

## Chapter 1

### **The Ostrogothic Kingdom: Ideologies and Transitions**

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#### *Abstract*

This chapter provides an overview of the political history of the Ostrogothic kingdom from Theoderic's accession until the end of the Gothic War and the promulgation of the Pragmatic Sanction by Justinian in 554. It discusses the ways in which power was organized and legitimized in a world of emerging barbarian kingdoms, but in which the political and cultural traditions of the Roman Empire continued to function as a key frame of reference. The Amal government developed careful strategies of representation in order to negotiate the loyalties and interests of diverse groups within the kingdom and to define their position in relation to the eastern emperor. The consolidation and eventual disintegration of the Ostrogothic kingdom was accompanied by contemporary debates about the legitimacy of Ostrogothic rule, and its compatibility with Roman imperial traditions. The resulting narratives and ideologies of transition continue to shape our understanding of the political changes which led to the emergence of a post-imperial world.

#### *Introduction*

The history of Ostrogothic Italy has complicated beginnings, reaching back well before the year 493, when Theoderic the Great established himself as a ruler over the peninsula. In 476, the general Odovacer overthrew Orestes as the leader of the army in Italy and deposed the emperor

Romulus Augustulus, the latter's son, an event which serves as one of the conventional dates for the end of Antiquity and the transition to the Middle Ages. There was nothing new in the seizure of power by a barbarian military commander, which had occurred many times before during the fifth century. In contrast to his predecessors, however, Odovacer did not attempt to install an emperor of his own choice, but instead sent the imperial insignia to the emperor Zeno in Constantinople, henceforth ruling over Italy as a *rex*.<sup>1</sup>

Roman authors of a later generation retrospectively interpreted these events as the end of the Empire in the West and cast Odovacer as a barbarian usurper – yet the Empire persisted as a framework for Italian politics well after 476.<sup>2</sup> The last western emperor to be recognised as such by his eastern colleague Zeno, Julius Nepos, died only in 481 in exile in Dalmatia, and Odovacer acknowledged both Nepos' nominal authority and the suzerainty of the emperor in Constantinople. Theoderic, in turn, seized power over Italy by mandate of the eastern emperor, and it seems that for him and many of his subjects, Ostrogothic rule over Italy was perceived as perfectly compatible with the imperial order.

By 488, tensions between Zeno and Odovacer had mounted to such an extent that the emperor decided to send Theoderic and his army to Italy to remove Odovacer from power. Theoderic, who had emerged successfully from a power struggle between various competing groups of Goths and their leaders in the Balkans in the course of the 470s and 480s, had recently

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<sup>1</sup> For the events, Stein, *Bas-Empire*, 2, pp. 39-58; Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, pp. 238-247; Moorhead, *Theoderic*, pp. 6-11; Henning, *Periclitans res publica*, pp. 57-70 (with bibliography).

<sup>2</sup> Marcellinus Comes, *Chronicle*, a. 476, ed. Croke; Jordanes, *Romana* 344, ed. Mommsen. See Croke, "AD 476", with the comments in Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 281-82. Fanning, "Odovacer", stresses Odovacer's Roman and imperial profile.

plundered Thrace and was at the time threatening Constantinople. For Zeno, dispatching Theoderic to fight Odovacer in Italy provided a way to deal with two problems at once.<sup>3</sup> Theoderic entered Italy in 489 and prevailed over Odovacer after a period of intense warfare. In 493, following a protracted siege of the capital Ravenna whence Odovacer had retreated, the two generals agreed to share rule over Italy. Theoderic, however, murdered Odovacer shortly after entering the city (allegedly with his own hands) and had many of his followers killed. Thereafter, Theoderic's army, the *exercitus Gothorum*, proclaimed him king.<sup>4</sup> Theoderic had been king of the Goths already since 474, and the renewed proclamation in 493 was probably meant to underline his claim to power over Italy and all of its inhabitants.

Theoderic ruled until his death in 526, but the Italian realm outlasted him only by two decades, being decisively destroyed in 552 by the emperor Justinian's army. Although it existed for little more than half a century in total, it has profoundly influenced our understanding of the transition from the Roman Empire to a post-imperial world in western Europe. By the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, barbarian kings had come to rule Roman provinces all over the West, in North Africa, Spain, and Gaul. Ostrogothic Italy, the former heartland of the Empire, is usually seen as the most "Roman" (and most "imperial") of these western "successor states". At the same time, it has been a paradigmatic case in the study of barbarian ethnicity, settlement, and political integration. This has resulted in quite diverse, and only partially overlapping, narratives for framing Ostrogothic history, which continue to elicit lively debates among historians. Did the emergence of Ostrogothic rule mark the end of the Roman Empire in the West and its

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<sup>3</sup> For the agreement between Zeno and Theoderic, see Moorhead, *Theoderic*, pp. 17-19; Haarer, *Anastasius*, 76-79; Arnold, *Theoderic*, pp. 63-71.

<sup>4</sup> *Anonymus Valesianus* 12 (57), ed. Rolfe.

replacement by a barbarian kingdom, the transition to a different, early medieval world? Or was it rather the short-lived renaissance of the western Empire? How was the position of the Ostrogothic state defined in relation to the Empire in the East? Should we stress the continuity with the political and cultural traditions of the Roman Empire or the barbarian alterity of this polity, its “Romanness” or its “Gothicness”? The main aim of this chapter is to present a brief outline of the political history of the Ostrogothic kingdom between 493 and 554, but also to address some of these issues.<sup>5</sup>

One important problem should be addressed from the outset: very often, the questions posed by modern historians (and the answers they provide) are informed by a set of underlying dichotomies, which also characterize broader debates on the period: continuity vs. change, decline vs. transformation, peaceful integration vs. violent conquest, Romans vs. barbarians. As many of the traditional views associated with the “fall of Rome” and the barbarian migrations (*Völkerwanderung*) have effectively been criticized in recent decades, it has become clear that we need to move beyond such dichotomies and analyze the Roman continuities of the barbarian kingdoms, and the processes of social, political, and economic change in a world for which the Roman Empire continued to function as a point of reference.<sup>6</sup> This is especially important

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<sup>5</sup> Fundamental works include: Wolfram, *Goths*, pp. 247-362; Heather, *Goths*, pp. 216-76; Amory, *People*; Barnish/Marazzi, eds., *The Ostrogoths*. Important aspects regarding the practice of government and administration in the Ostrogothic *regnum* are discussed in other chapters: see Bjornlie, Lafferty, Halsall in this volume.

<sup>6</sup> Pohl, *Völkerwanderung*; Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*; Brown, *Rise*; see the series *The Transformation of the Roman World* (1997-2004). The paradigm of decline and fall has been

regarding the most pervasive of these dichotomies, that between “Romans” and “barbarians”, which continues to shape the selection and interpretation of the late antique evidence in often problematic ways.<sup>7</sup> Recent work has demonstrated that the barbarian peoples who established power in the Roman West were not the stable and coherent entities imagined by previous generations of nationalist historians, and has emphasized the Roman (and Christian) foundations of the emerging barbarian polities.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, the multiple levels and changing conceptions of Roman identity have come into sharper view. There were eastern and western, military and civil, central and regional interpretations of Romanness and political legitimacy, only some of which overlapped.<sup>9</sup> Instead of finding a verdict on the Roman or barbarian nature of Ostrogothic society and its rulers, it is more interesting to look at 6<sup>th</sup>-century conceptions of empire, Roman and Gothic identity, and to study the ways in which contemporary actors interpreted, negotiated, and legitimized the political and ideological shifts and transitions. Indeed, many of the issues at stake in modern debates were already discussed, in similar terms, by the authors of our sources.

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forcefully revived by Ward-Perkins, *Fall of Rome*; Heather, *Fall*. For comment, see Pohl, “Rome”.

<sup>7</sup> Pohl, “Rome”, p. 99; for the archaeological evidence, von Rummel, “Fading Power”.

