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Introduction – Toward a history of the Vandals

Before all things [is] this, which now Almighty God has deigned to indicate through us on behalf of His praise and name; this has exceeded all miraculous works which occurred in the present age: that Africa should recover her freedom through us in so short a time, having been captured by the Vandals one hundred and five years ago – Vandals who were at once enemies of soul and bodies.

Thus the opening sentences of Emperor Justinian I.'s edict on the Praetorian Prefecture of Africa, issued at Constantinople in A.D. 534.¹ The enactment marks the end of a chapter in the long history of the Vandals. Justinian's *animus* is evident. So too the biases of three ancient witnesses of the African venture: Victor of Vita's Danielesque blast against the persecutors;² Procopius of Caesarea's supposedly Thucydidean war commentaries;³ and a nostalgic collection of Latin epigrams, gathered at Carthage soon after Belisarius' victory.⁴ No Paul the Deacon or Senator Cassiodorus stayed behind to compose a sympathetic *Historia Wandalarum*. How does the modern critic write a history of the Vandals?

The first principle of a proper account is its division into three periods: (a) before A.D. 406/407; (b) A.D. 406/407–534; (c) aftermath. The last is particularly challenging, for the Vandals suffered both a shadowy afterlife and a generally bad image.

BEFORE A.D. 406/407

The later prehistory of Europe is a maze. True, the spade remains the principal tool of investigation, and the portrayal of distinctive cultures still involves the analysis and grouping of related sites. But here the archaeologist enjoys and suffers a complication scarcely present in the study of Bronze Age and pre-Bronze Age Europe. During the Iron Age, literate observers based in the Mediterranean littoral and the Near East took fleeting and often inaccurate notice of inner Europe's inhabitants. While the compilers of the Hebrew Bible placed the *Ashkenaz* among Japheth's descendants,⁵ for instance, Greek observers such as Herodotus were becoming aware of the *Keltoi*.⁶ The pace of civilized awareness quickened when the Romans advanced their northern frontier first to the Alps and Rhone estuary, and the thence to the Rhine and Danube Basins.

So it is with the Vandals. Their homeland stood east of the Rhine and north of the Danube; and Roman observers started to remark on them during the first century A.D. The physical record of early first-millennium Europe remains the key to Vandal origins, but the occasional literary references must also be considered. Two examples will suffice. At the dawn of the Antonine Age, Cornelius Tacitus, ever fascinated with decadent Ro-

¹ Codex Iustinianus I, 27, 1, 1 (ed. Paul Krüger/Theodor Mommsen, Berlin 1887) 781. During the preparation of this introduction, I received helpful information from Guido M. Berndt (Paderborn), Serge Lancel (Grenoble), Cécile Morrisson (Paris), Ann Pollock (Madison), Philipp von Rummel (Freiburg), and Roland Steinacher (Wien).

² Apocalyptic elements in Victor's history: e.g. *Historia persecutionis africanae provinciae* I, 22 (cf. Dn 3, 38), II, 84 (Dn 13, 42) and III., 47 (Apc 13, 17) (ed. Serge Lancel, Collection des Universités de France, Série latine 368, Paris 2002) 106–107, 164, 199.

³ Procopius, *Bellum Vandalicum* I–II (ed. and trans. Henry B. Dewing, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, Mass./London 1916, ND 2000) passim. On Procopius and Thucydides compare, for example, Thucydides, *Historiae* I, 1 (ed. Henry St. Jones, Scriptorum Classicorum Bibliotheca Oxoniensis, Oxford 1900) and Procopius, *Bellum Persicum* I, 1 (ed. and trans. Henry B. Dewing, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, Mass./London 1914, ND 2001) 2; and see Averil Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century* (Berkeley 1985) 33–46.

⁴ On the *Codex salmasianus* and the Vandals, see *The Late Roman West and the Vandals*, ed. Frank M. Clover (Aldershot 1993) VI 1–22 esp. 20–22 and XVI 31–39.

⁵ Gn 9, 18 and 10, 1–5.

