Romans and Goths in late antique Gaul: aspects of political and cultural assimilation in the Fifth Century AD

RUCKERT, JULIA, MARGARETA, MARIA

How to cite:
RUCKERT, JULIA, MARGARETA, MARIA (2011) Romans and Goths in late antique Gaul: aspects of political and cultural assimilation in the Fifth Century AD. Durham theses, Durham University. Available at Durham E-Theses Online: http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/708/

Use policy
The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a link is made to the metadata record in Durham E-Theses
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the full Durham E-Theses policy for further details.
ROMANS AND GOTHS IN LATE ANTIQUE GAUL:
ASPECTS OF POLITICAL AND CULTURAL
ASSIMILATION IN THE FIFTH CENTURY AD

Julia Margareta Maria Rückert
University College, Durham

Submitted for the degree of MLitt
Department of Classics and Ancient History
University of Durham
2011
“The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the prior written consent of the author and information derived from it should be acknowledged.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td><strong>TABLE OF CONTENTS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Abstract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>List of illustrations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Abbreviations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>Illustrations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>Part I. The Question of Gothic identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>1. Ethnicity and ethnogenesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>2. The Romans and their views of the Goths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>3. The Goths and the concept of ethnogenesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>a) The <em>Traditionskern</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>b) The <em>Heerkönig</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>c) The <em>Traditionsträger</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>d) The concept of ethnic self-definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73</td>
<td>Part II. Goths and Romans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>1. Questions of leadership among the Goths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>a) Athanaric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>b) Fritigern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>c) Eriulf and Fravittas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

iv Abstract

v Acknowledgements

vi List of illustrations

vii Abbreviations

viii Illustrations

9 Ethnicity and ethnogenesis

20 The Romans and their views of the Goths

38 The Goths and the concept of ethnogenesis

40 a) The *Traditionskern*

43 b) The *Heerkönig*

47 c) The *Traditionsträger*

55 d) The concept of ethnic self-definition

65 1. Questions of leadership among the Goths

68 a) Athanaric

74 b) Fritigern

80 c) Eriulf and Fravittas
2. Alaric
   a) Alaric and the relationship with the Eastern court
   b) Alaric and the West
   c) The sack of Rome
3. Athaulf

Part III. The Gallo-Romans and the Goths
1. Athaulf’s succession
   a) Wallia and the question of settlement
   b) The question of hospitalitas
2. The Gallo-Romans
   a) Paulinus of Pella
   b) Rutilius Namatianus
   c) Prosper of Aquitaine

Part IV. Gaul and Rome
1. The concept of political loyalty
   a) Aspects of political instability in Gaul
   b) The civitas
2. Assimilation with the Gothic court
   a) Arvandus
   b) Seronatus
   c) Sidonius and other Gallic nobles
iii

102
103  3. The role of literacy
104    a) The Roman devotion to classical literature
105    b) The barbarian pursuit of literature
106  4. Roman-barbarian intermarriage as an aspect of assimilation
107
108  Part V. The impact of the Christian Church
109    1. The Gallic aristocracy and the episcopate
110    2. The Goths, the Franks and the question of Arianism
111
112  Conclusion
113
114  Bibliography
115
ABSTRACT:

The thesis focuses on the socio-cultural interaction between Gallo-Romans and barbarians in fifth century Gaul. Its aim is to investigate how both Romans and barbarians, particularly the Gothic people, shared a common living space within imperial territory, how this space was created, and to which extent both sides assimilated with each other in terms of their cultural and political understanding. By moving away from the argument of brutal warfare as the main means of contact, I am trying instead to look more at the changes of their cultural understanding which eventually would lead to the world of the Middle Ages. The slow emergence of barbarian powerbases created a political world that was different from the Roman empire. The Gallo-Romans had to accept a new political order in which they not only faced the gradual loss of their former positions of political/military superiority but which also challenged their previously undisputed concept of cultural understanding; violent occupation of Roman territory was only one part of this process as there was simultaneously a continuation of Roman literature and culture in general possible. Gradual attempts at assimilation can be seen for example in the continuation of Gallo-Roman aristocratic involvement in the political establishment of the Gothic court, and the increasing role of the Gallo-Roman nobility in the church in general and in the Episcopate in particular. Equally the Gothic side had to adapt their political and cultural understanding to a new concept which was compatible with the Roman administration if they wanted to survive as ethnic communities within the empire; such political/military assimilation not only with the Roman empire but especially with the Gallo-Roman aristocracy was even more important when it came to the establishment of an independent Gothic settlement and eventually a Gothic kingdom in Gaul.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

This thesis would not have been possible without the help and encouragement from various people for which I am immensely grateful: The Classics Department of Durham University and all its staff, Dr Peter Heather, Prof Benjamin Arnold, Dr Roberto Ciapiniello, The Rev Canon Dr David Kennedy, The Rev Dr Stephen Hampton, Prof Martyn Chamberlain, and all my friends and colleagues both in Durham and elsewhere. I want to thank especially Dr David Hunt for all his continuous patience, support and guidance throughout all these years. I also want to thank Prof Peter Rhodes for all his sterling support and time, invaluable comments and suggestions. My most heartfelt thanks and a gratitude deeper than words can express I owe to my parents and my grandmother – without their love, encouragement and unfailing support I could never have written this work.
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS:


ABBREVIATIONS:

A.M. Ammianus Marcellinus

Pan.Lat. Panegyrici Latini


ILLUSTRATIONS:

168

170  Map 1: Campaigns of Alaric and Athaulf

184  Map 2: Gaul in the fifth century AD
INTRODUCTION

From the fifth century AD onwards, the history of the Roman empire is often associated with the so-called ‘barbarian invasions’. It is an image of wild hordes of savage brutes fighting against the world of ancient civilisation, conquering and destroying it simultaneously. It is an image of the Roman empire being weakened in its defences and therefore lying itself open to be subsequently swamped with countless barbarians, all eager to get a share of the riches of the empire.¹ It is an image of Roman cultural superiority desperately fighting against the culturally inferior but military stronger barbarians. Yet such an approach to the history of the later Roman empire poses problems.

Firstly it continues many of the prejudices of the ancient world on the nature of foreign, that is to say non-Roman peoples from outside the empire; indeed the very term ‘barbarian’ is a prime example for such xenophobia. Secondly, it bears the danger of regarding the increasingly frequent appearance of non-Roman peoples within imperial borders as a threat to the continuity of the empire as a whole, thus perpetuating a notion that peoples from outside posed in general a threat to the stability of the empire. Furthermore, it implies that the subsequent settlement of such peoples on imperial soil presented a danger to the Roman state by undermining its political and cultural existence. In fact, by asking about the extent of socio-cultural interaction between Rome and peoples from outside the empire, one assumes a concept of juxtaposition between the two sides. Traditionally this has implied a superior status of the Roman side into which the inferior non-Roman side had to be integrated. Following this argument, the slow emergence of the political power of these peoples could then be nothing else than a prelude to an inevitable clash of the

¹ See for example Drinkwater (1996), 20-21.
two in which the barbarian side managed to defeat the imperial government sufficiently to gain eventually supreme political power.\(^2\) Such images are certainly quite dramatic and highly imaginative but they have little to do with reality. It is true that there was a great deal of warfare in the later Roman empire as well as serious and prolonged problems with the defence and security of the imperial frontiers. It is also true that the increasingly frequent occurrence of foreign peoples within imperial territory was posing both an administrative as well as military problem for the empire. However, the relationship between Rome and its neighbours was far more complex than to be explained as a fight of civilisation versus uncultivated brutality. Indeed the question how the Roman and non-Roman population lived together in the empire, how processes of assimilation and interaction were working or if such concepts were at all possible, cannot be answered in a straightforward manner.

Any research on that period lacks to a large extent the barbarian viewpoint as the vast majority of the ancient texts were addressed to the Roman audience and as such had been written in a way which suited best the political and/or religious convictions of this audience; hence the image of the barbarians is inevitably heavily biased and in most cases distorted. To establish the barbarian side one has to try to read between the lines, and even modern scholarly discussions are therefore prone to absorb some of the ancient perceptions of regarding specific authors and their opinion as the authoritative text on which to base their analysis of historical events.\(^3\) Besides many of the contemporary authors also belonged to specific social groups such as the...
church or the aristocracy; as such their portrayal of foreign peoples and their political
struggles within the empire heavily reflected their own social, political and religious
opinions and therefore presents a rather restrictive, if not one-sided narrative.
This thesis will look in particular at the emergence of the Goths; the reason for
choosing them lies in the amount of material we have about their political rise as
well as in the reaction of the Roman side to this phenomenon. The emergence of the
Goths as a formidable power in the late fourth century had fostered political and
economic problems in the empire, which the imperial authorities were increasingly
unable to control. The arrival or perhaps better the pressure the presence of various
different people created in the empire led leaders like Alaric and Athaulf to exploit
this weakness in order to maximise their own political agenda and military strength.
The Goths had in no way a military strength comparable to the empire, nor indeed
any internal organisation equivalent to the imperial administration; furthermore,
continuous differences about leadership or a coherent political programme made it
difficult to combat the empire effectively, and even the establishment of one leader
in the fifth century had not necessarily eased such problems. Yet precisely this lack
of military organisation and this continuity of rifts between various political factions,
indeed the very nature of being fragmented and not being one united people let alone
a state as Rome was, is a testament to their enormous political/military persistence
and strength. Throughout the military encounters with the Gothic side, the empire
had tried to subdue them and to incorporate them into the imperial system, but had
continued to fail. The Gothic development from a loose conglomeration of various
Gothic groups with their own agenda in the fourth century, to a coherent group with
a political concept in the fifth century was an exemplary process of assimilation with
the mechanisms of the imperial system. The realisation that their only way to gain
political recognition from the empire, and indeed to enhance their prospects of
fighting the empire effectively lay in the establishment of one ruler and a widely
accepted political agenda, was the result of an understanding of the functioning of
Rome as a state and its political/military system. Such a process went far beyond the
concept of adopting Roman goods as status symbols, since to understand the
functioning of the empire as a state and to turn this knowledge into a strategic
advantage for one’s own political advancement is to have become part of that very
system. The same could also be said about the Franks although in their case it was
less a question of fighting the Roman empire in its strength but rather of establishing
themselves against other barbarian powers such as the Goths.

Part I will look at the very complex debate of ethnogenesis and ethnic development
of non-Roman peoples, which has tried to find some answers to the vagueness of
broad terminology such as ‘barbarian’, ‘peoples’, ‘nation’ or ‘Goths’ though this
remains a highly difficult process; moreover the term ‘barbarian’ might even be
preferred as it contains a certain neutrality denoting the difference from the Roman
population whereas terms such as ‘Goths’ can pose serious problems by making
statements about the ethnic formation of such peoples which might not be accurate. It
will discuss some aspects of the debate on ethnogenesis, and especially its meaning
for the ethnic development of the Goths. It will also look at aspects of Roman
xenophobia and attitudes towards non-Roman peoples. From the Roman perspective,
the outside, barbarian, world presented by its very nature a permanent threat to
Roman civilisation.

Part II will look at the rise of the Gothic peoples and their gradual political
emancipation into a single nation. This development was closely connected with a
change in internal power structures, culminating in the establishment and acceptance
of one leader, notably Alaric and his successors. The previous concept of multiple
leaders had resulted in a tendency to overt fragmentation, especially when it came to
the extent of Gothic involvement in imperial politics and the precise nature of
payment for this. Alaric’s rise to power altered that system and it was under his
leadership that members of various different groups created a people who then
became known as ‘the Goths’. This made Gothic politics towards the empire much
more effective, though their eventual political independence and the establishment of
their own kingdom on Roman soil only happened under Alaric’s successors. The
gradual establishment of large barbarian groups within imperial territory created a
very complex if not at times dangerous situation. Their immediate impact in a
province could be, and indeed often was, violent or at least seriously interrupting
Roman life. However one ought to distance oneself from the almost hysterical
accounts by some of the contemporaries as such narratives were often written for a
specific audience with a specific target, and had less to do with historical reality.

Parts III and IV will look in greater detail at the extent of the barbarian interference,
not only in terms of actual material destruction but also in terms of their impact on
the Roman population. The lives of contemporaries such as Paulinus of Pella or
Rutilius Namatianus provide vivid accounts of the potential dangers and subsequent
struggles a Roman aristocrat could face if the barbarian impact was strong enough to
disturb the standard concepts of living in such a profound way that a continuation of
the said standard was no longer guaranteed. They will look at the increasingly
difficult process of continuing former structures of holding political offices, and the
need to assimilate with the new barbarian establishments. This of course created
problems of concepts of political loyalty, which in itself had continuously posed
problems in Gaul, which was apparent in treason trials such as the cases of Arvandus
and Seronatus. They will examine the various ways in which a political as well as
social acculturation between foreign peoples and Roman population was possible, by
looking in particular at the Gallic population. The Roman aristocracy in Gaul (although similar problems were faced in other provinces too) had to accept that their previous unchallenged political dominion had given way to being the subject of barbarian kings. Many of them found ways to arrange themselves with the new political regimes though it did not automatically mean a different ideological approach towards these new rulers. Political assimilation with the barbarians and an active role at their courts could very easily lead to questions of political loyalty and treason against the Roman state. The cases of Attalus, Arvandus, Seronatus and Sidonius Apollinaris, to name but a few, present excellent examples of the dilemma between active cooperation with the new barbarian rulers as the only way to a political future, and the fact that any such cooperation was theoretically regarded as treason against the Roman state. Increasingly people like these were actively employed by the new powers and came to play important roles at their courts although the acceptance of political reality had not automatically brought a change in the perception of the new rulers. With the political sphere being more and more dominated and controlled by the barbarian rulers, the traditional bastion of power of a Roman aristocrat was gone. The only way in which something of a substitute for this loss could be found was devotion to classical literature and learning; literature had always been part of the aristocratic lifestyle and the continuous pursuit of it within a circle of likeminded friends from the same social stratum became then a way to preserve part of aristocratic values. It enabled the Roman aristocracy to regard themselves as having remained culturally wholly Roman even if the actual reality had become a new world where both Roman and barbarian concepts of culture and politics were mixed.

Part V will then look at the role of the church, both in terms of providing a different concept for the Gallic aristocracy to continue previous political power, albeit in a
different way, but also at the role of religion as an ethnic tool of distinction and
identity; especially the question of Arianism versus Catholicism was an interesting
aspect in the relationship between Goths and Romans, and certainly had an impact on
the eventual success of the Franks, contrasting them with the ultimate failure of the
Goths.
Part I. The question of Gothic identity

There has been a very complex debate about the ethnic development of the Goths, focusing on questions whether they were one people, a nation, a tribal confederation made of various different groups which had their own ethnic origins and customs, or rather a mobile army consisting of mercenaries in Roman service. Equally questions concerning the ethnic identity of the Goths have been discussed at length: how these people viewed their own identity, which aspects created such an identity, and how flexible and adaptable this concept was. Relevant in this debate is also the Roman view on foreign peoples such as the Goths and other peoples, as it will help to understand their impact on imperial ideology and political as well as military actions towards them. This concept of identity is very important in connection with the question of the political development of the Goths in general and with the development of their concept of leadership in particular, as well as their eventual establishment of an independent kingdom in Gaul. It is therefore this idea of ethnic formation and identity one must examine first; this is by no means a decisive answer to the various questions ethnogenesis poses, nor indeed is it an exhaustive overview of the ethnic development of foreign peoples within Roman territory. It will focus primarily on the development of the Goths from the fourth century AD onwards.
1. Ethnicity and ethnogenesis

To ask about the exact mechanisms of the development of ethnic identity and its various processes is far too great a topic for the scope of this chapter. The following discussion aims more to look at some of the most common concepts of the ethnogenetic process of barbarian groups. This is important in order to understand the changing nature of the political and military relationship between the Goths and the empire, as well as the development of a socio-political concept among them, which was to lead to their settlement and eventual establishment of a Gothic kingdom in Aquitaine in 416 AD. To start with there is the fundamental question whether one can even label groups of people as ‘Goths’, ‘Vandals’ or ‘Franks’; naming such a group ‘the Goths’ would imply the concept of a homogenous group, very much a nation or at least a united people with fixed social rules and a common ethnic origin which modern scholarship concerned with ethnogenesis has vehemently argued against. However, to label them as ‘barbarians’ equally poses problems as this term can be too general and oversimplifying or if one follows its Greek meaning, downright degrading.¹ The term ‘barbarian’ does in fact already in itself refer to a specific concept of viewing foreigners in the ancient world; most of the Roman descriptions of foreigners were by their very nature a continuation of the standard ancient xenophobia, already found in much older cultures like Egypt and China, which had later been adopted by Greek and subsequently Roman ideology. Negative images of foreigners who did not fit into the cultural picture of the society from where the source came are a very old phenomenon. The foreigner is turned into the antagonist of civilisation, contrasting him and his supposedly inferior status with the supposedly higher standard of culture and morality of the civilised person; thus it

¹ See p.11.
emphasised the alleged superiority of the civilised person as well as using such a view as an excuse for aggression and political expansion against the foreigner. Adopted from Greek ideology, in Roman opinion barbarians were all, without distinguishing between their various ethnic origins, regarded as being the quintessential opposite of what civilisation and culture stood for. The term barbarian itself is the Greek expression for describing the incomprehensible sound of the barbarian languages; very soon, though, the mastery of proper language was regarded as a purely Greek, hence civilised, prerogative, and the term barbarian came to imply inferiority. It turned into a byword for anybody who did not comply with Greek standards of political organisation, language or culture, although there were people from literary and philosophical quarters who argued in favour of a natural equality between men and admired the achievements of other, non-Greek civilisations. Sources by venerated authors like Herodotus, which were thus copied by subsequent generations of writers, created a perpetual image of the stereotypical barbarian as the crude, uncultivated brute who dressed in funny ways, had exotic, mostly cruel customs and was only interested in fighting and destroying civilisation by terror for the sake of looting its riches. In fact, this standardised picture was so influential that it became a model of writing historical accounts to such an extent that most authors of the Greco-Roman world copied its rhetorical style and vocabulary. Most of the ancient authors not only followed certain standardised literary models of stereotypical representations of foreigners, but also incorporated moral, philosophical and religious ideologies in their accounts, which led to a biased, if not distorted

---

2 See for example article by Jones, W. (1971). In Drinkwater’s opinion, the ‘Germanic threat’ was such an artificial construct, further exploited by contemporary writers (like Ammianus), which allowed the Roman state to justify its administration of and presence in the Germanic world, see Drinkwater (1997);(2007), 360.


4 However, Herodotus was regarded by Plutarch as too barbarian-friendly: philobarbaros; Plutarch, de Her. mal. 857A- 858F.
picture of presenting these foreign peoples; despite the fact of their using criteria such as language, religion, armoury/ways of fighting and dress to describe differences between various barbarian people but also to contrast them with the Romans in general, these largely remained stereotypical concepts and failed to be analysed as an indicator of individual ethnicity of the people involved.\textsuperscript{5} Tacitus for example famously applied concepts such as overall culture, customs, religion, language and weapons to provide distinctions between the various people he was describing in his \textit{Germania} and compared these criteria in order to see which groups belonged together; although his system of classification has its problems and should be used with caution as an accurate ethnographical model, it is nevertheless remarkable that Tacitus went further than most Roman authors in the way in which he described foreign people.\textsuperscript{6} To describe foreign peoples as ‘barbarians’ then is to follow ancient traditions of xenophobia and a standardisation of foreign customs and behaviour. According to Kulikowski, though, and I agree with him in this matter, the term \textit{barbarian} is nevertheless to be preferred in its general approach when talking about foreign peoples as it avoids the trap of applying names such as \textit{Vandals} or \textit{Goths} to groups of people whose ethnic identity is far from established; indeed this ‘labelling’ with precise names is something the debate on ethnogenesis has tried to end or at least to clarify.\textsuperscript{7}

One of the problems with groups which have been given specific names is the nature of the sources: information about them stems almost exclusively from works of


\textsuperscript{6} See also Pohl (1998c).

\textsuperscript{7} Kulikowski (2002), 69-70, 82. Pohl (2005), 18-21.
Greco-Roman authors who mentioned foreign groups only when these peoples appeared within the imperial radar and became noticeable enough for imperial politics to be worth mentioning; to view them from an ethno-anthropological point for the sake of researching their customs was not of interest to contemporary writers though they did apply ethnic or racial concepts in their descriptions but this was only done to differentiate them from the Roman audience. Descriptions of different languages, religion, dress and customs have been suggested also in modern scholarship as indicators of belonging to certain ethnic groups but none of these elements have been wholly sufficient in their own right; certainly for the Romans, though, dress/appearance was a way in which barbarians were identified (the Celtic trousers or the Phrygian cap are famous examples) but such aspects served more to identify the barbarians in general and to contrast them with the Romans than to indicate any specific ethnic differences between various groups of the same people.\textsuperscript{8}

Yet ethnic identity is only one of many ways to identify a people and already in the ancient world there were debates which barbarian belonged to which group. Often people were put together under a collective name, as Tacitus did with the term Germani, although the reality of group formation and social structures was far more complex than such collective terms suggest. Indeed it was predominantly the Romans who used such terms whereas the people under this name identified themselves rather under individual ethnic terms as belonging to specific groups.\textsuperscript{9}

\textsuperscript{8} Even Sidonius continued such standardised descriptions of barbarians when he depicted a barbarian prince, Sigimer, in his clothing and appearance that contrasted sharply with Roman attire, see Sid. Ap., Ep. IV. 20; when he presented the Gothic king Theoderic in an almost Roman fashion, both in appearance and character, he did so to highlight the king’s favourable relationship with the Romans – the king’s appearance had to comply to Roman standards, as a barbarian attire would have made any amicable relationship with the Roman side less credible, see also Part IV.3c. See for example Pohl (1998 c) for a thorough discussion of the usage of dress/appearance, weaponry, and language by ancient authors to describe ethnic identities.

\textsuperscript{9} Archaeological material found in graves has often been used to interpret individual concepts of ethnic identity, see further below, pp. 16-9.
Modern scholarship has moved in various directions in analysing the ethnic
development of barbarian peoples – known as ethnogenesis, the debate on the origins
and ethnic development of barbarian groups. One of the most famous is the Viennese
school and the highly influential work by R. Wenskus, *Stammbildung und
Verfassung* with its concepts of the *Traditionskern* and the *Heerkönigtum*. Wenskus
explains ethnogenesis in this way: ‘barbarian groups [are] more or less
heterogeneous save for a small, though always unspecified, number of elite families
who bear the *Traditionskern* of a genuine ethnic memory. Successful military
leadership on the part of these noble lineages attracts followers like a snowball
rolling down a hillside, until under the right circumstances, usually those of
settlement, there takes place an ethnogenesis in which the core of tradition carried by
its noble bearers is widely adopted and subsumes the previously heterogeneous
identities of the non-noble following.’ In Wenskus’ understanding, the Roman
world was overcome by the stronger political concept of the Germanic *gentes*, which
reached way back into pre-Roman times. Although Wenskus’ concept has widely
resonated throughout this debate, it has not been universally accepted and has been
regarded by many as containing serious faults. One of the problems is in some
scholars’ opinion (notably M. Kulikowski, A. Murray and W. Goffart among others)
the acceptance of topics such as a migration mythology from Scandinavia as the
*Urheimat* of the Germanic *gentes*; another problem is to tailor material found in later
sources into material which is then used as hard-core evidence to create a concept of
ancestral myths directly linked to the ethnic origins of the peoples under
Others, like H. Wolfram or W. Pohl, have partly accepted Wenskus’ approach and developed it further: Pohl for example, though he rejects part of Wenskus’ analysis, nevertheless relies in his concept and definition of ethnogenesis in many ways on Wenskus’ idea of the *Traditionskern*; he also accepts H. Wolfram’s concept of connecting place-names/names of peoples with the development of their ethnic identity and to indicate their movements across the whole of Europe. In Pohl’s opinion some of such connections between places and peoples’ names cannot have been a mere coincidence or invention of the Roman authors writing about them. Furthermore, for him Gothic stories of their origin, for example, must have had some impact on their formation as a people as they carried some information about their past, although they were in most cases rather difficult to read because of the way in which they were created and transmitted: ‘There were all sorts of stories around, some of them also derogatory, and the tensions in our sources seem to be traces of a constant renegotiation of identity.’ Such stories might often occur in a rather disorderly fashion in Roman sources but then they would have appeared in a very similar way in the societies from which they originated as most of these stories would have been orally transmitted; in Pohl’s opinion such stories served as an oral memory of traditions and therefore had to incorporate various different narratives but always contained a core of some vital information about the past of the people in question. Other scholars found these concepts far too strict and argued for another approach to ethnogenesis, which regards the ethnicity of foreign peoples as so loose

13 Goffart (2002), 21-3 rejecting Wolfram’s concept of ethnogenesis; 32-5: Wolfram was following Wenskus in linking the *Traditionskern* to origin-stories such as found in the [now lost] works by Jordanes, Paul the Deacon and others.
16 Pohl (2002), 231-3; Pohl (2005), 24-36.
a terminology that it can be used in whatever way seems most acceptable. Yet whatever concept one accepts, there is in fact very little known hard evidence about foreign peoples other than what the Roman authors were interested in reporting; that means that especially the origins and early social, political and military development of such peoples are very much open to debate. Archaeology has undoubtedly helped us to understand such developments per se but it fails to explain peoples in regard to their diplomatic relationship with Rome, their internal social structures, their concepts of leadership or cultural customs – in short, the ethnic interpretation of archaeological material poses serious problems: grave goods might indicate concepts of ethnic identity, although there is the problem that modern archaeological concepts of ethnicity might not necessarily be compatible with ancient criteria of ethnic identity, especially when the adapting to new living conditions and adopting of different cultural aspects is a highly individual process and does not automatically become instantaneously visible in material culture. Besides, descriptions of specific customs by ancient authors do not always agree, let alone agree with material finds, thus highlighting even more the individuality of such criteria, and the difficulty of using them as an explanation for a universally applicable concept in terms of archaeological data; furthermore, symbols and/or artefacts, which were regarded by the Roman side as indicators of specific ethnic origins or identity, may not necessarily have been viewed by the people themselves as conveying the same message of self-identity.

Another way of interpreting models of ethnogenesis is the concept of linking archaeological and historical evidence to the extent that archaeological material is ethnologically interpreted; this has been rejected by some scholars on the basis that

18 Kulikowski for example has largely rejected any such notions of compatibility between ethnogetic methods and archaeology, whereas many others, for example Bierbrauer, Pohl or Heather, have partly accepted them.
archaeological finds cannot be connected with defining ethnic origins of specific peoples;\textsuperscript{19} thus objects decorated with similar patterns and occurring in a specific area cannot automatically be classified as the identification of the ethnic origins of the people living in that area or as the proof for the assumption that wherever such patterns of decorations are found, the same people could be found. On the basis of the concept of G. Kossinna’s \textit{Siedlungsarchäologie}, at times archaeology has been used as an indicator of ethnic origins of specific people: thus archaeological finds were directly linked with ethnic groups, indicating where specific peoples settled in the empire, according to the spread of these artefacts\textsuperscript{20}. If this approach is taken further, specific material finds can be interpreted to stand in direct connection with specific peoples found in written ancient sources. Kulikowski rejects that approach but does accept the fact that artefacts do certainly demonstrate levels of social hierarchy. It is possible that dress, weapons and jewellery did indeed indicate ethnic identity too but, if they did, we do not know in what way they did so. When this concept is applied to the Goths, Kulikowski is willing to accept the idea that the material culture known as the Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov culture in the area between Danube, Black Sea and the Carpathians which can be found from the third to the fifth century, precisely the time when the Goths were found in that area as the predominant political power, certainly can be used to identify Gothic social

\textsuperscript{19} For example Theuws & Hiddink (1996), 69-71 on the process of ‘Entromanisierung’ and ‘Germanisierung’, which, described, though, as a mental and social process, is made tangible in archaeological records, although this very process is slow to appear in the aforementioned archaeological material; they warn, though, of using the archaeological data by applying a too static approach to ethnicity and not leaving enough space for the recognition of individual adaptations of cultural elements. See also Pohl (1998 c), 41-2. Pohl (2000), 47-9. Van Ossel (1996), Bierbrauer (1996), Böhme (1996), Périn (1996), Wieczorek (1996 a, b): for the identification of specific ethnic groups via different forms of burial rituals in general and the finds of goods such as jewellery, weaponry and other items (or lack thereof) found in graves in particular, which were distinctly different according to each population. Carroll (2003), 143-4: archaeological evidence suggests that the individual displayed his ethnic origins with specific items put in the grave. Also Pohl (1998 c), 60, 63-4, 67-8 although he warns of using grave-goods as a tool for ethnic identification, especially as modern archaeological interpretation does not necessarily need to be compatible with contemporary concepts of ethnic identification.

\textsuperscript{20} For example Heather (2008), 23-6 for the historical problems and scholarly discussions Kossina’s approach has created.
structures; in other words, he is willing to accept a concept he previously rejected. Other scholars, for example V. Bierbrauer, have taken the link between material culture and Gothic ethnicity further and have argued that as the Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov culture was Gothic, an archaeological culture that shares similar characteristics with the Wielbark culture must therefore also be Gothic. Heather accepts the Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov culture of the late third century/fourth century AD as directly linked with the rise of Gothic power before the expansion of the Hunnic empire, but is aware of the difficulties of identifying ethnic identities through material objects, although he does link such material cultures with possible migration movements of the Goths (he interprets Jordanes’ migration story of one people under one king as doubtful and argues in favour of large, mixed population groups); in his opinion there were links with the Wielbark culture but this culture was perhaps more a cult league where more than just the Goths participated.\(^{21}\) There are serious difficulties with such an approach, not only because such cultures are not automatically compatible, as for example the meaning of material items can change when transported to different areas, but also because often archaeological evidence was/is used to provide material evidence for the interpretation of textual evidence about Gothic history, mainly based once again on the basis of Jordanes’ migration story.\(^ {22}\) Although I do not follow Kulikowski’s absolute rejection of this approach (because I do not accept his approach regarding the Goths as a Roman product of the third/fourth century, but believe in a Gothic history before they came in contact with the Roman empire – see further below), nevertheless I do agree with his warning

---

\(^{21}\) For a discussion on the Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov culture, see Heather (1991), 47-95. The culture had also been used to explain identification with the Taifali, Heather (1991), 60 contra Diaconu (1963). Heather argues that ‘the Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov culture was both homogeneous, and at the same time the product of a number of different ethnic and cultural strands’, 92. For possible links between Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov culture and Wielbark culture, and their connection with Gothic migration, see also Heather (1996), 21-5, 43-50, 84-6.

against linking archaeological material with literary evidence in order to provide each with a direct proof only. Archaeology does indeed offer very valuable contributions to the overall debate, but it cannot resolve it on its own, nor can literary evidence do this; it seems then that both methods are to a large extent incompatible, although they can and indeed do complement each other to a certain extent. As Mathisen has said: ‘the very inability of archaeology to provide precise ethnic identification is in itself indicative of the degree of interaction and adaptation…The picture that emerges [in relationship to the Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov culture and its connection with the emergence of Gothic identity/ethnicity] is one of a mixture of cultures in which no specific ethnicity can be identified.’

Although the tradition of linking archaeological finds or place names with the ethnic development and origins of foreign peoples is surely a very debatable concept, the idea of regarding the concept of ethnogenesis as an open approach by completely neglecting any archaeological evidence or any textual material is in my opinion prone to fail as it leaves the discussion open to the very problem which the entire debate has tried to end. To label certain peoples and their ethnic development as is most suitable for the respective concept of analysis of the author is surely equally prone to be a step backwards as it could fail to take into account the level of knowledge (based on a mixture of different disciplines) available about the development of these peoples.

Archaeology is most certainly a very important contributing factor in the debate on ethnogenesis. One of the most important elements of archaeological records in connection with ethnological issues is their ability to provide possible geographical frameworks of the spread/trade of specific goods; they can also offer a basis with which literary data can be compared, and thus they can offer a certain element of

---

23 Mathisen & Sivan (1999 c), 2.
precaution against taking literary evidence at face value. Considering the somewhat
problematic nature of many of the contemporary sources, an element of comparison
is certainly very useful. However, as said before, material objects are not
automatically correct indicators of ethnicity of specific people due to questions of
trade or exchange; production and decoration of objects are perhaps closer to help
identifying shared elements of ethnicity, although once again one should be careful
to regard the appearance of specific material in certain geographical areas as an
absolute proof for the appearance of ethnically identical people. However, neither
archaeological material or socio-ethnical studies on their own can work as exclusive
tools to explain fully the ethnic, social and political development of certain peoples;
any analysis of ethnogenetical processes should therefore be based on material taken
from as many sources, including literary as well as archaeological evidence, as
possible in order to provide as many ways as possible to analyse the available
material.25

---

24 Also Mathisen & Sivan (1999 c), 2 n.3.
25 For example pp. 21, 29-30.
2. The Romans and their views of the Goths

Again as with the discussion on ethnogenesis, this chapter is by no means an exhaustive interpretation over the various aspects of the treatment of foreigners by the Romans, nor is this its aim; the main purpose is to provide an overview of the relationship between the imperial government and the various Gothic groups – besides, much of the direct relationship between the two sides in the fourth/fifth century will be discussed in the subsequent chapters. The reason for this is that the development of Gothic leadership was intrinsically linked with Gothic service within the imperial army; furthermore, in particular Alaric’s rise to power was closely connected with the position the imperial authorities were willing to grant to him and his followers. Besides, the influence Rome had on the socio-cultural development of its barbarian neighbours should not be underestimated as it had indirectly also an impact on their political understanding.

The annexation of the Balkan and Danubian provinces and the creation of the Dacian province under Trajan in 107 had created a growth of culture and social organisation among its inhabitants, which had a direct impact on the people beyond these borders, including the Goths. However, this extended influence of Roman artefacts and Roman culture was not something Trajan had invented and indeed its principle, which was generally applicable across the imperial provinces, had a strong impact on the people beyond the imperial frontiers; in Kulikowski’s words: ‘two or three generations after Roman provincial culture began to develop inside the frontier, new and more sophisticated barbarian polities appeared along the periphery, prompted by both the example of Roman provincial life and the threat of the Roman army.’

Indeed for people outside the empire the attractions to life close to or even within the

\[26\] Kulikowski (2007), 41.
imperial sphere were manifold. In the earlier empire Roman law had forbidden marriage between Roman citizens and foreigners – any children from such unions were regarded as illegitimate and could not inherit, whereas with the acceptance of Roman citizenship the person ceased to be legally part of his family by birth. With the Constitutio Antoniniana in 212 Roman citizenship was granted to all freeborn inhabitants of the empire and with this lost most of its former prestige. In the later empire, Roman law distinguished between various groups holding different social status, but the real difference between them, or between barbarian and Roman, lay in their cultural understanding and their literary education.\textsuperscript{27} The mobility of the imperial troops led to an increase of people from all across the empire who ended their lives as inhabitants of provinces that were often geographically distant from their own native provinces. Furthermore, the frequent employment in the imperial army and also in many cases a close proximity to the imperial frontiers meant that many of these barbarian groups had been exposed to imperial goods, customs and administration for a considerable amount of time; this had had a profound impact on their own societies as they brought Roman customs with them when they returned to their own people.\textsuperscript{28} This process of Romanisation was a process that was deliberately encouraged by the empire in order to enhance a concept of an empire bound together by cultural understanding as this process gradually diminished sharp boundaries between Roman and non-Roman sphere.

\textsuperscript{27} A real sense of political identity and civic obligations for the causes of the empire were largely lacking. See also Liebeschuetz (2001), 343-5, 350-2.