<sup>8</sup> Pohl, “Strategies of Identification”; Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 35-45; and the sometimes polemical contributions in Gillett, ed., *On Barbarian Identity*. For a critique of nationalist paradigms, Geary, *Myth of Nations*, pp. 15-40; Wood, *Modern Origins*.

<sup>9</sup> Brown, *Through the Eye*, pp. 392-94; Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 470-82; Heather, *Fall*, pp. 432-43; Arnold, *Theoderic*, pp. 74-76, for Ostrogothic Italy.

Another, closely related problem concerns certain narratives that have become almost canonical in modern accounts of Ostrogothic history. For example, the history of the Ostrogothic kingdom is usually told in two parts, first a period of consolidation and prosperity under a strong and emperor-like Theoderic, and second, from the 520s onwards, a time of mounting tensions and crises in the latter part of his reign, eventually leading into further decline and the outbreak of war under his successors. This, of course, reflects the nature of the available (written) sources, the specific perspectives of their authors, and the interpretations which they seek to promote. These were texts written to explain, legitimize, or criticize, but also influence, the social and political developments of their time. It is therefore important to bear in mind the extent to which our understanding of the Ostrogothic state is conditioned by narratives and ideologies of transition created in the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

#### *Theoderic's imperial kingdom*

For Theoderic, as for Odovacer before him, recognition by the emperor in the East was crucial. Embassies seeking confirmation of his position had been sent to Constantinople even before Theoderic had achieved undisputed control over Italy. However, Zeno died in 491 and his successor Anastasius was reluctant to acknowledge Theoderic's rule. The elevation as king over Italy therefore happened without imperial consent, and it was only in 498, after protracted negotiations, that Anastasius finally recognized Theoderic's rule.<sup>10</sup> The *Anonymus Valesianus* reports that Theoderic "made peace with the emperor Anastasius with regard to the presumption of the rule (*presumptio regni*) and Anastasius sent back to him all the ornaments of the palace, which Odovacer had transferred to Constantinople [in 476]."<sup>11</sup> This symbolic act of returning the

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<sup>10</sup> See Moorhead, *Theoderic*, pp. 35-39, Haarer, *Anastasius*, pp. 80-82.

<sup>11</sup> *Anonymus Valesianus* (12) 64, ed. Rolfe.

*ornamenta palatii* in 498 signaled the acceptance of Theoderic's independent rule in the Italian provinces.<sup>12</sup>

If the conditions for this agreement were laid down in a formal treaty, no written record has survived. This has caused vigorous debate among scholars about Theoderic's constitutional position and the precise definition of the Ostrogothic kingdom as a political entity in relation to the Empire.<sup>13</sup> What kind of legitimate authority could Theoderic and his successors claim for their exercise of power over Goths and Romans in Italy? Was his role that of a "barbarian king" similar to other rulers in the West, or did he fulfill a properly imperial function on a par with his senior colleague in the East?

Theoderic, who was a Roman citizen and had received the consulate and the title of patrician, came to Italy as a representative of the emperor and as a royal leader of his Gothic army. He would go on to exercise his rule over all the inhabitants of Italy as a king based on the election by the *exercitus* and, eventually, the recognition by the emperor. While in older research Theoderic's kingship was seen as part of a supposedly "Germanic" tradition of kingship, this view has meanwhile justly been discarded.<sup>14</sup> More recent approaches instead emphasize the Roman traditions underlying political rule not only in Ostrogothic Italy, but in all the kingdoms

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<sup>12</sup> *Anonymus Valesianus* (12) 64, ed. Rolfe; see Kohlhas-Müller, *Rechtsstellung*, pp. 143-46.

Börm, "Kaisertum", p. 54 interprets this as an invitation to Theoderic to nominate a new western emperor.

<sup>13</sup> Jones, "Constitutional Position"; Wolfram, *Gotische Studien*, pp. 139-44, 159-70; Prostko-Proskýnski, *Utraeque res publicae*; Arnold, *Theoderic*, esp. 72-91.

<sup>14</sup> Notably (but not exclusively) in the works of German-speaking scholars such as Ensslin, *Theoderich*; Dahn, *Die Könige der Germanen*. For a critique, see Dick, *Der Mythos*.

established in the former provinces, for which the models were imperial rather than non-Roman.<sup>15</sup> Many elements associated with barbarian kingship which scholars used to interpret as “Germanic” traditions are now seen as being derived from imperial precedents. It is therefore more appropriate to speak of “post-imperial” kingship.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, as Walter Pohl has observed, kingdom and people (*regnum* and *gens*) were two distinct social spaces in the post-Roman kingdoms.<sup>17</sup> In Ostrogothic Italy, the *gens* was roughly equivalent to the Gothic army, or more specifically to those members of the Gothic military elite who elected the king and gave their consent to military expeditions. It deserves emphasis that this was by no means a homogenous group in terms of ethnic identification.<sup>18</sup> The *regnum*, by contrast, comprised the inhabitants of all of Italy and its provinces, including the Roman population. Accordingly, Theoderic used as an official title simply *rex* (without any ethnic or territorial specification), complemented by the *gentilicium* Flavius, which conveyed a distinctly Roman (and perhaps imperial) flavor.<sup>19</sup> To assume kingship would have provided a way to exert independent rule over a Roman region

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<sup>15</sup> Pohl, “Regnum”; Wolfram, *Gotische Studien*, pp. 139-73; Esders, *Römische Rechtstradition*; Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 488-94.

<sup>16</sup> Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 488-90.

<sup>17</sup> Pohl, “Regnum”, p. 443.

<sup>18</sup> See Swain and Halsall in this volume.

<sup>19</sup> Wolfram, *Goths*, pp. 286-88; idem, *Intitulatio*, pp. 61-62, 67-70; Prostko-Proskýnski, *Utraeque res publicae*, pp. 63-74. The use of an “ethnic” title (such as *rex Gothorum*) by barbarian kings was the exception rather than the rule in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries: Gillett, “Was Ethnicity”; Pohl, “Regnum und Gens”, pp. 440-41.



without openly challenging the position of the emperor or continuity with the empire and its institutions.<sup>20</sup>

Imperial legitimation and kingship were thus closely intertwined aspects of Theoderic's authority. Our various sources are mostly of a later date and transmit selective and sometimes conflicting accounts, thus giving rise to vigorous debates among modern historians; we should therefore perhaps resist the urge to harmonize them.<sup>21</sup> Theoderic's strategies of representation suggest that he was deliberately exploiting the ambiguity of his position as king.<sup>22</sup> While he abstained from using the imperial title (*imperator* or *Augustus*), official documents such as those contained in the *Variae*, often describe Theoderic as a *princeps* with the full range of imperial attributes.<sup>23</sup> Theoderic also seems to have respected certain ceremonial prerogatives, such as the right to issue coins with the ruler's portrait. The fact that he legislated by means of edicts (*edicta*) rather than through laws (*leges*) is usually interpreted in this sense as well, but his legislative activity clearly followed imperial models.<sup>24</sup> The anniversary of his reign in 500 was celebrated in Rome in truly imperial fashion, including games, a speech in front of the Senate, and a visit to St.

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<sup>20</sup> Pohl, *Völkerwanderung*, p. 136; Barnish, "Cuncta Italiae Membra", p. 319.

<sup>21</sup> Moorhead, *Theoderic*, pp. 39-51 provides a helpful discussion of the different viewpoints in the sources.

<sup>22</sup> Arnold, *Theoderic*, pp. 27-28 and 88-91, who emphasizes the overlap between royal and imperial language and titles; Fanning, "Odoacer", pp. 47-51. For a general overview: McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, pp. 267-84.

<sup>23</sup> Reydellet, *La royauté*, pp. 214-22; Giardina, *Cassiodoro*, pp. 146-48; Kohlhas-Müller, *Rechtsstellung*, pp. 88-99, 107-37.

<sup>24</sup> Lafferty, *Law*, pp. 28-29 and passim; Kohlhas-Müller, *Rechtsstellung*, pp. 235-45.