⁶ Herodotus *Historiae* II, 33, 3 and IV, 49, 3 (ed. and trans. Alfred Denis Godley, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, Mass./London 1920–1926, ND 2001).

man *mores*, fashioned a brief essay on their opposite, the supposedly pure ways of contemporary primitives. The *De origine et situ Germanorum* contains, incidental to Tacitus' primary concern, a jumble of information (uncertain in vintage) about the groupings, locations and ways of the early Germanic peoples. In the midst of this mixed offering stands a brief reference to the *Vandilii*, possible descendants (with other named groups) of Mannus, son of the god Tuisto. Where precisely were the Vandals in Tacitus' day? And how related to the other Mannus tribes?

The second testimony is one of the Constantinian remains of a history, composed by the third-century Athenian dignitary and a man of letters Publius Herennius Dexippus. During the reign of Emperor Aurelian (A.D. 270–275) the *Vandēloi* along the Danube suffered defeat, and made a treaty with the Roman authorities. The Constantinian excerptors and Dexippus offer a precious detail: the two *basileis* and the *archontes* of the Vandals gave their consent to the pact.⁷ Two “kings” seconded by an indeterminate number of “rulers”. How ancient was this two-tiered leadership among the Vandals? And how enduring? Information of this sort both frustrates and fascinates.

A.D. 406/407–534

The Vandals who crossed the Rhine in 406/407 and thereafter remained within imperial territory earned more Roman notice than their predecessors. For the second period the archaeological and literary records are in better balance. The concerns and canons of European historiography govern the study of the Vandals' imperial venture. In the present collection of papers, four points of view can be discerned, and a fifth stands in the immediate background.

The eventual consequence of the Rhine crossing was the development a briefly surviving client kingdom in and around Carthage, the North African heartland. The Vandals were not alone. Kingdoms appeared in other western provinces, at the same time. Some of these rudimentary experiments in government were more successful than others. How did the intruders maintain any identity of their own, now that they were surrounded by Roman provincials? This question has long been a major concern, especially in the nations of the Rhine and upper Danube region. It is no accident that Vienna and Paderborn have joined in sponsoring the present collection of papers. Since the beginning of this decade, an *Arbeitsgruppe* within the Austrian Academy of Sciences, the Institut für Mittelalterforschung, has included the Vandals within a broad study of the populations of the late Roman and post-Roman West. At the same time, the University of Paderborn's Institut zur Interdisziplinären Erforschung des Mittelalters und seines Nachwirkens (IEMAN) has intensified its interest in the survival techniques and identities of Western Europe's new entrants. The Paderborn and Vienna investigators work within and beyond a framework set, for instance, by Kaspar Zeuss and Theodor Mommsen.⁸ A particular line of inquiry, part of the Zeuss-Mommsen legacy, may be singled out as an inspiration for the jointly-supported Vienna conference on the Vandals. In 1888 Ludwig Schmidt of Dresden published a preliminary study entitled *Älteste Geschichte der Wandalen* – an announcement of the classic *Geschichte der Wandalen*, published in 1901 and re-edited in 1942.⁹ Schmidt's highly influential history was part of a larger effort, the monumental *Geschichte der deutschen Stämme bis zum Ausgang(e) der Völkerwanderung*, first released in 1904–1918 and re-edited in 1933–1941.¹⁰ The Schmidt inheritance persists to the present day, amidst enrichments by two Viennese scholars. In 1970 Erich Zöllner superintended the release of the Schmidt-inspired *Geschichte der Frank-*

⁷ Excerpta de legationibus gentium ad Romanos 2, “from the history of Dexippus of Athens” assigned to Dexippus' *Skythika* by Felix Jacoby: Publius Herennius Dexippus, *Skythika* (ed. Felix Jacoby, FGrH II A, 100, Berlin 1926) 452–480, at 460–461. On Dexippus see Fergus Millar, *Rome, the Greek World and the East*, ed. Hannah M. Cotton/Guy M. Rogers (Chapel Hill 2002/2004) 2: Government, Society and Culture in the Roman Empire, 265–297.

⁸ Kaspar Zeuss, *Die Deutschen und die Nachbarstämme* (München 1837). On Mommsen's many contributions see Reinhard Wolters, Mommsen, Theodor, in: RGA 2. Aufl. 20 (Berlin/New York 2002) 157–161.

