefs.[44] In such a case, it is tempting to regard Crocus as himself a ruling king, the forerunner of Chnodomarius, senior commander of the combined Alamannic forces gathered to face Julian at Strasbourg in A.D. 357. However, for the reason already stated, the need for security on the frontier, I still prefer to see him as a prince — a king's son or a leading aristocrat who could be away in a distant land for an extended period, and whose absence or even loss in battle would not cause immediate political crisis at home.

It requires only slight variation of the preceding to transform 'Crocus the federate' into 'Crocus the colonel', a man holding, in Wood's terms, a post of 'significance' which gave him proximity and influence as of right, not through happy circumstance. A federate force, commanded by Crocus, may have proved so useful to Rome that it was made part of the permanent military establishment.[45] It has, indeed, been proposed that Crocus was in charge of one of the élite guards regiments of the imperial field army: a barbarian-recruited *auxilium palatinum* of *c.* 1,200 men. This has been tentatively identified by Speidel as the *Regii* — 'The King's [i.e. Crocus'] Own', later found fighting alongside its twin unit, also raised by Constantius I from barbarians, the Frankish *Batavi*.[46] As such an officer, Crocus could certainly not have been a reigning king. The most influential fourth-century Alamanni in Roman service whom we know of were not 'kings'. They functioned as Roman officers, within the Roman command structure, inside the Roman Empire.[47] There were, indeed, two full Alamannic kings, Vadomarius and Fraomarius, who were given Roman military posts, but they lost their kingships before they became Roman officers.[48] (A Frank, Mallobaudes, did this in reverse order: officer, then king, but again not both at once.[49]) Here, again, 'Crocus *rex*' may have been an honorific. Alternatively, as Castritius has proposed, Crocus, like Fraomarius, may have been an ex-king,[50] a Roman ally who had abdicated or been deposed in the maelstrom of indigenous Alamannic politics, and then found useful work within the Empire as a regimental commander. But this requires Crocus' regiment to have been formed before his arrival.

Finally, to complete the spectrum of possible explanations of Crocus' position, there is real barbarian power. I return to the *Epitome*'s statement that Constantius had brought along Crocus for military support. This could mean that Crocus provided considerable strength in addition to that available through normal channels, Alamannic and Roman: that he was a senior, external, irregular, Germanic warrior commanding other external, irregular, Germanic warriors under the orders of the Western Emperor. The crucial issue then becomes the number of men involved.

[43] I owe this, and the following point, to the anonymous referee. For the details see Heather 1991, 108–15, especially 109 n. 78; Procopius: Amm. Marc. 26.10.3.

[44] Fighting as Caesar: see below p. 192.

[45] cf. Drinkwater 2007, 164 (though presenting a smaller scale process than that envisaged here).

[46] Speidel 1996, 165–6; cf. Castritius 2004, 388.

[47] Drinkwater 2007, 153.

[48] Drinkwater 2007, 149–50, 155–7 (Vadomarius); 150–1 (Fraomarius).

[49] Amm. Marc. 30.3.7.

[50] Castritius 2004, 388.

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For 'Crocus the war-lord' to have the sort of influence he had this must have been considerable. According to Elton, the strength of a first-class tetrarchic legion was *c*. 6,000.[51] I therefore propose 3,000–6,000 men as a reasonable range. Where does this estimate lead? Can we, for example, see Crocus as the leader of a massive alliance of settled Alamannic *reges*, such as came into being to fight Julian at the battle of Strasbourg in A.D. 357? Elsewhere I have proposed that the Strasbourg alliance fielded *c.* 15,000 men.[52] An organisation of only one quarter its size could have provided the sort of numbers proposed for Crocus. However, at such an early date in the history of the border settlements, even this strength would have been difficult to raise, and difficult to hold together in the absence of an external threat, far from home, and over an extended period.[53] From the Roman viewpoint, of course, it would greatly have magnified the potential for instability. But if 'Crocus the war-lord' was not a neighbouring *rex*, what was he? Here I propose a so far unconsidered reconstruction: of a Crocus who is a significant historical figure, but even wilder and woollier than usually depicted: not a courtier or officer, not a 'prince', not a 'king', and very likely not an 'Alaman'.