\textsuperscript{28} Böhme (1996), 92- for graves in the areas around the Rhine, Belgium and Northern France where grave-goods serve as an indicators for communities, which were essentially non-Roman in their ethnic origins (as the clothing and weaponry found is of non-Roman origin both in style and usage) but had adopted, at least in part, aspects and material goods from the Roman sphere (weapons manufactured in Roman territory, jewellery, Roman coinage); some of the grave-goods, especially those linked with clothing such as fibulae, and the spread of their occurrence also indicate the appearance of specific groups of non-Roman origin in certain areas. As these graves were located nearby Roman garrisons, there is a strong likelihood that these people had been serving in the imperial army or were at least closely linked with this military presence; furthermore, as an equally large part of the people buried there were women and children, there is a strong indication that these graves were not only linked with non-Roman troops in imperial military service but that there were entire groups of people as ethnic units.
The most common method of imperial administration of a conquered territory was to use its native population and to establish a governing body based on the already existing power structures with a strong focus on already existing or newly set up urban centres (in case of Gaul, the obvious choice was the civitas). This in turn would have further fostered local interest in Roman goods and culture, as the power-holding groups of the native population propagated these and Rome apparently deliberately fostered such processes through urbanisation, loan-provisions, the granting of citizenship (certainly an important point before 212) as a privileged award for services towards Rome; the promotion of the imperial cult with the local leaders very often incorporated as its priests as well as through education. A strong market for Roman goods was therefore to be found among the people living close to imperial frontiers; in fact the peoples living closest to the borders were often almost indistinguishable from their Roman neighbours. Besides, the imperial borders had to be flexible enough to allow Roman expansion yet at the same time prevent barbarian incursions; any concept of strictly defined frontiers as it is understood today was not to be found in imperial ideology. There were some natural boundaries like rivers or military fortifications like the Limes, but in many cases these frontiers seem to have been defined as the answer to specific problems rather than to mark specific territories in the first place. Imperial frontiers were quite permeable, allowing for a fluid exchange of ideas and culture, which opposes ideas of a Roman ‘block’ versus the outside barbarian world, although such concepts were undoubtedly valid when it came to Roman self-perception of cultural superiority over all non-Romans; indeed the political concept of a ‘Germanic threat’ has been rejected by Drinkwater as an

29 Hanson (1997), 72-8.
31 A.M. 26.4.5. Ammianus for example described the arrival of the Gothic groups like water bursting a dam and pouring into the empire, thus highlighting even more the danger of such invaders and the ultimate failure of an emperor like Valens to stop them.
'artefact, because most of the barbarian groups posed little danger to the empire unless it was distracted by other threats to its stability such as civil war'.\textsuperscript{32} Undoubtedly the idea of a permanent barbarian ‘threat’ was far more an aspect of imperial propaganda, intrinsically linked with the Roman perception of foreigners in general, which allowed for ideological concepts such as the acquisition of military glory, the enhancing of the status of the emperor, the justification for imperial expansion linked with the provision of fighting in order to occupy but also train troops. Besides, the empire was, in contrast to its outside neighbours, militarily in an absolutely dominant position, and almost all military encounters between barbarian and imperial forces tended to bring defeat for the less equipped, less-trained barbarian forces. Rome’s expansionistic policy had always demanded a careful management of its growing frontiers; imperial borders were in fact both too extensive for the relatively small amount of military forces to offer serious long-term protection without draining other parts of the empire of manpower (and thus weakening defences there) as well as too demanding for the fiscal budget.\textsuperscript{33} A strict polarisation between Romans and peoples outside imperial frontiers was therefore much more a theoretical attitude, usually employed in imperial ideology, whereas realistic political diplomacy often demanded quite a different, much subtler approach than many of the contemporary sources would like us to believe. Court propaganda demanded from

\textsuperscript{32} Drinkwater (2007), 360, 362. Pohl (2000), 35. Wells (1999), 102-4, 126-32. Millar (1982), 19-20. Pohl (2000), 53-4. Noy (2000 a), 213: the people from the Germanic and Danubian provinces were always regarded more as the stereotypical barbarian than foreigners from geographically more distant provinces. See also Whittaker (1994), 26-7, 31-60, 194-8. Indeed the continuous process of assimilation in the frontier zones is further indicator for the absence of a strict or impermeable frontier as otherwise the development of a society which incorporated both indigenous and Roman culture would not have been possible.

\textsuperscript{33} Goffart (1981), 283: he argues that the imperial administration was chiefly concerned with this overstretching of both military and financial resources as well as constant internal power struggles which left the barbarian appearance, at least in the beginning, as a marginal problem; this in turn totally underestimated the real danger these peoples were causing to the entire imperial administration.
the emperor to keep foreign peoples under control, moreover to remind them
constantly of their inferior, barbarian status, although that did not necessarily exclude
the simultaneous existence of diplomatic negotiations. It is this ideological spin,
written for the Roman audience, which forms a very large part of contemporary
accounts, thus making it at times difficult to see the real politics behind such rhetoric,
and furthermore complicated by the fact that the foreign peoples described in such
sources formed the elite of their groups which were prone to have assimilated with
Roman culture.\textsuperscript{34} In order to maintain a certain level of stability alongside its
frontiers, something very important considering the vast geographical expansion of
the imperial borders, it had always been a deliberate political concept to affiliate
foreign nations, especially peoples which could not be conquered, with Roman ideals
and incorporate them into the imperial system by turning them into client kingdoms.

Although theoretically everybody in the empire, and that included foreign peoples,
had the possibility to assimilate with Roman culture, in Roman ideology it was the
notion of life according to the \textit{mos maiorum} which could not be adopted but
someone had to be born into it to understand its concept; hence foreign, barbarian
peoples were by their nature excluded from understanding any such concepts and
could therefore never adopt the full range of Roman civilisation.\textsuperscript{35} The more such
kingdoms merged with Roman culture and its political as well as military interests,
the less likely they were to fight against the empire: to become \textit{amicus et socius} of
the empire carried considerable advantages which culminated very often in the total
assimilation with Roman ideas of the ruling group of the foreign peoples in question.

\textsuperscript{34} Heather (2001), 49-56. Wells, 95, 191-3.
\textsuperscript{35} Unruh (1991), 135-6. However assimilation was not necessarily equal with acceptance and Roman
prejudice against foreign peoples continued to exist. This can be found for example in Cicero: he had
noticed the difference between the ideology of Roman superiority and the political necessity of
assimilation, between proclaiming unchallenged Roman power yet accepting the limitations of Roman
culture (especially in comparison with Greek culture). Thus he argued for a policy of assimilation, for
example \textit{de re publ.} I.37.58, \textit{in Ver.} 2.5, 166. Sallust moreover propagated the idea of Rome as the
leader of all peoples as the Romans were born to be rulers, for example \textit{bel. Iug.} 31.11.
However, the process of becoming a client of Rome always meant the acceptance of Roman superiority to which the client aspired, whereas in the later empire the establishment of barbarians within the imperial system often lacked the acceptance of such a concept. The empire had to learn that any process of assimilation between barbarian establishments and the Roman state was increasingly based less on concepts of client kingdoms but much more on diplomatic compromises which often meant the acceptance of a large decree of military freedom of the foreign peoples in question, especially when they proved to be too strong to be treated in the usual way of subduing them and forcefully removing any political and/or military independence. This did not mean an alteration of Roman views or prejudices about such peoples. The various internal problems of the later empire, and the increasing strength of foreign peoples from outside was one of these factors, had created a climate of instability which left enough space for these foreign peoples to develop their own establishments, thus creating a powerbase which the empire was increasingly unable to counteract. Traditionally Roman perceptions of foreign peoples had followed concepts of strict distinctions between brute barbarian and cultured Roman, and the world of late antiquity made no exception in that; Romans and foreigners were separated by military as well as ideological frontiers. Despite the existence and indeed acceptance of necessary acculturation between the two, certainly Roman ideology had to ensure the continuous existence of this separation through propaganda and rhetoric – even if it was found much more in theoretical, literary accounts than in actual politics. Yet, one should be careful not to over-emphasise the expressions of eternal Roman success over its neighbours as mere concepts of imperial propaganda when there were times when the perception of a ‘barbarian threat’ became a dangerous reality and was to increase in being so in the late empire, especially when the imperial system was weakened. The Gothic crossing
of the Danube is an excellent example of this: a situation which was in no way
unprecedented quickly got out of hand and created a ‘threat’ to Roman control,
which remained uncontrollable and effectively became the foundation for the Gothic
success.\textsuperscript{36}

Rome tended to annex states nearest to its borders as client kingdoms, which acted as
buffer zones against incursions from further afield. Client kings thus provided
another aspect of imperial administration, especially when a conquest of the territory
in question would have been difficult, but the successful relationship between the
two depended on the benefits both sides gained from the deal; although the kings
ruled their area as if there was no Roman presence, their power depended to a large
extent on Rome as the imperial administration was always ready to interfere. A
similar relationship could also be conducted with independent leaders of foreign
people; however, such relationships should perhaps be better described as diplomatic
connections rather than client relationships.\textsuperscript{37} In many cases the giving of hostages
not only ensured a certain stability of the treaty but also further aided the process of
interaction and assimilation of the ruling family of these client kingdoms with
Roman culture. However, the relationship between Rome and her neighbours cannot
always be fairly described as the forceful imposition of Roman culture onto non-
Roman foreigners. Indeed the process of Romanisation was largely dependent on the
geographical location of the territory in question, which had a direct impact in the
extent of the adoption of and assimilation with Roman culture; whereas in the
Western territories Rome met groups of people with cultures they regarded as
barbarian, the Eastern expansion meant that it collided with people whose culture
had been an inspiration to Rome itself and who were largely keeping their own

\textsuperscript{36} See Part II. 2,3.
\textsuperscript{37} Hanson (1997), 69-72. There are several examples mentioned in Tacitus, \textit{Ann.} 2.63; \textit{Germ.} 41, 42. See also articles by Pitts (1989) and Heather (2001).
cultures intact; furthermore, the extent to which the acculturation with the Roman sphere happened was highly individual, and not always a process of exchange between separate groups of different societies. Besides, this spread of imperial culture was not only an aspect that influenced the world beyond the frontier-zones, as it was a process that was also happening within Roman society. The adoption of Roman culture by barbarians into their own cultural understanding encouraged the creation of a new culture in which Roman and barbarian cultures experienced mutual assimilation; this process is in German quite aptly called ‘Mischzivilisation’. In northern Gaul for example, in the late third/early fourth century this ‘Mischzivilisation’ created a new Gallo-Germanic culture, which was responsible for the later Frankish success when it was the foundation that introduced and bound the Franks to Roman culture; although they were to clash with the Roman empire on military/politically inspired levels, culturally they had adopted so much from the Roman side that it effectively came to a ‘Gallisierung’ of the Franks instead of a ‘Fränkisierung’ of Gaul, thus eventually enabling them to incorporate and successfully adopt the Roman system of administration, taxation and ecclesiastical organisation under Childeric’s and Chlodwig’s leadership.

This adoption of Roman culture by Rome’s neighbours, conquered enemies or barbarians living within the Roman sphere was largely a voluntary process, although undoubtedly fostered by the empire and often even wanted as a way to gain access to

---

38 Krausse (2005), 56-8.
39 Reuter (2005): the example given here is the migration of soldiers from across the empire to the southwest province of Germany. Böhme (1996), 92. There are numerous examples of barbarians (Arbogast, Bauto, Richomer, Fritigern, Gainas to name but a few) who entered Roman military offices and rose high in the ranks, either making a career in Roman services at the imperial court, or in some cases returned to their native homeland and influencing politics there; they were aptly described by A. Demandt as ‘Militäraristokratie’. See also Van Ossel (1996), 102-3 pointing out the long-lasting continuation of Roman culture and buildings into the sixth century. Barrett (1997), 51-3, 59, 63. See also Whittaker (1997), 152, 159. Hanson (1997), 67. Geary (2001), 110. Noy (2000 a), 10; (2000 b), 15-31 for issues of immigration into the empire in terms of its demographic implications and its research methods.
wealth; however Geary’s arguments that ‘Die germanische Welt [war] vielleicht die
großartigste und dauerhafteste Schöpfung des politischen und militärischen Genies
der Römer’ is surely an exaggeration as it regards the world of non-Roman peoples
almost as a Roman invention, though without doubt the world outside imperial
territory benefitted greatly from its continuous contact with the Roman world.\(^{41}\)

Miller warns against an over-emphasis on the influence of Roman culture on the
social structures of the peoples beyond imperial borders when he argues that the
cultures and societies emerging from this were in fact the result of a very long
process of interaction between the Mediterranean world and northern Europe, and
thus were not simply ‘Romanised’ because this process had started way earlier
before the Roman empire had become the dominant factor in the Mediterranean.\(^{42}\)

Barrett, too, warns that the concept of transporting Roman culture, especially
material goods, across its borders indicates a general idea of a common Roman
identity, which might not have been the case in this universal sense; thus for him the
term Romanisation carries its own difficulties, and is more applicable in terms of a
cultural concept/ideas, a ‘form of understanding’, than in terms of material culture,
especially when the Roman empire itself was a construct, not a ‘single reality’.\(^{43}\)

Although Barrett has a point in arguing that one should refrain from using the Roman
empire as a struggle of Roman versus barbarian and instead should regard the Roman
culture as being open to change and individual interpretation, his argument goes
perhaps slightly too far as it regards the Roman culture as essentially unstable and
prone to individual interpretation. Whereas he is undoubtedly correct that the people
who adopted Roman culture into their own interpreted it in different ways from its
original purpose or meaning in the Roman sphere, and moreover that even people

\(^{43}\) Barrett (1997).
within the empire interpreted cultural aspects individually, this does not mean that
there were not universally accepted concepts within the imperial sphere and culture
which were imposed on the inhabitants of the empire.

To be someone of a certain social standing one had to adopt the trappings of Roman
culture – which was also seen by various barbarian rulers who started to surround
themselves with at least rudimentary elements of Roman education. Thompson
argued that for the few prominent leaders among the Goths such a close relationship
and the diplomatic exchange with Rome had its advantages for their own power
positions: this altered the entire social structure of Gothic society when the leaders
received subsidies which they in turn used to extend their power of patronage and
social control, thus enabling them to set themselves apart from the rest of their
followers. The possession of Roman luxury goods, especially jewellery, weapons but
also money, thus could function as an indicator of a certain position within the
barbarian society and could therefore gradually change traditional social structures.

The payment of imperial subsidies and their wider distribution could also serve as a
deliberate diplomatic tool, used to establish and to foster relationships between the
empire and the barbarian group. Considering the extent and length of time of
exposure to the Roman sphere, though, one could argue that subsidies as part of a
treaty were perhaps less substantial in their impact on barbarian social structures.

Krausse for example argues that among the Celts even the import of Roman goods or
the adaption of the Celtic monetary system to the Roman system led to little
profound change in their cultural understanding; only when the occupation of a
territory continued, the pressure onto the existing population to adopt ‘foreign’

---

(2001), 145. Geary (2001), 110. For barbarian economy, see for example Elton (1996 b), 22-30; the
Goths were described by Elton as a semi-sedentary society as long as they were in the Danube area,
and turned into permanent settlers once they were in Gaul. Also Díaz (1999), 326. Whittaker (1994),
222-240.

customs continuously grew, which in turn created tendencies among the native
population to revolt with the aim to remove any of these ‘foreign’ customs.46 Heather
too doubts that Roman benefits had a great influence on the development of Gothic
society and interprets internal power struggles more as results of already existing
internal power-feuds.47 Yet there are examples of a direct link between the outbreak
of warfare and the lack of payment of imperial gifts. The Tervingi, for example,
started their revolt after the Danube-crossing when the promised supplies failed to
materialise, and even as late as the fifth century negotiations between the Goths and
the empire were frequently hindered by the lack of the said subsidies.

Yet the Roman definition of the Gothic peoples and their ethnic origins and
dynamics remains difficult to establish as it largely fitted into the standardised
pattern by which any non-Roman peoples were described with. Alaric’s or Athaulf’s
Goths were by no means the first Goths the empire had encountered, nor was the
trouble the Goths created in the late fourth century something completely new. The
Romans had been in contact with various Gothic groups already long before the
fourth century AD, and it was in the civil wars of the third century that the Romans
encountered Gothic groups as part of large-scale movements into the Eastern
provinces of the empire: 249 had brought the sack of Marcianople near the Black
Sea; the 250s saw the powerful king Cniva, who not only devastated large parts of

46 Krausse (2005), 57-61. He argues that in case of Gaul, the already existing infrastructure as well as
a certain extent of cultural compatibility for example in terms of religious aspects but also road
systems and urban structures helped the process of Romanisation. In contrast to this stands the less
developed infrastructure in the Germanic territories and to a large extent a lack of cultural and/or
religious compatibility, which then meant that the process of acculturation with the Roman sphere
took longer and encompassed a more radical change for the native population. Also Frank (2005),
143-4 for the simultaneous existence of Roman goods in Germanic settlements in the otherwise
unchanged Germanic culture of the Tauber and Main area in the second/third century, which indicates
a strong trade-based relationship; otherwise, though, the adoption of Roman customs seems to be
lacking.
47 Heather (2001), 26-7: he argues that the provision of imperial gifts was a longstanding tradition but
was more a diplomatic tool than an imperial measure to buy peace from the barbarians. In 441 the
failure of the empire to pay subsidies to Attila was used by him as the reason for the outbreak of
warfare, although in this case subsidies had become a way to buy peace.
Roman territory there but also defeated and killed the emperor Decius in 251, and further raids in Thrace and piracy along the coast of Asia Minor continued until 268-70. The 280s and 290s saw more successful campaigns against various Gothic groups, with Diocletian fighting against the Tervingi and Taifali – the first mention of the Tervingi as a subgroup of the Goths. Diocletian’s reorganisation of the administrative and military structures of the empire under the tetrarchy system renewed imperial strength, creating a hold on imperial power, which had serious consequences for the Gothic groups as it substantially altered the relationship between empire and frontier zones. Within a short time, there was a certain degree of cooperation between both sides, with the empire even allowing the expansion of power of certain groups like the Tervingi as a way to control parts of the Danube provinces through them. Their status as a buffer between the imperial frontiers and other barbarian groups strengthened once more their force; more warfare followed under Diocletian’s successors, for example Constantine’s campaigns in the 330s, and proved to remain a constant pattern until the time of Alaric.

The Roman view on ethnic dynamics was mainly to stop any attempt at a continuation or preservation of ethnic identity among conquered foreign peoples in order to ensure Roman supremacy. For the Romans ethnic identity went very closely with political identity and independence: to allow barbarian groups access to a communal area of settlement would further encourage or even create political formations which in turn could foster resistance against Rome. Valens’ decision to allow the Tervingi to retain their weapons when crossing the Danube was blamed by contemporaries as part of the reason for the outbreak of violence, and the decision to

---

51 Ferris (2000), 180: portraits of barbarians in visual art were always exclusively depicting them in defeat regardless how detailed the individuals were presented.
ban the Greuthungi from crossing the Danube too may have been an attempt to interrupt existing political alliances with the Tervingi, and thus to minimise the potential danger for the imperial side; besides, the massacres of various Goths in Constantinople and Thessalonica after the battle of Adrianople or after the revolt of Gainas clearly suggests that the very existence of a Gothic population in the cities or as soldiers within the army was seen as a potential hotbed for revolutionary movements which were threatening imperial interests and thus had to be eliminated. The usual treatment of such groups therefore meant the dispersal of its people as *coloni* across a province (at the same time controlling their movements even then as they were tied to the land), and in some cases prohibited them from providing recruits or federate contingents for the imperial army. This implies that Rome feared that groups of foreign peoples, despite being conquered, would not lose their claim to their ethnic identity and subsequently political identity, which was based on the concept of living in a group consisting of people with the same claim.

In contrast to modern scholarship, Roman writers were not interested in recording ethnographic details and providing a scientific analysis of the cultural habits of non-Roman people. Any notion to research into foreign peoples for their own sake was an alien concept in Roman literature, as any foreign peoples, including the Gothic groups only captured Roman interest once they had entered imperial frontiers or had become a noticeable opponent to Roman expansion or influence. Roman ideology was not engaged in concepts of ethnogenesis, socio-cultural assimilation or regarding them as individual people with their own history, as such concepts are very much modern perceptions; they have nothing to do with the way in which peoples like the Gothic groups were viewed by their contemporaries as they were evaluated far more

\[52\] Zosimus, IV.40.5 for incident in Tomi; Libanius, *Or.* 19.22, 20.14 for the lynching in Constantinople; Synesius' writings in general portray such anti-Gothic feelings and were calling for the expulsion of the Gothic population in Constantinople, especially in connection with the revolt of Gainas. Cameron & Long (1993), 107-9.
in the context of their geographical location, their nuisance as an imperial opponent,
or at best as their relative value as buffer zones or traders of foreign goods. This does
not mean that the Romans had no knowledge about the various different customs and
habits of the people they encountered, but such ethnographical issues were rather put
into specific categories of barbarian behaviour; indeed they were largely recorded to
demonstrate a general barbarian ‘other’ in contrast to the civilised Roman world: the
barbarian had to be put into such categories so as to provide a background from
which Roman values could be reflected; often a generic barbarian had to be invented
as a necessary counterpart to Roman self-definition and as a tool to highlight Roman
values and culture.\textsuperscript{53} This concept was also used by Christian writers who employed
the barbarians in their eschatological arguments as a mirror to highlight and/or
explain a lack of proper Christian faith and morale among the Romans; once again,
the individual barbarian was not so much described for ethnographical reasons but
served as a standardised image, which served as an antithesis to the Roman sphere.\textsuperscript{54}

There is a very interesting comparison in some contemporary Christian literature
which connected the Goths with a legend from the Old Testament, regarding them as
the incarnation of Evil, as the diametrically opposite to all Roman culture and
understanding. Bearing in mind the continuous presence of the Gothic cause in
imperial politics and increasingly successful attempts of assimilation between the
two sides, this negative image is certainly interesting. To digress here briefly: the
relationship Christian ideology had with the portrayal of barbarians in general was
certainly complex. In contemporary writing, the barbarian was often a generalised
figure, used as a moral stick to beat the Roman people with and to explain the
decline of Roman military power and political influence in terms of portraying him

\textsuperscript{53} Ferris (2000), 3-4, 184-186.
\textsuperscript{54} See also Part III. 2 c.
as God’s scourge sent to punish the lapsing moral of the Romans. However, the barbarians were primarily used as a vehicle for conveying a theological message of the final triumph of true faith and ultimate salvation; like worldly texts, these sources were very rarely, if at all, concerned with providing an analytical account of historical events. Jerome’s vast correspondence with many of his disciples, for example, did mention the effect the Gothic sack of Rome had on friends like Marcella, but personal sufferings as a result of this were analysed rather as a useful reminder of the vanity of all earthly things and to focus therefore on heavenly things instead.\footnote{Jerome, Ep. 40, 127.} Furthermore, for many of the Christian writers the arrival of the barbarians in the heartland of the empire and their increasing political and military power was regarded as a significant portent of the imminent end of the world, turning the barbarians into the forbearers of the Apocalypse. For the few pagan writers the lack of the traditional Roman mos maiorum, or for the Christian writers a lack of proper faith and the subsequent growth of sin, was regarded as one of the main reasons for the increasing weakness of the Roman empire. Setting Christianity equal with Romanitas, any event that seriously threatened the existence and continuation of the empire was explained as a punishment sent by God for lapsing Christian belief.\footnote{Olster (1996), 95-6.} Increasingly Christian authors linked the barbarian incursions with a lamentable lack of Christian moral values, creating the idea of regarding the resulting damage as a deserved expression of God’s wrath against His unruly flock. Especially barbarians of Germanic origin, although this did apply to other barbarian groups too, were portrayed in such terms; for example Attila was frequently described as God’s scourge. *Ezekiel, Revelation* and other Jewish and Christian texts, especially those concerned with eschatological messages in general and the last day of Judgement in particular, linked some barbarian tribes with the legend of Gog and Magog. Although
the exact meaning of what Gog/Magog stood for cannot be established for certain,
they did represent the embodiment of personified Evil, sent by God as a form of
judgement; often the battle of mankind against them was regarded as a necessary
event before the beginning of a new age. Depending on the author, various forms of
this legend, including the text on Alexander’s Wall, existed in Syriac, Greek and
Latin and several different barbarian groups were brought into connection with
them. Until Augustine, the text of Revelation 20 analysed the events concerning the
occurrence of Gog as an event before the final Judgement, whereas after Augustine’s
writing, Gog’s attack became increasingly linked with Antichrist’s war against the
Faithful. Writers like Justin, Irenaeus and Origen all used Ezekiel in their own texts
although they did not make any direct connection between Gog and any of the
barbarian people in the empire. However, Gog/Magog was often identified as having
personified itself in particularly troublesome people like the Huns, the Alans or the
Scythians, which in turn were often used as a synonym for the Goths. Jerome,
though, rejected the link between the Scythians and the Goths of his time; Indeed
Augustine firmly opposed the frequent tendency to link Gog with contemporary
enemies, and in particular with the Goths, although this concept continued; even
Eucherius of Lyons mentioned the traditional linking of the Gog/Magog legend with
the Goths in his Instructionum Libri Duo. A direct connection between the Gog-
legend and contemporary historical writing is rare although there are exceptions:

There is an example where the term ‘Scythian’ was not used in connection with the Goths but
somewhat indirectly with the Alans, a people who appeared within imperial territory together with the
Vandals and Suebes only after the Gothic arrival in the fourth century. Far earlier Josephus had
somehow linked the Scythians with Magog, the personified evil, who had been shut away from
civilisation by a wall erected by Alexander the Great around the edges of the world in order to protect
the civilised world against evil: according to Josephus, the Greeks called the people of Magog
Scythians. In a later passage, he describes the Alans as a ‘Scythian race’, although he does not make
the connection between the Alans being a personification of Magog: see Josephus, Antiquities I. 122-
3, 244-5, and 246-51.

Socrates mentioned the positive effect of a sermon on his congregation which had focused on the prophecies of Ezekiel that God would finally deliver His people from evils like Gog in connection with an attack on Theodosius by the Goths; more direct is a treatise by Ambrose to Gratian where he linked Gog directly with the Goths: ‘Gog iste Gothus est’, firmly emphasising the eventual victory of the empire as already prophesied by Ezekiel, which was further fostered by the continuous steadfast faith of Gratian.\(^{59}\) However, overall the deliberate link between Gog/Magog and the Goths, between personified evil that was embodied in the Goths, occurred far less frequently and was less directly exploited in terms of political propaganda than one could have expected. Bearing in mind the continuous presence of the Gothic cause in imperial politics and increasingly successful attempts of assimilating with them from a Roman viewpoint, this double standard is certainly revealing in terms of a deep-seated suspicion or at least unease with the barbarian presence in general but particularly with the Goths.

To sum up here, ‘Romanisation’ beyond the imperial frontiers, and ‘Mischzivilisation’ within the empire created a different world as Roman and barbarian cultures underwent a process of mutual assimilation. However, Roman culture and ideology largely prevented the empire from accepting and operating effectively within this new framework of conditions – at least on a political level. Although it could work well enough with its neighbours on a daily basis, the insistence on Roman superiority prevented any major long-term diplomatic interaction. Roman failure to come fully to terms with this created socio-political weaknesses that allowed the barbarians, particularly the Goths, to establish themselves within the empire. Although not created by Rome, the Goths were very

much influenced politically by Rome. The essential weakness of the empire lay in its
failure to recognise this and to stick to a rigid concept of barbarian stereotype that for
a long time did not allow for a process of real ethnography or assimilation. This can
be seen in imperial as well as Christian rhetoric, casting barbarians as the instrument
of divine wrath or as mentioned before as embodiments of evil like the Gog/Magog
legends exemplify.
3. The Goths and the concept of ethnogenesis

Who then were the Goths, apart from the image of a people from the edge of civilisation and beyond, that Roman ideology created? Can we indeed talk about the Goths as a people or were they a pure Roman invention, a collection of various groups with no ethnic identity apart from the identity Rome was willing to give them? If the concept of ethnogenesis on the basis of the Viennese school is applied to the development of the Gothic peoples, one can see how difficult this system is and how open to debate it remains; it does answer some of the questions the development of the barbarian peoples such as the Goths poses, though it fails to provide an entirely satisfactory answer.

Ancient authors like Zosimus, Ammianus Marcellinus, Olympiodorus to name but a few, labelled various different groups with individual names such as the Taifali, Greuthungi or Tervingi but equally called them Goths, Scythians or even more generally barbarians. This clearly shows not only that the ancient authors had little information who belonged to which group, but also that there was no such thing as ‘the Goths’ as a unified, homogenous group or nation but rather several groups with their own military organisation which occasionally cooperated, presumably in times of warfare, but were otherwise independent from each other. How far they were

---

60 Zosimus often called them Scythians or Goths: I.23, 27, 28, 63-4, IV.7, 10-1, 20-4, 34; the groups of Fritigern, Atalheus and Saphrax he labelled as German peoples, whereas Alaric’s group was described as barbarians. Ammianus is slightly more precise and labelled them as Tervingi and Greuthungi, but he also used the term Goths generically and in the context of Decius’ defeat, the term Scythes, A.M.,31.4, 5. Olympiodorus gave various versions of labelling the Goths in his accounts: he said the Vandals used the term *trolui* to describe the Goths (probably in a derogatory fashion in the aftermath of the Danube-crossing), frg.29 (on the later resonance of the interpretation of this term, see p.14, fn.14); he used the term *buccellarius* to describe certain Goths without making further comments on the exact origins of these Goths, frg. 7.4; he calls Alaric’s troops Goths, frg.6, 7.5, but Galla Placidia’s Gothic bodyguards barbarians, frg. 38; Wallia is described as leader of the Goths, frg. 30. Eunapius used the terms barbarian (for example in connection with the Maximus rebellion, frg.55) and Scythian (for example describing the Goths during the Danube crossing, frg. 41-2; mentioning Fravitas’ career, frg.59; describing Gainas, frg.60). For a more detailed discussion of names for the Goths, see for example Christensen (2002), 21-43,197-219.
ethnically of different origin is another matter, and was certainly of no interest to contemporary writers. Although the practice of labelling a whole group under one name, regardless of their nature and origins as individual groups, is very much debatable, I would nevertheless suggest calling ‘Goths’ for the time being those who are referred to as Goths by our sources. The sources talk frequently about the various Gothic groups, which were large and powerful enough to withstand the imperial army for several decades despite occasional defeats. Yet we know little about the precise size of such groups, especially as numbers of military units were prone to be exaggerated by contemporary authors, though their numbers must have fluctuated over the years. Equally there is little information about the actual formation of these groups: the ancient sources describe them as warrior bands under various leaders, at times cooperating with each other. It is not within the scope of this work to analyse the early development of the various Gothic groups before they became part of Roman society but rather to look at their development in the fourth century from these multiple groups into a political unit, which eventually settled in Aquitaine in 416 AD. Indeed the nature of their military and social organisation has been open to question: the interpretation of the nature of Alaric’s group has ranged from a group of Gothic mercenaries in Roman service to an entire nation on the move; the next chapters of this thesis will look in more detail at the development of Alaric’s followers.

61 Zosimus, V.42. A.M., 31.6.4-7, 15.2: various other people usually from the fringes of Roman society such as slaves or poor people joined these Gothic groups thus creating multi-ethnic communities.
62 Liebeschuetz (1992), 75-84. For more information about the early history of the Goths and their various social customs see for example the works by P. Heather, M. Kulikowski (2007). See also Collins (2006), 15-26.
a) The *Traditionskern*

One of the essential features of the Viennese school is its concept (which some scholars have questioned) of *Traditionsträger/Traditionskern* as a specific group of warriors, the *Traditionsträger* who ensured not only the continuation of the *Traditionskern* but also its transmission onto all followers under the overall leadership of the *Heerkönig*. Let us turn first to the concept of the *Traditionsträger* as an elite group who upheld the *Traditionskern*, who shared a mythic narrative of their past (with a divine descent of their rulers) and who shared their ethnic identity through such migration-myths from Scandinavia in search for a new homeland to settle. Indeed the history of the Goths has very often been connected with the term *Völkerwanderung* or migration of peoples from a northern country somewhere in Scandinavia or Poland as their *Urheimat*. As has been said before, there are scholars, for example H. Wolfram and W. Pohl, who have connected the occurrence of place-names with the ethnic development of specific people. However, there are serious problems with such an approach, not least because the only source on which this is based, Jordanes, is certainly very difficult to use, but also for the way in which this approach was later used in politics, mainly in twentieth century nationalistic propaganda. Although the ancient sources had never put the Goths in the same league as the Germanic groups (for the ancient sources, the Goths were far more a successor of the Scythians), it was the exploitation or rather invention of a Germanic past in the nineteenth century that linked the Goths with the Germans. Especially

---


64 To regard the Goths as another part of the German peoples and to give them as their *Urheimat* Poland and the Nordic countries was to prove fatal in recent history: the idea of regaining these places of *Urheimat* in order to expand German territory under the politically inspired propaganda concept of Nazi-Lebensraum was part of a policy which led to the Second World War and the Holocaust.

65 I deeply reject the concepts of ethnogenic processes of ‘ethnic/racial purity of the German race’ or its alleged Scandinavian origins German historians such as O. Höfler propagated in the 1930s on the
the *Getica* by Jordanes became the source on which the pre-Roman past of the Goths has often been placed; in Kulikowski’s words it was the basis from which a non-Roman past was invented for these peoples as their history before their contact with Rome would have been very blurred. Besides, in his opinion, although the ethnogenesis debate managed to question the tribal identity of barbarian groups, when it is applied to the Goths it did not do away with the idea of an ethnic memory held by a small group of nobles.\(^{66}\)

The idea of the *Traditionsträger* as a small band of people sharing the same ethnic memory poses in my opinion serious problems. I do accept that various Gothic groups came to share some common aims – which could be called a *Traditionskern* – which were most likely militarily inspired and would have served to link them together, especially when they became noticeable within the Roman sphere and started to press the empire for the realisation and acceptance of their own political/military aims. Such aims could have been a reason why different groups acted together in the first place – albeit in many cases on a temporary basis only; such links could have been formed already before a group came within the radar of Roman interest. Equally these links could have developed out of their exposure to imperial interference as a way to counteract the enormous military pressure of the empire, or gradually developed out of group dynamics. Hence, such shared interests were not a *Traditionskern* composed by a selected few of common ethnic origin, but could be shared by many groups; indeed such links were not necessarily ethnically or socially defined at all but were far likelier inspired by mercenary/military aspects and only later by political aims. Liebeschuetz argues that the exceptional military success

---

of Alaric’s group, which had started as a band of mercenaries, attracted other people from outside and turned them into a nation: this group shared original Gothic aspects such as language and religion but was essentially a new people. Liebeschuetz is surely correct that the mercenary aspect as the starting point for his group makes sense especially when considering Alaric’s aims in the various negotiations with the empire: throughout the main points remained supplies and a military title as a reward for Alaric. Land for settlement did feature but the long time it took from the 370s to 418 AD to reach its conclusion questions the immediate urgency of such a request, especially when the empire was by no means unfamiliar with the concept of settling barbarian groups on imperial soil. Only when this multi-ethnic warrior band gained success over a prolonged time, the question of a permanent settlement became more important because by then this mercenary band had started to transform itself into a people, including women and children, by absorbing other people from outside into the group. Thus any common aims such groups shared were subject to change over the years as well as being frequently redefined by those who supported these aims; furthermore, the extent to which the adaption to and adoption of cultural elements from outside happened was also an individual process, although it was partly influenced by the group of which the individual was part. This can perhaps be seen in the continuous quarrels between various leaders over a plan of action in regard to their military support for the empire. That brings us to the question of the Heerkönig.