⁹ Ludwig Schmidt, *Älteste Geschichte der Wandalen. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Völkerwanderung* (Leipzig 1888); Ludwig Schmidt, *Geschichte der Wandalen* (Leipzig 1901, ND München 1942).

¹⁰ Ludwig Schmidt, *Geschichte der deutschen Stämme bis zum Ausgange der Völkerwanderung* (Quellen und Forschungen zur alten Geschichte und Geographie, Berlin 1904–1918); Ludwig Schmidt, *Geschichte der deutschen Stämme bis zum Ausgang der Völkerwanderung* (München 1933/1941, ND 1969–70). On Schmidt's contribution in general, see Matthias Springer, Schmidt, Ludwig, in: RGA 2. Aufl. 27 (Berlin/New York 2004) 190–193.

en.¹¹ A decade later Herwig Wolfram's imaginative and carefully woven history of the Goths first appeared. *Die Goten* enjoyed a fourth edition in 2001, just as the present Paderborn and Vienna efforts were beginning to take shape.¹²

After the 406/407 traverse of the Rhine, the Vandals spent three years in the lands which became the Kingdom of the Franks and then the state of France. Modern French interest in the Vandals centers not their 406–409 venture in Gaul, but on the sojourn in North Africa. Here there is frequent collaboration between the academic communities of France and the North African states, especially Tunisia and Algeria. Two events have set the stage for the joint endeavor. In 1928 the French scholar Eugène Albertini announced the discovery, on the Algerian-Tunisian border, of the ink-on-wood acts of sale that eventually bore his name.¹³ Then, in the early 1970s, the Tunisian government and UNESCO instituted the *Campagne Internationale de Sauvegarde de Carthage*, an international effort to preserve the archaeological heritage of Carthage and her immediate vicinity, in the face of modern development. Within this framework stands a line of inquiry into the Vandals, as influential in its own way as the Ludwig Schmidt heritage discussed above. In 1952 the *Tablettes Albertini* reached full and magnificent publication.¹⁴ One of the four editors was Christian Courtois, *Chargé d'Enseignement* within the Faculty of Letters at Algiers, a post which he held in April 1955, when he defended his two doctoral theses, *Victor de Vita* and *Les Vandales et l' Afrique*, at the Sorbonne.¹⁵ The latter (principal) thesis comes amazingly close to being a complete history of the Vandals. After Courtois, a *quadrigae* of scholars has laid the foundation for today's inquires. Serge Lancel has been an influential guide in archaeological investigation, as evidenced by his command of the 1974–1978 Byrsa excavations – France's contribution to the Save Carthage Campaign;¹⁶ and amidst editorial work on Augustine-era texts he has produced a new edition of *Victor Vitensis*.¹⁷ Jehan Desanges has revolutionized the study of the Maghrib's native substratum in classical and late antiquity, thus making comprehensible (to single out one of many contributions) the southwestern limits of Vandal control in the African heartland.¹⁸ The archaeologist-epigrapher-historian Noël Duval has been a commanding presence in the study of late Roman, Vandal and Byzantine Africa, his own investigations including a running analysis of the dating methods used by the Vandals.¹⁹ The fourth scholar came to the study of late antique Africa by way of the seminar (within the *École Pratique des Hautes Études*) of the Byzantinist Paul Lemerle. In January 1968 Cécile Morrisson defended her doctoral dissertation, soon published as the catalogue of Byzantine coins at the Bibliothèque Nationale. An inspiration for the project and member of her doctoral jury was the British historian and numismatist Philip Grierson. At the same time, in 1967–1970, Cécile Morrisson resided in Tunisia, there commencing the study of coinage in late Roman and post-Roman Africa. She has

¹¹ Erich Zöllner, *Geschichte der Franken bis zur Mitte des sechsten Jahrhunderts* (München 1970). Zöllner emphasizes the debt to Schmidt in the subtitle (“Auf der Grundlage des Werkes von Ludwig Schmidt etc.”), and the preface V–VI.

¹² Herwig Wolfram, *Die Goten. Von den Anfängen bis zur Mitte des sechsten Jahrhunderts. Entwurf einer historischen Ethnographie* (München 2001). In the original preface (1978), Professor Wolfram emphasizes his debt to Schmidt and others.