Between A.D. 296 and 310 there was severe fighting between Constantius and Alamanni. This is conventionally dated to the late-290s, but Barnes has recently put it in the period A.D. 301–5.[54] According to a Latin panegyric of A.D. 310, Constantius won great victories over Alamanni near Langres (where he was wounded), at Windisch, and, in winter, by the Rhine (FIG. 1).[55] We find more details in Eutropius, who says that Constantius was suddenly attacked and almost killed near Langres by invading Alamanni. He was hauled into the city on a rope but then, after the arrival of a relieving army, was able to kill 60,000 of the enemy.[56] This figure must be exaggerated. Constantius needed a foreign victory to balance that of Galerius over the Persians in A.D. 297/98; his defeat of Allectus and the 'First British Empire' was not enough. But clearly something important happened at this time — big enough for Constantius and his supporters to be able to make light of the potentially damaging stories of his wounding and narrow and undignified escape. Relatively large numbers of Alamanni must have been involved. Where did they come from? As explained, it is unlikely that the earliest neighbouring settlements, on the lower Main and lower Neckar, could have generated such manpower. This leaves the interior. Elbe-Germanic warriors drifted in and out of Alamannia from the late Roman into the early medieval period.[57] One result of this was long-distance raiding into the Roman Empire deep into the fourth century (FIG. 1): under Julian (with the Roman defeat at Sanctio in A.D. 361),[58] under Valentinian I (with the Roman defeat in south-eastern Gaul in A.D. 365),[59] and under Gratian (with the Roman victory at Argentovaria in A.D. 378).[60] The preferred route of these raiders seems to have been down the High Rhine towards the Rhine-knee (perhaps after coming down the Main and up the Tauber[61] and Neckar), heading for the Belfort Gap (FIG. 2). This could be the explanation for the run of Alamannic hill-sites on the northern Swabian Alp, facing not the Empire but a major access route into their territory. Constantius I's known battle-sites (FIG. 1) suggest that his Alamanni may have followed the same route. For them, the Rhine-knee region

51 Elton 1996, 327.
52 Drinkwater 2007, 238–9.
53 The Alamanni managed to produce a single 'Great King' only very late, if ever, in their independent history: Drinkwater 2007, 123–4, 335–6.
54 Barnes 1982, 61.
55 *Pan. Lat.* 7 (6).4.2, 6.3–4. Drinkwater 2007, 187–8.
56 Eutropius 9.23.1.
57 Drinkwater 2007, 106, 238–9, 338.
58 Amm. Marc. 21.3.1–3. Drinkwater 2007, 255.
59 Amm. Marc. 27.1–6. Drinkwater 2007, 267.
60 Amm. Marc. 31.10.4–6. Drinkwater 2007, 310–11.
61 For the Tauber as an earlier Roman invasion route, see Drinkwater 2007, 50.

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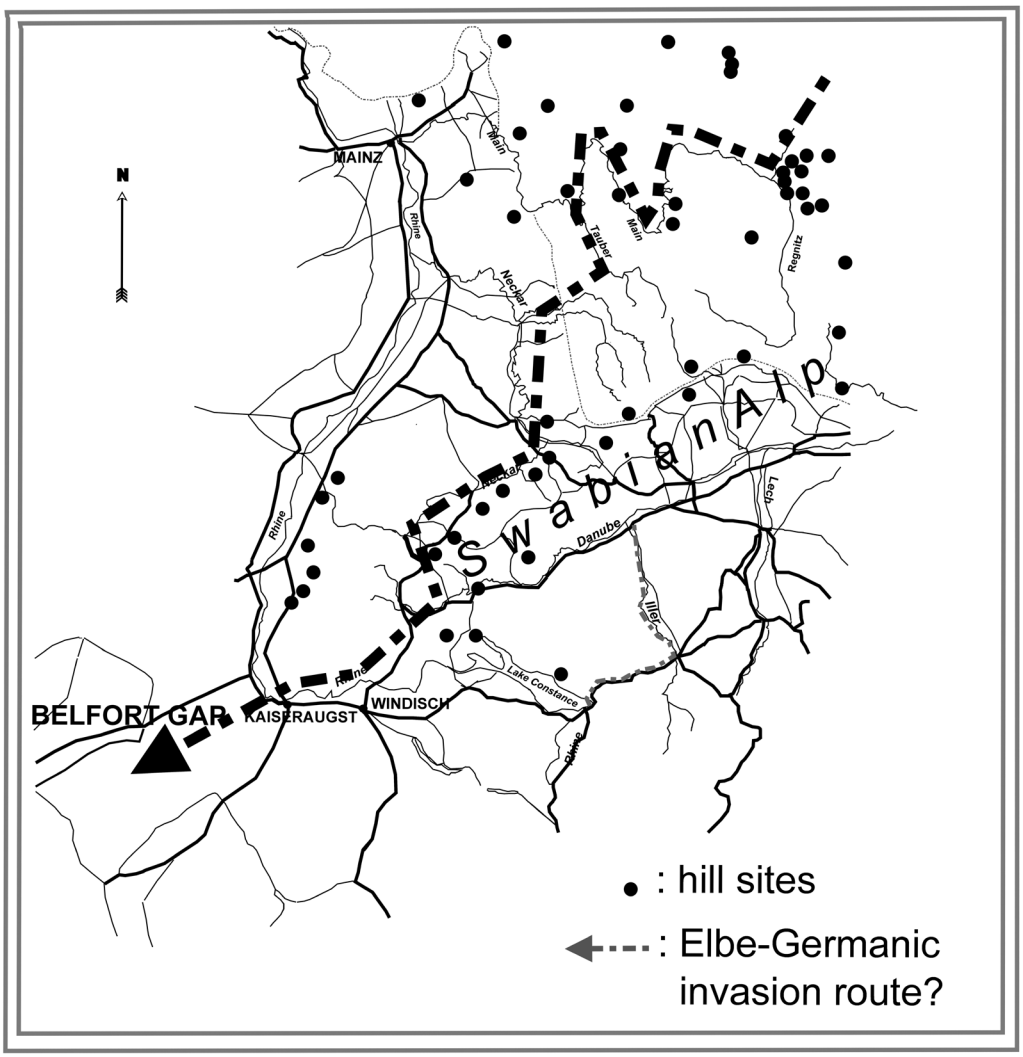