---

67 Liebeschuetz (1992), 75.
68 Liebeschuetz (1992), 80; (2001), 366.
b) The *Heerkönig*

The nature of leadership among the Gothic groups is open to debate although it is clear that it changed from multiple leaders to the acceptance of a single leader (although this is intrinsically linked with the development of the Goths as one people). Judging from the frequently appearing feuds for political/military leadership, the concept of a sole leader or king, not to speak of a united political programme was not automatically accepted by the people forming these various Gothic groups. There is no evidence precisely which qualities this leader had to encompass as even obvious aspects such as a large entourage and military prowess do not explain the fact that even leaders who fulfilled such prerequisites lost their bid for power.\(^70\) A group like the one Alaric was leading certainly had a strong military aspect: the constant payments of supplies by the empire, as well as Alaric’s frequent demands of a military command appear very much like a mercenary unit being paid for their services. If one takes Alaric as a leader, he was certainly a leader of a military-based group, thus the *Heerkönig* does make sense in terms of a military leader as the leader of a *Heer* or an army.\(^71\) However, the term *König* does pose problems. Normally the title *König*, king, refers to one leader of a people, or even to the head of a state in the sense of a monarch. It is true that the Gothic groups accepted the idea of a king, but these were rather leaders of small groups with their own retinue but not one overall leader over all Gothic groups in one united political system; when this term is for example applied to Alaric the same pattern emerges as

---

\(^70\) Kulikowski (2002), 79. Elton (1996 b), 32-7. See also Maier (2005), 69-120 for the subsequent development of the royal office.

\(^71\) Pohl (2000), 67-8. On the concept of the *reiks* or *rex*, and *iudex* as leaders of military subdivisions within larger groups of people, see Díaz (1999), 323-4. Heather (1996). Ammianus states the Greuthungi were led by a king whereas the Tervingi in contrast by a chief/leader, A.M. 25.5; 31.3, although Zosimus talked of a royal clan and regarded Athanaric as the head of this clan, Zosimus, IV.25, 34.
he was the leader of his group, even regarded as king by his own people, but he was not a king in the sense of a ruler over a nation with its own state. Also the idea of the Heerkönig as the descendant of a noble lineage, fostered by myths of divine ancestry, destined to rule, is surely very problematic, especially when applied to Alaric’s or Athaulf’s position; they might have come from a noble family but there is no information if they ever supported a divine descent of their families. This of course does not rule out that subsequent kings would have invented a divine ancestry for themselves, which encompassed earlier rulers, in order to manifest and/or justify their own power.

Hence the most likely candidates for leadership were those who had a strong military power and were able to unite most of the various political, military and mercenary aims of their group; thus a royal dynasty with its implications of direct succession might have been far too rigid a system to respond to these requirements. Although Gothic society accepted the concept of a sole leader or king, it does not automatically follow that Alaric and Athaulf were the descendants of a long line of undisputed autocrats; besides Athaulf’s successor Wallia was not part of the same family at all but was, at least according to Orosius, elected because of his political programme, which differed from Athaulf’s aims. Indeed the position of a sole leader was frequently challenged because he had to present but also to create as well as maintain aims that would appeal to the majority of his followers and would keep them as his entourage. The idea of a divine descent and mythological ancestry was thus surely only a secondary point: it was applied once such a leader had established himself and

---

72 Orosius, VII.43; see also Part II.3.
73 On the question if titles or rulers carried any ethnological meaning, see Gillett (2002), 89, 105, 108-15, 120-1: from his studies it is clear that titles such as rex Francorum or rex Gothorum do appear very sparsely and usually the title only without any ethnic prefix is the common standard found on coinage or public inscriptions (the usual medium to convey imperial ideology and thus later adopted by the post-Roman rulers). He concludes that ‘…coins and inscriptions [are] devoid of ethnic messages’ and if employed reflected more on the internal politically fragmented structures of kingdoms like the Franks or the Lombards where ethnicity could serve as a unifying element; judging from public propaganda material ethnicity as a political programme was not evident.
needed such a divine ancestry to give himself and his rule even more legitimacy, a concept that undoubtedly became far more important once the mercenary, temporary aspect of such group-formations had been replaced by a more permanent concept of a settlement, leading to the eventual development of a nation. Heather proposed that Alaric was a nobleman who became king and led a mass revolt of Gothic settlers (settled under the 382 AD treaty).\textsuperscript{74} There is a lot to be said for this approach – but Alaric’s early appearance was undoubtedly as a leader of a mercenary band who subsequently became king. That is not to say that Alaric was just a commander of a military contingent consisting entirely of male warriors, but rather that his rise to power derived from his military leadership and his followers who served as mercenaries within the Roman army. There were numerous candidates for leadership, each with their own military programme, who were at times supported but until Alaric never achieved a universally accepted role as overall leader. That however did not mean that the group as such ceased to exist but rather that it came to support someone else whose aims corresponded more with the political and military ideas of the majority or split up as was the case with Athanaric’s followers. Whether Alaric was from the beginning widely supported by all Gothic groups as their leader or only became \textit{the} overall Gothic leader because Rome regarded him as such and other Gothic groups subsequently joined him because he had proven himself to be the most prolific and successful, is very difficult to answer. However, he was certainly regarded as the leader and/or king by his own group of followers and managed to establish a line of succession when his brother-in-law Athaulf succeeded him; besides the establishment of a close family-member as the heir and successor of a leader is a strong indicator for a monarchical system. Furthermore, from Alaric onwards, the concept of one Gothic leader became an established idea. That does not

\textsuperscript{74} Heather (1996), 172.
mean that this leader was therefore automatically without fierce competition from equally able and established men – far from it as internal feuds for power continued to feature, but the leadership of one man was no longer questioned in its theory.
c) The *Traditionsträger*

The idea of the *Traditionsträger* creates problems when applied to the concept of ethnic self-definition of the Goths: we do not know how the peoples whom the Romans described as Goths would have described themselves nor is there a definite concept how the followers of Alaric or Athaulf were ethnically defining themselves. Liebeschuetz has brought another element into the ethnogenesis-debate by arguing in favour of a strong military aspect of the formation of barbarian groups. When this is applied to the Goths, he argues that Alaric’s followers already as a mercenary band undoubtedly had a concept of ethnic unity and regarded themselves as Goths, a concept which was carefully cultivated among them – a definition with which I principally agree. If the concept of the *Traditionsträger* is applied to this, then undoubtedly the *Traditionsträger* can only be seen as the people who shared this concept of ethnic unity. However, the idea of the *Traditionsträger* as a limited or fixed number of people should be rejected, as well as the notion to regard this concept of shared ethnicity as an exclusive idea, which was only accessible to a selected group. Indeed judging from the fluctuating size of such groups, concepts and definitions of ethnic belonging must have been flexible enough to absorb people from outside and to allow them to become permanent members of the group. This meant that various people with different ideas of what identity, political and military aims meant for them joined together and therefore would have added these definitions to the already existing concepts; I agree with Heather that it was the bulk of the population which carried and in my opinion created the definition of ethnic identity and it was not restricted to a small elite ruling group as the idea of the noble groups.

---

75 Liebeschuetz (1992), 81-2.
76 Heather (1996), 88 does accept the approach of the *Traditions kern*-model in its broad sense but rejects it when it is applied to the fourth century Gothic kingdoms as he regards it as too narrow in its idea of noble groups.
Traditionsträger implies. Against the idea of an entirely ethnic-based bond stands the absorption of various other people into the groups. Had it been strictly based on ethnicity, these groups would not have accepted people from outside on a prolonged basis. Unless outsiders could adopt the ethnic identity of the group they had joined, for example through intermarriage, most likely the numbers of the original group would have grown smaller over the years. Zosimus mentions slaves and other outcasts of Roman society as the majority of the people joining Alaric’s group, and there is no evidence that Alaric’s group continued to regard them as such; it is far more likely that these people were in fact incorporated into the group and must have been allowed to join the fighting ranks in order to provide Alaric with a fairly constant number of soldiers. Their desire to flee their own social background and join Alaric in order to gain a better living would make the absorption of them into his group a prerequisite for their joining – otherwise their deserting their own society would make little sense. This leads to the conclusion that any previous social position or their ethnic background was of little if any importance (further supporting the thesis that Alaric’s group started far more as a band of mercenaries than a people or even a nation, as ethnic or social background played a very small part in recruiting mercenaries), although there is no information whether they received the same rights and social position as the men who had followed Alaric in the first place; whatever the social structure of such a group was, it was certainly a multi-ethnic community. The aspects which eventually create a new identity are usually taken from various cultural backgrounds and are flexible enough to offer a sense of belonging to a group; thus elements from the culture surrounding this group are adopted, although

---

77 See also Heather (1996), 6-7, 84, 88, 301-3.
78 Zosimus, V.42.
they are partly subject to individual choice and interpretation, and mixed with already existing concepts of social and cultural understanding.79 Heather for example talks of hierarchical differences in such groups (a small group of a social elite, as well as groups of freed and slaves), which led to a social separation among them, so people joining from outside could easily have been absorbed into Gothic society but would only have achieved a subordinate position within. Furthermore, in his opinion, there was a core-group, which was set apart from the rest of the followers by its elite status, which in turn exclusively defined ‘Gothicness’. However this approach is perhaps following too closely the concept of the Traditionsträger as a social elite; also his distinction between social elite, freed and slaves is perhaps too much pointing towards medieval structures as a system to be applied to the fourth century, especially when he himself admits that such distinctions only appeared from the sixth century onwards.80 I view this concept as having serious faults, especially as it is too final in its approach for a society which was still in the making; thus groups like Alaric’s had to be flexible enough to accommodate other, non-Gothic people from outside within Gothic society and to allow the granting of equal social position (and subsequently political influence) within the group. If the mercenary aspect of a group like Alaric’s is correct, then, as said above, people from outside could indeed have joined the fighting ranks and as those formed the very basis for these groups, these people could have won political influence over the years, even more so if they had broken with their previous social background. Thus, the Traditionsträger were not so much a small social elite but rather the group as a whole. The fact that the Gothic groups were very often joined by other peoples, such as Alanic or Hunnic contingents, indeed suggests a certain degree of ethnic permeability; although such alliances were often on a temporary

basis only and did not automatically guarantee complete political/military loyalty between these groups, ethnic definitions seem to have been flexible enough as some of their members might have joined the Gothic groups for good.\textsuperscript{81} P. Amory’s argument however (which has been criticised by M. Kulikowski) that identity could even be a mere ideology as was later the case in the Ostrogothic kingdom, is rather too evasive to be applied to Alaric’s Goths.\textsuperscript{82} It would have been extremely difficult to retain enough followers to fight the Roman armies on the basis of a mere ideological concept of community – especially when the said community was spending a long time wandering through the Mediterranean whereas the Ostrogoths in contrast had established themselves as a kingdom in Italy. The idea of identity as an ideological concept might partly explain a reason for the fluctuation in numbers of followers, as people would have had no real concept of feeling any attachment to the group they had joined; yet it fails to explain how enough people could build a stable community to develop into a politically cohesive unit. In my opinion, the making of groups like Alaric’s needed a stronger dynamic than pure ideology to keep them together, especially when the concept of leadership was not fully established; however I do accept the concept of abstract ideology as a factor, a \textit{Traditions kern}, once a group had established itself. M. Kulikowski has recently argued even that the Goths themselves did not have any kind of self-identity before the third century but were in fact the product of the Roman frontier-systems; furthermore, it was the Roman perception of the Goths which in turn created an understanding of Gothic identity among them.\textsuperscript{83} It is true that later the Goths as a people were the product of their dealings with the empire as only then they started to form a political unity, and

\textsuperscript{81} Paulinus of Pella, \textit{Euch.} 379-85.
\textsuperscript{82} Pohl (2002), 225. Gillett (2002), 86-7: states that the concept of ethnicity as an ideology similar to other state-ideologies such as Christianity is far less obvious although ethnic identities did play a role in the formation of Rome’s successor states if only for the fact that these were labelled by their ethnic identity.
\textsuperscript{83} Kulikowski (2007), 55, 67-70.
that the Goths mentioned in the Roman sources not only included ‘Gothic’ people
but also members from various other people, including parts of the Roman
population, too; all these came to form gradually a multi-ethnic community from
which the Goths as a political nation under Alaric and his successors were to emerge.
Kulikowski rejects this idea of a poly-ethnic community because in his opinion, as
the Goths did not ‘come’ from somewhere but were rather a Roman invention, they
could not start to head a poly-ethnic community.\(^84\) Although this approach can be
accepted insofar as the idea of a migration myth based on Jordanes’ *Getica* or of the
Goths suddenly coming from outside the empire into imperial territory as one
people/nation is to be rejected, Kulikowski’s argument is surely incomplete as the
question of a possible Gothic migration has very little to do with the Goths being part
of a poly-ethnic community. In fact I would like to regard the term of a poly-ethnic
community as being applied to the Goths in terms of their ability to absorb other
people, which did not share aspects of Gothic identity, into their own groups. This is
not to deny the immense influence Rome had on the people beyond its frontiers. The
prolonged Roman interference in the political/military and subsequently social
organisation of foreign peoples across imperial borders, and Rome’s active
arrangement of political units among these people, undoubtedly had a profound
influence on the ethnic understanding and organisation of the various groups
concerned.\(^85\) However, interference in such matters does not automatically mean the
creation of them in the first place: in fact, to interfere in the socio-political fabric of
peoples across imperial borders implies that there was already a profound
organisation of concepts of socio-political identification existing and that precisely
such concepts were considered important enough for imperial interests to allow and
justify Roman interference. Kulikowski’s argument thus fails to take into account

---

\(^{85}\) Carroll (2001), 145, 147.
that despite the discouragement from the Roman side, peoples from various backgrounds were able to form a coherent group under Alaric, which must have developed its own identity – even if, as said previously, this identity was created in the beginning out of numerous, different and individual concepts. Kulikowski’s argument also cannot explain the fact that Alaric, as well as leaders before him, was consistently opposing the Roman authorities in search of imperial acceptance of his group, which implies that his followers had perceptions of an identity different enough from that of the Romans to insist on preserving it by remaining separate from the empire. Furthermore, Kulikowski’s point regards peoples outside imperial borders as having no identity and existence in their own right apart from what Rome was willing to give them. Such a point makes one wonder if Kulikowski has followed Roman ideas of regarding those outside imperial territory as people who, without Roman interference to turn them into civilised beings, were simply barbarians. Heather’s argument that it was the threat of Roman power which forced various Gothic groups to cooperate, which otherwise would not have done so as their differences over leadership were normally too big to overcome, is to me much closer to the point than Kulikowski’s idea.86

However, it is important to stress that there is a fine line between the empire creating such groups in the first place, and these groups establishing more coherent concepts of their ethnic and political understanding in the face of Roman interference. Ethnic identity does not necessarily need a firm political establishment for self-definition; even as the early history of the Gothic peoples presumably lacked a coherent political programme, there were other devices, mainly in the religious sphere, which served to focus questions of ethnic definitions.87 Even if one rejects the idea of large-scale migrations of the Goths, or the link between archaeologically defined cultures

86 Heather (1996), 177.
87 Heather (1996), 303 refers to cult-leagues also as a vehicle for political identity.
and socio-political groups, the need to have other, non-political, vehicles to convey aspects of ethnic identification becomes even more important. Thus, Rome as the possible creator of political identification among the Gothic groups was not automatically needed to serve also as the creator of their ethnic identification. Based on archaeological records, Elton also argued that barbarian society was far more uniform than some scholars have argued, and that there was little difference between various groups regarding their material culture or their socio-political understanding; there were some local/regional differences in customs but even these do no amount to profound distinctions between barbarian groups. Furthermore, for him the relative ease with which different barbarian groups assimilated with each other or indeed absorbed outsiders is itself a proof of the lack of any profound differences between these barbarian groups. Elton accepts that there would have been differences, albeit subtle ones, and that contemporaries were presumably aware of them, but any such notions are lost today.\footnote{Elton (1996 b), 15-9, 41.} He surely has a point that almost all of the contemporary understanding of the occurrence and meanings of such differences are lost to us, and that archaeological data should be used with caution when making allusions to socio-political and/or ethnical analyses of the people in question. However, socio-political concepts or aspects of ethnic identity might not have been necessarily expressed in material culture only, to the exclusion of every other way of conveying such messages to outsiders; hence a lack of evidence for profound differences between various barbarian people within the archaeological records does not automatically mean an absence of such concepts. Indeed he accepts the notion that the relatively stereotypical uniformity of describing barbarians and their actions in contemporary sources was a result of literary aspects and was perhaps not a true reflexion of reality. Again, if one is prepared to accept that contemporary literature should not be taken at
face value in terms of providing accurate ethnographical descriptions of barbarian
people, one should also be prepared to accept archaeological records as part of a
wider picture but not as a decisive answer for the ethnic understanding barbarian
people had of themselves.
The concept of ethnic self-definition

There is of course the question what happened to the concepts of ethnic self-definition as barbarian groups merged together or accepted members from outside which were not necessarily barbarian in their background (as was the case with people joining Alaric’s group). Similar problems were posed by entry into the empire as the imperial authorities normally did not allow the existence of total ethnic independence in the sense of representing political independence of barbarian groups; it is open to debate how the individual defined his ethnicity once he was living within Roman territory – if he regarded himself as Roman or still as belonging to the ethnic group of his own people. It seems that this largely depended on the actual process of joining the empire, whether it had been voluntarily or involuntarily: there are enough examples of barbarians who joined the Roman army and totally assimilated with Roman culture, which would lead to the conclusion that they regarded themselves more as Roman and lost their identification with their own ethnic origins; there is the example of the usurper Silvanus who had to flee from imperial officials but could not return to his own people because they would kill him too. However there are also counter examples like Alaric: he had been in Roman service for a number of years, and although he frequently demanded a Roman military rank for himself, he nevertheless retained his own ethnic identity as a Goth. Another obvious form of creating and preserving ethnic identity is religion; yet before the adoption of Arianism by the Goths in the 370s AD and Ulfila’s translation of the bible into Gothic, it is impossible to state in which way religious practices shaped or created concepts of ethnic self-definition among the Gothic peoples—apart from the assumption that religion played an influential role in the creation and

---

89 See also Part II.1b.
90 A.M., 15.5.
formation of ethnicity among the Gothic peoples. The passion of St Saba, the story of
a Gothic Christian martyr in the fourth century, for example, indicates that belonging
either to Christianity or pagan Gothic religion had served as a decisive factor in
establishing Gothic identity and/or support for Gothic politics. Again, archaeological
evidence (for example burial practices) can help in identifying certain patterns but
that does not mean that these patterns and their meanings can be automatically
interpreted. Heather has argued in favour of certain cult-leagues which in turn
created political bonds, but that does not help to identify any specific pre-Arian
religious patterns and their influence on the understanding or identification of ethnic
concepts among the Gothic groups. Arianism itself was not a Gothic invention; it had
been a specific form of Christian belief but was later rejected at the council of Nicaea
in 325 AD and declared to be a heretical doctrine; in terms of serving as a specific
ethnic distinction, however, it only worked as a deliberate factor of distinction when
the Goths were directly compared with their orthodox Roman neighbours and when
they insisted on continuing to practise this form of Christianity whereas the rest of
the empire had become orthodox.⁹¹ That this insistence might have become a serious
hindrance for long-term political success (when compared with the Franks who
immediately adopted orthodox Christianity) is another matter.⁹²

Not only religious practice but also social customs can serve as an indicator of ethnic
concepts. Another form of socio-ethnic distinction can be observed in legal matters:
some Visigothic laws and customs such as forbidding intermarriage between
Visigoths and Romans have been interpreted as a Gothic attempt to preserve their
ethnic distinction from too much Roman interference. However, all Visigothic law-
codes demonstrate substantial influence of Roman law and were most likely
applicable to the entire population. Indeed the mentioning of pure Gothic laws and

⁹² See also Part V.2.
customs is so infrequent that it not only points towards the application of the laws to
the entire population in general without making ethnic distinctions but it is also very
difficult to establish who actually constituted a Goth. Even the ban on intermarriage
was perhaps far less compulsory than previously thought, and once the Visigoths had
adopted Catholic orthodoxy there were hardly any distinctions between Visigoths
and Romans left. Yet despite so much integration some aspects of Visigothic culture
remained distinctly Gothic: only a Goth could become king, his title was that of King
of the Goths, treason was committed against the Gothic people and all the king’s
advisers, the *seniores Gothorum* as well as large numbers of the clergy carried
Gothic names.93 Whether that implies that all these people were ethnically of Gothic
origin or if Gothic names could also be adopted by people of different ethnic
backgrounds is open to question: judging from the evidence from the Frankish
kingdom, the latter was undoubtedly a feasible possibility.94 A shared language is
also an indicator of a shared identity, but barbarian dialects were often too
compatible with each other to offer any real factor of distinction; equally dress,
weaponry and jewellery can serve as indicators of concepts of identity and ethnic
origin, but again there is either not enough tangible evidence or it involves the
complex and difficult aspect of using archaeological material in the ethnogenesis-
debate.95 The same process is more difficult to assess, though, when it comes to
submergence into another barbarian group, as it could be a temporary measure like a
political alliance and was not automatically linked with the loss of ethnic identity.
The preservation of ethnic identity could theoretically be enforced by a voluntary and

---

93 Heather (1996), 284.
95 See Gillett (2002), 120: any Roman usage of ethnologically defined titles for barbarian rulers is
merely for reasons of labelling and would have had very little, if anything to do with barbarian self-
identification. There are equal problems for the application of Wenskus’ ethnogenesis model to
explore the origins of the Franks, see Murray (2002), 63-7. Heather (1996), 84.
deliberate upkeep of the community and its ethnic concept, for example by marriage
laws which banned marriages with other ethnic groups, religious practices or a
deliberate separation of settlements.

The other side of this process, though, is the involuntary process of a group being
absorbed by force into a different ethnic, political and/or military system (be that the
Roman empire or another barbarian group), but even that did not necessarily result in
a total loss of ethnic identity. For example, various different peoples like Goths,
Suebes and others became subject to Hunnic dominion but re-emerged after the
collapse of the Hunnic empire in much the same way as before; this indicates that
despite having been forced to give up their political/military independence, their
ethnic identity had been left untouched and was therefore not connected with their
political or military power. That process would therefore imply that military
dominant groups considered political power as separate from ethnic definitions.

Much of this, though, involved the relationship between barbarian groups where the
predominant factor was more the question of political hegemony over certain groups
than the preservation of ethnic identity; to change identity would have meant a
deliberate re-organisation of social strata which in turn would have asked for a far
stricter social as well as military control than was the case among barbarian peoples.

To come back to the example of the Hunnic empire - the Huns cared more for their
supreme military dominance and were little concerned with the ethnic identity of the
peoples under their control, at least as long as this ethnic identity did not threaten
Hunnic supremacy. Nevertheless, the absorption of a people into another did have
some effect on the conquered group’s social and political structures: only a certain
amount of adaptation to the structures of the dominant group could ensure a
continuation and moreover a certain degree of preservation of former social, political

and military structures as well as the ethnic identity of the conquered group; precisely this preservation of former structures was important if the group wanted to continue as an independent unit after the defeat of the former dominant group. In fact, the process of adaptation could go so far that even groups with a strong sense of ethnic identity could be separated into splinter groups, or even dissolved by being totally absorbed into the structures of the dominant group. It is important to bear in mind that social absorption, group identity and social adaption largely depended on the actual peoples involved and were by no means a standardised pattern that applied to all barbarian peoples.\textsuperscript{97} In the case of Alaric’s group, it seems to have managed to absorb other people from outside who were willing to adopt Gothic concepts of identity as all the ancient sources call Alaric’s group Gothic; this leads to the conclusion that either the ethnic identities of the people joining them were not taken into account (which would then question the extent to which they were actually incorporated into Alaric’s group) or they were willing to adopt Gothic identity. Furthermore, Athaulf’s group equally absorbed people from outside and these included, as had been the case with Alaric’s followers, people who seem to have adopted aspects of Gothic lifestyle or ‘Gothicness’ or belonged already to other Gothic units.\textsuperscript{98} However, what precisely symbolised this ‘Gothicness’ is very difficult to assess and even could have been subject to change over the years. Of course the approach of linking ethnic units to specific archaeological patterns would explain such symbols by the presence or absence of weapons, jewellery, personal items such as combs, especially in the context of specific burial customs; besides, this method is by no means decisive and there could have been patterns or customs which were either not expressed in terms of material culture, and thus are not evident.

\textsuperscript{97} Heather (1998), 103-9: for example the treatment of the Sciri by the Eastern government, or the fate of the Heruli where Hunnic dominion seems to have changed their tribal structures in such a way that their future and survival as a homogenous group was severely affected.

\textsuperscript{98} Heather (1996), 176.
in archaeological records, or modern historians are not able to read these
archaeological records and the entirety of existing symbols and their precise
meaning. That is not to say that archaeological records are completely unable to
serve the purpose of identifying social customs and to derive ethnic symbolism from
that, but they do not serve as the one and only method of doing so, although it has to
be admitted that in the absence of written records from the Gothic side, other means
to identify and to analyse ethnic symbols are very difficult or altogether impossible
to find. Equally the question who was deciding on such matters, indeed if anyone had
in fact any direct influence on the process of ethnic symbolism, is open to question;
Heather, following his concept of an elite group as the Traditionsträger, argues that
it was possible that there was some royal influence on such symbolism as the award
of specific items such as jewellery as a royal gift would have created a specific social
position for the person receiving these gifts.\footnote{Heather (1996), 309-21.}

So what is to be made of the peoples around Alaric? Can we call them Goths after
all, and if so, when did they become the Goths? Earlier I proposed to describe them
as Goths although in doing so one always has to be aware that they originally
consisted of different groups with their own names, presumably with some shared
but also some individual social customs and maybe in some cases also a different
ethnic aspect; these various groups formed a polyethnic community of Gothic and
other barbarian peoples such as the alliances with Alans or Huns, which could
cooperate at times, especially when confronted with severe military pressure. Only
under Alaric and then under Athaulf did some of these Gothic groups start to
cooperate together on a prolonged basis and absorbed people from outside which
eventually led to the formation of a political unit or nation; this process is the main
concern of the following chapter. It will look at the changing nature of Gothic leadership until the establishment of Alaric. Alaric and his successor Athaulf inherited a truly complex political relationship with Rome and many of their actions were largely influenced or dictated by this. It was in the context of this constant relationship with the imperial authorities that contemporary sources began to talk about the Goths as a major, solid counterpart to the empire.
Part II. Goths and Romans

‘He [Athaulf] at first was eager to blot out the Roman name and to make the entire Roman empire that of the Goths alone, and to call it and to make it Gothia instead of Romania, and that he become what Caesar Augustus had once been...When he discovered from long experience that the Goths by reason of their unbridled barbarism could not by any means obey laws...he chose to seek for himself the glory of completely restoring and increasing the Roman name by the forces of the Goths, and to be held by posterity as the author of the restoration of Rome, since he had been unable to be its transformer.’

Orosius’ comment about Athaulf’s alleged political revelation is in many ways remarkable and there are a number of possibilities of interpreting it. One is the ecclesiastical aspect of Orosius’ writings as he used it most likely as part of a religiously influenced statement: already in his description of Gothic actions during the sack of Rome, Alaric’s troops had demonstrated an avoidance of violence and plunder of the holy places. To present Athaulf and his Goths as peace-seeking people under a leader striving to restore imperial prosperity undoubtedly fitted into this picture, although it might have had very little to do with Athaulf’s actual political/military programme or his overall opinion about the Roman state. However, there is perhaps more to this statement, and there could have been aspects of Athaulf’s political/military actions that could have made Orosius’ comment more than being inspired by religious apologetics alone. It presents the Gothic leader as a

---

1 Orosius, VII.43.
2 Orosius, VII. 39. See also Sivan (2003), 110: she argues that Orosius might have presented Alaric’s apparent respect for the holy places as part of a pro-Anician propaganda which aimed to minimise attempts of accusing the Anicii of cooperation with the Goths. However, her argument that the Gothic procession with the holy vessels to the church St Peter presented an attempt to create a new form of Gothic royalty (p.120) has to be treated with precaution as it relies slightly too much on taking Orosius’ account as a real representation of actual events. In the light of Orosius’ intentions of using the Goths as a religious vehicle, Sivan’s argument is perhaps somewhat one-sided.
man who had recognised and accepted the ultimate superiority of Roman culture,
which inspired him to save it by providing it with the military strength it lacked; it
also demonstrated a fundamental understanding of what Rome stood for, and a
willingness not only to assimilate with it but to forgo his own political aims as a
Gothic leader.

The aim of the following chapter is to investigate how far such a comment could
have become a real political programme of Athaulf and his Gothic followers,
whether it was more a theoretical and abstract approach which had little if anything
to do with the political reality of both Goths and Romans, or whether it was the mere
expression of wishful Roman ideology. In the previous chapter we have seen how
complex it is to find an answer to the question of Gothic identity; a large part of this
complex process was directly interlinked with imperial politics, and it was this
relationship between the two that shaped the people around Alaric and his successor
Athaulf. The aim is to see how far Alaric and Athaulf and their followers were able
and willing to assimilate with the Roman empire, how far they retained their own
identity and separation from imperial influences, and to what extent such processes
altered their political and social organisation. This would then enable us to see how
far a comment such as Orosius’ was in fact possible at all. Even if Athaulf never
thought in such a way, the various Gothic groups underwent substantial changes
from their first contact with the Roman empire to their final settlement in Aquitaine.
It had been Alaric who had started this process of change, and it was his diplomatic
and military dealings with the empire which led not only to a socio-political
transformation of the Gothic groups but also a gradual alteration of the Roman view
of them. Yet Alaric’s own position within Gothic society was the result of a
development of the concept of leadership and ultimately how Gothic groups
cooperated with each other. The prolonged contact with the empire and the various
treaties had created tensions about the nature of leadership and about their formation as a people; the constant latent warfare with the empire had shown that their previous fragmentation into different groups with their own socio-political concepts was to become a real danger for a guaranteed survival of their individual groups. There were several leaders who attempted to avert the danger by trying to achieve overall power and thus to create a unified Gothic front against imperial power and interference. The acceptance of a common leader like Alaric not only altered their social structures but also helped to deal more effectively with the empire, thus enabling the majority of the Gothic groups to withstand imperial attempts to conquer them; however, it is extremely difficult to find out if all Gothic groups in fact supported Alaric and became part of his followers or if they lost their own fight against the empire and were submerged into the imperial machinery dealing with conquered barbarians (certainly for the Roman sources, Alaric became the Gothic leader of the Goths, which left little room in contemporary writings for other, less important groups). Orosius’ comment implied that there had been previous attempts by the Gothic groups to overrun the empire and to replace it with a Gothic nation: to ‘become Caesar Augustus’ was a direct challenge by Athaulf to Honorius’ position as emperor, although Gothic military power was in fact never sufficient enough to justify it as a serious claim. It is this changing nature of Gothic leadership one ought to examine first as it formed part of Athaulf’s military and political heritage.3

1. Questions of leadership among the Goths

For the Gothic groups involved in the treaty of 382, this had marked a change in their internal power structures. The ancient sources offer very little information about the exact conditions of the treaty: Synesius talked of land given to the Gothic groups, Themistius used the phrase of them having turned their swords into ploughshares and having turned to live in Thrace, something which is echoed by Pacatus, who described them as farmers. However, such language is fairly common and does not state whether or not the Gothic groups did indeed receive land for settlement or had asked for land; there was also no information on the obligations of the treaty in terms of taxation and/or the provision of military recruits for the Roman army, but we do know that the treaty failed to recognise any overall Gothic leader.

For a long time the political conduct of the various Gothic groups against Rome had been dominated by different opinions of various leaders with their own groups of followers who were often more or less equally powerful; internal controversies and the tendency to split into multiple subgroups as a result was a common occurrence. Gothic politics against the empire were to a large extent seesawing between uncompromising warfare and solidarity with the empire as being in active military and/or political service. Even such grand military successes as Adrianople could not disguise the fact that this fragmentation, indeed the very structure of how these groups operated, posed a serious threat to their withstanding the empire for a long time; only negotiation to find a modus vivendi with the empire was a way to prevent the long term loss of manpower and their own identity. Effectively a different type of warfare was needed as the imperial government and army was in no way structured like fellow barbarian groups when a simple decisive battle or personal combat

---

4 Synesius, de reg. 21. Themistius, Or. 16. Pacatus, Pan. II.22.
between two leaders was enough to decide the political supremacy between the two. Successful diplomatic dealings with the empire required the continuous existence of a politically united line accepted by the majority of the people, but precisely the nature of these various peoples made that very difficult. Even Athaulf was later facing the delicate task of balancing the various leaders of subgroups and allies with his own political aims and eventually became a victim of it. Furthermore, as the events immediately before the battle of Adrianople had demonstrated, mutual distrust between Rome and the various leaders of the Gothic and other contingents was deep, and frequent open warfare had given both sides more than ample opportunity to distrust the other side. Before Alaric the various Gothic groups existed most likely independently of each other – even when they temporarily formed larger groups, which operated together; yet even such co-operations could not deflect from the problem that each of these groups had very much their own agenda. Alaric was the first one who would manage to unite a large group of followers under one political system and furthermore managed to pass this on as a military and political legacy to his successor Athaulf. From the imperial point of view this served Rome’s concept of divide et impera as a united Gothic front could prove to be extremely difficult to counteract (for example the later barbarian ‘superpowers’ like the Vandals were impossible to stop); the failure of the treaty of 382 to recognise an overall leader, which had been a point of discussion between Fritigern and Valens, was perhaps part of this imperial agenda.\footnote{Themistius, Or. 16} However, the problem of fragmentation was perhaps also to blame for this – although imperial propaganda had styled Athanaric as the overall Gothic king, this claim better suited court politics than it had anything to do with the realities of Gothic leadership, as there was most likely no candidate who would have been widely accepted as such. The claim to power rested to a large extent on the
military capacity and the ability to attract and lead a large number of followers who had to be kept in alliance through the distribution of booty; if this military supremacy failed, as was the case with Athanaric, the unsuccessful leader was replaced by another, which in some cases meant that the people which had lost their leader lost their own individual position too and were absorbed into the new group of the new leader.  