Peter's.<sup>25</sup> Theoderic also stepped into the role of a Christian emperor, quite irrespective of his non-Nicene (“homoean”) creed.<sup>26</sup> He sponsored the building of churches and acted as a mediator in doctrinal debates and conflicts of succession within the Catholic Church. The acts of a Roman synod held in 499 show the assembled Catholic bishops extending acclamations to Theoderic as if to an emperor.<sup>27</sup>

A famous inscription set up by a distinguished Roman senator celebrated Theoderic as “illustrious king” and “perpetual *Augustus*”, showing that even if he did not openly style himself an emperor, his subjects certainly could imagine him in this role.<sup>28</sup> Theoderic and his courtiers in Ravenna used both the language of kingship and the language of empire to articulate the legitimacy of the Ostrogothic government. In Cassiodorus' *Variae*, *regnum* and *imperium* are used interchangeably for both the Italian realm and the eastern Empire, sometimes differentiating “our realm” from the “eastern realm”, but never with an “ethnic” qualification such as “kingdom of the Ostrogoths”. Continuity with the Roman Empire is also conveyed by the frequent use of *res publica*, a term which could express both shared traditions and claims to distinctiveness vis à vis other barbarian kingdoms and equality vis à vis the eastern Empire.<sup>29</sup> The works of Ennodius

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<sup>25</sup> *Anonymus Valesianus* 65-67 (12), ed. Rolfe; Vitiello, “Teoderico”; McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, p. 273.

<sup>26</sup> Heather, *Goths*, pp. 223-25. See also Lizzi Testa in this volume.

<sup>27</sup> *Acta synhodorum*, Synod of 499, ed. Mommsen, p. 405; Moorhead, *Theoderic*, p. 54.

<sup>28</sup> CIL X, 6850-52; Moorhead, *Theoderic*, pp. 47-48; Giardina, *Cassiodoro*, pp. 73-99, who suggests a connection with Cassiodorus and the court.

<sup>29</sup> Suerbaum, *Staatsbegriff*, pp. 247-67; Giardina, *Cassiodoro*, pp. 124-31; Prostko-Postkynski, *Utraque res publicae*, pp. 75-101.

likewise display a sense of imperial self-assurance on the part of the senatorial and clerical elite.<sup>30</sup>

Eastern emperors clearly acknowledged Theoderic as a ruler with legitimate authority over the Italian realm. In his correspondence with the Senate in Rome, Anastasius referred to Theoderic as the “exalted king (*excelsus rex*),” who is entrusted with the “power and solicitude of governing you.”<sup>31</sup> Similarly, Justin referred to him as “preeminent king.”<sup>32</sup> Eastern observers were also well aware of the ambivalence of Theoderic’s status. The Latin historian Jordanes, who composed a *Gothic History* and a brief *Roman History* in Constantinople in the early 550s, carefully weighed the language of barbarian kingship against that of the Roman imperial tradition when he characterized the beginning of Theoderic’s rule in Italy.<sup>33</sup> His writings also alert to the contrast between the imperial legitimation of Theoderic’s takeover and the idea, which he borrowed from the chronicler Marcellinus Comes, that the western empire had ended in 476.<sup>34</sup> Procopius, writing in Greek, carefully exploited the tensions between king and emperor, tyranny and imperial authority, when he noted in his *Wars* that Theoderic, like a barbarian ruler, used the title  $\rho\eta\chi\acute{\iota}$  (“*rex*”/“*rhix*”), but that he showed himself to be a true emperor over Goths and

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<sup>30</sup> Rohr, *Ennodius*; Näf, “Zeitbewusstsein”; Amory, *People*, pp. 112-20.

<sup>31</sup> *Collectio Avellana* 113, ed. Günther, p. 507.

<sup>32</sup> *Collectio Avellana* 199, ed. Günther, p. 658; Wolfram, *Intitulatio*, pp. 54 n. 103.

<sup>33</sup> Jordanes, *Romana* 348-49; Jordanes, *Getica* 289-95, ed. Mommsen.

<sup>34</sup> Jordanes, *Romana* 345; *Getica*, 243, ed. Mommsen.

Romans through his deeds – even if he had been a tyrant in name.<sup>35</sup> Both Jordanes and Procopius of course wrote with hindsight: their accounts of the beginning of Theoderic's reign and his rule were shaped by the climate of the 550s, when the legitimacy of Ostrogothic rule over Italy had become an explosive issue against the background of Justinian's attempt to restore direct imperial control over the West. Procopius' account of war-time negotiations between Gothic ambassadors and the eastern general Belisarius demonstrates that the question to which extent Theoderic's assumption of power had been authorized by the emperor (and could therefore be seen as conforming to imperial traditions and prerogatives) was a crucial argument for (de)legitimizing the Italian war.<sup>36</sup>

Already in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, there were thus diverse vocabularies of power available to characterize the rule of Theoderic and his successors. The balance between kingship and empire, between military leadership and Roman civil power, was constantly re-negotiated by different political players throughout Theoderic's reign and that of his successors. So was the shifting status of the Ostrogothic state between barbarian kingdom and empire restored, and the definition of its relationship with the eastern Empire.

#### *Organization of power and the rhetoric of legitimacy*

The Gothic envoys who made the case for the legitimacy of Ostrogothic rule of Italy in Procopius' account made their point by underlining continuity with imperial traditions of

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<sup>35</sup> Procopius, *Wars* 5.1.26-30, ed. and trans. Dewing; Wolfram, *Intitulatio*, pp. 40-41, suggested a transliteration of either a Gothic or a Latin term, but see now idem, *Gotische Studien*, p. 140; Reydellet, *La royauté*, pp. 202-05.

<sup>36</sup> Procopius, *Wars* 6.6, ed. Dewing.

government, most of all with regard to the careful preservation of Roman law and of the institutions of the civil administration, which continued to be in the hands of Roman officials.<sup>37</sup> Modern historians tend to concur. The Ostrogothic kingdom is often singled out among the “barbarian successor states” of the 6<sup>th</sup> century for its remarkably Roman profile. The policies and ideologies promoted by Theoderic point to his strong commitment to the idea of the integration of the Goths into the existing political framework and of consensual rule over Goths and Romans along the lines of Roman imperial traditions.

As a ruler of Italy, Theoderic inherited two centers of government, Ravenna, where the imperial administration was located, and Rome, the seat of the Senate.<sup>38</sup> The balance of power and influence between these centers required careful attention from the king, as had been the case for his predecessors.<sup>39</sup> Given the enormous influence of the senatorial elite in terms of wealth and patronage, Theoderic needed to carefully ensure their support by showing respect to their privileges and to the political traditions connected with the care of the *res publica*. They continued to enjoy nominations to the consulate and the associated social prestige, and the Senate was left with its traditional political prerogatives.<sup>40</sup> Appointment to offices within the palatine bureaucracy was generally bestowed upon members of the Roman aristocracy, which meant that traditional structures of patronage and career options remained largely intact.

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<sup>37</sup> Procopius, *Wars* 6.6.17-20, ed. Dewing.

<sup>38</sup> In addition, other Italian cities functioned as royal residences, most notably Pavia and Verona, see Bjornlie in this volume.

<sup>39</sup> Bjornlie, *Politics*, 127-34; Wickham, *Italy*, pp. 15-19.

<sup>40</sup> Barnish, “Senatorial aristocracy”; Schäfer, *Senat*; Moorhead, *Theoderic*, pp. 140-72; Radki in this volume.

Although some Roman aristocrats seem to have kept a certain distance from the Ostrogothic court, many others, such as Liberius or Boethius, were involved in government through the assumption of high offices as praetorian prefect or *magister officiorum*. The distinctiveness of the political traditions of the senatorial elite in Rome and that of the court-centered aristocracy in Ravenna thus persisted.<sup>41</sup> The great families seem to have been particularly important during the early phase of Theoderic's reign, but he also promoted persons of less exalted origins, many of them from northern Italy, a policy that seems to have caused tensions among the senatorial elite.<sup>42</sup>

The civil administration continued to function largely along late imperial models, although there were also significant modifications in response to the changed economic and military situation in Italy.<sup>43</sup> This was essential, since taxes needed to be collected and public order upheld. Cassiodorus' *Variae* provide exceptionally rich information about the administration under Ostrogothic rule. The picture they present is one of continuity – the Ostrogothic state emerges as essentially Roman. While it is clear that Cassiodorus shaped his collection to deliberately convey such a message, it is also fairly certain that there was actual continuity to a remarkable degree.<sup>44</sup> The changes which Theoderic did introduce are probably less “un-Roman” than they have been often made out to be. Rather, they point towards the

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<sup>41</sup> Schäfer, *Senat*, pp. 149-69; Matthews, “Boethius”, pp. 26-31.