¹³ Eugène Albertini, *Documents d' époque vandale découverts en Algérie*, in: *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* (1928) 301–303.

¹⁴ *Tablettes Albertini: Actes privés de l' époque vandale (Fin du V^e siècle)*, ed. Christian Courtois/Louis Leschi/Charles Perrat/Charles Saumagne (Paris 1952).

¹⁵ Pierre Riché, *Chronique - soutenance de thèse en Sorbonne*, in: *Revue historique* 215 (1956) 228–232; Christian Courtois, *Victor de Vita son oeuvre. Étude critique* (Algiers 1954); Christian Courtois, *Les Vandales et l' Afrique* (Paris 1955/Aalen 1964).

¹⁶ Serge Lancel Jean-Paul Morel/Jean-Paul Thuillier, *Mission archéologique à Carthage: Byrsa I, and Byrsa II* (Rome 1979, 1982).

¹⁷ *Gesta conlationis Carthaginiensis a. 411; Augustinus, Breviculus conlationis cum Donatistis* (ed. Serge Lancel, CCSL 149A, Turnhout 1974); *Victor de Vita: Histoire de la persécution vandale en Afrique* (ed. Serge Lancel, Collection des Universités de France, Série latine 368, Paris 2002) 1–212. Serge Lancel reports (*per epistulam*, 15 June 2003) that he is preparing an edition (with translation and commentary) of Augustine's letters.

¹⁸ On the southwestern sector of Vandal Africa see Jehan Desanges, *Un témoignage peu connu de Procope sur la Numidie vandale et byzantine*, in: *Byzantion* 33 (1963) 41–69. Appreciation: Jehan Desanges, *Toujours Afrique apporte fait nouveau; Scripta minora*, ed. Jean Leclant (Paris 1999).

¹⁹ *L' Afrique vandale et byzantine (1^{er} partie)*, *AnTard* 10 (2002). *L' Afrique vandale et byzantine (2^e partie)*, *AnTard* 11 (2003). The most recent discussion of Vandal dating methods appears at loc. cit. 11 (2003), 85–96. Appreciations: *Orbis Romanus Christianusque. Travaux sur l'Antiquité Tardive rassemblés autour des recherches de Noël Duval*, ed. François Baratte et al. (Paris 1995); *Mélanges d'Antiquité Tardive (II). De infima antiquitate studiola in honorem Noël Duval*, ed. Catherine Balmelle/Pascale Chevalier/Gisela Ripoll (Turnhout 2004).

successfully established a broad context for the present understanding of Vandal-age currency.²⁰ Of all these scholars – Courtois and successors – Eugène Albertini would have been exceedingly proud.

The Vandals of the African heartland were Roman clients, suffering changeable treaty relations with the imperial government from soon after the crossing to Africa until the rupture of 533/534. The imperial setting of Vandal Africa has long been the concern of Italy's scholars – understandably so, for Italy bore the brunt of Vandal wrath between 440 and 480. Many Italian scholars have given attention to Vandal-Roman relations, but once again a specific strand of investigation has been most influential. In 1926, no less an ancient historian than Gaetano de Sanctis, prize student of Karl Julius Beloch, gave critical attention to some of the picturesque ancient tales about the Vandal sack of Rome, 2–16 June 455.²¹ De Sanctis was reacting to a study published the previous year by Alberto Gitti,²² a *Vorarbeit* of that scholar's eventual dissertation, which reached the reading public in 1953. The *Ricerche sui rapporti tra I Vandali e l'Impero romano* focused on the troubled years between the Vandal assault on Carthage (439) and the sack of Rome.²³ It is an excellent study, a model for future work.