---

6 Geary (2001), 111-3. Whether absorbing into a different group also meant the loss of the individual ethnic identity of the group is very difficult to assess as it depended on the nature of this process and on the composition of the groups involved, see Part I.1.
Athanaric was one of the very first leaders who rose to widespread prominence as a Gothic leader in the 360s and is a prime example of the difficulty of maintaining this status; he is also a good example of the application of imperial propaganda and the difficulties the contact with Rome posed for the survival of identity and military as well as political independence. Athanaric lost his power over the question of Tervingian admittance into the empire and the extent to which they should become involved in political affairs of the empire as federate troops. There were several reasons why various Gothic groups wanted to be admitted officially into the empire, the increasing pressure from the expanding Hunnic empire and the difficulty if not failure of these Gothic groups to counteract that being one of them. Quarrels about the efficiency of Athanaric’s defence politics and the subsequent ousting of him and his followers demonstrate that various opinions about the political future of these Gothic groups existed. Although the extent to which Hunnic expansion already posed a serious threat in the 380s has been debated, it would not be surprising had their expansionist policy upset already existing power structures and by doing so, jeopardised the acceptance of leaders like Athanaric. According to Ammianus, the question how to counteract the Hunnic threat had led to Athanaric’s deposition and a political conflict when the majority of the Tervingi and Greuthungi refused to support his idea of resistance and opted instead to move their settlements into Thrace by asking the empire for asylum; part of the plan might have been to become employed as auxiliary troops in imperial service and to avoid even further conflict, both internally as well as facing the Huns. According to Zosimus, Athanaric had stood in the way of the plans of Fritigern, Alatheus and Saphrax, which forced them

---

8 A.M., 27.5; 31.3.
to remove him from power and to replace his rule with their own, joint, rulership.\footnote{A.M., 27.5 and Zosimus, IV.34 state that Athanaric was driven from his territory by a domestic conspiracy. Neither Orosius nor Themistius provide any detail of Athanaric’s personal motives.}

The Tervingi then supported two leaders, Alavivus and Fritigern, the Greuthungi Alatheus and Saphrax, although Saphrax himself might have been a leader of an Alanic contingent which at that time was in alliance with the Greuthungi.\footnote{A.M., 31.4. Kulikowski (2007), 128. Heather (1991), 136-7. There were also other groups like the Taifali and Greuthungi involved which would eventually conclude separate treaties with the empire or were conquered and lost their independence. See also pp. 73, 80.}

Athanaric’s previous policy towards Rome has been described as unforgiving, he himself as a person who had sworn never to set his foot onto Roman soil, which makes any ideas of assimilation with the empire very unlikely. Three years of aggressive warfare with Valens had eventually led to the conclusion of a treaty in 369, leaving both sides in need of a decisive victory, yet it established a status quo with Rome which accepted the relatively strong position of Athanaric.\footnote{For the reasons of the outbreak of the war and the spectacular conclusion of the treaty in the middle of the Danube, see Eunapius, frg. 37. Zosimus, IV.10. Libanius, Or. 12.78. Themistius, Or. 8. 10. A.M., 26.10, 27.5, 31-4. Kulikowski (2007), 105-6, 114-6. For the consequences of the treaty, see Heather (1991), 116, 118-9, 120-1; (1997), 67.}

In fact, his successful insistence on concluding this treaty with Valens in the middle of the Danube was a strong assertiveness of his own perception of his power but also of the Tervingian position in general; in Heather’s opinion this stance demonstrates a firm understanding of what was Roman territory and what was Gothic territory, but such a perception was not only shared by Gothic groups but also by the Alamanni who also concluded treaties in the middle of the Danube.\footnote{A.M., 28.2-5, 30.3.4-6. Heather (1996), 85.} One should not so much regard such behaviour as the expression of a concept of an actual territorial Gothic realm, as this would require the concept of a territory in the sense of a state/nation which was not apparent yet, but rather more as an affirmation or indeed understanding of Gothic strength and success. Heather has argued that in the face of increasing Roman pressure on them the Gothic groups started to operate much more aggressively than
It is undoubtedly true that with increasing Roman interference Gothic attitudes to concepts of leadership and political programmes had to change, but it is also important to bear in mind that we only know of allegedly increasing Gothic aggressiveness because both sides came into much more frequent contact with each other than ever before. In fact there is no way to know how aggressive Gothic politics/military campaigns were before they had firmly gained Roman attention and were thus featured in Roman records, as these groups themselves did not record their early history. Once again, just because the contact with Rome had a strong impact on the political/military formation of the Gothic peoples, it does not automatically mean that Rome had created the foundation of such formations in the first place. 

Athanaric’s eventual move to seek asylum in Constantinople then must have meant an enormous change of Athanaric’s previous opinion towards the empire. As Sivan rightly observed, his travels from his exile through hostile territory and his asylum together with his friendly reception and eventual lavish burial in Constantinople strongly suggest that he must have been in some contact with the Romans before; otherwise such a move seems more than surprising. Whether Athanaric himself had hoped to gain some military position by joining the Roman side after he had lost his power among his own people, is impossible to say; certainly there were many barbarian leaders before and after him who sought access to power by entering Roman service when they had failed to gain or retain power among their own people. Athanaric could have tried to follow them, though his death shortly afterwards put an

---

13 Heather (1996), 304.  
14 See Part I.1.  
15 Zosimus, IV. 34. Sivan (2003), 114-5. His own father had received a statue in his honour behind the senate in Constantinople, which implies a somewhat close relationship between the Tervingi and the empire. Therefore his move to Constantinople was perhaps not that surprising as Athanaric would have been familiar with Roman politics/diplomacy for a long time, despite his own anti-Roman politics earlier on. Themistius, Or. 15; Or.10: for the annual receipt of gifts, which indicates an ongoing diplomatic exchange between the two. See also Heather (1996), 57-63.
end to any such ambitions, if he had harboured any such at all. If he had hoped to
gain a military position within the imperial army, it would certainly have meant a
radical change of his previous hostile opinion towards an attempt to gain
reconciliation with the empire, although it might be too farfetched to call this a
deliberate move actively to support the empire. One point in support of his change of
attitude is that he had previously withdrawn with a small entourage to a different
location;\textsuperscript{16} this means that Athanaric had not become a total outcast within his own
social group when he managed to retain a small group of followers, yet seems to
have preferred to enter into a relationship with the empire. Ultimately the question
refers back to how Gothic identity was formed and whether someone of non-Roman
origins entering Roman service would assimilate with Roman culture to the extent of
forgetting or even rejecting his own ethnic identity. Judging from the behaviour of
many Gothic generals, it was possible to completely assimilate with the Roman
sphere, but there were equally some who rejected their new life among Roman
culture and returned to their own origins; whether, though, that was an expression of
returning to their ethnic roots because they had ultimately failed to come to terms
with the Roman world, or whether it was a concept of trading alliances with the
system which offered better political/military chances (in a reverse action of joining
the Roman side in the first place), is open to question and undoubtedly largely
depended on the individual.

Unsurprisingly the imperial propaganda made much of Athanaric’s appearance in
Constantinople when this was the same man who had once sworn never to set foot on
imperial soil; without any major imperial success against the Gothic groups,
Theodosius engaged heavily in propaganda to gloss over this problem and to justify

his own politics. To grant Athanaric asylum and to give him a state burial in 381 when he died shortly afterwards certainly served this purpose. Yet Heather’s argument that this is demonstrated in Themistius’ oration as Theodosius’ ‘love of mankind’ is not totally convincing: the emperor is presented by Theodosius in the guise of a philanthropist mainly to disguise the chaos regarding the Gothic wars, though Theodosius would surely have been acting differently if the situation would have allowed it.17 Surely there was no need for the emperor to receive Athanaric in this way – apart from propaganda reasons – unless he wanted to attempt to pacify doubts among the Gothic population about imperial politics. That however would have needed a certain amount of knowledge of Gothic politics in imperial circles in order to address Athanaric as a key figure. Athanaric, though, had lost any prominent or influential position among his own people, which would lead to the conclusion that the imperial officials were not necessarily up to date with Gothic power structures and the recent changes of leadership when they continued to style Athanaric as the overall king of the Gothic peoples.18 Judging from the frequent and extensive contact Rome had with the world outside its borders, this makes the total ignorance of Gothic affairs on the imperial side somewhat difficult to believe. The display of philanthropist feelings makes more sense because to show *clementia* towards one’s enemy was one of the essential virtues of an emperor and essentially highlighted his ultimate power over life and death. To demonstrate *clementia* towards Athanaric only emphasised Theodosius’ absolute power over his former enemy and thus helped his presentation in terms of imperial propaganda. How the overall Gothic population in Constantinople reacted to this is impossible to judge, especially as there is no information to what extent they were integrated in Constantinopolitan life, how they reacted to imperial propaganda, or how much

---

18 A.M., 27.5. Zosimus, IV.34.4-5. Orosius, VII.34.6-7.
affiliation they held with Gothic groups outside the empire, and hence what their 
opinion of Athanaric was. In regard to their ethnic integration it is telling that the 
revolt of Gainas was to create a witch-hunt against the Gothic population and writers 
like Synesius were more than ready to style their large numbers as a permanently 
underlying danger for the security of the state. Whether this means that they stood 
out as a separate minority among the city’s population and emphasised their 
separatism (thus giving opportunity for accusations such as those Synesius voiced), 
or whether they were in fact following a Roman lifestyle yet were still perceived as a 
separate minority by the Romans, is impossible to tell.

For the imperial authorities, the lack of a defined Gothic leader and the continuous 
fragmentation into various groups presented advantages; as will be seen in the case 
of Fritigern, imperial propaganda was perfectly ready to style a Gothic leader as 
overall king when it suited court politics but in fact refused to grant the political 
acceptance of any such title or influence to any Gothic leader.
If already Athanaric’s move to Constantinople was a gradual move to find some reconciliation with the empire, certainly his successor Fritigern took this attempt even further. Fritigern was yet another leader over some Gothic groups who attempted to gain a large power base but he too remained far more a princeps inter pares than to set himself apart as Alaric was later able to do. As mentioned before, Fritigern had replaced Athanaric together with Alavivus as leader of the Tervingi presumably sometimes in the 370s as he was one of the leaders in the crossing of the Danube in 376; although Alavivus did play a role in the political negotiations, it was Fritigern, who seems to have been in overall military command in 377 and it was he who directly negotiated with Valens before the battle of Adrianople and his advisers as being recognised rex socius et amicus, as client king of Rome. In fact the conditions of the treaty the Tervingi had been given after their entry in the empire were so favourable that it has been argued that Valens might eventually have allowed the creation of a Gothic or Tervingian kingdom within the imperial borders though the ancient sources only mentioned a mutual agreement. This request demonstrates that leading people among the Gothic groups were undoubtedly familiar with the governmental and administrative structures of the empire, and Fritigern was fully aware of the internal workings of the empire and wanted to use them for his own means. Although there is no information about his personal motives and how he wanted to use such a title, judging from the role of a client, Fritigern seems to have envisaged remaining a Gothic leader yet being in Roman service (and effectually

under Roman control) – something Alaric would later try to achieve although Alaric himself certainly wanted independence from Roman control.\(^{21}\) Whether or not Fritigern’s request also meant a deliberate move on his part to a more profound consolidation and assimilation with the empire is impossible to say, though he must have been aware of the implications a client kingship would have had for him and his followers. Had his request been successful, Fritigern would have preceded Athaulf’s plan of restoring the empire as he had been unable to oppose it.

Unsurprisingly however Rome neither granted Fritigern his request nor contemplated any such notion as the establishment of a Gothic autonomous state on imperial soil, as this would have stood in complete opposition to the very structure and ideology of the empire.\(^{22}\) As Ammianus and other writers confirm, Valens did welcome the Tervingi as a new source of recruits and money (which in light of his Persian campaign he needed), hence also allowed them to retain their weapons; yet the uncontrolled immigration of other groups like the Greuthungi and Taifali plus the general favourable terms of the treaty were already posing serious problems in the provinces, so that the idea of deliberately allowing the autonomous establishment of a Gothic settlement is more than unlikely. Valens even tried to reduce the number of immigrants (and that meant the reduction of potential recruits and money) by allowing only the Tervingi (excluding the Greuthungi) to cross the Danube plus having further measures in place to keep them under control. Yet the imperial army was unable to check the revolting Tervingi and prevent the Greuthungi from crossing into the empire too; in Ammianus’ words, ‘this request [of being allowed to cross the Danube] was rejected as not being in the public interest’.\(^{23}\) This reaction by the

---

\(^{21}\) For client kings, see for example Heather (2001), 15-69.

\(^{22}\) Heather (1991), 174: on the nature of Gothic leadership for military campaigns.

imperial authorities was to repeat itself when it dealt with Alaric and Athaulf: foreign peoples were welcome as sources of recruits but any such negotiations had to be entirely under imperial conditions which did not take into account any independent barbarian, or for that matter Gothic, aims.

There was another event which indicates that the imperial officials were by no means willing to accept Fritigern’s request of political advancement: Lupicinus, commander of Thrace and the officer in charge of the Danubian operation invited both Alavivus and Fritigern to dinner at Macrianople with the intention to capture and kill them. The attempt failed and caused not only much bloodshed, but gave Fritigern and his followers even more reason to doubt the sincerity of the Roman commitment to any serious negotiation. Although Lupicinus was portrayed by Ammianus as scapegoat for the disastrous result of this plan, and the coup was clearly an attempt to curb the Gothic problem in general and Fritigern’s request for personal power in particular, it is not clear whether or not Lupicinus acted on his own account or had followed imperial orders. Judging from Ammianus’ account, it seems, though, that Lupicinus had acted on his own or was at least left to deal with the situation as best as he could, since he had already tried to keep the Gothic problem under control by calling in more troops to disperse the Goths and to stop further attempts of revolting. If Ammianus’ statement of the commander’s greed is correct, and the mismanagement of the promised food supplies was not a deliberate imperial policy to undermine Gothic strength, then the attempted murder at the murder appears to have been a desperate measure: Lupicinus was trying to stamp out a situation which threatened to

24 A.M., 31.4, 5. Alavivus disappeared after the banquet of Lupicinus: whether Lupicinus’ attempt to kill both of the Tervingian leaders provided an opportunity for Fritigern to depose an opponent without being accused of murder, or if Alavivus was held hostage and killed by the Romans, or simply lost his power, cannot be known. Kulikowski (2007), 132-4: argues that Lupicinus had not plotted the murder from the beginning but was overwhelmed by events and as skirmishes between Gothic and Roman contingents spread, he panicked which in turn convinced Fritigern that his only chance lay in rebellion. Heather (1991), 141: for him Lupicinus most likely acted with some sanctioning by the imperial authorities.
become uncontrollable. Had Lupicinus acted directly on behalf of imperial orders, Ammianus would surely have mentioned it, even more so since the outcome of this was open revolt which would have provided yet another point to blame Valens for political incapacity and the utter failure of his Gothic policy. Even if Ammianus did not mention the imperial involvement in Lupicinus’ plan, it does not follow that it was not the case; indeed the employment of someone like the Thracian commander who was clearly not capable of the task given to him, presented enough material to blame the imperial authorities and Valens’ government in particular for mishandling the situation. The result was the battle at Macrianople in which Lupicinus and his army were severely defeated; Fritigern’s group was subsequently joined by other Gothic contingents including slaves and other members of socially weak/oppressed groups, and turned itself very quickly into a highly successful fighting group – a strong similarity to the composition of Alaric’s followers later on.\(^{25}\)

There is a further problem to the establishment of Fritigern as a client king, as acceptance by Rome was one thing, but to be accepted as such by his own followers quite another. The fragmented nature of the Gothic groups would have stood in the

\(^{25}\) A.M., 31.5-6. There were other revolts in Thrace, for example the Gothic contingents under Sueridus and Colias in the garrison in Adrianople. Interestingly, though, these Goths had shown no interest in Fritigern’s rebellion or the entire Gothic ‘problem’ which would suggest that they had little if any feelings of close association with the Gothic cause or even with a common Gothic identity. However, a quarrel broke out over the supply of food and money that both commanders had demanded for their journey to join Valens’ Persian campaign on the Eastern frontier. When the local city council refused and brought in troops the situation escalated and violence broke out. Sueridus and Colias’ soldiers succeeded in the subsequent fight and eventually joined Fritigern’s troops. What is interesting here is that there were Gothic commanders (like Sueridus and Colias) in the imperial army who had originally no inclination whatsoever to support Fritigern’s plans and ideas; in fact they appear to be Gothic in nothing but name. It was the Roman side, though, which treated them as if they were supporters of treacherous plans, thus effectively making them more ‘Gothic’ – at least in political terms – than they originally were. Whether or not commanders like Sueridus and Colias regarded themselves ethnically as Goths whilst being in the Roman army, or acquired such an identity only once they had joined Fritigern has to remain open. If one wants to compare them with other Goths in imperial services, these men seem to have been loyal to the Roman state alone, regardless of their ethnic origins; Fravittas for example, despite his earlier involvement in Gothic politics, was perfectly willing to fight against a fellow-Goth, Gainas, which suggests that feelings of ethnic identity were not a fixed concept (on Fravittas, see p. 93).
way of creating a united Gothic kingdom as any such concept would have called for
the widespread acceptance and support of one leader only. As the subsequent events
demonstrate, any such notion was still under-developed and the consolidation of
power in the hands of a single leader was still unacceptable for many. Furthermore, if
the Tervingi on their own would have been too small to make such a concept
feasible, a Gothic kingdom would have meant the formation of a Gothic nation and
the merging of various groups into one – again something which was yet unaccepted.
Temporary cooperation for military purposes was an accepted custom yet the making
of a kingdom by demoting individual power bases and group structures for the sake
of creating a political unit was not an option. It is however worth mentioning that the
treaty concerning the Tervingi also featured the request for land in Thrace as an area
for settlement. Judging how long it took for Alaric’s/Athaulf’s group to gain land in
Aquitaine, one can wonder if the Tervingi had developed their internal socio-political
structures further and were already on the way to creating a coherent people. For
Fritigern to be accepted as *rex socius et amicus* would have given him precedence
over other leaders and could in turn have helped to restructure the group dynamics of
the Tervingi. In a letter to Valens Fritigern hinted that the idea of demanding Thrace
as settlement had been forced upon him by his followers. Whether that was an
attempt of his to represent himself as Roman-friendly in order to increase his chances
of becoming client king, or if it was the truth, cannot be known; the failure of siege
warfare against Adrianople and Constantinople, though, was also the result of
colliding opinions among the various leaders and their failure to listen to Fritigern’s
advice.26 Undoubtedly then Fritigern still had to reckon with the opinion of other
leaders around him if he wanted to remain in power. The lack of any more
information about his later life supports the idea that Fritigern also failed to find any

26 A.M., 31.6.
lasting power position among the Tervingi, despite his military leadership at Macrianople in 377 and his victory at Adrianople in 378.\textsuperscript{27}
c) Eriulf and Fravittas

The quarrel about the extent of involvement as recruits and their interference in Roman politics continued to foster fragmentation among the various Gothic groups in the late fourth/early fifth century and highlights the fact that questions of assimilation with Rome were far from solved. In 392 during a banquet given by Theodosius for two Gothic leaders, Eriulf and Fravittas, a deadly quarrel about the extent of Gothic involvement broke out where Fravittas killed his opponent Eriulf.

Theodosius had planned to use Gothic warriors as auxiliary troops in his fight against the usurper Eugenius yet both Gothic leaders could not agree to what extent, if at all, Gothic troops should be involved in imperial politics. Eriulf had argued that the only way to survive as an intact group and to preserve their independence was to keep out of imperial business. Only a strong solidarity between the various Gothic groups could ensure their future strength; this argument was further supported by their successful negotiations of the treaty of 382, giving them a semi-independent status, which had been based on precisely this military strength. How lasting any such military alliances were was a different matter, but Eriulf’s fear of Gothic troops being destroyed between two Roman armies was undoubtedly a real threat; moreover, recent engagements in Roman battles had resulted in heavy losses on the Gothic side and had undoubtedly fostered suspicions that the empire was using Gothic contingents deliberately in the worst fighting to reduce them.

Fravittas’ argument – according to Eunapius supported only by very few of his followers – stood in sharp contrast to this as he regarded the conditions of the treaty

---

29 Zosimus, IV.56; V, 20-2 on Fravittas’ later career at the Eastern court.
of 382 to provide recruits for the imperial army as binding and argued in favour of fighting for Theodosius. Fravittas’ later pursuit of personal assimilation with Roman culture, by entering a military and political career in the Eastern empire and marrying a Roman wife, would certainly make a pro-Roman policy of his plausible. However, Fravittas failed to gain any lasting power among his own people; presumably his deadly fight with Eriulf would have endangered his role among his Gothic followers as it would have created a feud. Thus it could be that his subsequent life in Roman service had been a way to escape this feud and to find power elsewhere. Presumably Fravittas joined the Roman forces with his group of followers, which would strengthen the argument that these groups were predominantly mercenary in their structure. In contrast to Fritigern or Alaric, he was ready to grasp the opportunities of gaining power that the imperial army offered him, but had no wish to retain links with his own people or to exploit the opportunities the imperial offices presented to foster his power-bid among the Gothic groups. This open controversy between Eriulf and Fravittas was in fact nothing new and internal feuds were to remain a constant problem among leading Gothic individuals; later Alaric faced some competition from individuals who had their own band of followers, as did Athaulf – indeed his murder was the result of a feud. In P. Heather’s opinion these different political sides can be interpreted as an indicator for the survival of Gothic tribal structures, especially when groups like the Tervingi, Greuthungi or Taifali can be found as separate units in the events in the 380s; from

31 Eunapius, frg. 59.
32 Harries (1994), 57-9: there is also the question whether people like Sigeric or Sarus acted more like ancient condottieri than had any serious ambitions to gain political leadership. See p.107 and Part II.3: Sigeric’s treatment of Placidia would suggest, though, that he had at least some interest in politics and/or issues concerning the Gothic leadership as his action stood in remarkable contrast to Athaulf’s pro-Roman politics (the appalling treatment of Placidia was a public rejection of her dead husband and thus – at least indirectly – of his politics). Heather (1996), 143 has argued that both Sarus and Sigeric were in fact members of a rival dynasty and contenders for overall Gothic power, and thus serious opponents to both Alaric and Athaulf; Sarus, similarly to Fravittas, entered Roman services to pursue his ambitions there. See p.92 for Fravittas’ later career at the Constantinopolitan court.
the treaty of 382 onwards, the distinction between Tervingi and Greuthungi started to fade, and by the time of Alaric their original distinction was no longer apparent.\textsuperscript{33} Eriulf’s concerns about the dangers the involvement in imperial politics posed for the Gothic groups proved to be correct and it was in the aftermath of the campaign against Maximus that Alaric became noticeable.

2. Alaric

Alaric is perhaps the most famous of the Gothic leaders: it was he who became one of the strongest opponents of the empire in the fifth century, it was he who sacked Rome centuries after the first sack by Celtic troops, it was he under whose leadership the Gothic groups gradually transformed into a people, and it was as leader of a band of Gothic warriors that Alaric rose to prominence. Mathisen has argued that it was during the process of Alaric’s rise to power, connected with a change in the concept of Gothic leadership, that Gothic society underwent a gradual but dramatic change in its nature. Furthermore, it was during the process of Alaric’s rise to power that the question of land for settlement became an increasingly important point, which was closely connected with the socio-political development of the Gothic people towards a political nation as well as their concept of leadership in general.\(^{34}\) The subsequent chapter will try to investigate this further.

Despite the ongoing debates about Gothic involvement in Roman politics, Gothic groups continued to lend their military support to the imperial army as part of the treaty of 382; for example Gothic troops fought in the campaigns against the usurpers Magnus Maximus in the late 380s and Eugenius in 394. These contingents were only paid for the duration of the campaign and tended to swear their loyalty to their own chiefs under whose command they stood rather than to the emperor himself. Arrangements like these pointed towards a mercenary aspect as the main dynamic of such groups. Whether the members of such groups shared the same ethnic origins or tended to be a collection of the best fighters with different ethnic backgrounds, is impossible to answer. Also it is impossible to answer whether they followed their leader because they shared the same ethnic origin or had family ties.

\(^{34}\) Mathisen & Sivan (1999 c), 3-4.
with him or because he promised the highest reward. Zosimus reports attempts at
treason among some of these auxiliary troops when Maximus had allegedly promised
them a greater reward than the empire would pay for their service; Maximus’ defeat
caused these troops to seek refuge in Macedonia where they started a revolt, which
soon spread into Thessaly, and it was in this rebellion that Alaric first came to
prominence. Another motive for the uprising could have been a renewed argument
about the extent of Gothic involvement in such battles, especially when losses of
manpower had been very high, especially in the battle of the Frigidus and
presumably against Maximus too, even if the sources do not record this.

This rebellion has been interpreted at times as an uprising of the Tervingi who had
concluded the treaty in 382, but Liebeschuetz argues that this group was a band of
mutinous mercenaries under the leadership of Alaric who were looking for payment
and military recognition rather than the uprising of an entire people or even a nation;
the sources nowhere regarded this rebellion as a breach of the treaty of 382, which
makes it very unlikely that the entirety of the Tervingi were involved. Furthermore,
as seen in the previous section, the various Gothic groups had serious difficulties in
agreeing on an overall political/military concept let alone on one accepted leader, so
to regard Alaric already as the leader of an entire nation is somewhat farfetched – at
least at that time.

Zosimus, IV.45.3, 4.48. Claudian, con. Stil. I.94-115. Maximus had killed Gratian before
establishing himself as emperor. Eugenius came to power after Maximus’ revolt. Maximus had left
the young Valentinian II (son of Valentinian I, Valens’ brother) in control of Italy and Africa but
invaded these regions in 387, forcing Theodosius to embark on a military campaign when Valentinian
and his mother Justina fled to Constantinople, urging him to restore the dynasty which had raised
Theodosius to the throne. After the revolt, Valentinian was sent to Gaul in the care of Arbogast; the
relationship between the two became unbearable with Arbogast openly refusing to obey the young
emperor, which prompted Valentinian to hang himself. Arbogast revolted and proclaimed Eugenius, a
Roman aristocrat, as emperor. Theodosius crushed this revolt in 394 at the battle of the Frigidus.

2.36-8; de bel. Get. 166 ff., 610 ff.; con. Stil. I.83-5, 94-6. Synesius, de reg. 19.2. See discussion in
Part I.1,3 for the nature of such groups.
How many people were part of this group is not entirely clear though its numbers seem to have fluctuated and remained open to change over the subsequent years. Claudian’s account of a vast amount of men is most likely an exaggeration in order to enhance the achievements of his patron Stilicho against them. Yet Alaric’s group was large and well enough organised for Stilicho to be unable to defeat him in open battle in both 395 and 397.\textsuperscript{37} As said in Chapter I, undoubtedly Alaric’s group also came to include other people apart from his Gothic followers, thus gradually developing into a poly-ethnic community bound together by the nature of Alaric’s successful leadership and the promise of imperial supplies. Often such groups would exist as a unity as long as military success and booty were guaranteed by its leader, but would disperse again as soon as this success failed to materialise; it was a credit to Alaric’s personality to have kept most of his followers despite his frequent political failures.\textsuperscript{38} I would like to argue that this willingness to remain together as a group (although numbers undoubtedly continued to fluctuate) formed part of a process of ethnogenesis: various people from different ethnic backgrounds and with different reasons for joining became part of Alaric’s group which then gradually developed into a new people.

Alaric appeared again in 394, this time in the service of Theodosius as part of the emperor’s troops in his fight against Eugenius; most likely he was the leader of a band of Gothic federates; the relationship with the imperial officials remained strained as Alaric felt dissatisfied with the payment and the lack of a personal/military reward for participating in the campaign. Theodosius’ death in January 395 and the subsequent questions of imperial authority between the two
imperial courts did nothing to ease these tensions; according to Jordanes, it was after Theodosius’ death that Alaric’s followers declared him king, because in their opinion Theodosius’ successors spent no money on Gothic supplies and too long a peace was depriving the Goths of their fighting power. Two recurring themes are featured in this statement: supplies or their lack, and the underlying importance of the support of Alaric’s followers for his political career; supplies remained a constant factor of political negotiations until the Gothic settlement in Aquitaine. The support of the followers of the Gothic leader equally continued to play an important role, not only under Alaric but also under Athaulf; even in the Ostrogothic kingdom, the role of Gothic followers in their support of the king was still a necessity for the ruler to remain in power.

Supplies were indeed a core-aspect in the subsequent events, when Alaric’s group started to raid Thrace to help themselves to subsidies which the imperial authorities failed to provide. This was to become a very familiar strategy of Alaric although this tactic was and was to remain only partly successful. What followed was constant fighting on Alaric’s side to gain a military title and the official recognition of his position and his group’s autonomy by the imperial authorities. Athaulf’s later remark talked about his earlier aim of overrunning the empire although he was later to recognise its impossibility; whether Alaric ever planned to overrun the empire and to replace it with Gothia is very difficult to say. I would like to argue that Alaric’s main aim was far more the achievement of his personal ambitions and to secure the recognition of his group as an independent people within imperial territory, than to replace the emperor as Odoacer was later to do. Furthermore, despite several years of raiding and the occasional battle, Alaric never fully succeeded in pressuring the

---

39 Jordanes, Get.146.
empire into his own terms; it must have been clear to him that it was impossible for
him or his group to replace the empire with a Gothic nation.
After Theodosius’ death, Alaric’s troops had started to revolt openly and rapidly to develop their own agenda. Interestingly, the motive of personal dissatisfaction at having missed out on rewards was later blamed for the outbreak of another Gothic revolt, that of Tribigild and Gainas. Alaric’s main aim was to win recognition for himself and his followers, yet he lacked the military strength to do so. In spring 395, Alaric moved his group towards Constantinople, hoping to materialise his ambitions there; in Claudian’s account, which was undoubtedly biased, Rufinus entered into an alliance with Alaric, allowing him to raid Macedonia and Thessaly. Most likely Alaric plundered these provinces in order to provide supplies for his followers but also to force the prefect into negotiations, a tactic he was to employ frequently. In summer 396 Stilicho moved with both imperial armies from Italy against Alaric, but also to interfere in Eastern politics and to affirm his influence there. Before any confrontation with Alaric happened, though, Stilicho withdrew; presumably this had more to do with continuous problems in controlling the imperial armies, as well as part of a strategy of employing Alaric’s group in later warfare, than with Rufinus’ treacherous interference. Alaric continued his raiding campaigns in Greece between

---

41 Claudian, *in Ruf.* II. 28-36, 54-6, 100-2, 270-1. Claudian’s accusations are most likely part of his extreme hatred for Rufinus and his aim to present his patron Stilicho in the best possible way. Theodosius’ death left Stilicho and Rufinus, the *prefectus praetorio orientis* as bitter rivals over the guardianship of Theodosius’ sons Honorius and Arcadius and the political supremacy at the Eastern court. Rufinus had been one of Theodosius’ closest advisers and had become de facto ruler of the East as Arcadius’ guardian. Due to several rival competitors especially among the leading generals, his position was difficult to maintain, and without any major military support, his main political weapon was diplomacy. Born in Gaul his politics stood in sharp contrast to the ambitions of the Constantinopolitan aristocracy and gave reason to intervene in Western politics. Contemporaries like Zosimus and Claudian interpreted Rufinus’s actions as prone to treason and blamed him for the eruption of Gothic violence, or in Sozomen’s and Socrates’ opinion, even for the arrival of the Huns (an accusation perhaps based on Rufinus’ largely Hunnic bodyguard). Zosimus, IV.51, 5.5-4. Socrates, *Hist. Eccles.* VI.2. Sozomen, *Hist. Eccles.* VIII.1. Lütkenhaus (1998), 10. Liebeschuetz (1990), 91. Heather (1991), 201. Kulikowski (2007), 165. Williams & Friell (1994), 139.
395 and early 397, still aiming to pressure Rufinus into negotiations. This whole series of raids clearly demonstrates the limits of Alaric’s actual power in relationship to imperial politics: looting was to a certain extent a useful weapon as it severely damaged the infrastructure of these provinces and thus had a lasting effect on taxation, eventually forcing the imperial administration to react to Alaric’s demands; besides, Alaric had nothing more in hand to pressure the empire to agree to his plans than to wait for when and in what way the empire chose to react. In fact, this dilemma remained the same under Athaulf’s leadership, which makes his remark that he wanted to replace the empire with Gothia somewhat doubtful, especially when neither Alaric nor indeed Athaulf had the military strength to encounter the imperial troops in several open battles.

Rufinus was assassinated in 395 and his successor Eutropius entered into a pact with Stilicho which left him to pursue Alaric’s group for the second time in summer 397 and force them north to Epirus, but as before, no decision was taken and Stilicho withdrew for the second time; again it was most likely the result of failing military discipline and possible bribery. Subsequently Eutropius surprisingly entered into a treaty with Alaric in 397. In fact Eutropius had little choice other than to conclude this treaty, which left him politically vulnerable (his own troops were still employed against the Huns in the Caucasus), or to accept Stilicho’s further political interference, although it was a decision which caused serious resentment among Constantinopolitan politicians; certainly this treaty did not mean any change in the Roman perspective towards Alaric or a general pro-Gothic policy of Eutropius.

Claudian, in Ruf. II.130-68,195-201. Zosimus, V.5.6-8, 5.6.

Eutropius was a former slave and eunuch who held the position of praepositus sacri cubiculi; having arranged Arcadius’ marriage with Eudoxia, he was head of the imperial household and clearly one of the people who had benefitted from Rufinus’ assassination. Managing to secure for himself the patrician title and the consulate, he was regarded by Claudian as yet another obstacle for Stilicho to gain power in the East. If Stilicho had initially hoped to gain control by removing his rival is open to question but it is very doubtful that his influence was ever extensive enough to have succeeded in ordering Rufinus’ murder. Certainly Stilicho’s hopes came to nothing and also Gainas’ troops who...
Ironically it was the rivalries between two Roman generals which had brought this treaty along, rather than Alaric’s strategy of raiding. Alaric’s strategy had worked insofar as he was able to exploit the internal rifts in imperial politics to gain a new treaty.

Not much is known about the precise conditions of this treaty other than the fulfilment of most of Alaric’s aims. Interestingly an area for settlement in Macedonia and Dacia formed part of it, though whether Alaric had any intention of permanently settling his group or not is hard to tell. Questions over land were important insofar as they addressed concerns about the accommodation of and supply for his followers, though a territory for permanent settlement is something quite different. According to Paulinus of Pella, Athaulf’s group was accommodated on the basis of *hospitalitas* and there was no mentioning of them as being permanently settled. Precisely this lack of interest in getting land for a permanent settlement is in Liebeschuetz’s opinion a further proof that Alaric’s followers were still much more inclined to earn their living with the sword. Presumably the area for settlement featured more as an area for providing supplies for Alaric’s followers, although it could be that his group already contained contingents that were either not fit for fighting (women and children) or too old to do so. The other main feature of this treaty was a military title for Alaric though there is some debate whether or not he actually received the title of *magister militum per Illyricum* already in 397 AD (the same demand reappeared in 405 AD when he received it (again?) from Stilicho and it remained a topic of negotiation with Honorius); according to Claudian he did whereas for Synesius this had committed the deed got no reward. Eutropius had declared Stilicho *hostis publicus* and his politics against the *magister militum* were further aided by the revolt of Gildo in Africa as Gildo had transferred his loyalty to the East; this forced Stilicho to return to Rome, as he had to secure Rome’s corn supply. Synesius exaggerated Eutropius’ political weakness as much as possible in order to promote his own patron Aurelianus. Claudian, *in Eutr.* II. 194-6, 226-8. Cameron & Long (1993),118-9. Liebeschuetz (1990), 58, 91-3, 98. Kulikowski (2007),166-9. Heather (1988), 166-9; (1991), 202-4, 207.
was only a mere possibility. Despite Synesius’ doubts, it is quite likely that Alaric did receive this position, which gave him some judicial power, and according to Claudian even access to armament factories, although that was perhaps yet another exaggeration. When Synesius bitterly complained in the *de regno* about the possibility of a Goth dressed in his native dress and yet being able to attend the senate in a toga, he obviously referred to a person of the highest rank; attending senatorial meetings was only allowed to persons holding highest offices and required the status of *illu{st}ris* which a title such as *magister militum* would have granted. By the time Synesius was composing his speech, neither Tribigild nor Gainas were counted among the *illustri*, although Gainas has often been regarded as the main target of Synesius’ text.\textsuperscript{44} However, Alaric’s demand to become *magister militum* would have been far more obvious (or in case Claudian is correct, he would have received the rank already): he would not only have been holding supreme military command as a Roman general, but he would have also been granted the title of *illu{st}ris* and thus being ranked beside the consul with the possibility of access to the Constantinopolitan senate. Regardless whether or not Alaric had already received this rank, for Synesius it was the mere possibility alone of Alaric gaining this power, which posed a serious threat to the security of the Eastern government.\textsuperscript{45} For P. Heather, Alaric’s continuous request to be granted some military command was a very important political factor in maintaining his own position; it would have given him more official recognition from the Roman side and access to larger

\textsuperscript{44} Synesius, *de reg.* 19-21. Tribigild only held a minor rank at that time, and Gainas, although he held a higher military rank, received the title of *magister militum* only at the outbreak of Tribigild’s revolt in 399. Synesius wrote his speech presumably in late 388/early 399, most likely before the fall of Eutropius and either shortly before or after Tribigild’s rebellion, Heather (1988), 160; (1991), 207. The time of the composition of the speech would certainly allow for Gainas to be a target for Synesius, but Alaric was far more in the foreground of political negotiations and presumably would have been considered to pose the more serious threat.