<sup>42</sup> Schäfer, *Senat*, pp. 170-211; Moorhead, *Theoderic*, pp. 147-58.

<sup>43</sup> For details, see Bjornlie in this volume. Barnwell, *Emperor*, pp. 140-69, puts greater emphasis on change underlying a facade of continuity.

<sup>44</sup> For the political message of the *Variae*, see Giardina, *Cassiodoro*; Kakridi, *Variae*; and most recently, Bjornlie, *Politics*.

creation of a reduced governmental apparatus which became more tightly centered on the royal court, and to the blurring of boundaries between military and civil functions.<sup>45</sup>

An essential aspect of securing the consensus of both the senatorial and the Gothic elite was the provision and accommodation of the Gothic army.<sup>46</sup> There has been fierce debate among historians about whether the barbarian armies who established their rule in the Roman territories received land for settlement, or rather a share of the tax revenues. Recent work tends to emphasize that tax shares and landed property were not mutually exclusive models. For Ostrogothic Italy, the limited evidence that we have indeed suggests a combination of tax-based salaries and the redistribution of land, both of which would have resulted in a process of administrative decentralisation. This matter is of obvious importance for how we imagine the distribution of power and wealth between the Roman landowners and the Gothic military elite. The task had to be handled in such a way as to avoid alienating the former, while giving the latter access to land and more or less direct control over its resources, which probably intensified the integration of the Gothic elite into the social fabric of Italy.

Whatever our judgement about continuity and change in Italy after 476/493, it is clear that careful argument was needed to persuade the wider public of the new government's political authority and legitimacy. The texts produced at the court to this end, notably the works of Ennodius and Cassiodorus, show that intense rhetorical efforts were made to explain the functioning of the Ostrogothic polity to the different political actors involved, and to convince them that this was a polity which deserved their support and loyalty. The rhetoric of *civilitas* was

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<sup>45</sup> Bjornlie, "Law", p. 158-60 and in this volume.

<sup>46</sup> Halsall in this volume. See also Innes, "Land"; Bjornlie, "Law", and Porena, ed.,

*Expropriations*.

employed profusely to suggest the “Romanness” of the Ostrogothic state, in which political culture and civil society functioned according to Roman patterns.<sup>47</sup> The rule of (written) law was the main ingredient of an ideology of government focused on *civilitas*, that is, the preservation of just and lawful government and jurisdiction.<sup>48</sup> Apart from lawful government, *civilitas* was demonstrated by the ruler himself through dispensing justice, taking care of the poor, and investing in public infrastructure and the urban fabric. It also included the display of a measured approach in religious matters, including the protection of the rights of religious minorities such as the Jews and respect for the privileges of the Nicene church.<sup>49</sup>

A closely entangled problem was how to conceptualise the social and political role of the new “Gothic” ruling elite and its relationship to the rest of Italian society. The basic answer provided by the court in Ravenna was the idea of a functional division, where the “Goths” represented the military elite responsible for the defence and security of Italy, while the “Romans” were entrusted with the maintenance of civil government and culture. “Goths” and “Romans” thus played complementary social roles.<sup>50</sup> There has been much debate about the implications of this notion for our understanding of Gothic identity and of the distinctiveness of

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<sup>47</sup> Giardina, *Cassiodoro*, pp. 39-43; Kakridi, *Variae*, pp. 327-73; Bjornlie, *Politics*, pp. 216-53 and 306-28.

<sup>48</sup> Reydellet, “Théoderic et la civilitas”; Saitta, *La Civilita*; Kakridi, *Variae*, pp. 339-446.

<sup>49</sup> E.g. Cassiodorus, *Variae* 2.27 and 10.26, ed. Mommsen; see Sessa and Cohen in this volume.

<sup>50</sup> Amory, *People*, pp. 43-85 is misleading in his conflation of what he calls the “ethnographic rhetoric” of functional division with *civilitas*, and in his suggestion that *civilitas* rhetoric was replaced by a stress on “Gothicness” since the 520s. For critique, see Kakridi, *Variae*, pp. 293-325, 339-47; Arnold, *Theoderic*, p. 172.



the Gothic *gens*.<sup>51</sup> What is important here is that while Gothic identity indeed seems to have been mainly functional in that it referred to membership of a military elite, the distinction between “Goths” and “Romans” clearly represented an oversimplification of a much more diverse (and dynamic) social and political reality.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, it is crucial to recognise that the image projected by the government of the respective roles of Goths and Romans was not only an argument about distinction, but also about the reciprocity of the different groups within Italian society. It is true that some Goths needed to be reminded to live up to the norms of *civilitas* (or to be persuaded about its benefits), but so did some Romans. While the praetorian prefect Liberius received high praise from Cassiodorus for his achievement regarding the accommodation of the army, Cassiodorus’ letter also suggests that the *possessores* needed to be reminded of the benefits of this arrangement.<sup>53</sup>

However, the main message of the documents collected in the *Variae* (or the writings of Ennodius) was to emphasize the compatibility between Gothic rule and Roman traditions.<sup>54</sup> According to this vision, the Goths differed from other peoples (*gentes*) in that they were not barbarian, but were capable of combining military strength with Roman law and culture.<sup>55</sup> A similar argument underlies the efforts to demonstrate the prominent role of the Goths within

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<sup>51</sup> See Swain in this volume.

<sup>52</sup> Rightly emphasized by Amory, *People*, passim. See Pohl, *Völkerwanderung*, pp. 140-44.

<sup>53</sup> Cassiodorus, *Variae* 2.16.5, ed. Mommsen.

<sup>54</sup> Giardina, *Cassiodoro*, pp. 25-46; Kakridi, *Variae*, pp. 160-91, 318-26. Barnish, “Roman Responses” and Bjornlie, *Politics*, suggest an eastern audience for this message.

<sup>55</sup> Examples: Cassiodorus, *Variae* 3.23.3, 7.25.1, ed. Mommsen; Kakridi, *Variae*, pp. 293-347; Teillet, *Des Goths*, pp. 281-303; Moorhead, *Theoderic*, pp. 66-89.

Roman history as evidenced by Cassiodorus' historiographical projects.<sup>56</sup> The warlike features and military power of the Goths, on the other hand, were not necessarily in contrast to their "Romanness", but rather complemented it. After all, martial valour had been at the origin of the Roman Empire itself, and "arms and laws" formed a central motif in Justinianic conceptions of imperial success.<sup>57</sup>

Another key element of Ostrogothic ideology was the promotion of the pre-eminence of their ruling dynasty, the Amals. From what we can tell about the contents of Cassiodorus' lost *Gothic History*, the construction of a genealogy of the Amal kings which extended seventeen generations back in time, was an essential part of his effort to turn "Gothic origins into Roman history".<sup>58</sup> Cassiodorus himself viewed this project as a piece of cultural brokerage, designed to bring about consensus by stressing the compatibility between Gothic and Roman traditions.<sup>59</sup> The heroic past of the Amals, to be sure, was largely fabricated, but it served to underline the ancient prestige of both the Gothic people and their rulers.<sup>60</sup> This could have helped to render

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<sup>56</sup> See Reimitz, "The Historian", pp. 43-45 Heather, "Historical Culture", pp. 342-52.

<sup>57</sup> Arnold, *Theoderic*, pp. 121-41; Maskarinec, "Clinging to Empire".