Before they set sail across the *fretum Gaditanum*, the Vandals spent two decades in the Iberian Peninsula (409–429). In a sense, the present interest in the Spanish hour stems from Isidore of Seville's *Historia Gothorum Wandalorum Sueborum*, a brief and frequently derivative work offering a more balanced portrait than those of Victor and Procopius.²⁴ But it is Isidore's calling, rather than his history, that has set the context for subsequent investigation. Today's peninsula-based scholars, including some contributors to the present volume, look for the Vandals in the physical remains of fifth-century Spain, carefully comparing any finds with the literary testimony. The parent of such interest is the long-standing fascination with the Christian Community in Spain. One example will suffice. In 428 the Vandal chieftain Gundiric died in Hispalis (Seville), province of Baetica, just as he was “laying his hands impiously on the basilica of the Martyr Vincent” – so Isidore, in his history.²⁵ Regarding this event, one can still profitably consult Enrique Flórez, who argued in 1752 that one of Isidore's predecessors, the fifth-century chronicler and ecclesiastic Hydatius, offers a proper setting for Isidore's account. Speaking of the same incident, Hydatius identifies the object of Gundiric's wrath as the *ecclesia civitatis*. For Enrique Flórez, Hydatius' expression (implying a principal church within the city) and the more detailed account of Isidore are mutually illuminating.²⁶ Interest in the Vandals, within the context of Spain's ecclesiastical past, persists to the present day.²⁷

Philip Grierson's contribution to Cécile Morrisson's doctoral dissertation has already received attention. In addition to the nations of the Continent, the British Isles have long been fertile ground for the study of the late Roman Empire, Edward Gibbon providing the most notable impetus. For the *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* Gibbon drew inspiration from a 1764/1765 sojourn in Italy.²⁸ Today his heirs are fascinated with all aspects of the late Roman and post-Roman Mediterranean. Just recently some of them have given specific attention to the Vandals. The intellectual ancestry of this development is complex. Two immediate forebears seem to have been most influential. During his long association with Gonville and Caius College in Cambridge, Philip Grierson published penetrating studies of late Roman and early medieval coin-

²⁰ Cécile Morrisson, *Catalogue des monnaies byzantines de la Bibliothèque Nationale* (Paris 1970). The details about her doctoral dissertation and residence in Tunisia came to me *per epistulam*, 19 October 2005. A recent assessment of North African coinage appears in *AnTard* 11 (2003) 65–84.

²¹ Gaetano de Sanctis, *Scritti minori* 6, 2 (Rome 1972) 732–733, no. 93. For an appreciation of his distinguished career, see Arnaldo Momigliano, *Secondo contributo alla storia degli studi classici* (Rome 1960) 299–317.

²² Alberto Gitti, *Eudossia e Genserico*, in: *Archivio storico italiano* ser. 7, 4 (1925) 3–38.

²³ Alberto Gitti, *Ricerche sui rapporti tra I Vandali e l'Impero romano* (Bari 1953).

²⁴ Isidore's history depends on earlier chronicles, but contains significant additions. Frank Clover, *Review of Isidore of Seville's History of the Kings of the Goths etc.*, in: *Classical Philology* 62 (1967) 229–230.

²⁵ Isidorus Hispalensis, *Historia Gothorum Wandalorum Sueborum* 73 (ed. Theodor Mommsen, *MGH AA* 11, *Chronica Minora* 2, Berlin 1894, ND München 1981) 296.

²⁶ Hydatius, *Chronica* 79, s.a. 428 (ed. Richard W. Burgess, *The Chronicle of Hydatius and the Consularia Constantinopolitana. Two Contemporary Accounts of the Final Years of the Roman Empire*, Oxford 1993) 88–90; Enrique Flórez, *España sagrada* 9 (Madrid 1752) 100.

²⁷ See, for example, *Purificación Ubric Rabaneda, La Iglesia en la Hispania del siglo V* (Granada 2004) 211–222.

²⁸ Patricia Craddock, *Young Edward Gibbon, Gentleman of Letters* (Baltimore 1982) 198–229, 222–223.

age, his investigations having an impact that extends well beyond the field of numismatics.²⁹ The currency of Vandal Africa frequently drew his attention.³⁰ His activity is roughly contemporaneous with that of another scholar, E. A. Thompson, the Dublin-trained classicist who developed a keen interest in the Germanic successor states, especially during his years at King's College (London) and Nottingham, 1945–1948 and 1948–1979 respectively.³¹ Now, back to today's heirs of Edward Gibbon, the intellectual children of Edward Thompson and Philip Grierson. During the present decade, just as the Vienna and Paderborn effort was taking shape, a group of young British scholars organized a series of panels on "Early Medieval Africa", at a succession of International Medieval Congresses, held each summer at the University of Leeds. The fruits of these North Africa sessions reached print in 2004, under the title *Vandals, Romans, and Berbers* and the editorship of the Cambridge-trained scholar Andrew Merrills. Interestingly enough, three of the contributors to the Merrills volume are also involved in the Paderborn-Vienna enterprise.³² Today, the study of the Vandals is truly an international affair.