\textsuperscript{45} The picture of an imminent barbarian threat led by a barbarian general who had been granted the right to exercise Roman power made a very useful topic to raise political tensions and to blackmail Eutropius’ government, especially when Synesius was writing for his patron Aurelianus. Liebeschuetz (1990), 106-7. Heather (1988), 163-5.
subsidies, as well as securing him direct access to imperial politics thus enhancing the Gothic position at the imperial court with Alaric as its agent. Furthermore, it would have strengthened his power among other Gothic nobles, especially when he was not without rivals for the position of leader. Yet to hold an imperial military title did not automatically transform Alaric into another barbarian general in Roman service because he wanted to retain simultaneously his leadership over his own group. Alaric was the only one of the barbarian generals who did achieve a high Roman command and yet remained ultimately the leader of his own people; in other words, he was *magister militum* but also conquered Rome as the leader of a Gothic army, which was fighting against the empire. Athaulf’s remark allegedly showed him as directly challenging the position of the emperor himself whereas Alaric wanted to gain only a military title for the advancement of his own Gothic interests. Indeed Alaric’s position to consolidate a military power-position within the imperial system with his Gothic leadership was seemingly an attempt to create a new definition of the Gothic leadership. All Gothic leaders before him had been a Gothic leader or king/judge or had changed sides and had made a career within the imperial troops; this was either the result of them having lost their bid for power among their own people or having entered the imperial sphere from the beginning without even attempting to gain any leading position among the Goths. Athaulf of course took this even further by attempting to connect the concept of Gothic leadership directly with imperial authority, although he too failed to be successful. Kulikowski argued that Alaric himself wanted to hold this military title for its own sake though he fails to


47 Sivan (2003), 112 for the complexity of Alaric’s model of leadership: ‘Neither the ideological nor the actual genesis of Alaric’s kingship can be traced with precision. Nor does it appear to conform to a specific Gothic form of enunciating power.’ See also pp.116-8.
take into account that Alaric surely wanted this title also in order to promote Gothic aims.\textsuperscript{48} Nothing would have been easier for Alaric and his followers than to become absorbed into Roman culture like for example Fravittas, who had assimilated himself with the Roman sphere to the exclusion of his Gothic origins. Yet Alaric refused any such attempts from the imperial side, suggesting that his aim to gain a military title was connected with more than mere personal motives.

Alaric must have been aware of the real political factors behind the conclusion of this treaty and must have known that, despite its favourable conditions, the overall Roman opinion towards him largely depended on the current courtier in power. Perhaps it was this knowledge that made him decide to break with the Eastern government and to move to Italy in 401. A full explanation for this step is impossible to provide but it was to a large extent due to the rapid changes of politics at the Eastern court: Eutropius was deposed in August 399 and his successor Aurelianus used the alleged pro-Gothic policy of Eutropius to blame him for an unsuccessful policy, promising in his turn to throw out Alaric’s group.\textsuperscript{49} Aurelianus however had succeeded with Gainas’ help – that is with Gothic troops – which makes a strict anti-barbarian policy unlikely. However, none of these courtiers had a particularly strong anti- or pro-Gothic policy, but the entire Gothic cause made an excellent topic in political argumentation as it could be used either to pacify the barbarian contingents or to destroy political enemies by strictly promoting a fight for Roman interests. Perhaps also the elevated position of Gainas and Fravittas might have encouraged

\textsuperscript{48} Kulikowski (2007), 1,157.

\textsuperscript{49} Aurelianus was the former prefect of the city and a close ally of the senate; he became praetorian prefect in summer 399 and designated consul for 400. His succession has been at time interpreted as a victory of the anti-barbarian or for that matter anti-Gothic party in Constantinopolitan politics with the aim to clear the army from any barbarian element and to set up a national feeling which out the stability of the East above everything, even at the cost of the Western government. Several scholars, however, see this approach as mainly based on a misinterpretation of Synesius’ works and a modern invention of Eastern nationalism, see Liebeschuetz (1990), 105; Heather (1988), 152-3.
Alaric to stay in the East and wait for similar honours, especially when both Goths had started their careers just like Alaric.

To digress here for a moment: there is an interesting comparison between Alaric and Fravittas, as Fravittas succeeded to highest honours in the Eastern government. Ironically it was the question of Alaric’s involvement in Roman politics which caused Fravittas’ own downfall. He had been appointed to end Gainas’ revolt and had received access to all military as well as naval units to do so. Considering Synesius’ anti-Gothic feelings, not surprisingly he failed to record that it was a Goth who was employed by the state to defeat another Goth. As reward for ending Gainas’ revolt, Fravittas received the consulate, a triumphant entry into Constantinople and a column dedicated to his sea-victory; shortly afterwards, though, he fell from power, but not as a result of anti-Gothic feelings but rather as victim to court intrigues. Part of the reason for this was a quarrel he had with Count John about the political conduct against Alaric, which was made even worse when Stilicho had failed to recognise the Eastern consuls of 404/5, and had entered into an alliance with Alaric in 405. The difference between Alaric and Fravittas lay not so much in the question which government was readier to accept a Goth to occupy a high imperial office, but in the fact that Alaric was not prepared to relinquish his position as leader of a Gothic group. Alaric might have hoped to convince the Eastern court that he was able to fulfil both roles, as Gainas had done. However, the subsequent crushing of

---

50 Count John (a close friend of the empress Eudoxia) had been previously tried by Gainas and sent into exile but was later recalled and resumed his political position. Aside from the business over Alaric, Fravittas had accused John of his conduct in military matters and his opposition against imperial unity. Influential courtiers like Hierax and others managed to overthrow Fravittas’ arguments and it seems that he was either tried for treason and executed or assassinated which is more likely. The sources mention his honours but none of them accused him of treachery; indeed accusations of treason presumably would have resulted in the damnatio memoriae and that was apparently not the case. The date of Fravittas’ death is not entirely clear: after Gainas’ defeat he continued campaigning in Thrace but could have been killed as early as 401. Cameron doubts this and places it not earlier than 405. Indeed Fravittas’ accusations against John that he jeopardised the political harmony between the two imperial governments, places his death more likely into the years 404/5 as John had not reached any political influence before 404, and relations between the two courts had not deteriorated before 404.
the Tribigild/Gainas revolt and the refusal of Aurelianus’ successor Caesarius to enter into a new alliance must have shown Alaric that his options to gain an elevated position in the Eastern government were seriously limited; furthermore, if Alaric had been made *magister militum per Illyricum*, the strong anti-Gothic feelings both among the Constantinopolitan population as well as among the leading courtiers would have threatened his position, and perhaps he thought it wise to retreat with his followers to the West before he was entangled in the aftermath of the Gainas-revolt.\(^5\)

This political instability probably resulted in a lack of imperial supplies for Alaric, perhaps further aggravated by Hunnic movements in the Balkans, which disturbed Gothic settlers there.\(^5\) Alaric must have been aware that his success and ultimately the survival of his group depended on the way in which he was able to manipulate both imperial governments by using political/military difficulties by causing them in the first place or exploiting them. Although this treaty had been a political success, Alaric’s group was by no means in any position to dictate its terms to the empire let alone to justify any claims of overrunning the empire and, as will be seen in the subsequent events, this situation was to change very little.

---


\(^5\) The Constantinopolitan mob had started a witch-hunt of the Gothic population in the city although it was mainly targeted at the followers of Gainas; it was even rejected by some imperial officials especially when it involved the burning of a church, although the official condemnation of such an action was presumably closer linked with the burning of the church than the killing of part of the Gothic population of the city. See Synesius, *de prov.* II.117 A-120 C; Liebeschuetz (1990), 114-5, 119-22. Cameron & Long (1993), 223, 333.

b) Alaric and the West

The unstable situation at the Eastern court had brought Alaric once more to the West, hoping to get there what he had ultimately failed to gain or was fearing to lose in the East. As had been the case in his dealings with the Eastern government, his aim to use continuous raids to force the imperial government into negotiations in most cases failed to materialise. Even if he planned to pressure the empire to its utmost limits, it cannot have included any notion of conquering the entire empire and replacing it with a Gothic kingdom; as will be seen later even the conquest of Rome was in strategic terms far more a psychological victory than a real political advantage. Liebeschuetz argues that Valens and Theodosius had been engaged predominantly to settle the various Gothic groups according to traditional diplomatic procedures; there had been frequent demands on the Gothic side to be accepted as independent allies and Fritigern’s request had tried to establish a client relationship with the empire, but this had been refused. Alaric was pressuring Honorius to accept his group as foederati, as independent allies with the right to keep their weapons; effectively Honorius was asked to accept a group which was as willing to fight for the empire as it was willing to fight against it.\(^53\) What had changed, though, was not only the military strength of the Gothic group under Alaric, which proved effective enough to pressure Honorius continuously, but also that Alaric remained its leader despite frequent setbacks.

Although the political landscape was less fragmented in the West than it was in the East, Honorius’ personal weakness had fostered numerous rival groups at the court, each with their own political agenda. Potentially this could have enabled Alaric to exploit the intrigues of the various influential courtiers for his own demands, but it

failed. Aside from Ravenna, the senators in Rome too had their own political ambitions, and although they were involved in imperial politics to a far lesser extent than in previous centuries, their political movements nevertheless played a part. It is interesting that Galla Placidia as Honorius’ half-sister had opted to remain in Rome, with her claims to the Theodosian heritage, which theoretically stood higher than those of Honorius, and thus distanced herself from her brother and became part of a set of politicians with their own political agenda. One can wonder if already before her capture by the Goths she actively harboured political ambitions and objectives, which stood in contrast to Honorius and if this was the case, how far she influenced Athaulf to ‘challenge’ Honorius’ position both before their marriage and by marrying him later.\(^{54}\)

Two major military confrontations between Stilicho and Alaric had gained neither side any success, and for some time Stilicho refused to enter into any negotiations with Alaric.\(^{55}\) However in 404/5 a new alliance between the two was formed, which renewed the appointment of Alaric as *magister militum*. Stilicho’s motives for this are far from clear, but it was much more an answer to the political circumstances the empire (and Stilicho) faced than a change in the perception of Alaric or his plans; the idea was that his appointment would pacify Alaric’s continuous grievance of neglect by the imperial officials, thus giving Stilicho space to deal with the Eastern government, as well as counteract the recruitment problem Stilicho faced.

\(^{54}\) Lütkenhaus (1998), 20-1.
When military pressure forced Stilicho to abandon his negotiations with Alaric in 406, Alaric returned to Italy in 407 to demand 4,000 lb of gold as payment for his military services in Epirus (another reminder of the mercenary aspect of Alaric’s group), which Stilicho succeeded in paying. Stilicho’s murder in August 408, though, created a similar situation to the one Alaric had already faced in the East, as both his wish for an appointment and his demands for payment and supplies had once more been left unfulfilled; any hopes on Alaric’s side to exploit the unstable situation in Ravenna failed as Honorius refused to pay Alaric. As negotiations once more deteriorated, Alaric tried to pressure Honorius into a treaty by besieging Rome in winter 408/9, starting a game that was as effective as disastrous. The decision to use Rome as the pawn was politically a very shrewd move as it provided him with a psychological tool by threatening the ancient heart of the empire; at the same time, though, it was a desperate move as the city only served this purpose while it was threatened whereas a continuous refusal on Honorius’ side would mean its eventual sack and the open admission of his political failure.

Whether or not Alaric or some of his followers regarded the fact of using Rome as a ‘hostage’ as an expression of directly challenging the empire (by regarding Rome as the ‘mother’ and origin of the empire) cannot be established. I would regard it more as a difficult measure to force the empire into paying Alaric’s demands than an actual plan of dominating the empire, although one cannot rule out that Alaric regarded it as an ideological challenge. It certainly showed an understanding on

---

56 Zosimus, V.29.5-9, 5.30.1-34. Stilicho had faced the pressure of the migration of Vandals, Alans and Suebes in 406 and the usurpation of Constantine III in Britain and Gaul. His success in paying Alaric’s demands had led to open accusation of treason against him and had led to his murder. His successor Olympius refused a continuation of a lenient Gothic policy. Matthews (1975), 308-12. Lütkenhaus (1998), 24-7. See Collins (2006), 12-5 for the moves of Vandals, Alans and Suebes.
Alaric’s side of the somewhat complicated communication between Rome and Ravenna, and an awareness of its fragmented political landscape. Furthermore, Alaric opened his own negotiations with the Roman aristocracy, aside from his dealings with Honorius, which saw a group of senators travelling to Ravenna to open talks with the imperial court although any such attempts ultimately failed. Alaric’s calculations proved correct insofar as Honorius was prepared to pay for supplies but continued to refuse to grant Alaric a military title. The fact that he had opened talks with the senate whilst still negotiating with Honorius is indeed not only an affirmation of the continuous political involvement of the Roman nobility in politics, but also of Alaric’s perception of his own power. Besides, his reaction to Honorius’ refusal to accept his demands was as bold as it was dangerous when he appointed the Roman senator Priscus Attalus as his own emperor in December 409, thus effectively demonstrating that he regarded himself to stand equal or even above Honorius’ position and power as emperor when he acted as king maker.

Why Alaric still wanted to receive a military title and honours from an institution whose leader he now openly challenged and even refused to recognise, is very difficult to answer. To appoint a counter-emperor instead of merely supporting or promoting a Roman usurper (like Constantine III) suggests that Alaric regarded his own power as far greater than that of a mere leader of a band of Gothic auxiliary

---

57 Zosimus, V, 36-8.
58 Zosimus, V.36.1-44, 5.45-56. Sozomen, Hist. Eccles. IX.6-7. Kulikowski (2007), 8-9: the aim was that the broad Roman population would be the first to feel the enormous pressure of food-shortages and impending starvation due to the Gothic blockade and would revolt against the senatorial families which were less prone to suffer from the siege. The threat of revolt would prompt them to urge Honorius to find some agreement with Alaric. Indeed the deteriorating hygienic conditions and lack of food supplies forced Honorius to re-open talks. There were also some Roman senators, among them Priscus Attalus (see further below), who opposed Honorius and were willing to cooperate with Alaric. Shaw (2001), 151 argues, though, that by and large the Roman aristocracy and the imperial government had failed to recognise Alaric’s demands and to understand his position. Considering the long time it took the imperial side to accept a solution to the Gothic ‘problem’ which was accepted by both sides, Shaw’s comment is undoubtedly correct.
59 Sivan (2003), 119-21: for the eventual failure of the cooperation between Attalus/the senate and Alaric, due to Attalus’ miscalculations of the political situation, and underlying tendencies of contempt for a barbarian ruler which could be found among the Roman aristocracy despite their ideas of using the same barbarian ruler for their own political machinations with Ravenna.
troops; Alaric effectively portrayed himself to stand above Honorius’ authority by appointing an emperor himself, thus directly challenging Honorius’ right as emperor. This leads to the question whether Alaric saw himself as the leader not of a Gothic group but of a new nation, which stood equal to the Roman empire, thus giving him the position to appoint an alternative for Honorius, rather than to support another Roman supporter with Gothic military help. Alaric’s refusal to accept the subsidies Honorius was prepared to supply could suggest that he regarded his followers as standing above a band of mercenaries who demanded their payment for their military employment, and wanted more for them than mere payment. However, Alaric had not appointed himself as counter-emperor but had chosen Attalus, which would suggest that he had no desire to replace Romania with Gothia by setting himself up as Caesar as Athaulf would later claim he had wanted to do. The danger lay in the refusal to accept Honorius’ position as it would only harden Honorius’ refusal to enter into serious negotiations but also because Alaric allowed himself to become, at least partly, a tool of Roman politics, especially when there was a faction of Roman senators, among them Attalus, who opposed Honorius; besides, their willingness to cooperate with Alaric was as much –if not more – due to the pursuit of their own political aims as it was an expression of believing in joint Gothic-Roman politics. Thus a likely possibility for Alaric choosing Attalus could have been an attempt of his to exploit certain court intrigues at Ravenna, which aimed to replace Honorius thus hoping to gain advantages by supporting a candidate a faction at court was likely to back. According to Paulinus of Pella, Attalus himself regarded his appointment as a political charade, though from the Gothic viewpoint a connection

---

60 Part of the problem were religious differences as some of these Roman families had kept their pagan beliefs and promoted themselves as guardians of traditional Roman values, and opposed the strong Christian emphasis of the Theodosian dynasty, see Kulikowski (2007), 9, 174-6. In the light of this argument it is surprising that Placidia not only remained in Rome and fostered a different political line to Ravenna, but that she promoted her Theodosian heritage.
with the Roman aristocracy could only be in their interest, especially when these
aristocrats had access to resources as well as a certain level of influence in the
imperial administration.\textsuperscript{61} For the senators, although they were by no means a
homogenous group, the inability of Ravenna to reach any lasting conclusion with
Alaric was aggravating their own position, as Alaric was quick in using Rome as the
‘battlefield’ to press for his own interests. An alliance with Alaric could then be used
as a tool to remove the politically intolerable Honorius. The current successor of
Stilicho was Jovinus who later indeed supported Attalus and was to receive military
help from Athaulf too; furthermore, it does demonstrate that Attalus was by no
means the weak Gothic puppet Paulinus portrays, but someone influential courtiers
regarded as a feasible candidate not only to replace Honorius but also to rescue the
political situation in the West.\textsuperscript{62}

Kulikowski recently argued that it had been Alaric’s almost inborn loyalty to
Honorius as the emperor that had prevented him from sacking Rome far earlier.\textsuperscript{63}

Taken further, this would mean that Alaric did not create himself to be emperor but
rather chose Attalus, because he felt too much reverence for Honorius to replace him
himself. Yet this argument is based on the assumption that, because Alaric
supposedly had been born inside imperial territory, he naturally shared the Roman
concept of loyalty towards the imperial dynasty. First of all, there is no evidence

\textsuperscript{62} Priscus Attalus had previously been \textit{comes sacrarum largitionem} in 409 at Honorius’ court and
\textit{praefectus urbis} in Rome, thus being directly involved in court politics. Attalus’ eventual failure was
due not so much to a general political miscalculation or personal inability but the stout loyalty of other
courtiers for Honorius, most notably Heraclius, \textit{comes Africae}, which hindered any serious support for
Attalus. Heraclius created a severe shortage of supplies for Rome which in turn questioned Attalus’
usefulness for the Goths; as any movements out of Italy were too dangerous at that point, the only
way was to re-open talks with Honorius. Furthermore, Constantine III was yet another counter-
emperor who had widespread support among the Gallic aristocracy, which created some kind of
unifying element between them and the Roman aristocracy as both supported candidates who stood in
opposition to Honorius. The Gothic position in this was difficult as they played an active role in
promoting Attalus yet at the same time served as a tool for both these Gallic and Roman aristocrats to
work for their own political aims, namely the disposition of Honorius, but not necessarily to promote
\textsuperscript{63} Kulikowski (2007), 4.
what Alaric really thought of Honorius, and judging from Attalus’ appointment he
certainly felt no loyalty towards the emperor, nor can one assume that just because a
non-Roman had been born inside the empire, he naturally had a sense of loyalty
towards the imperial institution; judging from the many Roman usurpers, there was
no guarantee whatsoever that even Romans would be naturally loyal towards the
current imperial dynasty. Such a concept would imply that imperial frontiers were
automatically creating some kind of inclusive boundaries with a common cultural
understanding that all residents of the empire shared, based on the fact that they all
lived inside these borders. It is true that Alaric tried to avoid conquering Rome as
long as possible, yet that had less to do with loyalty and more to do with the ultimate
admission of his failure to negotiate with Honorius; but that does not allow for the
assumption of an inborn loyalty towards Rome. Had Alaric felt this loyalty as
Kulikowski is arguing, most likely he would have joined the Roman army, like so
many other barbarian generals, and would have risen high in the ranks there, yet he
proved himself to be as ready fighting for the empire as against it. Therefore Alaric’s
loyalty was primarily towards his followers and his interests in establishing this
group rather than to promote the interests of the Theodosian dynasty. Another point
for promoting Attalus could have been an attempt to create a situation that would
finally force Honorius to react: Attalus thus served the same purpose as the siege of
Rome. I would argue that it was most likely a mixture of the above and its overall
effect was to be as successful as Athaulf’s later marriage to Placidia: it demonstrated
the growth of Gothic power but it failed to alter dramatically their political/military
position. If Attalus’ appointment had been intended to pressure Honorius, it failed;
Alaric reduced his demands once again to a level which was suitable for auxiliary
troops: ‘[Alaric] did not want office or honour, nor did he wish to settle in the
provinces previously specified, but only the two Noricums which are on the far
reaches of the Danube, are subject to continual incursions, and pay little tax to the
treasury. Moreover, he would be satisfied with as much corn each year as the
emperor thought sufficient, and forget about the gold. Thus there could be friendship
and alliance between him and the Romans against everyone who took up arms and
was roused to war against the emperor. Yet even these reduced demands came to
nothing and Alaric finally marched on Rome, which fell on 24 August 410 AD. The
sack of Rome and the capture of Galla Placidia looked at first sight like the final
culmination of Gothic power but in fact it was the failure of Alaric’s politics as it had
deprived him of the only really successful tool to pressure Honorius and he was still
without a treaty with the empire. The only short-term positive effect was that it had
provided him with an enormous amount of booty and had occupied his soldiers –
indeed an important factor as his troops had not been engaged in any serious warfare
since the Balkan campaigns, which could potentially create a climate of treason and
mutiny among them; any victory, however small, was essential in such a climate.

The main problem Alaric faced was the lack of steady supplies without which his
followers were unable to continue as a large group or indeed to gain any strong
power-base from which they could further develop their political establishment;
indeed both Alaric and Athaulf were trying to find ways to end their dependence on
imperial supplies. This implies that the people around Alaric was rapidly developing
into much more than just being a relatively small band of mercenaries, and therefore
needed much more than mere payments for military services but a steady, large
income of food supplies; this matter is also closely connected with the increasingly
important question of a permanent Gothic settlement within Roman territory. This
question of land is an indicator that Alaric’s followers had developed from a band of

\[64\] Zosimus, V.50.3.
civitate dei* was a direct moral and theological answer to the destruction of Rome. Lançon, (2000), 39.
Kulikowski (2007), 5.
mercenaries to a much larger group, as mercenaries would have been able to exist on a much smaller scale of supplies. Alaric’s aim to cross to Africa via Sicily, and Wallia’s later attempt in 416 AD to achieve the same, must have been an attempt to counteract the permanent food shortage by moving into the province from where most of the grain supplies came. Alaric’s demands throughout had included secure subsidies, although by now it must have become more apparent that even guaranteed supplies were not a long-term alternative to an area of settlement where arable land would have maintained a large group for much longer.\(^{66}\) Athaulf too, continued to struggle with the difficulty in finding enough supplies for his group, and it is to his leadership we must turn next.

---

\(^{66}\) Orosius, VII.43.2. Olympiodorus, fr. 22.1-2. Liebeschuetz (1990), 72, provides another argument for Alaric’s attempt to cross into Africa as a possible punishment of the *comes Africae* Heraclius who had fiercely opposed him and Attalus. See also Collins (2006), 26-37 for further Gothic history.
3. Athaulf

Succeeding Alaric in 411 AD, it was left to Athaulf to deal with the continuous problem of guaranteed supplies and the increasing difficulty questions over an area of settlement posed. Athaulf was Alaric’s political successor when he was able to finalise the question of a Gothic settlement that had formed an increasingly essential part of Alaric’s political/military agenda. The difference to Alaric was that Athaulf had to deal with a subsequently different concept of leadership which had to accommodate the issues of a settled barbarian people in immediate proximity to the Roman population. Thus his political concept of supporting the Roman empire with Gothic power can also be interpreted as an answer to create a modus vivendi with the Romans but also as an attempt to define the concept of Gothic leadership in a new way which was suitable to a settled people. Thus a prerequisite for Athaulf’s plan to replace Romania with Gothia in Gaul would have been a strong Gothic position both militarily as well as politically, and as the subsequent events showed this was not the case. Neither questions over a territory for settlement nor over complete independence from the empire in terms of supplies, had been successfully resolved – in fact these issues continued to dictate Gothic movements in Gaul (and for some time in Spain) to a large extent.

To turn to the problems of territorial settlement and guaranteed supplies: both were linked and had a direct influence on the development of Athaulf’s group as well as on the intention to become wholly independent from the empire. If one accepts the notion that Alaric’s group at the beginning of his career was indeed a band of mercenaries as has been previously discussed, the question of supplies then had been largely a question of payment for military support for the empire.\(^67\) However, as this

\(^{67}\) See Part I.2.
mercenary band started to absorb other people from outside and grew in size (absorbing not only men fit for military service but also women and children), it needed much more than mere payment for military campaigns, and the demand for actual food supplies became therefore an increasingly important issue; indeed Alaric’s request shortly before the sack of Rome referred to corn supplies rather than money. As Alaric had not managed to establish a lasting agreement with Honorius, and attempts to gain access to Africa had failed, Athaulf was forced to continue the policy of moving and plundering to access these supplies; but as Italy had soon lost its value of providing the required resources, Athaulf moved into Gaul. Even if one debates the mercenary aspect of the original composition of Alaric’s group and rejects the earlier payments as a form of military wages, certainly by now it had developed into a conformation which was nothing short of a new people and therefore required far more supplies than a relatively small group of soldiers. Whether one can label Athaulf’s group already a nation as it contained by now more than just a warrior-dominated group, or whether one reserves such a definition for the time when this people established themselves in Aquitaine in 416, or even as late as their kingdom in Spain when the Gothic court issued laws, is open to debate. Certainly in the ancient sources there was no distinction any more between various different Gothic groups, but already Alaric and even more Athaulf were regarded as the leader or king of the Goths, very much implying one homogenous group under one established leader. Even if one does not accept the idea that this group was a nation yet, it was certainly a ‘nation in the making’. It had lost its pure mercenary aspect, it had grown in size, it had started itself to absorb people rather than being absorbed into the imperial system, and its leadership under one leader had become an established fact (even if there were still internal feuds about it, although they were more concerned with the actual person holding power rather than with the concept as
such). Athaulf’s later comments on adopting and supporting Roman law have been interpreted as a step beyond the Gothic request for a settlement and have been regarded as a sign towards their emancipation as a nation or state; this is based on arguments that the Goths still regarded themselves more as Roman magistrates or as heirs to Roman power, thus still being subject to overall Roman authority (based partly on the interpretation of their Law Codes as a continuation of Roman edicts rather than completely new legal creations). Yet such an interpretation regards the Goths as a nation only when they had adopted Roman law, which implies that without this Roman law there was no possibility for a non-Roman people to become a nation or a state in their own right, or that their own laws were not sufficient enough for them to form a nation. Surely the acceptance and assimilation with Roman law had nothing to do with the development of a barbarian group into a political/military unit, nor into a new people or even a state/nation. Athaulf’s idea of incorporating Roman law into Gothic structures could have been an attempt to find an easier *modus vivendi* with the empire but this does not exclude the notion that already before this the various Gothic groups or Alaric’s followers had had their own concepts of legal matters.

However as Alaric before him, Athaulf was to become trapped in the turmoil of the imperial administration: as supplies remained a crucial part of any negotiation, Heraclian’s revolt in Africa had delayed grain supplies and made this topic even more pressing. Furthermore Flavius Constantius’ rise to power in Ravenna had seriously altered the political balance and had upset Jovinus and his supporters.

---

69 The Visigothic law collection of the *Breviarum* of Alaric II in the sixth century is based on Roman interpretations of law and written from a Roman perspective. The question remains to whom this law code was applied, and if it concerned Goths and Romans alike or only one of the two; it seems, though, that the Goths were expected to fall under the jurisdiction of the Gothic king whereas the Roman population was tried under Roman law. Matthews (2000), 32-3, 37-9. See also Part I.3.
Athaulf himself had originally supported Jovinus but soon fell out with him and was willing to hand over Jovinus to Ravenna in exchange for a new treaty. The subsequent harsh treatment of Jovinus’ followers by Constantius led to considerable misgivings among the Gallic aristocracy, and as Constantius was trying to reaffirm imperial power in Gaul he had to pacify Gallic interests in the long term. Questions over a permanent Gothic settlement on imperial soil were still an awkward problem and were made even more complex as negotiations with Athaulf had to avoid any serious impact on the Gallic aristocracy and their social as well as political sphere in order to regain support among them. Furthermore Constantius’ increasing military defence left increasingly little space for Athaulf to manoeuvre. The situation was complicated by the fact that Athaulf’s own position among his Gothic followers was not without its challenges. Although his leadership was widely accepted, his feud with Sarus demonstrated that despite the acceptance of a single leader the person to hold this position was subject to challenge by men with a similar background. It was the respective leader who defined the military/political programme of the Goths, and in an episode concerning Paulinus of Pella Athaulf himself admitted that he and his decisions were in fact far from being wholly independent from his followers whose opinions he had to take into account.  

Although the move into Gaul had created a very difficult position for Athaulf, it was perhaps less surprising if one considers that many of the major players in this political game were somewhat connected with each other and had numerous connections with Gaul: one of them was Galla Placidia who had been part of the political establishment in Rome with which Attalus was connected. Furthermore, Placidia was to prove a potentially dangerous ‘weapon’ in Athaulf’s hands: Placidia’s relationship to Valentinian I through her mother gave her a stronger link.
with the Theodosian dynasty than Honorius could claim and presented potentially a
different political view from Honorius. Already during her time in Rome, Placidia
had proved an opponent of Honorius or, if one believes the weak character of
Honorius himself, at least of the ruling faction at Ravenna – in fact her remaining in
Rome instead of fleeing to Ravenna when the Gothic invasion became imminent
suggests a certain distance from the imperial court; at least factions which stood
against Honorius could have used her distance from her half-brother in order to
exploit their own claims of anti-Honorian policies. This distance from Honorius was
already apparent in her role in the trial against Serena: according to Zosimus, she
was involved in the political establishment in Rome and played a role together with
some parts of the senate in convicting Serena. Lütkenhaus also argues that Placidia
seems to have left Rome without any violent attempts on the Gothic side, and
concludes that this could be an indication that she was already in contact with those
senatorial circles which supported Attalus, and thus indirectly the Goths. Another
major player was Jovinus, a Gallic noble who had started a rebellion in Gaul in 411
and in turn was promoted by a large group of the Gallic aristocracy as part of a
strategy to alter the situation in Ravenna to their own political advantage. According
to Wolfram, Jovinus was also keen to establish a basis for cooperation with Athaulf
when Athaulf’s position in Italy posed the chance to transport the usurpation from

Gaul into Italy and to boost its potential success through Gothic military help; but

71 Zosimus, V.28, 34, 38-9. The fact that Serena was Stilicho’s widow and their two daughters had
been married to Honorius, and that Stilicho had been Honorius’ chief adviser and military leader for
some time, undoubtedly added to the somewhat strained situation between Honorius and Placidia.
Due to the absence of the emperor, Rome had lost its status as the political centre of the empire, but it
had allowed for the rising influence of the senate and the continuity of Rome as a cultural centre,
which remained intact despite serious political/military/social unrest and instability, see for example
Alföldi (2001), 4-5. See article by Alföldi (2001) for senatorial pride and continuity of influence in
Rome, despite profound difficulties in the political and social sector (misuse of offices, food
shortages, dilapidation of public buildings etc); the inscriptions continue a message of general
aristocratic pride in Rome’s culture and aristocratic commitment to the upkeep and restoration of the
eternal glory of Rome, regardless of their background or religious conviction.
72 Lütkenhaus (1998), 72-5: he argues that Constantius’ insistence to get Placidia back from the Goths
was also directly linked with his own attempts to secure further his political bid, not only in terms of
gaining a family relationship with Honorius but also to secure the support of senatorial circles.
aside from Jovinus’ connection with Sarus, an enemy of Athaulf, Jovinus’ promotion of his brother to the purple without Athaulf’s consent had further strained their relationship and made Athaulf hand over Jovinus to Ravenna.\(^{73}\) Jovinus stood in connection with Attalus, who was himself supported by Athaulf.

After the end of this revolt, Athaulf must have known about the tensions between Constantius and the Gallic aristocracy, especially when he saw the drastic measures against the Jovinus-supporters; any attempt on their side to fight for their own political aims without consent from Ravenna could have been hardly surprising. In the light of Athaulf’s break with Jovinus, support among the Gallic aristocrats for the Gothic cause in order to ensure their access to supplies was essential. Placidia could not only present a pawn to pressure Ravenna, especially when Constantius was more than keen to have her back, but she as a member of the imperial house and known to pose a different line from Honorius could also serve to convince the Gallic aristocrats to support the Gothic cause, which was vital to gain access to continuous supplies. Besides, there were some Gallic aristocrats, who were willing to support Athaulf and his aims, which raises the question whether his policy already before his marriage with Placidia was showing signs of supporting the restoration of Roman interests, as he was to claim at his wedding. Orosius talked of the influence Placidia had over Athaulf, and as she was with the Goths already since 410 it could certainly be that her presence and undoubted political insight had a certain impact on Athaulf’s decisions to favour increasingly a policy of restoration; in the light of this argument, the wedding in 415 would have been then just the manifestation of this policy. Attalus was re-appointed emperor with various Gallic aristocrats (among

\(^{73}\) Olympiodorus, fr. 18, 20. Orosius, VII.42.6. Sarus was a former commander under Honorius, promoted by his patron Stilicho, and had become an influential imperial agent. He was also a mortal enemy of Athaulf who quickly killed him though this feud was later to be responsible for Athaulf’s own murder; Sarus’ brother Sigeric continued this feud and eventually became for a very brief time Athaulf’s successor. Elton (1996 b), 34-5. Matthews (1975), 314-5. Heather (1991), 197-8. Burns (1992), 53. Lütkenhaus (1998), 76. Wolfram (1997), 146.
them Paulinus of Pella) as members of the new government and Athaulf himself
married Placidia in a Roman-style ceremony in Narbonne.