<sup>58</sup> This seems fairly certain even if it is difficult to extrapolate from Jordanes' *Getica*. See Heather, "Cassiodorus"; Barnish, "Genesis"; cf. Cassiodorus, *Variarum* 11.1; for summaries of the debate about the relationship between Cassiodorus and Jordanes, Croke, "Latin Historiography", pp. 361-67.

<sup>59</sup> Cassiodorus, *Variarum* 9.25.4-6, ed. Mommsen; Reimitz, "The Historian", p. 43.

<sup>60</sup> Heather, "Cassiodorus".

Amal rule more acceptable to self-conscious Romans,<sup>61</sup> but also to mobilize the loyalty and cohesiveness among the Goths themselves by underlining the singular claim of the Amal family to rule over them. As Peter Heather has rightly emphasized, the Goths were not a homogenous group whose loyalty towards Theoderic could be taken for granted.<sup>62</sup> As a strategy of legitimation, the rhetoric of Amal legitimacy was situational and tuned to the aims and audiences of the respective texts – much as the stress on *civilitas*, the functional division of Goths and Romans, the martial valour of the Gothic *gens*, or the imperial quality of the Ostrogothic state. In a complex political environment in which the Amal rulers had to negotiate the loyalties and interests of diverse groups, there was need for both strategies of integration and strategies of distinction.

### *Kingdom and empire*

The Ostrogothic kingdom formed part of a complex political landscape, and its position (and that of its rulers) needs to be considered not only in relation to the eastern emperor, but also to the competing powers in the West. Frankish Gaul and Vandal North Africa shared many features with Ostrogothic Italy: they followed Roman models of government and representation, and strove for recognition and legitimation by the eastern emperor. Theoderic's claims to imperial status were reinforced in the years around 500 through the recovery of lost territory of the former Italian prefecture. His claims to hegemony over the western powers were strengthened through a series of dynastic marriages which created a network of alliances with the ruling families of

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<sup>61</sup> Arnold, *Theoderic*, pp. 160-74; Wolfram, *Gotische Studien*, p. 154. In general, see Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, p. 489.

<sup>62</sup> Heather, *Goths*, pp. 236-48, Wiemer, "Goten", pp. 606-15.

Franks, Vandals, Burgundians, and others.<sup>63</sup> These aspirations were effectively checked by the rising power of the Franks under Clovis, and the interventions of the court in Constantinople. In 507, the Franks defeated the Visigoths in the famous battle of Vouillé and killed King Alaric II, Theoderic's son in law. Shortly after this victory, the Emperor Anastasius rewarded Clovis with an honorary consulate and patriciate, and it may not be a coincidence that an eastern fleet ravaged the Italian coast precisely in 507/8.<sup>64</sup>

However, in the aftermath of Vouillé, the Ostrogoths succeeded in expanding their territory, establishing control over the area south of the Durance (Provence), as well as over the remainder of the Visigothic kingdom on the Iberian peninsula. There, Theoderic, acting on behalf of his grandson Amalaric, removed Gesalic from power, Alaric's II son by another mother. Gesalic received support from the Vandal and Frankish kings, but was defeated in 511 and again in 513. As a result, Spain was ruled as part of the Ostrogothic kingdom until Theoderic's death, allowing access to Visigothic treasure, taxes, and military resources.<sup>65</sup>

The major theme in relations between Italy and the East, apart from Constantinople's role as a power broker in the West, was ecclesiastical politics. During the later part of Anastasius' reign, a series of attempts were made to solve the Acacian schism and settle the disagreement between the eastern churches and Rome over the acceptance of the decrees of the Council of

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<sup>63</sup> See Arnold in this volume.

<sup>64</sup> Mathisen, "Clovis"; Heather, *Goths*, p. 232; Marcellinus Comes, *Chronicle* s.a. 508, ed. Croke.

<sup>65</sup> Collins, *Visigothic Spain*, pp. 40-45; Diaz/Valverde, "Goths", pp. 360-64.

Chalcedon (451).<sup>66</sup> The reunion of the churches was finally effected after the Chalcedonian Justin succeeded the anti-Chalcedonian Anastasius in 518. While it has been suggested that this made it easier for the bishop of Rome and the senatorial aristocrats to turn to Constantinople as a political alternative, it is doubtful whether the newly established concord would have weakened Theoderic's position in Italy.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, in 519, Justin demonstrated his approval of Theoderic's chosen successor Eutharic by accepting him as a partner in the consulate and adopting him as a son at-arms.<sup>68</sup>

### *Succession and narratives of failed consensus*

To secure the succession within the Ostrogothic kingdom was one of Theoderic's major problems during the latter part of his reign. After it had become apparent that there would be no male heir, Theoderic found a suitable candidate in Spain in the person of Eutharic, who was called to Ravenna and married Theoderic's daughter Amalasuenda in 515.<sup>69</sup> Strong efforts were made to present Eutharic as the most legitimate and desirable heir to the Ostrogothic throne. According to Cassiodorus and Jordanes, Eutharic was of Amal descent, which modern historians tend to disbelieve and rather interpret as a genealogical fabrication.<sup>70</sup> Apart from the

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<sup>66</sup> Haarer, *Anastasius*, pp. 115-83; Meier, *Anastasios*, pp. 250-319; Moorhead, *Theoderic*, pp. 194-200.

<sup>67</sup> Amory, *People*, pp. 206-19; Noble, "Papacy", p. 417. See also Sessa in this volume.

<sup>68</sup> Moorhead, *Theoderic*, p. 199-200. See Cassiodorus, *Variae* 8.13, ed. Mommsen; contrast idem, *Chronicle* s.a. 519, ed. Mommsen.

<sup>69</sup> On Eutharic, see Wolfram, *Goths*, pp. 328-29; Heather, "Theoderic", pp. 167-68.

<sup>70</sup> Jordanes, *Getica* 251 and 297-99; Heather, "Cassiodorus", pp. 106, 115; idem, "Theoderic", pp. 167-68; Diaz/Valverde, "Goths", p. 365-67.

genealogical links it allowed to construe, Eutharic's Spanish origin could have eased his accession over a united kingdom of Italy and Spain.<sup>71</sup> Approval by the eastern emperor was equally important, which was signalled through the joint consulship and Eutharic's adoption as a son-at-arms by Justin mentioned above. Cassiodorus rose to the occasion to write a brief world chronicle culminating in this event, stressing that the magnificence of the consular games held by Eutharic in Rome was apt to impress even the emperor's envoy.<sup>72</sup>

Eutharic died prematurely in 522/3, leaving behind a son by his wife Amalasuenta, the eight-year-old Athalaric. Establishing Athalaric's claim to the throne turned out to be a difficult task. Indeed, the most infamous event of Theoderic's reign, the trial and execution of the philosopher Boethius in 523, followed by that of his father-in-law Symmachus, was probably connected to conflict over succession.<sup>73</sup> The charges brought forward against Boethius (and the senator Albinus, whom he had risen to defend) were of high treason and secret negotiations with Constantinople. It has been assumed that Boethius was part of a group harbouring plans to formally restore the Empire, and James O'Donnell has suggested that Boethius himself was striving for the imperial title.<sup>74</sup> A more likely explanation is that Boethius was part of a senatorial faction who wanted to see Theoderic's nephew Theodahad on the throne, and sought support for that position in the East; moreover, tensions between Boethius and members of the

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<sup>71</sup> Heather, "Theoderic", p. 168 and Arnold in this volume. Contrast Barnish, "Cuncta Italiae Membra", p. 331 with n. 59.

<sup>72</sup> Cassiodorus, *Chronicle* s.a. 519, ed. Mommsen.

<sup>73</sup> Matthews, "Boethius"; Robinson, "Dead Boethius", summarizes sixth-century accounts.

<sup>74</sup> O'Donnell, *Ruin*, pp. 166-67.

courtly elite in Ravenna undoubtedly played a role.<sup>75</sup> A long-standing dissatisfaction of Boethius, or indeed of a group of Roman traditionalists, with Amal rule seems an unfounded assumption.