FIG. 2. Proposed route of long-distance Elbe-Germanic raiders.

would have been an even more tempting way into the Empire because in the late third and early fourth century it had few Roman defences and was unprotected by local Alamannic buffer kingdoms.[62] Constantius could well have fought and defeated Crocus as a long-distance raider and then recruited him to command warriors whom, again according to the Latin panegyric of A.D. 310,[63] he levied from the conquered *Germani*.

[62] Drinkwater 2007, 83, 192. (Lorenz 1997, 160, notes the likely attraction to raiders of crossing the Rhine around Basel, where the river is narrower.)

[63] *Pan. Lat.* 7(6).6.4. Cf. Wood 2006, 77.

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If Crocus was by origin a long-distance war-leader, not a settled king, it is also likely that he was not, strictly speaking, an 'Alaman'. As noted, 'Alamanni' and 'Alamannia' were probably Roman concepts. From the Roman viewpoint, Alamanni were simply those who came out of Alamannia. 'Crocus the war-lord' was termed 'Alamannic' because he came into the Empire across the High or Upper Rhine.[64] However, if he was a long-distance raider and if, in the end, he managed to return home, he would have left Alamannia behind for places further east in the Elbe-Germanic triangle, and so ceased to be an Alaman. 'Crocus, king of the Alamanni', may therefore be interpreted as 'Crocus, leader of Elbe-Germanic raiders who first attacked, then aided, the Empire'.

In conclusion, which of the five views of Crocus, king of the Alamanni, proposed above is the most plausible? The *Epitome* is a vexing source, but its account of Crocus implies his possession of supernumerary military strength, and should be adhered to as far as possible. This must rule out 'Crocus the hostage' and 'Crocus the kinglet'. It also rules out 'Crocus the colonel' because, though command of a palatine regiment would undoubtedly have given Crocus some form of military strength, it could not have been supernumerary: Constantius would have been able to call upon it as a matter of course. 'Crocus the federate' would have commanded supernumerary strength, but not nearly as much as 'Crocus the war-lord', which is my preferred identification. On this reconstruction, Crocus, his many men, and his no doubt numerous captains and lieutenants, will have presented a disturbing sight as they strutted the streets of York that eventful July in A.D. 306 — full of bluster and drink following the successful conclusion of the Pictish war.[65] In employing them, Constantius would have shown a touch of imagination and daring out of keeping with his modern reputation for somewhat dull competence and self-effacement;[66] and he grew close to Crocus, allowing him a voice in imperial affairs.

But at the end we must retain some scepticism about the role of Crocus. Events as important as an accession seldom unfold totally spontaneously. The whole thing — both the 'hiatus' and Crocus' 'urging' of Constantine to take power — could well have been rigged. The move against the Tetrarchy was novel and dangerous. If things went badly for Constantine, it might be useful to be able to attribute their beginning to the intervention of a foreigner, and a barbarian to boot: someone whose actions could be blamed, as well as praised, as events required. In other words, the story of the Crocus-incident could have been pro-, just as much as anti-, Constantine propaganda. And, whoever he was, what was Crocus' likely reward? A recent novel has him accompanying Constantine as counsellor down to the battle of the Milvian bridge.[67] However, my guess is that the new emperor would not have wanted him around for long. Though Crocus must have been about the same age as himself, Constantine would have wished to project him as one of yesterday's men. He was probably paid off as soon as possible and, if 'Crocus the war-lord', sent back into the Elbe-Germanic triangle.

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64 Drinkwater 2007, 48, 69.

65 Anon. Vales. 2.4; Amm. Marc. 27.2.2. Wood 2006, 77.

66 cf. Seeck 1921, 1.29: '… ein Mann von stiller Pflichtreue und geringem Ehrgeiz, sehr geeignet, jeden Auftrag tüchtig und erfolgreich auszuführen und sich zugleich willig unterzuordnen.'

67 Rangoussis 1999.

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