Some contemporaries regarded this marriage as the fulfilment of a prophecy in the
Book of Daniel of the marriage between the daughter of the king of the South and the
son of the king of the North. They was undoubtedly aware of this interpretation,
and as he was writing his history from an ecclesiastical standpoint it was very
important for him that it was not the Christians who were responsible for the gradual
breakdown of imperial structures. Yet there was a problem with this interpretation:
the Goths had become major players in political and military matters, but as Arians
they belonged to a heretical group and posed a problem for this concept; the marriage
of their leader with a daughter of the imperial house added a further element of
complexity to this, especially when it had posed an obvious defiance of imperial
orders. A way for Orosius to interpret this problem could have been to present the
Goths and especially their leader as wanting to preserve peace and being interested in
using their military power for the restoration and continuation of the Roman empire.
Besides, imperial ideology dictated that there was only one empire, namely a Roman
and Christian one, hence Orosius almost had no other choice than to present Athaulf
as engaging in preserving *Romania* with Gothic power. Also Placidia’s presentation
as having a profound impact on Athaulf would certainly fit into this picture: Placidia
as an orthodox Christian could not only be seen as influencing Athaulf in the
religious sphere, but also to fight for the imperial house, whose representative she
was. Orosius might also have used Athaulf and his representation in his histories in
much the same way as Salvian used the barbarians: to depict the Gothic leader as
having the wellbeing of the Roman state more in his heart, despite not being a
Roman himself, than the emperor or his courtiers, would have served as a mirror to

---

demonstrate the lack of morale and values among the Romans. Considering all these possible interpretations, there is ample scope to doubt Athaulf ever having made such a statement about his political intentions, and even if he hinted at some such view, how much was later the expression of Orosius’ writings. Lütkenhaus for one doubts that contemporaries believed in any attempts to turn such rhetoric into a serious political programme. However, I do believe that there was indeed more to Athaulf’s statement than the mere expressions of contemporary writings or ecclesiastically inspired interpretations. The fact that the Goths were to a large extent dependent on the help of the Gallic aristocracy for accessing supplies would have turned Athaulf’s statement into a shrewd political move to convince influential aristocrats to lend their support to the Gothic cause. In an interesting analogy, Alaric had already made a similar statement shortly before his final attack on Rome, when he promised to use Gothic strength to fight for Roman interests and to regard Rome’s enemies as a common enemy. Of course Alaric had proved ready to issue such statements yet remaining essentially hostile to Rome in order to gain maximum advantage for Gothic interests, and perhaps such a comment should not be taken as a serious political programme, especially when he tried to gain access to larger supplies; however, it is interesting that a very similar concept was to emerge under Athaulf in what was essentially the same situation when he largely relied on the support of the Gallo-Romans. Whether that was a sign of a political concept, though, which had started already under Alaric and resurfaced under Athaulf, yet was never taken seriously by the Roman side, is impossible to say. Furthermore, the aristocrats who attended the wedding in Narbonne belonged to a group of Gallic nobles whose relationship with Ravenna was more than strained after the Jovinus-episode; for example the family of one of the attendants, Rusticus, had suffered badly as a result.

---

75 Zosimus, V.50. See also Díaz (1999), 329.
of the prosecution of Jovinus’ followers. These people would have looked for a political alternative to the present regime in Ravenna and for Athaulf to exploit these rifts by helping them to fight this faction at Ravenna, as well as restoring Roman strength, would have made ample sense.

Athaulf’s earlier claims to replace Romania with Gothia and to become what Caesar Augustus had been had been a direct challenge to Honorius’ position as emperor. To digress here briefly: increasingly barbarian kings were to start adopting the imperial trappings of presenting a ruler on coinage and other objects not only as a way to imitate Roman culture, but as these visual images conveyed a message of imperial unity and power, so representing themselves in the same way was an attempt to transfer the same political message. In Elsner’s words, the ‘emperor’s image…gave access [through viewing and ritual] to the holy presence of a living god, or in Christian times to the chosen representative of God, under whose protection the civilised world had been placed’ as the emperor ‘was not merely a person, he was the definition and symbol of the nature of the Roman state.’

For a barbarian king to use such imagery and propaganda such as the concept of restoring Roman interests and values as Athaulf did was not only meant as an open appreciation of Roman culture but far more that he understood himself to be the rightful successor to the message this imperial imagery carried and ultimately to imperial authority. Athaulf’s use of a language of ‘restoring’ Roman order goes as far back as Augustus’ concept of ‘restoring republican values’ and clearly demonstrates a far more ambitious political

\[76\] Ammianus described the entrance of Constantius into Rome, giving a striking image of this power personified in the emperor, A.M.,16.10 (for the city of Rome in late antiquity, see for example Alföldi (2001)). Carolingian architecture for example deliberately evoked comparisons with imperial buildings in Rome. Furthermore Charlemagne crowned himself emperor at Rome in 800 and presented himself not only as a Frankish king but also as the continuator and successor of the old Roman empire. The process of merging Roman imagery and mythology with barbarian art was very longstanding as for example Lucian’s comment in the second century on Celtic representations of Heracles demonstrates. Wood (1997), 116-22. Elsner (1998), 27-30, 53-87, 136-8. Kelly (2001), 171-6,182. Millar (1967). Ferris (2000), 176-7.
concept than a mere challenge to replace Honorius as the dominant military power; thus Athaulf put himself as a rightful claimant of imperial power and its message of preserving and enhancing Roman values; thus in championing a political concept based on Augustan precedent, his political agenda would allow him to be portrayed as a second Augustus, and therefore as a new saviour-like figure to restore Rome to its glory and to lead it to a second Golden Age.

His marriage with Placidia added dynastical claim to this as he entered into a marriage alliance with the imperial house, and with this he could potentially claim access to the imperial throne; after all, Constantius’ later marriage to Placidia made him eventually co-emperor with Honorius. It is interesting then that Athaulf decided to marry Placidia as he must have been aware of these dynastic implications, but also that their child was named Theodosius, thus demonstrating the hope to unite Gothic and Roman power in one person. Furthermore, if one takes the approach that Placidia served much the same purpose as Alaric’s siege of Rome Athaulf deliberately rejected her value as a pawn by marrying her because her exchange in return for grain had been part of any further negotiations with Ravenna. Considering how important access to supplies was for his group, Placidia thus must have had a strong impact on Athaulf, which would make her political influence on him plausible. Another indication that there must have been more to Athaulf’s remark than mere ideological interpretation from Orosius is the fact that coinage issued by Attalus around the same time talked about a *restitutio rei publicae* which was (in terms of coinage) a unique occurrence at that specific time; the fact that Attalus was entirely dependent on Gothic military power must have meant that his political programme of restoration was equally dependent on Gothic help and thus directly

---

77 Honorius was childless despite being married twice, so any of Placidia’s children were the obvious heirs to the Western throne; the baby Theodosius, though, died shortly after his birth. In Heather’s opinion, the choice of the baby’s name indicates that Athaulf himself wanted to become the power behind the throne, Heather (1996), 149.
supported by Athaulf. How Athaulf’s followers regarded his political concept cannot be established; later his short-lived successor Sigeric (Sarus’ brother) would openly distance himself from him when he murdered Athaulf’s children from his first marriage to a Gothic woman, and forced his widow Placidia to walk some miles in front of his horse; such an open humiliation of someone who represented both Athaulf’s politics and imperial links was clearly an indicator that he distanced himself from Athaulf’s policy; whether, though, that was just an expression of a personal feud or indeed a public rejection of the political programme of his predecessor is impossible to say. Much later in the Ostrogothic kingdom, some of the nobles were to regard Amalasuntha’s classical education and her contact with the Eastern court as a severe threat to Ostrogothic culture and political interests, which eventually led to her assassination. Whether a similar faction was present among Athaulf’s followers, who regarded a pro-Roman policy as threatening Gothic interests, and perhaps found its expression in Sarus’ and Sigeric’s opposition, cannot be established.

If some of his followers harboured misgivings about Athaulf’s policy of a connection with the Gallic nobles, they soon found support for their opinion as the much-desired connection with the Gallic aristocracy soon came to an end. The reason was not so much a lack of commitment on both sides but Constantius’ continuous pressure on Gaul which broke the connection between parts of the Gallic nobility and the Goths. 414 saw a famine, which made the consistent food supplies for the Goths very problematic and increased the burden on the civitates although there was no open revolt against the Goths. Constantius’ decision to blockade the trade seriously threatened further supplies and was the main reason for Athaulf to retreat to Spain at the end of 414. During this move not only some of the Goths but also members of the

---

78 Lütkenhaus (1998), 80-2: the inscription on the coinage was deliberately used by Attalus to promote his political programme.
Roman population rioted against Attalus’ officials for their incompetence in dealing with this crisis, which was further complicated by the deserting of Alanic troops who had been fighting with the Goths. Overall Athaulf’s politics had failed, as the alliance with the Gallic nobles had not been strong enough to endure Constantius’ pressure and the fragmentation of Gallic interests. There were still no guaranteed supplies or a territory for settlement; Athaulf could not return Placidia without losing face, and as Ravenna regarded her return as an essential part of the negotiations any further exchange with the court was severed. In summer 415, though, Athaulf was killed in Barcelona. Considering the fact that Athaulf had faced the problems of supplies and a settlement already at the time of his succession to power, his rule had failed. However, it was under his rule that the Goths had increasingly developed into a coherent group, indeed became a people who were to settle in Aquitaine under his successor Wallia in 418.

Whatever Alaric’s aim had been when he had so fiercely demanded a military title from the Roman authorities, whether he had entered the army already with the aim to gain power among his Gothic followers, whether he intended to use a military title to affirm his power-position among his own people against other contenders, or whether he hoped to use it as a form of assimilating barbarian power with Roman authority, is open to question. Alaric’s start as the leader of an auxiliary contingent within the imperial army does not mean that the group around him represented a band of troops revolting against the empire or that Alaric’s position is a choice

79 The presence of these Alanic contingents is an indicator of how fluent these groups still were in terms of temporarily or permanently absorbing people from outside their group. Constantius also blocked the Pyrenean passes which stopped the Goths from moving back into Gaul when their raids in Spain had met with little success. Paulinus of Pella himself got entangled in this resistance near Bazas. Paulinus, Euch. 285-8, 330-40. Orosius, VII.43. Olympiodorus, frs. 22.1-1, 24. Liebeschuetz (1990), 73. Lütkenhaus (1998), 83-6. Matthews (1975), 316 for unrest in Africa.
between presenting him either as a military leader or a Gothic king.\textsuperscript{81} The service within the imperial army gave Alaric a basis from which he could develop his own power, a fact also highlighted by his continuous request for a Roman military title. As he started his career within the imperial army, he was certainly a military leader, not least in the Roman view, but there is no information whether or not this included an already existing leading position among his own people. Thus, Alaric should be seen as a military leader who eventually became the leader of a group that was gradually to develop into a nation; it is not so much a question of regarding Alaric and his group either as a nation or an army (to borrow here the term from Liebeschuetz), but rather to see this group developing from a strong military starting point into a nation. Alaric, regardless of what his social position among his people encompassed before he entered the Roman sphere, was the dynamic force behind this development. Yet it does not follow that he ‘created’ the Goths as a people – his was a group which was transformed under his and Athaulf’s leadership into one of the first barbarian ‘superpowers’ and became successful enough to withstand Roman resistance and thus to develop further. Athaulf certainly had taken a firm step towards connecting concepts of Gothic leadership with Roman imperial power, hoping to consolidate such a programme not only by his marriage to Placidia but even in the future of his and Placidia’s so poignantly named son Theodosius; it was only under Theoderic II and especially under Euric that the concept of understanding Gothic kingship merged firmly with Roman concepts of power and authority.\textsuperscript{82} Interestingly Theoderic II continued the link between the Gothic court and the Gallic aristocracy Athaulf had created, when he supported the Gallic nobles in their choice to make Avitus emperor (the Gallic nobility needed the military support of the Goths

\textsuperscript{81} Díaz (1999), 327-9.
\textsuperscript{82} See Díaz (1999), 330-5 for the further development of Gothic understanding of royal power. See also Part II.1.
as did Avitus). According to Sidonius, there is also an echo to Athaulf’s earlier political programme when Theoderic says of Avitus that he had helped him to understand that Roman laws are pleasing to him as is peace \(^83\). Sidonius’ audience in Rome did not favourably regard such a strong connection between the emperor and the Goths, and Avitus fell from power within a year when he lacked the Italian support. \(^84\) However, Sidonius’ praise of the Gothic king formed part of his overall pro-Roman treatment of Theoderic II, a concept that was connected to Sidonius’ own close relationship with Avitus and support of the Gallic cause; \(^85\) thus the extent to which Theoderic made such comments as part of his own political conviction or to regard himself as a political successor of Athaulf, has to remain open.

As has been seen, the development of the Goths under Athaulf was intrinsically linked with Gaul and the Gallic aristocracy. Athaulf’s intended political programme, already supported by a group of aristocrats, had further fostered a need among the Gallic nobility in general to start to assimilate with the Gothic establishment. The next part of the thesis will look in more detail at this relationship, and how the Gallo-Romans regarded their socio-political position in a changing world.

---


\(^{84}\) Mathisen & Sivan (1999 c), 17-9; there is an inscription existing which is dated to the reign of king Thorismund (451-53), addressing him as *dominus noster* which for Mathisen & Sivan indicates that the Gothic kings regarded themselves now as equal in status to the Roman emperor.

\(^{85}\) See also pp.183-4.
Part III. The Gallo-Romans and the Goths

Contemporary Roman writers often talked of a disruption and subsequent decline of Roman lifestyle and culture once the barbarian peoples had moved into the empire for good. This part of the thesis will examine whether the Roman population really seriously suffered from the settlement of non-Roman peoples on their land, what it meant in terms of disruption or even extinction of Roman lifestyle, or whether such statements were more the expressions of specific intentions of the authors expressed in literature, which had little resemblance with actual reality. There is a lot to be said for both sides, and to an extent integration between the new peoples and the Roman population was not possible without some disruption or at least alterations of former concepts of lifestyle and culture; in fact it was this process of alteration and adaptation to a different world which created the basis for integration and assimilation between the two sides.

The first chapter will look at the actual settlement of the Goths in Aquitaine since this formed the basis from which any further development of either rejection or integration stemmed, as the Gothic settlement was a political fact which the Roman population had to come to terms with. The second chapter will then look at questions of disruptions of Roman culture due to an unprecedented barbarian presence and interference in Roman lifestyle and how the Roman population reacted to this. The third chapter will look at specific aspects of integration and indeed absorption into Gothic rule as another way to establish a common basis for living. Finally it will glance at a specific way of adaptation with the new political system, that is the world of the bishop, as an alternative to Roman or Gothic rule.
1. Athaulf’s succession

a) Wallia and the question of settlement

Let us turn then to the eventual Gothic settlement in Aquitaine and its significance for the development of concepts of adaptation to a new lifestyle. Athaulf’s eventual successor Wallia stood in no family connection with Alaric or Athaulf, as Athaulf’s murder by some opponents, perhaps including Sigeric, had disrupted any dynastic hereditary system. Only Theoderic was to establish a dynasty with a succession-line, and although he was married to a daughter or sister of Alaric there is no reason to believe that he was elected on the basis of being a relative of Alaric.¹ Orosius reported that Wallia was elected as Athaulf’s successor due to his promise to pursue a strict policy of anti-Roman politics.² Whether such a promise really demonstrated a true intention of reversing previous ideas of restoring Romanitas with Gothic help and to stop further steps towards assimilation with the Roman world, or more a desperate attempt of Wallia to find another way to establish Gothic success, is impossible to say. Furthermore, as said before, there is of course the difficulty of how far Athaulf’s comment on restoration can be taken seriously and thus how far Orosius had to create this dichotomy between him and his successor. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, there is much to be said for taking Athaulf’s remark of restoration as a serious political programme. Yet Athaulf’s politics had not gained the desired independence for the Goths and thus it would have made sense for Wallia to distance himself from the politics of his predecessor. However Wallia’s

¹ Orosius, VII.40 described Athaulf only as a kinsman of Alaric without giving any more detail about the family relationship between the two. Zosimus stated Athaulf as Alaric’s brother-in-law, V.37. See also Heather (1992), 87. Wolfram (1990), 99.
² Orosius, VII.43.
attempt to cross into Africa as a way to secure guaranteed grain supplies without imperial interference failed, and Constantius’ blockade made a return to Gaul and perhaps a plan to renew cooperation with the Gallic aristocracy futile. Eventually Wallia concluded a treaty with the empire in 416 AD, and in contrast to Athaulf he was able to return Placidia without losing face – thus fulfilling one of the obligations of renewed contacts with Ravenna. In Lütkenhaus’ opinion, Wallia could even strengthen his position with this treaty, and if one accepts Wallia’s earlier political plans as anti-Roman, this treaty was indeed improving Wallia’s position, when his previous political programme had gained nothing to support the Gothic population in terms of supplies, which were badly needed.\(^3\)

With the Gothic population numbering between 80,000-100,000 people, a guaranteed grain supply continued to be of vital importance and Placidia’s return to Ravenna brought 600,000 *modii* of grain for the Goths; in return the Goths had to provide military support for the imperial army.\(^4\) That formula would have pointed more towards the normal treatment of mercenaries, who received payment in return for military service, and thus would have stood in the traditional way in which previous negotiations between Goths and Romans had been concluded. However, this time it also explicitly featured land for farming, thus land for a permanent settlement.\(^5\)

Although Alaric had already demanded land as part of his negotiations, the factor of a permanent settlement now points towards a much more established form of political and social unity among the Goths; this in turn leads to the question whether the Goths had now become a nation or were still a conglomerate of various different

\(^3\) Orosius, VII.43.10. Lütkenhaus (1998), 88-90: there is a debate whether the crossing to Africa was a mere plan or in fact an actual failed attempt. Be that as it may, the fact alone that Wallia was contemplating such a move is surely reason enough to see how important the grain supplies were for the Gothic population.

\(^4\) Precise numbers for the Gothic population are difficult to establish with numbers fluctuating due to military defeat or diseases, though presumably numbers would have kept fairly high by people joining the Goths from outside. Nixon (1992), 65-8.

groups cooperating only for their political advantage against Rome. It is true that the
Goths continued to cooperate with various other, different ethnic groups, undoubtedly for their mutual political advantage, and that these alliances were at times prone to break; I would argue, though, that the granting of a specific territory for permanent settlement was an expression of imperial acceptance of Gothic independence and their status as a nation, albeit without an actual country of their own. Even the subsequent Gothic employment in imperial service to fight the Vandals and Alans on the Iberian Peninsula did not diminish the empire’s acceptance of Gothic strength as a fact. Indeed their employment against the new barbarian groups in Spain suggests that Ravenna was happier to accept Gothic power and to find a modus vivendi with them than to make arrangements with the Vandals and their allies. In 418 the Goths under Wallia’s successor Theoderic I moved back to Gaul and finally settled in Aquitaine.

Although the Gothic position was one of relative weakness, there was no reason on the Roman side to doubt Gothic strength or their existence as an independent people. In fact part of the reason why the empire had settled them in Gaul was to provide a higher degree of stability in an area that had suffered from recurring tendencies of internal unrest, large-scale devastations due to the movements of the Alans, Vandals and Suebes. The Goths were a welcome military help as long as they continued to serve the Roman cause, in much the same way as Athaulf’s statement of preserving Roman strength through Gothic power had dreamt of. Mathisen has argued that Constantius’ decision to move the Goths into Aquitaine was effectively a confirmation that both the Rhine and Britain had ceased to be under Roman rule; the

---

6 If the decision to have the Goths fighting in Spain was an attempt to diminish their power it failed nor did it stop the emergence of a new barbarian superpower, namely that of the Vandals. Burns (1992), 53-6. Bachrach (1969), 355-7. See also Collins (2006), 26-37 and Mathisen & Sivan (1999 c), 9.
7 Wolfram (1997), 147.
area given to the Goths as a settlement served as a buffer-zone designed by Constantius to protect Italy and the Mediterranean; furthermore, it meant that Aquitaine was by now considered by the imperial authorities as a marginalised area, good enough to help serve imperial interest but not important enough any more to be taken into serious consideration for continued imperial protection. Bearing in mind the recurring differences many members of the Gallic nobility had with the imperial administration (see below), such a territorial reorganisation by Constantius would undoubtedly have been viewed with suspicion by them, and may have made some of them even more perceptible to support Athaulf’s attempts to create a political cooperation with the Gallic aristocracy, or at least to use the Goths as a vehicle to oppose the government in Ravenna because of its treatment of Gallic interests.

Yet even the eventual settlement should not be seen as a sign that differences within Gothic society about succession to the leadership were entirely solved, or that the Goths were operating entirely on their own. Their alliances with other barbarian peoples continued, for example Paulinus of Pella mentioned a group of Alans who acted as allies although they were to break this bond during the siege of Bazas. The successor of Theoderic I, Theoderic II, incorporated some, though not all, of his brothers into his administration on the basis of a power-share; indeed one of them left out was Euric, who promptly killed his brother Theoderic II to succeed him. Not all of this was entirely due to brotherly rivalry, but underlying problems with nobles who played an important role in the exercise and distribution of power were still found as late as the fifth century. Paulinus mentioned Athaulf’s concern over the consultation of his advisors whose ideas he had to incorporate in his politics in order

---

Mathisen & Sivan (1999 c), 6-7, 8-10.
to pacify them; also Sidonius talked of Gothic elders or nobles sitting in a council as advisors to the king.\footnote{Paulinus, \textit{Euch.} 357-63, 377-99. Sid. Ap., \textit{Carm.} VI. 451-7; \textit{Ep.} I. 2. 4. See also Heather (1992), 87-9.}

Any Gothic settlement in Gaul had to be as little disruptive to Gallo-Roman life as possible to avoid unrest. Indeed the Goths had already had some sort of cooperation with the Gallo-Roman aristocracy under Athaulf, but then there had been no question of a permanent settlement and ultimately the burden on the Gallic administration had proven to be too heavy to sustain any cooperation between the two sides. This time, Gaul had already suffered from the serious disruptions because of the movements of the Vandals, Alans and Suebes to Spain, and it faced further serious trouble with the revolt of the \textit{Bacaudae}. It could be that Constantius now tried to settle the Goths in order to stop any further spread of the \textit{Bacaudic} revolts as the Goths would fight to preserve their own territory, and thus automatically defend the Roman landowners too. Bachrach, however, regards the idea of the imperial government using the Goths to control the \textit{Bacaudae} as seriously doubtful and argues that this would portray the imperial government in a much stronger position in terms of having retained administrative influence in Gaul than was actually the case.\footnote{Liebeschuetz (1990), 74. Matthews (1975), 307, 320. Nixon (1992), 70-1. Thompson (1956), 66-9. Bachrach (1969), 354. For the activities of the \textit{Bacaudae}, their origins and the meanings of their revolts, see Drinkwater (1984), 349-71; (1989), 189-203; (1992), 208-17. Van Dam (1985). Rubin (1995). See also further below.} Besides, the Gallo-Roman communities presumably had already suffered too much from the Vandal movements in order to stage any serious opposition to the Gothic settlement. As will be seen further below, there was in fact very little active resistance from the Gallo-Roman population against the new settlers.

Although the exact terms of the settlement are somewhat ambiguous, it seems that the Goths received payment only in return for military assistance, which was most likely negotiated individually on each occasion; the actual land for settlement in the
Garonne valley from Toulouse to Bordeaux was presumably managed on the basis of the *hospitalitas* system. As will be discussed in the next chapter, this process of accommodating the Goths on Roman soil had a dramatic impact on the traditional culture of the Roman population and brought on serious changes, whatever the intrinsic details of the actual workings of the settlement were.

---

11 Hydatius, 69. Philostorgius, 12.4. Burns (1992), 58, 60. Heather (1991), 221. Nixon (1992), 71. Barnish (1986). The term *hospitalitas* was originally used in connection with the billeting of soldiers, describing a temporary method by which mobile military units were housed; soldiers billeted on private estates could receive up to one-third of the house for their use. In the nineteenth century E. Gaupp based his theory of the accommodation of barbarians on this system, arguing that the Roman estates were divided into fractions of a third between Roman owner and barbarian host who would then gradually gain full legal power of his allotted part. How the *hospitalitas*-system changed from a temporary arrangement of military billeting into a term for permanent land tenure is unclear, see also Mathisen & Sivan (1999 c), 12.
b) The question of *hospitalitas*

There are numerous arguments about the exact details of how the *hospitalitas* system worked, whether it implied divisions of land and/or revenues or both, and the extent of the share the Goths received; it is outside the scope of this chapter to discuss the full arguments on this controversial topic but it is important to investigate its overall pattern in order to understand the consequences for the way in which Romans and Goths had to live together. Goffart’s interpretation of this system was based on the division of tax-revenues rather than land: two-thirds were given to the barbarians (one-third to the king, one-third to his followers), the remaining third stayed with the Romans; in terms of accommodation, the barbarians were allowed the use of one-third of the house of the Roman owner.\(^\text{12}\) Wolfram agreed with the argument of tax-divisions, as did Durliat who argued that the imperial administration redirected the tax income of the barbarian settlements to the new inhabitants, which therefore meant not the expropriation of existing ownership but the transfer of taxes. In his opinion the cities came to play an important part in transferring the taxes, paying two-thirds of the tax revenues directly to the barbarians who were responsible for the administration and defence of their settlement areas, and retaining one-third for urban expenses. Liebeschuetz rejects this idea on the basis that cities did not share one-third of the imperial tax income but one-third of their own customs. Furthermore, the idea of tax-divisions does not work for him, on the basis of a Visigothic law which stated that the Goths were to receive a share of the land and not of revenues, even if contemporary sources failed to declare the explicit use of land for farming; equally difficult for him is Goffart’s failure to distinguish between temporary settlements and settlements designed to be permanent as well as his

assumption that all settlements worked in the same way as such terms varied
according to the political circumstances.\(^\text{13}\) Heather regards Goffart’s idea as ‘partly
convincing’ but for the settlement of 418 he argues that land division remained the
central question.\(^\text{14}\) Indeed Philostorgius explicitly referred to land that was given to
the Goths, and does not mention any sharing of tax-revenues. However, there is a
problem with this passage: as the Goths received the grain supplies in exchange for
Placidia already in 416 AD and the settlement in Aquitaine took place two years
later, Philostorgius perhaps merged the two treaties into one event.\(^\text{15}\) Nixon too
rejects Goffart’s idea on the basis that it is not only in contradiction to the sources
but also that in his opinion there was enough land available to accommodate foreign
settlers as well as an urgent need for agricultural cultivation. In his opinion, the
movements of the Vandals and Alans as well as the previous Gothic wanderings had
undoubtedly caused some degree of devastation in Gaul, which meant that the southern parts and especially Aquitaine suffered from \textit{agri deserti} as many
landowners had been killed or would have fled the area; the imperial government
could then settle the Goths in this area, fulfilling their request for a territory for
settlement and at the same time using them to restore the economic profit of the
Aquitaine territory.\(^\text{16}\) According to Burns, farming of this area also reduced the costs
for the upkeep of the \textit{limes}. Due to its unstable political situation, Gaul required a
certain military presence but the imperial administration was unable to change the
usual division of tax-revenues the regular Roman troops received; what was
therefore needed were low-maintenance troops, and thus the Goths could be

\(^\text{14}\) Heather (1991), 222, n.83; (1996), 182.
\(^\text{15}\) Philostorgius, 12.4-5=Olympiodorus, fr. 26.2.
employed for precisely this scheme as they would receive land as well as benefits in return for their military service.\textsuperscript{17}

Another question the *hospitalitas* system posed is whether barbarian landowners were liable to pay taxes or not. Wolfram argues that barbarian settlers were liable to taxation like their Roman counterparts as theoretically anyone holding property was subject to taxation; according to Nixon, though, it is unlikely that the Goths paid any taxes to the Roman government and any taxes levied in Gothic territory went to its own court. Furthermore, the Goths maintained a standing army, which had to be paid presumably from tax-money. The Roman landowners as taxpayers therefore provided the means for this money and were thus enormously important for the Gothic establishment both economically as well as militarily. Hence as long as Roman interests did not question Gothic dominance, there was no reason whatsoever on the Gothic side to oppose the Roman population and thus there was relatively little serious resistance on the Roman side against the new political regime. Besides, Wolfram argued that the *hospitalitas* system fails to account for the fact that the Roman population lacked any serious resistance against giving up as much as two-thirds of their property to the barbarian newcomers; for Wolfram and Collins the system thus must have employed an accepted and familiar system of accommodating the Goths, particularly since the sources fail to record it as outstanding and the Roman population offered so little opposition to it.\textsuperscript{18} Considering the recurring tensions and accusations by the Gallo-Roman aristocracy of a lack of interest in Gallic matters by the imperial government on the part of the imperial system, a

\textsuperscript{17} Burns (1992), 57-63.
\textsuperscript{18} Wolfram (1997), 112-5. The case of the Ostrogoths demonstrates that, depending on their individual status, they were assigned to certain *civitates* alongside the Roman population and were granted accommodation as well as a share in the tax-exemption (*sors*) of the third (*tertia*) of the regular land tax (*annona*). According to Barnish (1986), 192-3, the Vandal *sortes* were tax-exempt too, and tax-*sortes* could be turned into land-holdings, which consequently meant that the imperial administration lost any claim on them. Barnish (1986), 176-7. Liebeschuetz (1997), 144-7. Collins (2006), 34-5. Mathisen & Sivan (1999 c), 12-5.
hospitalitas system which inflicted too much damage on the aristocracy, especially concerning their interests in agriculture and real estate, is unlikely. Mathisen’s argument that the choice of Aquitaine for the Gothic settlement was part of Constantius’ reorganisation of imperial territory in the West, which thus marginalised this part of Gaul, is also interesting in this context. Constantius’ concept would undoubtedly have angered at least some of the Gallic aristocracy as being treated in this negligent way by the imperial authorities; thus the disruptive nature of the terms of the hospitalitas-system must have been kept to a minimum as any serious damage to their financial and agricultural interests due to the hospitalitas offered to the Goths would have further aggravated the Gallic aristocracy and would have undermined any support on their side for Constantius. Whatever system was therefore employed must have been designed to cause as little disturbance as possible. For example Paulinus of Pella suffered more loss of property because he had no Gothic lodgers on his estate, which implies that the Gothic settlers were not necessarily perceived as a cause of great damage to the running of the estate.\textsuperscript{19} As said above, Philostorgius explicitly mentioned land in connection with the settlement of 418, which was echoed in a sixth century law-code of Leovigild’s, and it would have made little sense for the sixth century law to refer back to the original setup and to ask those who had taken more than their two-third share to return the surplus.\textsuperscript{20} Although it is certainly possible that a redistribution of land was part of the arrangement, Collins argues that this would have been totally unprecedented, although of course this does not exclude its invention; as said before, expropriation of arable land would have potentially harmed aristocratic interests –

\textsuperscript{19} Another reason for Paulinus’ loss of property was the interference of members of his own family; see also Part III.2.

\textsuperscript{20} Heather (1996), 182, 284. See also Mathisen & Sivan (1999 c), 23-7 for the recurring issue of land tenure found in the C. Euric. in the 470s: any property transactions under Roman rule before the Gothic settlement were to remain in power; another aspect was to do with claims resulting from the division of land.
judging from Paulinus of Pella, though, there were Gothic settlers on Roman estates, but these were not perceived as a serious problem. As the sources state explicitly the use of land-distribution, there is no reason to doubt them: as Mathisen & Sivan have rightly stated: ‘If the Goths were banned from land tenure...where did they actually live?’\textsuperscript{21}

Nixon’s and Burns’ proposal (see above) is certainly convincing, especially when this meant the ultimate preservation of aristocratic interests in agricultural production. I would argue that there was indeed a re-distribution of land (the incorporation of deserted territory given to Gothic settlers for farming), which was designed to create as little disruption as possible to Gallo-Roman interests, although for me the question of taxation has to remain open; presumably there was a different distribution of tax, which as Collins suggested, might have incorporated some part of tax payments going to Gothic settlers instead of an increasingly inefficient imperial administration.\textsuperscript{22} If the Goths indeed received deserted land to settle, I would suggest that they paid tax from this land as they were landholders and thus liable to pay taxation. Part of this money then would have gone to the Romans, which thus preserved aristocratic interests, because, although they had lost the land as possession, the nobility still gained some profit from it in terms of tax income; this would have given them little reason to complain as the Goths were re-cultivating land, which meant no extra work for the Roman side whilst gaining financial benefit from it.

Whatever then the real workings of the system were which was used to accommodate the Goths in Aquitaine, it was certainly more complex than a mere question of open rejection or acceptance. The lack of recorded active resistance does not automatically mean that the Goths were completely accepted as the new political

\textsuperscript{21} Mathisen & Sivan (1999 c), 13. See also Chrysos (1989 b).
\textsuperscript{22} Collins (2006), 34-5, following Goffart and Durliat.
regime, or that the Roman population did not offer some rejection of their rule, be
that either direct or indirect opposition. As will be seen in the next chapter, there
were many ways in which both sides came to accept each other or at least to find
some common ground.
As could be seen in the previous chapter, the way in which barbarian newcomers came to be settled on Roman soil poses serious questions about its exact mechanisms. Particularly questions of property and possession of land and its management, but also its further consequences such as the extent and/or continuation of political influence, pose profound problems. Whichever system was eventually applied to accommodate the Goths in Aquitaine, it meant some sort of change for the Roman landowner and the way in which he had to manage his own property.  

R. Mathisen is surely right in saying that contemporary accounts only present the ‘tip of the iceberg’ and that there were very few indeed who were not affected by these complex changes. This close proximity with the Goths and other barbarians caused some friction, especially when the barbarian establishments gained much more political and military strength. Besides, as soon as the imperial administration was no longer able to impose its control in the traditional way, Roman provincial life and order was in danger of suffering from mismanagement, political unrest and uprisings, but above all the Roman population was left to deal alone with the new political situation: as will be seen later, there were several difficulties with this. One was that some provinces, indeed especially Gaul, were already prone to feel
neglected by the imperial government, which in turn created a frequently occurring political instability in this region; the establishment of Gothic power there only added to this rather unbalanced state. Furthermore, when left alone, some members of the Roman aristocracy developed a level of assimilation with the new forces which stood in sharp contrast to their loyalty to the Roman state; indeed active cooperation with the new government was effectively treason against the imperial government – even if it had become a necessary and often vitally important matter to find a level of active interaction with the barbarian kingdoms. But what was perhaps the most worrying aspect of such concepts of political and to some extent cultural assimilation for many Romans was the fact that many aristocrats involved increasingly regarded such matters far less as treason than as a form of political advancement or preservation of their socio-political position. Overall it was a long-term process for both sides but perhaps it was not so much a question of how much the Romans lost and how much the barbarians gained, but rather how much the distinct diversities between them gave way to the formation of a new society and a new political order. On the basis that many of the great Gallic families were able to continue their traditional lifestyle or at least to assimilate with the new regimes, J. Matthews has argued that the impact the new barbarian establishments had on provincial life was often far less destructive than some of the contemporary sources want us to believe.25 I agree with Matthews’ statement, although I do not completely reject the notion of violent clashes between Romans and barbarians; yet one ought to be wary of the idea of big battles between two gigantic forces as the only decisive form of contact. When confrontations happened, they happened on various levels and it was not only Roman versus barbarian, but also Roman versus Roman and barbarian against barbarian; indeed the concept of confrontation between Romans

and barbarians should be interpreted more in terms of a process of not only accepting
or rejecting changes in the social, cultural and political landscape but also actively
participating in a changing world. Clashes occurred when this process was not
accepted or no common denominator could be found.

The following examples of Gallic aristocrats and other Roman fugitives by no means
provide an exhaustive overview but they highlight some specific cases of direct
Roman-Gothic (or other barbarian) contact before the firmer establishment of mutual
consent or at least acceptance. They also emphasise the highly individual responses
to the political climate in Gaul, which varied from resignation or withdrawal from
political involvement to active personal resistance or the promotion of Roman
interests.
There are numerous examples of people whose life was directly or indirectly affected by the Gothic settlement in Aquitaine or by the establishment of barbarian power in general. Paulinus of Pella wrote a personal account of his turbulent life, the *Eucharisticon*, spanning from his wealthy youth to the loss of his property to the Goths in his later life, reducing the scion of a wealthy Roman family to unfamiliar levels of poverty. Yet the *Eucharisticon* is more than a mere description of political events affecting an individual, as Paulinus wrote it at the end of his life when he had tried to convert to a religious lifestyle; like so many things he tried, he did not quite succeed in keeping to a strict monastic life but it does highlight an interesting fact – that of entering religious orders. As will be discussed in a later chapter, the concept of entering monastic orders, either as a way to renounce or escape complicated or even dangerous socio-political events, or to replace the potential or actual loss of worldly social status and political influence by gaining ecclesiastical positions, became an important feature of late antique lifestyle among the aristocracy. Moreover Paulinus’ attempts to regain some of his lost property and to try to re-establish himself can also be found in other accounts of contemporaries. Paulinus’ life is a very good example not only of the disruption of former Roman life many of the Gallic aristocrats had to face but also of the complex and even at times awkward attempts to assimilate with the barbarians.