These events cast a long shadow over Theoderic's reputation. The narrative of the last years of his life is almost inevitably told in the form of a grim epilogue to an otherwise prosperous reign. This is due to the fact that there are very few sources covering this period, and those which have been preserved were written from an extremely hostile perspective. Their version of events was sometimes highly selective and stylized, responding to political circumstances and concerns of their own.<sup>76</sup> Boethius, in his *Consolation of Philosophy*, written during imprisonment, denounces the injustice and lawlessness of the court in Ravenna and laments the loss of Roman political freedom (*libertas Romana*) under tyrannical rulers.<sup>77</sup> The *Anonymus Valesianus* inserts the Boethius affair into the broader context of a narrative about the ultimate failure of Theoderic's imperial experiment in Italy. He styled the crisis of the 520s in terms of religious antagonism between Catholic Romans and a heretical king.<sup>78</sup>

Religious differences were also a touchstone in deteriorating relations with the eastern Empire. Shortly after the trial, Theoderic sent an embassy led by the Bishop of Rome John and a number of high-ranking senators to Constantinople in order to dissuade the emperor from pursuing measures against the "Arian" (non-Nicene) churches in the East. The exact nature of

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<sup>75</sup> Barnish, "Maximian", pp. 29-31; Moorhead, *Theoderic*, pp. 232-35; Bjornlie, *Politics*, pp. 138-41.

<sup>76</sup> On the literary image of Theoderic, see Goltz, *Barbar-König-Tyrann*.

<sup>77</sup> Moorhead, "Boethius", pp. 19-20; idem, "*Libertas*".

<sup>78</sup> *Anonymus Valesianus*, 14-16 (81-94), ed. Rolfe; Barnish, "Anonymus Valesianus".

such measures remains unknown, just as the precise outcome of the embassy.<sup>79</sup> The *Liber Pontificalis* describes the bishop's visit to Constantinople in triumphant terms, contrasting the honours he received from the emperor with the cold welcome the envoys received on their return to Italy. John died shortly after his return, and the *Liber Pontificalis* turns his death (much as that of Boethius and Symmachus) into the death of a martyr for the Catholic cause in the hands of a heretical king (*rex hereticus*).<sup>80</sup>

Given the biases of our sources, we should be very cautious in drawing conclusions about a long-standing antagonism between "Arians" and "Catholics", or between pro-imperial traditionalists and pro-Gothic loyalists, for that matter. But we also need to take note of the fact that such antagonistic language was available, and that orthodoxy and heterodoxy, Roman *libertas* and barbarian oppression, could become buzzwords in describing the diverging views of different interest groups in the kingdom. Indeed, the trial of Boethius and related events of the mid-520s, and the fault lines which emerged in this context, became the touchstones in the discussions about Theoderic's legacy and the legitimacy of Amal rule during the Gothic wars and beyond.<sup>81</sup>

These events, moreover, occurred in a period of external tensions. In Burgundy, King Sigismund murdered Sigeric, his son by Theoderic's daughter Ostrogotho in 522; shortly

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<sup>79</sup> Greatrex, "Justin I", pp. 78-81.

<sup>80</sup> *Liber Pontificalis* 55.5-6, ed. Duchesne, with Noble, "Papacy", pp. 418-23; Goltz, *Barbar-König-Tyrann*, pp. 400-25; Amory, *People*, p. 220; Sessa discusses the event in more detail in this volume.

<sup>81</sup> Robinson, "Dead Boethius"; Bjornlie, *Politics*, pp. 147-84; Vitiello, "Cassiodoro anti-Boethius?".



thereafter, the Merovingian king Chlodomer attacked Burgundy. Sigismund lost his life, and an Ostrogothic army under Tuluin managed to expand the area under Ostrogothic control in southern Gaul.<sup>82</sup> At the same time, relations with the Vandal kingdom became strained after king Hilderic succeeded to the throne in 523, who pursued a policy of reconciliation towards the Nicene church in an effort to develop an alliance with the emperor. At some point before 526 his predecessor's widow Amalafriada, Theoderic's sister, was murdered. In response to the threat posed by this shift in diplomatic allegiances, Theoderic developed the plan to construct a fleet, which remained unfinished at his death in 526.<sup>83</sup>

#### *Theoderic's successors*

Much as for Theoderic's last years the kind of story we can tell for the reign of his successors as kings of Italy is largely determined by the limited range of documentary and narrative sources which have survived. When Athalaric succeeded his grandfather in 526, he was still a young boy and his mother Amalasuenda acted as regent on his behalf.<sup>84</sup> Her position depended on her control of the prince and on the careful management of loyalties.<sup>85</sup> Documents from the beginning of the reign preserved in the *Variae* show the efforts to consolidate support for Athalaric's rule by a strong emphasis on (dynastic) legitimacy and consensual rule, suggesting that there had been difficulties in asserting his claims. On his accession, Athalaric sent letters to

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<sup>82</sup> Wolfram, *Goths*, p. 312; Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 51-53.

<sup>83</sup> Procopius, *Wars* 4.9.3-4; Cassiodorus, *Variae* 9.1 and 5.17 (on the fleet), ed. Mommsen; Merrills/Miles, *The Vandals*, pp. 132-34.

<sup>84</sup> Wolfram, *Goths*, pp. 322-37; Heather, *Goths*, pp. 260-63.

<sup>85</sup> For further consideration of Amalasuenda's precarious position and maneuvering, see Cooper in this volume.

the Senate and the people of Rome, Italy, Dalmatia, and Gaul.<sup>86</sup> In these letters, the king demanded an oath of fidelity from all his subjects, including the Senate, pledging in return to uphold the rule of law and the rights granted by Theoderic, and to continue his grandfathers' policies and equitable government.<sup>87</sup> Athalaric (or his advisors) also used this occasion to make an argument about his legitimacy as heir to the throne. The letters stress that he had been designated as such by Theoderic, and they deliberately evoke the consent of the magnates at court. In the letters to the Senate and the *Gothi*, his descent from the Amal family, this most glorious royal line, was emphasized.<sup>88</sup>

Other letters show the need to conciliate and contain potential rivals to the throne, not least Theoderic's nephew Theodahad.<sup>89</sup> A letter in which he was granted a gift of land by the new king included a warning to comport himself well.<sup>90</sup> Likewise, when the general Tuluin was appointed as commander in chief of the army (*patricius praesentalis*), he was reminded in no uncertain terms to act strictly in the interests of the young king and not to seek power for himself.<sup>91</sup> A gesture of reconciliation was also extended towards the families of Boethius and Symmachus, whose properties were restored by Amalasuenta, but at the same time, the

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<sup>86</sup> Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 8.2-8, ed. Mommsen.

<sup>87</sup> Esders, "Rechtliche Grundlagen".

<sup>88</sup> Cassiodorus, *Variae* 8.2.3 and 8.5.2, ed. Mommsen.

<sup>89</sup> Heather, "Theoderic", p. 169.

<sup>90</sup> Cassiodorus, *Variae* 8.23, ed. Mommsen.

<sup>91</sup> Cassiodorus, *Variae* 8.9.7-8, ed. Mommsen.

architects of his downfall figure in positions of honour in the *Variae* in letters dated to shortly after the beginning of her reign.<sup>92</sup>

Despite these efforts at re-establishing consensus, the stability of the new regime remained precarious. Amalasuētha faced considerable opposition at court. At stake was control over the young king and his policies, possibly paired with concerns about his viability as a military leader at such a young age. Following Procopius' account in the *Wars*, this has often been interpreted as a conflict between Amalasuētha's Roman advisors and Romanised Goths on the one hand and a vigorously "pro-Gothic" party on the other who resisted the Romanisation of the Gothic elite. Procopius framed this conflict in anecdotal form as a struggle about the prince's education – Roman letters or Gothic military skills.<sup>93</sup> His use of oppositional rhetoric ("Roman" vs. "barbarian" values), should however not be taken literally. Together with his praise of Amalasuētha, it is best placed in the context of his overall strategy to legitimize Justinian's war in Italy.<sup>94</sup> Procopius' rhetorical strategies apart, Amalasuētha was put under considerable pressure by her opponents. The queen's strategy was to seek a deal with the emperor Justinian to secure her personal safety.<sup>95</sup> Eventually, she managed to survive the crisis, by removing her major opponents (among them likely Tuluin) from Ravenna, sending them on military campaign to be subsequently killed.<sup>96</sup> In 533, she installed Liberius as a new *patricius praesentalis*, while

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<sup>92</sup> Procopius, *Wars* 5.2.5, ed. Dewing; Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 8.16-17, 8.21-22, ed. Mommsen.