AFTERMATH

In his war commentaries Procopius conveys a fanciful tale, possibly related to him by Vandal survivors of Belisarius' conquest, about Vandal origins. In times past, before the hour of the Hasding chieftain Godagisil (406–407), the Vandals lived on the shores of Lake Maeotis (Sea of Azov). There some of them remained, after Godagisil led a large number "to the [lands of the] Germans, who are now called the Franks."³³ Years later the Maeotic remnants sent a legation to Geiseric's realm. Using rhetorical commonplaces (about the mutability of human affairs) to obscure the words Geiseric and the envoys might have said to one another, Procopius concludes the story: "Of those Vandals, at any rate, who remained in their ancestral land, neither remembrance nor name is preserved to my day."³⁴ Procopius' story brings to view the possibility of an European aftermath of the African venture. The pursuit of such a phenomenon is closely linked with another, the image of the Vandals in medieval and modern Europe. On this matter, the 1954 investigation of Hanno Helbling is most helpful. Just recently, an astute critic has presented an excellent blueprint for future work.³⁵

This, then, is a sketch of a history of the Vandals. *Laboremus*.

²⁹ Appreciations: Studies in Numismatic Method presented to Philip Grierson, ed. Christopher Nugent Lawrence Brooke/B.H.I.H. Stewart/J.G. Pollard/T.R. Volk, (Cambridge 1983); and Philip Grierson, *Scritti storici e numismatici*, ed. Ermanno Arslan/Lucia Travaini (Centro Italiano di Studi sull'alto Medioevo, Collectanea 15, Spoleto 2001).

³⁰ Philip Grierson, *The Tablettes Albertini and the Value of the Solidus in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries A.D.*, in: *Journal of Roman Studies* 49 (1959) 73–80; and Philip Grierson/Mark Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage, with a Catalogue of the Coins of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, I: The Early Middle Ages 5th–10th Centuries* (Cambridge 1986) 17–23, 418–422.

³¹ Appreciations: Hazel Thompson, Edward Thompson, in: *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 32 (1988) 1–5; Robert A. Marcus, E. A. Thompson and the Study of Late Antiquity, in: *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 32 (1988) 6–10.

³² *Vandals, Romans and Berbers. New Perspectives on Late Antique North Africa*, ed. Andrew H. Merrills (Aldershot 2004). On the steps leading to the publication of the volume see Dr. Merrills' preface, XI–XII. Contributors to both the Leeds and the Vienna-Paderborn efforts: Walter Pohl, Roland Steinacher and Andreas Schwanitz.

³³ The preliminaries of the tale appear in Procopius, *Bellum Vandalicum* I, 1, 10; I, 2, 5 and I, 3, 1, ed. Dewing 6, 10, 22.

³⁴ Procopius, *Bellum Vandalicum* I, 22, 1–18, ed. Dewing 184–188. The verbal exchange between Geiseric and the ambassadors (I, 22, 7–12, ed. Dewing 186) is a re-statement of Geiseric's reflections on human fortune at *Bellum Vandalicum* I, 4, 12–13, ed. Dewing 36. For Procopius' occasional reliance on word-of-mouth reports by conquered Vandals see *Bellum Vandalicum* I, 3, 33–34, ed. Dewing 32. In general, see Berthold Rubin, *Prokopios von Kaesareia*, in: *RE* 23,1 (1957) 273–599, 414.

³⁵ Hanno Helbling, *Goten und Wandalen. Wandlung der historischen Realität* (Zürich 1954); Roland Steinacher, *Vandalen*, in: *DNP* 15/3 (2004) 942–946.