Paulinus had been born at Pella in Macedonia in 376 AD as the son of the *vicarius* of Macedonia and sometime proconsul of Africa. Sent to the vast country estate of his family in Bordeaux in Gaul when he was two years old, he grew up in the

---

26 Sivan (1993), 49-73.
comfortable yet modest lifestyle in the countryside the provincial Roman aristocracy enjoyed: ‘a house equipped with spacious apartments and at all times suited to meet the varying seasons of the year, my table lavish and attractive, my servants many…the furniture abundant…plate more preeminent in price than poundage, workmen of divers crafts trained promptly to fulfil my behests, my stables filled with well-conditioned beasts…state carriages to convey me safe abroad’. The movements of Athaulf’s Goths into Gaul in 411, their involvement in Jovinus’ uprising and Gallic affairs in general put an end to this prosperous lifestyle. As previously seen, the mechanisms of the accommodation of barbarians under the hospitalitas are these days widely disputed; according to Paulinus, though, this system had its advantages in serving as a certain level of protection for the Roman owner against potential plunder because the Gothic lodgers too depended on the economic prosperity and continuation of the Roman estate. Unfortunately for him, Paulinus did not have such lodgers – presumably his involvement in Gotho-Roman politics as a member of Attalus’ court had granted him exemption from that – which resulted in 414 in the loss of a substantial part of his inherited estate and of his mother’s property in Bordeaux to Gothic looting. Although the loss of property cost Paulinus dearly, none of the members of his household suffered any injury, deportation or got killed; though Paulinus’ account is by no means the only decisive account of the nature of Gothic looting, there was far less open bloodshed than some of the other contemporary accounts make us believe. There were undoubtedly several cases of imprisonment and at times deaths of aristocratic landowners, yet most of these fatalities were often the bitter result of failed political ambitions and involvement on the wrong side rather than the result of any sort of deliberate Gothic

policy to kill as many Romans as possible. One of Paulinus’ two sons did die from
his active involvement at the Gothic court but Paulinus himself did not blame the
Gothic authorities for this but rather his son’s failed political ambitions. Furthermore, as previously discussed looting had been part of Gothic strategy for
some time as a tool to pressure the imperial government into negotiations and to gain
access to supplies; it would be foolish to minimise or neglect its impact on the
Roman population (both poor as well as aristocratic) yet it is important to distinguish
between a policy of raiding with the deliberate aim of destroying Roman culture, and
looting as an inevitable side-effect of politics. The notion of a deliberate motive on
the Gothic side to enter the empire only for plunder and killing is a distorted if not
altogether wrong picture; it is based very much on the accounts of contemporaries
like Hydatius or Victor of Vita who were writing in general from an ecclesiastical
point of view and were thus interpreting contemporary events with specific religious
motives in mind which might have had very little to do with actual political reality.
The Goths fought with the empire for the recognition of their political independence
and in that process raiding became a tool to pressure the imperial government,
precisely because of its effect on the Roman population, which in turn could move
the imperial authorities to counteract this impact by entering into negotiations; thus
the disruption of provincial life by barbarian raiding was the inevitable result of the
establishment of Gothic independence.

From his account it would be easy to portray Paulinus as the innocent victim of
Gothic vandalism who had nothing to do with them and who lost everything to the
machinations of Gothic politics; however, Paulinus’ involvement with the Goths was

description of the sack of Rome and the civil behaviour of the Goths especially in regards to the
Roman churches (echoed in one of St Jerome’s letters to Marcella, Ep.127) should be treated with
cautions though as it was most likely inspired by religious argumentation.
certainly more complex than that. The loss of his property was by no means only the result of Gothic looting but was the outcome of a feud between him and various members of his family, among them his brother, over the inheritance of his father and the grant of annual income to his mother. It seems that some of his relatives had used the political turmoil to help themselves to parts of Paulinus’ possessions, which left him unable to reclaim them – a phenomenon which seems to have been common practice for some time. McLynn argues that Paulinus’ sons might have persuaded their father to give them his Gallic estates and in return would have offered him a revenue from some of the income from these estates; but the sudden death of one of them and the ultimate death of the other due to his involvement at the Gothic court in Bordeaux left Paulinus’ former properties in the possession of his relatives. Equally the loss of his property in Marseilles was not the result of a deliberate Gothic looting, but Paulinus’ endeavour to find a new means of income had failed and he himself had sold it to a Goth; although the offered price for this property was in Paulinus’ words inadequate, it was nevertheless accepted by him, and there is nothing in this transaction which would have suggested a form of force or threat on the Gothic side. The inadequacy of the price seems to imply that the market at that point was swamped with too many similar properties – perhaps a sign that there will have been many more people like Paulinus who had suffered from the difficult social/political situation and had lost possessions or were forced to sell them in order to counteract poverty; the other possibility is that Paulinus desperately needed the money and was selling his property for an inadequate price rather than waiting for another buyer.

30 Informers who exploited the prevalent political instability between various barbarian kingdoms and the empire continued to exist even into Sidonius’ times, see for example Sid. Ap., Ep. V.7. In Paulinus’ case the situation was rather a family quarrel than a case of courtly interference.
31 Added to this was his failure to go to his Greek properties in Epirus as well as the demands of parts of his family to maintain them. Paulinus, Euch. 246-70, 422-30, 459-62, 482-95, 500-7, 512-5. McLynn (1995), 469-70, 475-7.
32 Paulinus, Euch. 422-4, 502,552-3, 556-60, 575-81. McLynn (1995), 478-81. His mother’s property in Epirus is not mentioned again and must have passed to another relative after her death as he would
Paulinus’ problems with retaining a continuous income based on his real estate were therefore as much part of the interference of his relatives as part of Gothic looting; the Gothic presence in Gaul played a disruptive role in Paulinus’ life but not necessarily a purely destructive one.

Although he does not mention it in any great detail, Paulinus was in fact by no means completely unacquainted with Gothic politics and the Gothic relationship with the Gallic aristocracy or with politics in general. Even if Paulinus’ own description of his upbringing and youth in the *Eucharisticon* gives the impression that he had never displayed any political ambitions nor that he had been groomed or pushed to enter any imperial office as his father and grandfather had done but had rather preferred to spend his youth in pursuit of luxurious leisure, he was nevertheless not completely unacquainted with the political world. Indeed he later became one of the ministers of Attalus’ government, which certainly confirms that Paulinus was directly involved in Gallic politics and had moreover a very close relationship with Attalus and thus ultimately with Athaulf. The reason for Paulinus’ lack of holding public offices or any serious education had been ill health in his youth, which was cured by a vigorous devotion to hunting although he returned to literature in old age. Yet the pursuit of hunting and other matters related to the countryside and the management of his estates were not a negative activity as Paulinus effectively worked to improve the estates, which essentially provided him and his family with food and above all with

---

have been solely dependent on his Gallic properties; the mentioning of his sons (*nati*) in this context is difficult as both his sons were already dead, so either he had more sons who were never mentioned in the text or he was referring to other relatives as *nati* as the term can also mean offspring and could therefore refer to other male relatives. There is also the possibility that the loss of Paulinus’ property was due to Paulinus’ support of Attalus, and that the imperial authorities had confiscated his property as a subsequent punishment, which left his land/property even readier for distribution among Gothic settlers; this could also explain the involvement of the Goth in the payment for the remaining interest of Paulinus’ former Aquitanian properties (his two sons had tried to reclaim part of the lost property but there was also a Gothic claimant to this, who might have been interested in buying the rest once Paulinus’ sons had died), see Mathisen & Sivan (1999 c), 26-7.

33 See p. 20.
his wealth.\textsuperscript{34} Besides, it was an activity that could be linked back as far as republican traditions of Roman values with the concept that aristocratic wealth had to be based on the possession and subsequently management of land. As will be seen further below, engagement in farming remained attractive for many members of the aristocracy: Sidonius had to remind some of his friends that they owed it to their ancient name and family to get involved in politics and to leave the countryside at least for some time.\textsuperscript{35} Furthermore, as a landowner and active manager of his estates, Paulinus would have been closely involved in the workings of the \textit{civitas} and local networks which would have meant at least a minimal exposure to politics, which most likely would have grown with the pressure the Gothic arrival added to these networks and local administration and could have been part of his desire to work for peace. Although Paulinus does not mention in the \textit{Eucharisticon} how he met Attalus, even before Attalus appointed him as part of his administrative team the two must have been sufficiently acquainted with each other for Paulinus to receive this position and Paulinus must have had serious political and/or local connections to make him a valuable choice; furthermore, Paulinus was ambitious enough to become involved in the regime of a usurper against Honorius; he himself admitted that he entered into cooperation with the Goths because he wanted peace.\textsuperscript{36} Besides, it is somewhat unlikely that Attalus would have appointed a complete political novice for an office in the inner circle around an emperor, especially in a counter-regime, which needed all the political support possible to survive. Yet even if Paulinus had never been active in political circles before Attalus, his close family-relationship with such eminent people like Ausonius surely would have counted in his favour in terms of

\textsuperscript{34} Paulinus was very keen on estate-management and farming; even when living in reduced circumstances in Marseilles he tried to turn a plot of land into a productive arable farm. See also Drinkwater (2001).

\textsuperscript{35} Sid. Apoll.,V.14; VIII.8.

establishing and maintaining local networks and as such would have been of value for Attalus.

Although Paulinus belittles his appointment as *comes sacrarum largitionum*, as an office granted by an ‘operetta’-emperor whose puppet regime was entirely dependent on Gothic power, it nevertheless meant that he had direct access to Gothic politics: ‘The tyrant Attalus burdened me in my absence with an empty title of distinction, making me *comes sacrarum largitionum*, although he knew that this office was sustained by no revenue, and even himself had now ceased to believe in his own royalty, dependent as he was upon the Goths with whom he was finding protection of his life but not of his authority, while of himself he was supported neither by resources of his own nor by any soldiery.’\(^{37}\) This statement of Attalus’ dependence on Gothic military strength suggests that nothing that Attalus was doing was without explicit Gothic consent – thus Paulinus’ own office must therefore have met with Gothic approval too. One of his attempts to regain part of his lost property and to secure safety for his family was by directly appealing to Athaulf himself – again a sign of Paulinus’ direct contact with the Goths.\(^{38}\) Athaulf was unable to grant his request, in Paulinus’ words because he was pressured by his followers’ contrasting political aims; whether that can be seen as a further hint of ongoing debates about political conduct and leadership among the Goths, or whether it was Paulinus’ deliberate phrasing in order to gloss over his personal political failure, cannot be answered. Of course it should be remembered that Athaulf was by then by and large dependent on the distribution of supplies to which he had gained access through his cooperation with the Gallic aristocracy; the full burden of providing these supplies, however, rested on the *civitates* and unsurprisingly there was discontent against both

---

\(^{37}\) Paulinus, *Euch.* 293-301.

the Goths and also some of the Gallic nobles and their political mingling with Athaulf. Paulinus was certainly caught up in this and his earlier involvement with Attalus would have added to this. Bearing in mind that, despite his direct involvement in Gothic-Gallic politics and the court of Attalus, Paulinus had suffered from Gothic looting, a personal failure of his political conduct, which subsequently left him exposed to Gothic incursions, could also be partly responsible. Besides, he was directly involved in the turmoil surrounding the siege of Bazas where the Alanic contingent, which until then had been in alliance with the Goths, eventually changed over to the Roman side; Paulinus managed to extract himself from Bazas, although he was threatened with death, but afterwards does not mention any further serious involvement with Athaulf or Attalus, nor did he gain any advantages from the turmoil surrounding the movement of the Goths across Gaul. Judging from this, his involvement and cooperation with them was by no means straightforward and perhaps had even suffered strains, as Paulinus gives the impression that he was never really a firm supporter of Attalus or indeed the Goths. Paulinus gives the impression that he was rather forced into cooperation by circumstances without having any serious ambitions and that he personally had overall little political interest or even the ability for diplomacy.\textsuperscript{39} Besides, after Attalus had been deposed, Paulinus was apparently no longer interested in politics – at least the \textit{Eucharisticon} does not mention the holding of any further political offices or any involvement in imperial affairs. Considering though how active the Gallic nobility generally was to promote its own political interests, and furthermore its commitment and firm belief in the essential necessity of the aristocracy to enter political offices, this is surprising; yet Paulinus’ lack of any financial means could have been a serious obstacle to any further political endeavours; also the fatal outcome of his son’s attempts at a political

\textsuperscript{39} Paulinus, \textit{Euch.} 81-4, 258-70.
career at the Gothic court might have added a component of reluctance to pursue any
further political involvement. It could also be that his only political ambition had in
fact been with Attalus and he had believed in cooperating with Athaulf (hence his
close connection with him), but that after that regime collapsed he had not harboured
any further political interest. The only problem with this is Paulinus’ own negative
account of Attalus’ politics. Yet there is another possibility for Paulinus’ behaviour
and that was the intention of writing the *Eucharistic con*: he wrote it as a religiously
inspired treatise, as the account of someone who had managed to overcome his
troubled life by devoting himself to a religiously inspired lifestyle. Worldly
ambitions stood in the way of achieving such religious devotion which had at its core
the belief in withdrawing from the world in order to devote the soul to heavenly
things, and therefore it could well be that Paulinus deliberately minimised his
political career and involvement with Attalus in order to highlight his ‘conversion’
and his attempt at renouncing his former life. As will be discussed later, the
decision to enter ecclesiastical orders or the aspiration to follow a religious lifestyle
was a serious phenomenon at that time; Paulinus’ decision to try to enter some sort
of monastic order or at least alter his previous lifestyle in order to comply with semi-
monastic patterns was therefore perfectly acceptable.
Ultimately Paulinus’ numerous attempts to find a new way of living under Gothic
rule failed; his life is an excellent example of the potential limits of assimilation
between Roman population and the barbarian newcomers: that is not to say that he
did not try to find a level of cooperation or that assimilation was not at all possible
for him but rather that he personally failed in achieving any lasting success. Yet
Paulinus was not the only one of his family whose life had been altered by the Gothic
presence. If the identification of several of his family members is correct, then there

---

were some other of his relatives who had lost their properties due to Gothic impact but had resettled elsewhere: Jerome wrote of a certain Julianus, perhaps a brother of Paulinus, who had lost his Gallic property due to Gothic impact and had subsequently resettled in Dalmatia where he supported monastic settlements. Unfortunately there is no information whether his estate had been looted or whether he had sold it to others much as Paulinus himself had done, and if he had sold it what the precise reason for this was; an exchange of letters with someone as eminent in ecclesiastical circles as Jerome would suggest that Julianus had somehow become involved in religious circles.41 Whether that was a result of his intention to withdraw from a worldly career due to Gothic impact and to enter a religiously orientated life, or mere coincidence is impossible to say. There is also no information whether Julianus was involved in current political affairs, and how far that might have influenced his life.

In the light of the effect the weakening of imperial affairs had on many Romans and their conduct towards politics, it is surprising that Athaulf’s insistence on restoring Rome’s former strength through Gothic power found so little resonance among them. Of course it could well be that Athaulf’s alleged comment was taken far more seriously as an actual political programme of the Goths than had ever been intended, and that more historical weight has been put upon Orosius’ statement than it can actually bear; as previously said, it has to be taken into consideration that Orosius’ writings were ecclesiastical texts and therefore written with a certain intention which might have had little if anything to do with politics. It could also be that many Gallic aristocrats, perhaps even some of those who were directly involved in Attalus’ regime and thus directly in contact with Athaulf, were simply not ready yet to accept

a direct Gothic interference in imperial affairs or their complete political and military independence. Even people like Sidonius Apollinaris, who was younger than Paulinus of Pella and therefore had been much more exposed to Gothic power as an established fact, still felt an enormous unease about the new Gothic lords, although he came to accept their strength and cooperated with them. How much more difficult the same process must have appeared then to Paulinus and his contemporaries, which makes their unease to adopt Athaulf’s suggestion all the more understandable. Certainly Paulinus does not seem to have believed in any lasting strength of Athaulf’s power although he must have been supportive enough of him to enter into any cooperation with Attalus’ regime. Perhaps his decision to work with Attalus was part of a general involvement in political affairs, in which many Gallic nobles took an active interest, and Paulinus just followed this, but never pursued it as a serious personal ambition.
b) Rutilius Namatianus

Paulinus’ life may have become an example of the turmoil many of the Gallic aristocrats were subjected to by the Gothic establishment, but his later withdrawal from any involvement in current affairs was an individual choice. Furthermore, whereas Paulinus’ life can be regarded as an example of the beginning of a process of assimilation between Gallic nobles and the Goths, Rutilius seems to have followed a different way insofar as it appears that he did not opt for collaboration with the Goths but rather advocated the programme of renewed imperial strength under Flavius Constantius against an establishment of Gothic power. The reason to include Rutilius as an example is that he was a Gallic aristocrat and contemporary of Paulinus but, instead of following a policy of cooperation in order to preserve Gallic and local interests as so many others of his fellow countrymen did, he opted instead for opposition against the Goths. This makes it all the more interesting for this discussion, as he seems to have been nevertheless intent on promoting his Gallic interests. This of course leads to the question to what extent it was necessary for the Gallic nobility to engage in assimilation with the Gothic court in order to preserve their political ambitions, or whether it was just a choice made by individuals on an individual basis.

Rutilius, in contrast to Paulinus, was certainly much more involved in political endeavours. Like his father, Claudius Rutilius Namatianus was one of the relatively few Gallic aristocrats who had risen to a high-profile career in Rome: he had been *magister officiorum* and *praefectus urbis* in 413/4 under Honorius, an interesting fact as the majority of such positions were firmly in the hands of Roman senatorial families, apart from the Gallic praetorian prefecture which was predominantly...
occupied by Gallic nobles.⁴² Rutilius had left Rome and his official position there in order to return to his homeland and to care for matters concerning Gallic affairs. Considering the prolific positions he held in Rome, the decision to leave, regardless of the envisaged time-frame, was remarkable, all the more so since Gaul had suffered from severe political turmoil since the arrival of the Goths (although that would certainly apply to Rome too as we will see later); hence there must have been serious reasons for Rutilius to do so.

Part of it could have had something to do with his links with Gaul as a native of this province. As discussed earlier, the Gallic nobles in general cared very passionately about their home country and retained close links with their civitates and local networks.⁴³ As a native of Gaul, most probably of Toulouse, this would certainly have meant that Rutilius still retained links with his Gallic estates as his ancestral home, if only on the basis that these country estates provided the main source of income for his aristocratic lifestyle; a certain extent of control of and interest in the management of these estates was therefore vital for the preservation and continuation of the family wealth. The arrival of the Goths in general but especially any questions concerning their accommodation on Roman estates would have had an impact on the overall management but also the efficiency of these estates. Rutilius could therefore have returned to Gaul precisely because of the Gothic presence in order to preserve his ancestral lands and to oversee any future alterations regarding his estates.⁴⁴ Although Athaulf had moved the Goths into Gaul in 412/3AD, three years later, when Rutilius was travelling to Gaul, Italy was still suffering from the devastations: ‘Since Tuscany and since the Aurelian highway, after suffering from the outrages of

---

⁴³ Sivonen (2006), 11, 36.  
⁴⁴ Rutilius, de red. suo, I. 20-2.
Goths with fire and sword, can no longer control forest with homestead or river with bridge, it is better to entrust my sails to the wayward sea.45 Whether or not Rutilius had owned property in Italy, and if it had been damaged or lost during the Italian stay of Alaric’s troops and the sack of Rome in 410, is not known. To a certain extent a similar picture of damage would have been prevalent in Gaul although Gaul had not been used by the Goths as a territory for substantial looting as the Italian countryside and especially the wider area around Rome had become. Destructions in Gaul then would have been on a slightly smaller scale but nevertheless frightening; however, Gaul was to be used for the eventual settlement of Ataulf’s Goths, which carried its own disruptions and problems for the Gallic landowner. There is no information whether Rutilius’ estates in Gaul had been affected by the Gothic arrival as we know nothing about their extent or location (apart from the assumption that they would have been located near Toulouse as Rutilius was most probably born there) but it is certainly a possibility. Rutilius’ return to Gaul as a precautionary measure to investigate any damage or prevent future damage to his Gallic estates would have made perfect sense and would have explained the urgent speed for travelling in winter despite the unsuitability for travel during this time of the year.46

However, Rutilius’ decision to move to Gaul was nevertheless at least partly independent of personal interests in his Gallic business as it was also most likely a response to the temporary recovery of Roman strength under Constantius; his writing was a carefully composed script to demonstrate his support for Constantius.47 In

45 Rutilius, de red. suo, I. 37-42, 325, 331-6. Noy (2000), 15: Rome’s population after the sack of the city declined from approximately 1,000,000 to 300,000.
46 See Sivan (1986), also for a discussion of Rutilius’ journey based on the severe fragmentation of the second book. For a date of Rutilius’ journey, she gives the year 417 as the most likely date.
47 Sivan (1986), 527-32. The praise of Constantius might have formed a passage which had been prefaced by a section on Gaul and Arles which had been closely connected with Constantius’ military campaign. Also there were further links between Arles (now the capital of the Gallic provinces) and Constantius due to namesake.
sharp contrast with Paulinus, Rutilius had a strong political interest, a close
close connection with Ravenna and especially Flavius Constantius: bearing in mind
Constantius’ anti-Gothic policy, this effectively suggests a rejection of
Athaulf’s/Attalus’ political programme in particular and of any concept of
cooperaion between Goths and the empire in general. The partial regaining of
Roman control under Flavius Constantius and his firm grip on Gaul, in regard to both
the Gallic aristocracy and the imperial dealings with Athaulf, gave rise to more
ambitious endeavours among some Romans to restore Gallic strength. Yet as will be
seen further below, the relationship between Constantius and the Gallic nobility was
certainly in the beginning a rather strained one. A strengthening of Roman interests
in Gaul was surely welcome but the killing of several of the Gallic nobles who had
supported Jovinus had created deep mistrust against him, although Constantius could
hope that a policy of enforcing Roman rule in Gaul against the Goths was to be
regarded as more positive than his negative impact over the Jovinus affair. Being a
Gallic noble one could have expected Rutilius to have similar problems with
Constantius’ conduct and his decision to return to Gaul could have created some
difficulty. There is nothing in his career to suggest that Rutilius ever played with the
idea of joining Jovinus and so undoubtedly he had remained loyal to Honorius; thus
there was no problem for him in dealing with Constantius’ politics in regard to the
Gallic nobility and he could embrace Constantius’ message of renewed imperial
strength without any misgivings. Just as Rutilius’ prefecture in Rome could have
been a reward for this loyalty so his continuous political support for Constantius
could have meant that he received an official appointment in Gaul from Constantius.
Besides, having been involved in a high-profile career not in Gaul but in Rome,
Rutilius was perhaps much more a Roman who happened to come from Gaul but was
involved in imperial politics than a Gallic noble who had taken up some position
within the imperial administration. Paulinus in contrast was certainly more the Gallic
noble, devoted to his local interests and estates, who somehow got involved in
politics. Certainly in his writing Rutilius propagated a patriotic message of the need to return
to Gaul in order to restore Roman power – despite being deeply distressed to leave
Rome: ‘The fields of Gaul summon home their native. Disfigured they are by wars
immeasurably long, yet the less their charm, the more they earn pity. It is a lighter
crime to neglect our countrymen when at their ease: our common losses call for each
man’s loyalty. Our presence and our tears are what we owe to the ancestral home…
now is the time after cruel fires on ravaged farms to rebuild, if it be but shepherds’
huts’.\footnote{Rutilius, \textit{de red. suo}, I. 19-30, 35-6, 43-6.} This almost patriotic spirit contained a political message, a call for resistance
against the growing pressure of Gothic power and against any cooperation with
them, as well as an urge to rebuild both material loss as well as political strength:
‘Things which cannot be sunk rise again with greater energy, sped higher in their
rebound from lowest depths…The span [of Rome’s life] which does remain is
subject to no bounds, so long as earth shall stand firm and heaven upholds the stars
…Let the impious race [the Goths] fall in sacrifice at last: let the Goths in panic
abase their forsworn necks. Let lands be reduced to peace pay rich tribute and
barbarian booty fill their majestic lap.’\footnote{Rutilius, \textit{de red. suo}, I. 129-45, 161-4. Sivonen (2006), 130-1.} Such passages contain the kind of political
call that the recent successes of Constantius’ blockade of Gaul justified, as well as
being simultaneously a reflection on Rome’s enduring glory in the traditional style of
Virgil and Horace.

\footnote{Rutilius, \textit{de red. suo}, I. 19-30, 35-6, 43-6.}

In the light of renewed political strength for the imperial administration under
Constantius, Rutilius’ decision to opt against any collaboration with the Goths made
sense, though the gradual increase in Gothic strength would have made it short-lived in its effectiveness. As his poem ends abruptly at the beginning of the second book, there is sadly no further information available about Rutilius’ travel to Gaul and especially about his future personal and political conduct.\textsuperscript{50} Hence we cannot know if Rutilius was nevertheless forced later on to find a certain decree of assimilation with the Goths necessary to preserve his Gallic interests.

Interestingly two of Rutilius’ friends had opted to move to Italy although both were members of the Gallic nobility: Protadius, a former prefect of Rome, stayed on an estate in Umbria; Victorinus, \textit{comes illustris} and like Rutilius a native of Toulouse, had moved to Tuscany after the Goths had captured the city in 413.\textsuperscript{51} Nixon has argued that the devastations in Gaul due to Gothic impact must have been enormous if both were willing to live in Italy which was still suffering from the aftermath of the looting of the same Gothic troops a couple of years earlier (which Rutilius had aptly described). Lütkenhaus, however, states that none of them were actual refugees but had declined to accept any further official appointments by Constantius, although both had previously played an active role in his regime, and had subsequently left Gaul for Italy – thus a reverse of Rutilius’ own decision, if his return to Gaul had anything to do with an appointment by Constantius.\textsuperscript{52} Whether that is an implication that they had fallen out with Constantius or had moved to Italy hoping to gain political offices there, is impossible to answer. Heather argues in a different way and thinks that the main reason for them leaving Gaul was their refusal to enter into any cooperation with the Gothic court but they rather accepted a lifestyle in reduced circumstances.\textsuperscript{53} Considering the usually strong links the Gallic nobility had with its

\textsuperscript{50} Lütkenhaus (1998), 66, 85, 110-1, 132. Paulinus’ office in Attalus’ or Athaulf’s regime stood by its nature in opposition to Constantius.

\textsuperscript{51} Rutilius, \textit{de red. suo}, I. 493-6, 542-51.


ancestral territory, such a decision was indeed a serious one, although of course one should not assume that every individual Gallic aristocrat had a strong connection with his home or estate which stood above any political ideas. Nevertheless Protadius’ and Victorinus’ decision to leave suggests that for some the mere thought of cooperation with the Goths was more than their political convictions would allow. It will be seen further below that this refusal to cooperate with the barbarian courts was something which remained a factor even half a century later.

There is another contrast to Paulinus and that involves the question of religion, as Rutilius’ Christian belief has been subject to debate. Despite the fact that the majority of the Roman population was Christian, paganism continued to be found among some members of the Roman aristocracy although from 416 onwards any pagan was officially banned from holding any public office. Rutilius has been regarded as a pagan because of his attacks on ascetic monks: however, that does not exclude the possibility of him being a Christian as criticism of the ultra-ascetic movements of the church was widespread even among Christian believers as a too extreme form of belief; regardless whether or not Rutilius was a Christian, his account was certainly by no means religiously inspired as Paulinus’ *Eucharisticon* had been.\(^{54}\) Therefore it is perhaps less surprising that Rutilius’ text contains a much stronger political message than Paulinus was ever concerned with. In contrast to Paulinus, Rutilius was not so much concerned with offering an account of his life as a form of thanksgiving to God for his rescue or to demonstrate his personal change from aristocrat to a believer devoted to heavenly things. Rutilius was writing from a Gallic, aristocratic viewpoint and was concerned with the political restoration of

---

\(^{54}\) Sivonen (2006), 140-1.
Roman power in Gaul, and the recovery of its Roman morale, its belief in Rome’s enduring greatness and success.
c) Prosper of Aquitaine

A very similar message of a hope in a brighter future and a call for a renewed political spirit or even resistance to Gothic expansion as was apparent in Rutilius’ writings can also be found in religious texts of younger contemporaries of Rutilius. Apart from Paulinus’ *Eucharisticon*, poems like the *de providentia dei*, the *Carmen coniugis ad uxorem* and the *Epigradma Paulini* were written in a similar social context and for a similar audience. Although these poems come from an entirely religious background and focus predominantly on questions of divine intervention and man’s faith, they nevertheless contain an aspect of politically inspired views albeit in a far more indirect way.

Prosper of Aquitaine, like Rutilius and Paulinus a Gaul, the author of the *Carmen coniugis ad uxorem* and perhaps also of the *de providentia dei*, included a similar message of renewed hope in imperial strength; although the authorship of the *de providentia dei* is still debated, the contents of both poems are so similar that it is legitimate to mention both texts in the same context. Written around the year 416/7, the *de providentia dei* used contemporary events far more as background to focus on

---

55 The *Epigradma Paulini*, written around 406, incorporated the Vandal arrival in Gaul and contrasted the fight against the invading barbarians with the spiritual fight of every Christian against sin. The damage caused by the Vandals and Alans by devastating the countryside was regarded only as a temporary event whereas the lapse of Christian morale is regarded as far longer lasting. Attempts to repair the damage in Gaul are seen as yet another aspect of a desire for worldly things instead of a desire for heavenly salvation. Thus the barbarians served the purpose of showing man the vanity of earthly matters, serving as a trigger to point man towards a much-needed moral reform; in the writer’s opinion proper morality and faith would help to fight them, as it would deprive the violent impact of its fearful reality. Its overall message is thus predominantly religious, though; it does incorporate some political meaning too in terms of using the barbarians as a tool for the discussion of Christian morality. See Roberts (1992), 97-9. McLynn (2008), 45-52.

56 Marcovich (1989) argues in favour of Prosper’s authorship of the text. Heather (2005), 235, states the author as ‘anonymous’. Green (1971), 131-2, doubts Paulinus as author and refers to its allocation to Prosper. The *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*, 550, refers to the question as unsolved whereas the *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, 878, rejects Prosper’s authorship as the poem was written too early (around 417). Chadwick (1955), 122, refers to the authorship as disputed but credits Prosper with it as the poem is very similar to his writing and was cited under his name by Hincmar of Reims in the ninth century. Indeed Prosper was already born in 395 so was theoretically able to have written the poem in his early twenties. Thus I do follow Marcovich’s interpretation of regarding the *de providentia dei* as Prosper’s work.
questions concerning Christian morality and belief; the barbarian destructions in Gaul were described very much in the style of martyr stories, almost styled as a metaphor for the general sufferings of Christians against the assaults of the devil. Thus temporary political events served as a literary vehicle for theological writings. The descriptions of the actual destruction caused by both Goths and Vandals are quite dramatic: ‘Who is not shaken by the heap of ruins all around him, remaining intrepid amidst the flames and flood…each time the image of our fatherland, all in smoke, comes to our mind, and the whole range of destruction stands before our eyes…if the entire ocean had poured over the fields of Gaul, more creatures would have survived the vast waters…for ten years of slaughter we have been cut down by the swords of the Goths and Vandals…we have suffered all a man can take’.

Worse for the author than the actual material damage was the havoc the barbarians caused with the souls of faithful Christians when the extent of the material damage inflicted on the Gallic population not only affected people who were regarded as sinners but failed to spare even innocent children and members of the church: ‘The same whirlwind took away both the wicked and the good’. Thus the very social structures as well as concepts of ecclesiastical teaching were suddenly questioned; hence the author urged his audience to resist this chaos because in his opinion the spiritual battle for the salvation of the soul and the political/military battle against these barbarians was one and the same: ‘Even if you are stricken with the wounds of a shattered world…still you should keep your strength […] Stop violating the high honours allotted to an everlasting race with your ignoble fears. Conquer the heaven instead and seize the immortal glory which has been reserved for you.’

58 Prosper, de prov. dei I.43-52, 57-60.
59 Prosper, de prov. dei I. 7-10, 203-5.
much in the material damage they caused, but rather in the threat to the belief in the teachings of the church when the violent barbarian actions not only killed innocents but increasingly expanded their military/political influence, thus questioning God’s care for His people. Wallace-Hadrill argued that contemporaries linked the destruction caused by the Goths with the Goths being Arians, and thus belonging to a heretical group. 60 Political resistance against the advances of barbarian power was therefore desirable because it was hoped it would end any further intrusions, thus preventing further opportunities to damage the belief in divine interference. Furthermore, as Catholicism was directly linked with the concept of the empire as a unity between religion and state, the fight against a heresy was even more important. 61 Any true Christian therefore had to engage in active resistance against the Gothic expansion in order to prevent them from damaging the belief in theological doctrines by undermining the trust people put in the teachings of the church; material damage and the suffering of innocents on a large scale could lead people to question divine providence and thus endanger the teachings of the church as well, at least from a theological viewpoint, as the salvation of their souls, hence these destructions had to be stopped. 62 That there had always been and still were tendencies in Gaul for political resistance against the imperial government,
especially when its performance raised questions about its care of Gallic interests, only added to such a call. Furthermore, as the Goths were Arians, it was the duty of every Catholic Christian to fight the followers of a heretical church. The similarity between Prosper’s writing and Rutilius’ message is this call for resistance as in Rutilius’ opinion too the real danger the Goths posed was the damage they could do to undermine Roman morale and the continuation of the belief in lasting Roman success; the only obvious contrast between the two authors lies in the form of belief which it was worth fighting for. For Prosper it was the Christian doctrine of eternal salvation, while for Rutilius it was the traditional Roman trust in its eternal domination and greatness.