<sup>93</sup> Procopius, *Wars* 5.2.1-20, ed. Dewing.

<sup>94</sup> Joye/Knaepen, "L' image", pp. 230-244.

<sup>95</sup> Procopius, *Wars* 5.3.10-30, ed. Dewing.

<sup>96</sup> Procopius, *Wars* 5.2.21-22, ed. Dewing; Wolfram, *Goths*, p. 336; Heather, *Goths*, p. 260-61.

Cassiodorus became praetorian prefect of Italy.<sup>97</sup> The letter in which Cassiodorus signalled his accession to the Senate is actually a panegyric of Amalasuetha, in which he highlighted the legitimacy of her rule on behalf of Athalaric as well as her excellent qualities as a skilled and educated ruler.<sup>98</sup>

Cassiodorus did his best to emphasize the achievements of the Gothic army under her regency, but the overall situation must have seemed less secure. In 530, the *dux* Witigis had to fight back Gepid and Herul armies who had invaded Pannonia Sirmiensis. The counter-attack led into eastern territory, probably not to the satisfaction of the emperor, who may have instigated the conflict.<sup>99</sup> In Spain, the political union was dissolved upon Athalaric's succession and kingship passed on to Theoderic's grandson Amalaric, which meant the loss of Visigothic revenue and manpower. Amalaric was killed in 531 after a disastrous defeat at the hands of the Franks and was succeeded by Theudis.<sup>100</sup> The Franks also took control over the Thuringian and Burgundian kingdoms in 531 and 532-34, respectively. Henceforth, they were a direct (and increasingly powerful) neighbour of the Ostrogothic kingdom.<sup>101</sup> When Justinian invaded the Vandal kingdom in 535, Amalasuetha allowed his fleet to use Sicily as a basis, probably in

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<sup>97</sup> Cassiodorus, *Variae* 11.1, ed. Mommsen.

<sup>98</sup> Cassiodorus, *Variae* 11.1, with Fauvinet-Ranson, "Portrait"; Vitiello, "Nourished".

<sup>99</sup> Cassiodorus, *Variae* 11.1.10 and Procopius, *Wars* 5.3.16-30, with Arnold in this volume.

<sup>100</sup> Heather, *Goths*, pp. 276-78; Diaz/Valverde, "Goths", pp. 368-70.

<sup>101</sup> Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 51-54.

return for his support of her regency. Tensions persisted, however, as the Ostrogoths took advantage of the situation to reclaim the Sicilian city of Lilybaeum.<sup>102</sup>

In 534 Athalaric died, leaving his mother in a precarious position. She decided to elevate her cousin Theodahad, who had previously been outflanked in the competition for the throne, as her co-ruler. In their official announcements, both of them emphasized their will to concord and respect for each other, but Procopius reports that Amalasuētha required a secret oath from Theodahad according to which effective power would remain with her.<sup>103</sup> Theodahad had built up a considerable power base of his own in Tuscany, in part by relentlessly alienating property.<sup>104</sup> The studied concord between the two rulers did not last very long, for Theodahad soon had Amalasuētha imprisoned, and by early 535, she was dead.

To Justinian, this represented a pretext for intervening in Italy, for he had given his consent to the arrangement and claimed that Amalasuētha was under his protection.<sup>105</sup> A senatorial embassy sent by Theodahad to conciliate the emperor fell apart, with the patrician

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<sup>102</sup> Procopius, *Wars* 5.3.10-29, ed. Dewing, who also claims that Amalasuētha harboured secret plans to surrender Italy to Justinian.

<sup>103</sup> Cassiodorus, *Variae* 10.3-4, ed. Mommsen; Procopius, *Wars* 5.4.8, ed. Dewing; La Rocca, “Consors”.

<sup>104</sup> Cassiodorus, *Variae* 4.39, 5.12, 10.5, ed. Mommsen; Procopius, *Wars* 5.4.1-11, ed. Dewing. On Cassiodorus’ portrayal of Theodahad, see Bjornlie, *Politics*, pp. 311-20; Krautschick, *Cassiodor*, pp. 127-30; Vitiello, *Il principe*, pp. 114-62.

<sup>105</sup> Procopius, *Wars* 5.4.22-31, ed. Dewing; cf. *ibidem*, 5.5.8-10 and Procopius, *Secret History* 16, ed. and trans. Dewing, where he claims that the murder was instigated by the empress Theodora; Jordanes, *Getica* 307.

Liberius (by now an old man) defecting to the imperial side.<sup>106</sup> While it is unlikely that Justinian had a long-standing plan to “reconquer the western Empire” as an earlier generation of scholars believed, a discourse which delegitimized barbarian rule in the western Mediterranean had slowly built up in the East from the 520s onwards, employing tropes about barbarous tyranny, heterodoxy, and the end of the western Empire in 476.<sup>107</sup> Against the backdrop of a swift success of the imperial army in North Africa, where the Vandals had been removed from power by 534, Justinian mounted pressure against Theodahad’s increasingly fragile regime. In June 535, Belisarius landed with a fleet in Italy, while the Gepid general Mundo led an offensive in Dalmatia.

### *The Gothic War*

Negotiations between Constantinople and Ravenna continued as Justinian dispatched armies to Dalmatia and Sicily. Belisarius’ quick success in Sicily prompted Theodahad to seek an agreement with Justinian. The details of the proposed agreement as reported by Procopius reveal some of the points of contention between the Amal king (and probably his predecessors) and the emperor. These included full jurisdiction over senators and the right to bestow the highest senatorial offices as well as certain ceremonial prerogatives.<sup>108</sup> From Procopius’ narrative,

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<sup>106</sup> Procopius, *Wars* 1.4.23-25, ed. Dewing.

<sup>107</sup> Croke, “AD 476”; Amory, *People*, pp. 135-47; Mirşanu, “Imperial Policy”. Barnish, “Cuncta membra”, p. 332 notes that already during the early 530s, Justinian “occasionally legislated with Gothic Italy in mind”.

<sup>108</sup> Procopius, *Wars* 5.6.1-5, ed. Dewing; Chrysos, “Amalerherrschaft” and Prostko-Proskýnski, *Utraeque res publicae*, pp. 171-211, who may be overestimating the extent to which it is possible to extrapolate from this the terms of previous agreements, cf. Heather, *Goths*, p. 220.

Theodahad emerges as a fickle leader who was subsequently intimidated into secretly offering all of Italy in return for his personal safety and property, whereas he then decided to forfeit all agreements and fight after Ostrogothic armies had scored a victory over Mundo in Dalmatia.<sup>109</sup> Soon afterwards, Belisarius took Naples and Theodahad was deposed and subsequently killed. He was replaced by Witigis, a man of military pedigree but not of Amal descent.<sup>110</sup> The few official documents preserved in his name use a rhetoric of military prowess (alongside divine providence) to rally support.<sup>111</sup> Although Witigis claimed that proximity to Theoderic through deeds was more important than kinship, he nevertheless married an Amal princess, Athalaric's sister Matasuentha.<sup>112</sup> Witigis restructured the Gothic forces and was able to besiege Rome in 537, but he was forced to lift the siege after imperial forces had attacked Picenum (an area of strong Gothic settlement) and then advanced as far as Rimini. Witigis had to retreat to Ravenna, where he was besieged by Belisarius. An offer regarding the division of Italy (this time along the line of the river Po) reached Ravenna from Constantinople, but whereas Witigis and the Gothic *exercitus* consented, Belisarius refused to accept the terms.<sup>113</sup> Negotiations continued, resulting in Witigis' surrender to Belisarius, who marched into Ravenna in May 540. The Gothic king and his entourage were captured and brought to Constantinople, while Belisarius was recalled. According to Procopius, Belisarius had tricked the Goths into opening the gates by creating the

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<sup>109</sup> Procopius, *Wars* 5.6.6-27, ed. Dewing.

<sup>110</sup> On Witigis: Wolfram, *Goths*, pp. 342-49.

<sup>111</sup> Cassiodorus, *Variae* 10.31, ed. Mommsen; Cassiodorus, *Reliquae orationum*, ed. Traube, pp. 473-76. See also Procopius, *Wars* 5.11, ed. Dewing; Jordanes, *Getica* 309-10, ed. Mommsen.

<sup>112</sup> Cassiodorus, *Variae* 10.31.5 and 10.32.3, ed. Mommsen; Heather, *Goths*, pp. 263-64.

<sup>113</sup> Procopius, *Wars* 6.29.1-6, ed. Dewing.

expectation that he was prepared to become king (or emperor) in Italy himself. Whatever Belisarius' real intentions, the opportunity of preserving political independence from Constantinople may indeed have been attractive to members of the Italian elite.<sup>114</sup> Jordanes, by contrast, described these events as a straightforward capitulation, which to him marked the end of "the famous *regnum* and the most courageous *gens* of the Goths".<sup>115</sup>

What seemed like a swift victory for Justinian, similar to the conquest of North Africa, turned into protracted and dreadful war which was to last another fifteen years. There is no need to recapitulate in detail the course of the war, for which Procopius' *Wars* provide the main narrative.<sup>116</sup> From this narrative, indecisiveness and rivalry among the military leadership paired with a lack of adequate reinforcements and resources to provide for the payment of the Italian army, itself exacerbated by the fact that the Persian war reopened in 540, emerge as the main causes for the imperial forces' failure to consolidate control over Italy. Moreover, the repressive policy of the eastern administration in Italy, including rigorous tax demands, alienated the support of the landowning elite.<sup>117</sup>

This allowed the Gothic forces to regroup. After the brief and unsuccessful reigns of Hildebald and the Herul king Eraric, Totila was elevated as a king by the army in 541.<sup>118</sup> Totila was a very efficient military leader, who achieved a series of victories, thus realigning the

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<sup>114</sup> Procopius, *Wars* 6.29-30, ed. Dewing; Wolfram, *Goths*, p. 349.

<sup>115</sup> Jordanes, *Getica* 313, ed. Mommsen.

<sup>116</sup> Detailed summaries: Wolfram, *Goths*, pp. 349-62; Heather, *Goths*, pp. 263-71; Wiemer, "Goten", pp. 616-26.

<sup>117</sup> See Wolfram, *Goths*, p. 352; Heather, *Goths*, pp. 267-68.

<sup>118</sup> On Totila, see Wolfram, *Goths*, pp. 353-61; Moorhead, "Totila"; Carnevale, "Totila".



support of the Gothic military elite. Within a short time, Totila regained control over much of Italy, taking Rome twice in 546 and 550; Ravenna remained in imperial hands throughout the war.

Choosing loyalties was probably much less clear cut than any straightforward division between “Romans” and “Goths” would suggest.<sup>119</sup> Some members of the political elite transferred their allegiance to the emperor early on (for example, Liberius), while others continued to support the Ostrogothic government. Cassiodorus, who probably stayed with Witigis until the capitulation of 540 is a well-known example.<sup>120</sup> The senators were among the crucial players, and therefore most vulnerable to threats and suspicions of disloyalty. Both Witigis and Totila committed brutal massacres against members of the Senate, and many fled to Constantinople.<sup>121</sup> The bishop of Rome Vigilius clearly supported the imperial cause, although by the late 540s, he would come into sharp conflict with Justinian over the Three Chapters Controversy.<sup>122</sup> Vigilius’ predecessor Silverius had been deposed by Belisarius following accusations of pro-Gothic treason during the siege of Rome in 537.<sup>123</sup> Procopius’ *Wars* also reveal that the civilian population suffered brutally at the hands of both sides. Support for the imperial armies seems to have been strong in Southern Italy during the early phase of war

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<sup>119</sup> Moorhead, “Loyalties”; Amory, *People*, pp. 165-94.

<sup>120</sup> Cassiodorus’ trajectory between 537/550 is difficult to reconstruct: see O’Donnell, *Cassiodorus*, pp. 105-07, and the suggestions in Bjornlie, *Politics*, pp. 13-19.

<sup>121</sup> Procopius, *Wars* 5.26.1; 7.21.12-17; 7.34.1-8, ed. Dewing. Schäfer, *Senat*, pp. 263-75.

<sup>122</sup> Sotinel, “Autorité pontificale”.

<sup>123</sup> *Liber Pontificalis* 60.7-8; Procopius, *Wars* 5.25.14. For the Catholic clergy, see Amory, *People*, pp. 225-27.

(although there were notable exceptions, for example in Naples), but eroded due to the relentless policies of the governmental officials and the brutality of the imperial army. It is also questionable whether the imperial army would have seemed any more “Roman” to the inhabitants of Italy than the Gothic forces, given that it contained large contingents of barbarian soldiers.<sup>124</sup>

In 550, with the Persian war drawing to a close, Justinian was finally able to intensify the western campaign. He appointed a new commander in chief for Italy, namely his cousin Germanus. It has been suggested that the latter’s marriage to Theoderic’s granddaughter Matasuentha signalled the will to find a compromise between imperial and Gothic traditions regarding the reorganisation of the western realm.<sup>125</sup> In any case, Germanus died on the way to Italy in 550. He was replaced by Narses, who quickly regained lost ground for the imperial side. King Totila lost his life at the battle of Busta Gallorum (Taginae) in 552, and his successor Teia was killed only a few months later in the last decisive battle of the war on Mons Lactarius, whereafter his forces submitted to the emperor’s authority.<sup>126</sup> There was continued resistance on a smaller scale from Gothic units mainly in Northern Italy, some of which held out as late as 561.<sup>127</sup>

The official end of the war was marked by the promulgation of the Pragmatic Sanction in 554, by which the emperor Justinian restored direct imperial control over Italy.<sup>128</sup> This is an

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<sup>124</sup> Pohl, “Justinian”, pp. 463-64.

<sup>125</sup> Notably by Momigliano, “Cassiodorus”, based on Jordanes, *Getica*, 314.

<sup>126</sup> Procopius, *Wars* 8.35, ed. Dewing.

<sup>127</sup> Heather, *Goths*, p. 271.

<sup>128</sup> *CIC*, Nov.Iust, App. 7, eds. Schoell/Kroll; Pilara, “Aspetti”.

interesting document for what it tells us about the measures taken in the face of economic and social instabilities caused by war, but also for the retrospective imperial view of the legitimacy of Ostrogothic government. The emperor explicitly confirmed all legal transactions and concessions made by legitimate kings on the request of the Romans or the Senate, that is Theoderic (called *rex*) and his successors, while those of Totila (called a “most abominable tyrant”) were declared void.<sup>129</sup> The Sanction was issued on the request of Vigilius, then in Constantinople, and some of its provisions reflect the concerns of the senatorial and ecclesiastical elite. Bishops and local notables were given a role in the election of provincial governors and some control over economic policies.<sup>130</sup> Justinian ostentatiously reclaimed imperial prerogatives and the traditional markers of *civilitas* such as coinage, taxes, care for the *annona*, public buildings, and most importantly, legislative authority. The *Justinianic Code* and all subsequent novels were to be valid in Italy retroactively. This was a potent signal that Italy was now part of a single *res publica* again, reunited by God’s will.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> *CIC*, Nov.Iust., App. 7.1-2, eds. Schoell/Kroll.

<sup>130</sup> *CIC*, Nov.Iust., App. 7.12 and 18-19, eds. Schoell/Kroll; see Stein, *Bas-Empire*, pp. 613-19.

<sup>131</sup> *CIC*, Nov.Iust., App. 7.11, eds. Schoell/Kroll.

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