This very dramatic, almost overtly exaggerated, account of Gothic/Vandalic looting in Prosper’s poems was certainly used to emphasise a theological message, almost forcing the reader to carefully examine the strength of his own belief in the ultimate salvation of God’s people despite large-scale material damage. The destruction the Goths caused in Gaul was like the cruel tortures a martyr had to face at the hands of his prosecutors, and only his steadfast belief in his salvation by God and the ultimate victory of this belief would lead him to achieve the martyr’s crown, the *corona*. For Prosper the events in Gaul were a test for spiritual renewal, which would eventually be rewarded in heaven (again the parallel to the martyr’s reward is used). Some ecclesiastical writers took the expansion of Gothic or Vandalic power even further and regarded it as the fulfilment of prophecies concerning the last Day of Judgement:

---

63 Muhlberger (1992), 29-31. Chadwick (1955), 170-3, 179, 248-50. Roberts (1992), 99-102, 106. Chromatius of Aquileia (Aquileia was to an extent in the frontline in the constant tug-of-war between Alaric and Honorius) at the very end of the fourth century argued similarly when he compared the Romans captured by the success of the barbarians with the yoke the Israelites had to bear in Egypt; for him prayer and a strong faith would deliver Rome from the barbarians as God would fight for the Romans, although he did not live to see Rome’s capture by Alaric as he had died already in 407 AD: see *Sermones* 16.4.
for example Hydatius interpreted the barbarian arrival and subsequent damage as a
sign of the imminent apocalypse, linking it with prophecies found in passages from
Ezekiel, Daniel and Revelation.\textsuperscript{64} Also Orosius had connected the marriage between
Athaulf and Galla Placidia with a prophecy in the book of Daniel; although Orosius
was not as ‘hysterical’ as Hydatius in his description of Gothic actions, and this
strong message of the impending end of the world cannot be found in his writing,
perhaps he assumed that a theologically trained reader of his account would
nevertheless be able to read this marriage as yet another sign of the imminent end of
the world. Indeed he himself had fled his native Spain in order to avoid the
interruptions caused by the Vandal arrival – in his own words having been warned by
the prophecies in the Gospel about the imminent danger.\textsuperscript{65}

In contrast to Prosper’s focus on large-scale damage of Gaul by the Goths, which
included even the looting of the sacred places and members of the church, Orosius’
and Jerome’s account of Gothic behaviour during the sack of Rome made much of
their open reverence for the Christian churches, though again their texts were equally
written with a religious intention in mind, and thus cannot be taken as a completely
accurate account; indeed the Goths in these accounts were used to highlight the lack
of morale the Roman population had displayed by portraying savage barbarians like
the Goths as having more reverence for the Christian faith than the Romans.\textsuperscript{66}

However, despite the obvious and frequent use of the Goths and other barbarians in

\textsuperscript{64} Hydatius, bishop of Aquae Flaviae in Gallaecia in Spain, wrote in the mid fifth century a striking
account of the devastative effects on the Spanish countryside caused by the Vandals, similar to the \textit{de providentia dei}. See for example Burgess (1996), Thompson (1976), Ripoll López (1998) for the
archaeological records found in Spain which stand in contrast to Hydatius’ accounts in terms of large-
scale destructions. See also Martin (1997) for the interpretation of archaeological records in
connection with contemporary events.

\textsuperscript{65} The reason to consult eminent theologians elsewhere could have been another reason for Orosius’
departure from Spain as he went to Augustine in Hippo as well as Jerome in the Holy Land. Matthews
Heather (2005), 209.

\textsuperscript{66} Orosius, VII.39. Jerome, \textit{Ep.} 127 was writing to Marcella about the Gothic display of piety; he was
based in the Holy Land and had heard accounts of the sack of Rome via fugitives; Orosius was one
who provided such an account for Jerome. However, Orosius came from Augustine as one of
Jerome’s visitors, and it could be that both adopted a similar account from each other.
contemporary ecclesiastical writings to convey religious messages, Paulinus of Pella’s description of the Gothic impact on his own family explicitly stated the lack of any harm suffered by any member of his family, although he did suffer material loss of property. Although one could argue that Paulinus’ text likewise tried to convey a religious idea and was therefore portraying Gothic action in a better light, the Eucharisticon was far less clearly structured in its religious message than the texts by Jerome, Orosius or Prosper; furthermore, as discussed above, Paulinus was a direct witness of Gothic incursion and had direct contacts with the Goths and Athaulf, so his account of Gothic behaviour in Gaul should not be completely dismissed when being compared with Prosper’s account. McLynn’s interpretation that Prosper’s texts also contained strong references to Roman politics in Gaul also found a link with Paulinus’ description.\textsuperscript{67} In his Eucharisticon the loss of his properties was for him as much the result of Gothic looting as it was of the mismanagement and injustice of the Roman judicial system when he had to fight for his inheritance against some of his close relatives in court; not only had the Gothic incursions destroyed part of his property but to some extent it was the exploitation of a faltering imperial administration, which had robbed him from recovering some of his income. Also Salvian accused the mismanagement and exploitation of the administrative system by the Romans as being one of the reasons for the upheaval and dissolution of society in Gaul when the corruption of the Roman system forced the poor population to seek justice among the barbarians; again, the barbarians and their actions serve more as a catalyst, emphasising the already underlying problems within the Roman system, without being the sole reason for Gaul’s instability. Salvian portrayed the failure of the Roman state as a failure to include all its citizens within its community, because it is exploited by the self-interest of those who hold

\textsuperscript{67} See pp.143-5.
power, and to control those in power; in his argumentation barbarians damaging
Roman interests should therefore hold no surprise as this was precisely what the
Romans were doing to their own people.\textsuperscript{68}

Prosper’s \textit{Carmen coniugis ad uxorem} likewise was primarily concerned with the
impact of contemporary events on the spiritual life and belief of his fellow Gallic
Christians. Although the text does provide references to the current devastations in
Gaul, these are less dramatic than the accounts in the \textit{de providentia dei}: ‘He who
often rode in covered carriages through splendid cities now walks into the deserted
countryside suffering on his weary feet…neither are the fields in the same condition,
nor any cities, and everything rushes headlong towards the end’; Gaul has become a
desolate place from where peace had departed.\textsuperscript{69} But as the last few words state,
Prosper’s main focus was that these devastations were a clear sign of the imminent
end of the world; thus the contemporary events were necessary to prompt man to
focus his faith on heavenly things in order to gain eternal life: ‘Therefore it is not in
vain that we are born in these times, which perish to us and in which we perish but in
order that we might in this life earn eternal life’.\textsuperscript{70} The effect on Prosper was to
dedicate his life to his Christian belief and he urged his wife to join him in this
exercise. Once again the barbarians, although there is no detailed reference to them,
or rather the effect their actions had on contemporaries’ minds, were used as a
vehicle to convey a religious message; Prosper does cite ‘kings fall on kings with
countless arms’, which might be a reference to the various rival barbarian groups in
Gaul, but there is no direct discussion of Gothic actions or Vandal devastations as
had been the case in the \textit{de providentia dei}. In McLynn’s opinion, though, the

\textsuperscript{68} Lambert (1999), 126.
\textsuperscript{69} Prosper, \textit{Carmen}, 17-29. Translation due to courtesy of Dr Roberto Chiappiniello. McLynn (2008), 46.
\textsuperscript{70} Prosper, \textit{Carmen}, 41-3; also 30-1, 65-8, 71-3.
passage of ‘kings fall[ing] on kings’ is far more a reference to the problems various Roman usurpers such as Maximus, Attalus or Jovinus were causing in Gaul; thus a large part of the damage in Gaul was not committed by the barbarians but by the various contenders for the imperial throne and the subsequent fighting. Although this interpretation is undoubtedly a possibility, it might still contain a hidden reference to Gothic interference in the resulting chaos, especially when Athaulf was directly involved with Attalus and Jovinus, using both for his own politics with the imperial authorities. Although Prosper might not have been aware of the intrinsic details of the relationship between Attalus, Jovinus and Athaulf, he was undoubtedly aware of the fact that Athaulf stood in close contact with these men and furthermore with the Gallo-Roman aristocracy too. Thus, if the passage is referring to the impact of imperial politics on the Gallic population, it was perhaps more complex than a mere pointing towards imperial usurpers but incorporated also the Goths as well as the Gallo-Roman nobles as all three parties were intrinsically linked with each other.

Although Prosper’s texts were primarily religious texts, focusing on aspects of divine providence and eternal salvation, contemporary politics and the barbarian actions in Gaul did play a certain role in these writings, as they had indirectly influenced if not inspired these texts. That their theological message was mixed with a call for political resistance against the barbarians was not surprising, particularly since Constantius’ increasing political dominance offered hopes in the recovery of imperial strength. Constantius’ arrival as the new dominant figure in Roman politics would have also been harboured as a sign of the ending of the recurring problem of usurpers, which, if one follows McLynn’s interpretation of Prosper’s poems, was perhaps as much to blame for the chaos in Gaul as the barbarians.

---

Although the previous chapter showed that there were calls for resistance against the Gothic establishment, the reaction of the Roman population to the Gothic presence in Gaul was diverse, and their interaction with contemporary politics of both the empire and the Goths was not always straightforward. Reasons to stay or leave a province, to get involved in politics or to withdraw, were largely a matter of personal choice, wealth and social position – dependent as much on a belief in the unchangeable strength of the empire on the one hand as on a recognition of Gothic power and a wish for future cooperation and integration with a new political power on the other. However, increasingly this personal choice was driven by political and economic necessity and many Gallic landowners had little option other than to enter into collaboration with the Goths in order to preserve their local interests.

Even as late as the fifth century, Sidonius continued to mention refugees and people whose lifestyle had been seriously affected by the expansion of the Gothic kingdom. Talking to his friend Constantius, he describes the effects of destroyed landscape:

‘What tears you [Constantius] shed…over buildings levelled by fire and houses half-burnt. How you lamented the fields buried under the bones of the unburied’. In fact, Sidonius himself, as well as members of his family, was directly affected by the Gothic court: some had fled Gaul, like his brother-in-law Ecdicius with his sons who left for Rome in 475 AD in fear for their safety; others had lost their property and had been reduced to poverty. One has to be careful with such accounts and not to blame the destruction the Gothic establishment created as the only reason for personal hardship or exile; furthermore, some Gallic aristocrats had left Gaul on a

---

temporary basis to conduct official business elsewhere and had gone to places like Rome.\(^3\) By Sidonius’ time in the later fifth century, many members of his circle, including him, had become actively involved in political offices at the Gothic court. Furthermore by his time the relationship with the Goths had seriously altered and, as will be seen below, the cooperation of his contemporaries with the Goths was a complex process. Losing property or seeking refuge out of fear for personal safety was to a large extent part of the risk the involvement at the various barbarian courts brought with it, and would have been the negative outcome of political alliances gone wrong; already in the beginning of the fifth century one of Paulinus’ sons had suffered from such circumstances and had eventually been killed. Sidonius’ own exile was the result of his active political role and not the outcome of random Gothic looting which had forced him to flee: Sidonius, by then bishop of Clermont, was sent into exile as part of his active role in the resistance of the city against the expansionist policy of the Gothic king Euric: ‘For the armed bands of the tribes that surround us are terrifying our town [Clermont], which they regard as a sort of barrier restricting their frontiers. So we are set in the midst of two rival peoples and are become the pitiable prey of both; suspected by the Burgundians, and next neighbours of the Goths, we are spared neither the fury of our invaders [i.e. the Goths], nor the malignity of our protectors [i.e. the Burgundians]’; as a result he lost his property and suffered from all sorts of hardship: ‘We ourselves are being visited with glaring penalties for obscure offences’.\(^4\) After two years in exile Sidonius managed to get recalled to Euric’s court and his property was restored to him. All this indicates that by the end of the fifth century the barbarian courts had become very similar to the imperial court and that political alliances and offices carried a certain risk of supporting the wrong side; to lose property and/or status was no longer a question of

\(^3\) Mathisen (1992), 230-2.
a group of barbarians looting a province in order to access supplies, but far more the
outcome of political machinations. Reasons for getting involved with the barbarian
courts in the first place were numerous; an important part was played by the fact that
Rome became increasingly unable to support or to maintain imperial interests in
Gaul as a successful policy such as Constantius had been able to pursue. Tendencies
to care for Gallic interests in their own way were a widespread phenomenon among
the Gallic aristocracy as were voices of discontent with the extent and efficiency of
the imperial administration in Gaul as will be seen in the next chapter. The fact that
many Roman aristocrats stayed in Gaul and tried to find some level of cooperation
with the Goths, whereas others opted to withdraw or even leave the province to find
refuge elsewhere, created a very fragmented picture. Besides, it does raise the
question how contemporary aristocrats in fact viewed the social, political and
military future of Gaul. Discontent with the imperial authorities on the grounds of
neglecting Gallic interests or interfering too much in Gallic affairs was a recurring
problem; the Gothic settlement in 418 had done nothing to ease such tensions, which
were to culminate in serious rifts over the extent of both the aristocratic involvement
at the newly established Gothic court as well as Gallic loyalty towards the imperial
establishment.

It has been argued by some scholars that the decision of some Gallic aristocrats to
leave Gaul and to resettle elsewhere in the empire raises questions about the extent to
which these nobles still believed in the continuation of Gaul as an integrated part of
the Roman empire or at least considered it to be under imperial administration and
control. I would add to this that the decision of other Gallic nobles to seek instead a
basis for cooperation with the Gothic and other barbarian kingdoms, and to take this

cooperation even further by trying to assimilate with the new political regimes, can equally be regarded as raising questions about a genuine belief in a continuation of Roman life in Gaul. Even the consideration of working under let alone actively participating in a regime other than the imperial government poses serious questions of loyalty to the empire or at least casts doubts on the effectiveness of imperial interference. Gallic tendencies to propagate a certain degree of neglect of their interests at the imperial court might have helped people to consider the prospect of cooperation with the Goths as something less than treason but rather more as a political necessity. Hence such endeavours of Gallic nobles were more the result of their shrewd political thinking, which recognised the need to find some level of integration with the Goths, than a complete change of understanding of their own social background. Furthermore assimilation with the Goths or with other barbarian courts could be and indeed often was regarded as posing serious questions about their political loyalty towards the empire, but as having little to do with their loyalty to Roman culture; to hold an official position at the Gothic court did not automatically make these Gallic aristocrats Gothic – in fact almost all of them fiercely insisted with a certain amount of nostalgia on the preservation of their Roman upbringing and their taste for its culture. Muhlberger’s argument that contemporaries had little interest in the general political and military situation of the empire or how their province fitted into the wider administrative system is in my opinion slightly too broad – especially in regard to the Gallic aristocracy.\(^6\) It is true that contemporary authors might not have been interested in linking recent political events with a wider historical picture and that contemporary accounts were in almost all cases written from a specific standpoint; it is also true that there was perhaps little general political awareness outside the circle of those who were immediately

\(^6\) Muhlberger (1992), 28, 37.
involved in political/military matters. When one looks at many Gallic nobles, though, this general lack of interest in politics was not the case. These people might have been little interested in a historical or sociological analysis of the underlying problems and reasons for the gradual change of their lifestyle and the establishment of the Gothic and other barbarian kingdoms. Yet they were very much aware of these changes and were very often actively involved in endeavours that led them to the heart of political and military matters. In fact, the political and cultural future of Gaul was one of their most important interests and led them in many ways back into active political service, albeit often in the form of being employed at the barbarian courts. Lack of analysis, especially in the sense of modern historical writing, was not automatically a lack of interest. Besides, many of the ecclesiastical writers provided a great deal of analysis of the reasons of this change – although it was solely based on religious doctrine.

The first part will deal with the relationship between the Gallic aristocracy and the Roman empire, as this provides the background for the frequently occurring usurpations and the tendency of the Gallic nobles to care for their own aims. Furthermore, it also explains why some Gallic aristocrats were quickly seeking various forms of employment with the various barbarian groups in order to secure their own interests without waiting for the empire to fulfil them. Such attempts at collaboration with the barbarian courts were not automatically part of an acceptable political conduct. Despite the increasing political and military power of the Gothic kingdom, most of the Roman nobles were still able to fulfil their political and cultural expectations, from their public role in holding official positions to their devotion to classical education with all its wider implications of culture and art. At the beginning of the fifth century, though, the neglect of a devotion to the preservation or even restoration of Roman traditions and power was met with
suspicion, ranging from admonishing letters to open accusations of treason against the imperial state. The sheer necessity to find a level of integration, though, made any such suspicions increasingly artificial, and by the end of the century these had become more or less confined to the cultural sphere. Assimilation with the Goths could take many forms, although active involvement in Gothic service was perhaps the most challenging and complex one.

Traditionally members of the Roman aristocracy had occupied juridical and administrative positions within the government and had come to regard this as an integrated, defining part of their life and identity as a Roman aristocrat. The establishment of the barbarian courts and the subsequent decline or adoption of the former imperial administrative positions through these new regimes created an increasing lack of opportunity for such positions.⁷ Not only did this gradually replace the imperial administration or at least heavily change it to adapt to barbarian needs, but it also deprived the Roman aristocracy of one of their most important occupations since republican times as the holding of public offices was in fact the very definition of their role as an aristocrat. Thus one of the most prominent features of their self-definons broke away and forced them to find new ways to establish themselves in a public role as well as to demonstrate their cultural understanding. Alliances with the Gothic court provided replacements for the lost positions within the imperial system, although political assimilation did not automatically mean cultural integration too. The Gallic nobles had come to realise that the political and military future of Gaul lay with the various barbarian establishments; influential positions in their governments not only provided a continuation of their former public positions but also could enhance or restore personal safety and wealth. The second chapter will therefore deal with those Romans who were willing to gain

⁷ Sirks (1996), 151-5.
access to prestigious employment at the Gothic court and who regarded such endeavours as in no way endangering their definition of being Roman. In fact an efficient relationship with the Gothic and other barbarian kings had often become much more important for the continuation of their aristocratic lifestyle than a nominal loyalty to the emperor – and at times gave the aristocrats involved more personal freedom to promote their own individual political and economic interests. The world in which the barbarian courts were operating was restricted and therefore often more direct in its control than the imperial court with its vast administrative machinery. In remoter provinces the local aristocracy was then to a larger extent able to pursue its own businesses without too much direct official interference; the sheer geographical distance from the imperial court and the restricted power of the barbarians provided ample opportunities to channel potentially disturbing news in their best interests.\(^8\)

Political endeavours at the Gothic court were not the only possibility of restoring former positions of social prestige and influence. Increasingly members of the Gallic aristocracy opted to join the church and to gain positions of power in the religious sphere – in most cases they became bishops. The third chapter will look what involvement in the religious sphere meant for many of the Gallic nobility. Ecclesiastical offices offered a social prestige very few if any worldly offices could ever bestow. This enabled members of the aristocracy to continue their former lifestyle of wealth and social prestige as well as regaining an indirect but nevertheless very important administrative as well as political influence.

\(^8\) Heather (2005), 100-10.
1. The concept of political loyalty

Before one can examine any process of assimilation between Gallic aristocrats and the Gothic kingdom or what precisely this assimilation encompassed, it is important to look first at the relationship between the Gallic nobility and the imperial court. The following is by no means an exhaustive survey of the historical complexity of this relationship nor is it intended to be, but it is investigated in order to give an overview of how multi-layered the connections between Gaul and the empire were. This will be important in regard to the subsequent question of any process of assimilation of the Gallic nobility with the Gothic court and especially in connection with accusations of betraying Roman values by doing so. I would even argue that many of the later accusations of treason against the empire were in fact expressions of promoting and securing local Gallic political and military interests; although it cannot be denied that the extent of collaboration some Gallic nobles engaged in was undoubtedly favouring the Gothic or other barbarian courts, and therefore at least questioned their devotion to the prosperity of the empire.
a) Aspects of political instability in Gaul

Gaul had a long history as a notorious place for political unrest, with a high number of usurpers with the tendency to either care for its own needs without waiting or accepting imperial intervention or to revolt when the emperor had seemingly lost interest in Gallic matters. Ideas of political unpredictability and an almost ingrained tendency to revolt within the Gallic peoples, known as the *terror Gallicus*, formed part of a longstanding stereotypical picture of the Gallic population, and could be found in almost the entire Roman literature dealing with Gaul from Caesar to Tacitus, the Historia Augusta and Ammianus. Caesar’s attempt to seek senatorial rank for some members of the Gallo-Celtic nobility was regarded as a serious break with tradition, and Claudius’ decision in 48 AD to admit Gallic aristocrats into the Roman senate equally met with a certain amount of resistance on the Roman side, on the basis that these Gallic nobles were little more than barbarians and thus incompatible with becoming part of the constitutional heart of imperial administration. The revolts of Julius Florus and Julius Sacrovir in 21 AD, Julius Vindex in 68, as well as Julius Civilis and the rebellion of the Batavi in 69-70, fostered the image of Gaul as a consistent hotspot for unrest, and certainly in the later empire notions of opposing the political establishment of the empire were a recurring problem. The ‘Gallic empire’ of Postumus from 260-74 is perhaps the most famous result of such opposition, which showed both the seriousness and also the limitations of such usurpations. It would be wrong to regard these revolts as recurring separatist attempts to create complete Gallic independence from the empire. Most of the

---

9 Drinkwater (1983), 22-8 on the link between *terror Gallicus* and *terror Germanicus* and the justification this gave to Roman politics as well as to Caesar’s conquest of Gaul in the first place; also 40-9, 80-2; also (1997). Sivonen (2006) 26-8, 131. Strohker (1948), 5-9. See especially Urban (1999).

usurpations throughout Gallic history in fact had happened in direct relationship to
the political events of the wider empire and were a response to these (this also
included the self-representation and propaganda of the rebels). For example the
rebellion of Florus and Sacrovir in 21 was the result of social unrest and complaints
about the burden of increased taxation and mismanagement of the Roman
governors; equally the rebellion of Vindex in 68 and the subsequent uprising of the
Batavi and Treveri in 69/70 happened in the year of the four emperors and were a
direct response to the challenges of the succession of Nero. Vindex’ motive was
again based on complaints about the imperial administration in Gaul and, although
he tried to convince the civitates to fall away from Rome and to proclaim an
imperium Galliarum, he was by no means ubiquitously supported, not even among
his own people, and finally failed. Also the revolt of Albinus against Septimius
Severus in 196-7 was part of a fight for the imperial throne in years of civil war, and,
although these revolts originated in Gaul, they were much more part of a wider
political and military response to the rows over the imperial succession than an
expression of the Tacitean idea of perennial Gallic restlessness. Ideas of separatism
became more apparent in the third century crisis, culminating in 260-74 with the
emergence of the ‘Gallic empire’ under Postumus, yet he was a high-ranking Roman
officer in Gallienus’ administration with whom he fell out and declared himself as
counter-emperor; again it did not mean a complete break with Rome out of
nationalistic or separatist ideas but was an answer to the wider political
circumstances of the imperial government and its effects on the Gallic provinces –
even if it went clearly against the imperial system by the very appointment of a

\[11\] Urban (1999), 120-30,135-43.
\[12\] Tacitus, Ann. III.43.
many of the Gallic ‘rebels’ shared in contemporary presentation, such as ‘love of freedom’, a Gallic
‘tendency’ to be disloyal and prone to revolt.
counter-emperor. The fourth century saw the continuation of such revolts, and as was previously the case they were intrinsically linked with the wider political/military picture of the imperial government: 350 saw the usurpation of Magnentius, 355 that of Silvanus, 360 the revolt of Julian, which was followed by Magnus Maximus in 383 and Eugenius in 392. Ammianus reported previous Gallic resentment in connection with Julian’s revolt although this served Ammianus with a perfect opportunity to present Julian as a saviour-like figure whose presence alone was regarded as a sure guarantee of better political conditions in Gaul. Although Ammianus’ hero-worship of Julian should lead one to treat this account with caution, there were other writers who also report similar incidents. In 389 after the victory over Magnus Maximus, Pacatus voiced Gallic resentment against Theodosius as in their opinion the distant military campaigns of the emperor had led to Maximus’ usurpation as an attempt to promote Gallic interests.

The fifth century made no exception in this and, if the relationship between the Gallic population and the imperial establishment was already complex before the arrival of the Goths, the movement of Athaulf’s Goths into Gaul and his political attempts at cooperation with the aristocracy only added to this complexity; it was further highlighted by the final establishment of the Goths in Aquitaine in 418 as this added the point of collaboration with another political group to the question of promoting Gallic aims. The usurpations of Constantine III in 407 and Jovinus which had received widespread support among the Gallic aristocracy were again more expressions of self-help and a rejection of specific imperial politics than attempts to renounce being part of the empire or belonging to the Roman world; another indication that all these contenders remained a firm part of the Roman establishment

14 For the effects of the third century crisis on the Germanic provinces, see for example Nuber (2005), 442-3, 446-50 and Fingerling (2005), 452-3, 456-7.
15 A.M., 15.5.2.
is the fact that all the contenders for imperial power proclaimed themselves as ‘Roman’ emperors and not as ‘Gallic’ emperors – thus the challenge was against the present holder of the imperial throne and not against the office or Rome as such.\textsuperscript{17} Constantine had gained his followers after the devastations of the Danube crossing by the Alans, Suebes and Vandals in 406 and the relative lack of imperial response to the subsequent crisis. Important for the inhabitants of Gaul was a continuation of the security the imperial presence conveyed, and if this continuation was threatened, as it would have been in times of civil war or dramatic changes in the imperial succession, a usurper had to adopt the coverings of providing this security. In his aim to re-establish imperial strength in Gaul and to avoid further unrest in the form of yet another usurper, Flavius Constantius had to regain support among the Gallic nobles after the killing of a number of them in the aftermath of Jovinus’ uprising if his political reorganisation of Gaul and his fight against Athaulf were to be successful. It is therefore no surprise that he distanced himself from Dardanus, once Praetorian Prefect of Gaul, whose direct involvement in Jovinus’ assassination and the subsequent murder of his followers had caused widespread hatred among many of the Gallic nobles who had supported him. Sidonius listed a whole number of prominent contenders for power and their individual vices, and claimed that for his grandfather Apollinaris, once Praetorian Prefect of Gaul under the usurper Constantine III, Dardanus had been worse than all those vices taken together.\textsuperscript{18} Also the strong connection of the Gallic aristocracy with the \textit{civitates} and their continuous ability to retain their political activity was something Constantius had to reckon with; if he wanted their support, he had to prevent too much pressure on the \textit{civitates},

\textsuperscript{17} Stroheker (1948), 53-5.
especially in terms of the Gothic settlement.\textsuperscript{19} For the Gallic nobles a close cooperation with Constantius was helpful insofar as it gave them some influence through him at Ravenna whereas they themselves had overall far too few representatives at court to play any active role in influencing imperial politics; the few Gallic nobles at court belonged to a circle which had remained loyal to the imperial government, although eventually even members of families which had supported the usurpers would join this group.\textsuperscript{20} A lack of Gallic presence at the imperial court was nothing new; there had been few Gallic senators and equestrians in the early empire, and in contrast to other provinces there was no member of the Gallic aristocracy who became emperor until Avitus.\textsuperscript{21} After Avitus’ fall, Sidonius continued to voice similar resentments in his panegyric to Majorian in 458 and indirectly warned him about the continuation of Gallic feelings of neglect by the imperial government, especially after the attempt of the Gallic aristocracy to promote their own emperor Avitus in 455-6 had failed; although Sidonius’ personal relationship with Avitus certainly made his comment somewhat biased, it nevertheless demonstrates the continuation of such concepts.\textsuperscript{22} In fact, there seems to have been another attempt by a certain Marcellus, another Gallic noble, to become emperor after Avitus’ regime had failed; although Sidonius is very vague about the whole affair and does not provide any great detail or explanation. Despite doubts about his identity, Marcellus was most likely himself a member of the Gallic nobility, perhaps from Narbonne, where in the 440s a Marcellus was serving as

\textsuperscript{19} Lütkenhaus (1998), 113-21: on the establishment of the concilium septem provinciarum in Arles as a way to distribute the pressure on the civitas.


\textsuperscript{21} Van Dam (1985), 12-3, 21. Lewis (2001), 91-3. The movement of the imperial capital from Trier to Arles in 395 had further removed the centre of Roman control from the northern sphere and increasingly had focused Gallo-Roman attention to the southern part of Gaul.

\textsuperscript{22} Sid. Ap., Carm. V. 353-63. Indeed after Avitus’ fall, Sidonius was very elusive in his writings to reveal any precise details about his relationship with Avitus, as too outspoken political statements could be potentially fatal, see Mathisen (1979 b).
Praetorian Prefect of Gaul. Sidonius was not the only one who raised underlying aspects of dissatisfaction with the imperial administration. A chronicle of the invasion of Gaul in the 410s, written in 452 by an anonymous author from around Marseilles, exactly reflects the bitter disappointment with the imperial government and feelings of deliberate neglect of the Gallic situation. For him the dramatic destruction of Roman life was to be blamed on the mismanagement of the Roman state and a weak and ineffective administration under a corrupt imperial dynasty which was not only incapable of restricting the various barbarian groups but even actively invited them to gain a share in imperial territory. The ‘hero’ of his account is Magnus Maximus (382-388), who in his opinion had vigorously defended Gaul against the barbarian and, although he was an illegitimate ruler, was nevertheless to be preferred to an imperial house that actively damaged Roman culture. There are some problems with this text, though: the author was writing half a century after the events he was describing and most likely transferred his views on current politics into his account; moreover there was little mention of recent events and many of his arguments were based on gossip-style accounts, for example that Galla Placidia’s daughter Honoria had invited the Huns to enter the empire. Yet if one compares this account with the previous accounts, his opinion is hardly surprising and stands in a long tradition of Gallic opinion towards the Roman administration.

Also in religious writings accusations of imperial mismanagement and exploitation could be found. In his *de gubernatione dei*, Salvian severely criticised social problems like social divisions and the effects of crippling taxation on the poor population by putting the blame not only on the failings of the imperial administration but also on the Gallic aristocracy. The exploitation of the poor forced them to seek refuge from tax prosecution even in barbarian territory, thus turning

---

these originally Roman people into barbarians themselves: ‘They seek among the barbarians the dignity of the Roman because they cannot bear barbarous indignity among the Romans…they migrate either to the Goths or the Bacaudae, or to other barbarians everywhere in power; they prefer to live as freemen under an outward form of captivity than as captives under an appearance of liberty […] thus men began to live as barbarians because they were not permitted to be Romans’. A very similar argument was voiced by Orosius who equally accused the imperial administration of mismanagement: ‘Also the barbarians detesting their swords, turned to their ploughs […] so that there be found among them certain Romans who prefer poverty with freedom among the barbarians, then paying tribute with anxiety among the Romans’. Salvian’s reason for this argumentation was not to provide a social analysis but an answer to the problem theological doctrine faced when evil people such as the barbarians were allowed to gain power at the cost of the Roman people. He not only blamed the imperial house for a lack of compassionate interference in social problems as for example the Gallic chronicler had done, but the Gallic aristocracy in general by arguing that it was their abuse of power, by exploiting the prevalent social and economic difficulties, which had prompted Romans to seek their lost liberty in rebellion or by joining the barbarians. This was perhaps less an open attempt by some Romans to become part of the Gothic or other barbarian peoples by actively adopting their customs or even joining their political realms, than an accusation against the Romans in charge that there was increasingly hardly any distinction between Romans and barbarians possible. Salvian was not against the Gallic aristocracy in general, but he rejected their lack of providing social

---

25 Salvian, _de gub. dei_, V.5-6.
26 Orosius, VII.41. The image of swords turned into ploughs and spears into pruning hooks already appeared in Isaiah 2.4 containing prophecies on the coming of the Day of Judgement. Again, an interesting link contemporary theology made between apocalyptic texts and contemporary events, something, which can also be found in the texts of Rutilius or Prosper, see Part III.2 c.
security.27 The problem for Salvian was not so much the attempt of the Gallic aristocracy to care for Gaul by itself but rather that the nobles in charge continued the mismanagement of the imperial side in much the same way, thus further forcing the poor population into the arms of the barbarians. In a time when the Gallic aristocracy felt a strong and recurrent need to set itself apart from the imperial administration in order to provide for its own needs, Salvian’s opinion was thus contrary to the argument that it was the imperial government alone which was responsible for the instable situation in Gaul.

In H. Heinen’s opinion, these rebellions in Gaul demonstrated the close administrative and military connections of the Western provinces, but geographical connections did not necessarily always culminate in united political/military aims; none of these uprisings should be interpreted as a sign of a united Gallic or Western political agenda of a strict separatism from Rome. Had there ever been a strong united belief in a Gallic nation, surely one of these revolts would have succeeded in creating a Gallic state for some time. As Carroll has suggested, there were recurring violent expressions of discontent with the Roman administration but they were short-lived; besides, none of the various Gallic groups shared a united political front but were far more interested in individual perspectives as their own definition of identity was far more based on tribal units, which made a belief in a political nation impossible.28 The frequent demands of the Gallic nobility to have their political aims recognised by the empire were undoubtedly not a sign of separatist movements against the empire but on the contrary an expression of being involved in the imperial system; only a degree of direct involvement in imperial politics would have

28 Carroll (2001), 149. See for example Theuws & Hiddink (1996), 66-9, 79-80 on the peripheral structure of the Northern part of Gaul in the fifth and sixth and seventh century.
enabled them to recognise signs on the imperial side of neglecting Gallic interests. Political resentment was more directed against specific points within the imperial administration but never against Rome itself or the concept of the emperor as the head of the Roman state, and never in any way questioned their Romanitas.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{29} Sivonen (2006), 106, 114.
b) The *civitas*

The Gallic nobles were usually far more engaged in the business concerning the *civitas* and an active involvement in imperial affairs was rather confined to the religious sphere of the Roman priesthoods. The main focus of the Gallic landowner, which connected him effectively with the Gallic countryside, was the *civitas*, originally the traditional Gallic nations which Rome had kept and developed further with their own capitals and a Roman constitution, and even more so on a local level the *pagus*, originally the tribal organisation of Gaul. Mentioned in Caesar, the structures of the *civitates* were undoubtedly older, though, and the subsequent Roman administration left these structures by and large intact, which further eased the acceptance of the Roman presence in Gaul. As Lewis has observed, their strength lay in them being based on the ‘socio-political regions of Gaul’, and although their power was greatly diminished with the Roman conquest, the local aristocracy remained an important factor in running these communities, which perpetuated itself in the link the Gallo-Roman aristocracy was to have with the *civitates*.\(^\text{30}\) This created a strong sense of identification with Gallic matters and was expressed in a close tie with local networks and patronage.\(^\text{31}\)

The *civitas* was the focal point of local administration and religion as well as a centre from which aristocratic pride in and attachment to their Gallic homeland stemmed. Paulinus of Pella for example talked about his strong involvement in local networks and Sidonius stressed his deep connection with his Avernian roots, which he placed above his connection with Rome, when he begged Euric to restore him to his former

\(^{30}\) Lewis (2001), 70-1. For details of the structures and development of the local governments, see Drinkwater (1983).

Although the presence of the imperial court in Gaul provided a distraction from these links, it never managed to sever them completely and it was these connections, perhaps more than connections with the imperial court or the Roman government, which remained the main focus for identity for the Gallic aristocrat. Any Gallic identity was therefore more connected with the *civitas* or with the area where the aristocrat came from (apart from the strong emphasis on family and rank) and not necessarily with the whole of Gaul; Gaul was indeed a geographical construction but not a united political unit. This strong link with the affairs of the Gallic countryside and its population certainly goes a long way in explaining the fierce insistence of the Gallic aristocracy on having their interests recognised by the imperial court and if necessary on using force to achieve this aim. The close connection of the aristocracy with their local communities could also be seen in their ability to raise their own armed forces, although changes in the military organisation of the imperial army after the frequent interference of Gallic auxiliary commanders in imperial politics put an end to this; again in the fifth and sixth century there were some Gallic nobles who levied their own troops. For Van Dam, the strong dynamics between landlords and peasants through a system of patronage and dependence and the link with local networks became all the more apparent when the imperial administration was weakened; he regards the case of the *Bacaudae* as an example of this connection. Also Sivonen saw this phenomenon as an expression of local attempts to solve socio-political problems with which the imperial administration was unable to deal. Drinkwater, however, doubts these explanations on the basis of

---

32 Paulinus, *Euch.* 435-7. Sid. Ap., *Carm.* VII. 585-90. Of course Sidonius was trying to regain his position after his exile, and the emphasis on his Gallic roots made sense, especially when Euric had effectively replaced Roman rule in Gaul.

33 Van Dam (1985), 15-6, 28-9, 33. For the organisation/administration of the *civitas*, see Sivonen (2006), 103-14, 137, 141-3, 158.

34 Stroheker (1948), 11-2. Sivonen (2996), 16-7, 68. Lewis (2001), 72: Gaul was largely a construction, thus Rome had to create a unifying identity, which included the entirety of Gaul and not just the links with the *civitates*; the Altar in Lyon as a meeting point for the *Concilium Galliarum* served such a purpose.
severe recurring disruptions of the continuity of the Gallic aristocracy, which would have made concepts of continuous local leadership unlikely; he also rejects the idea of this uprising as a fight between different social strata. For him the *Bacaudae* were a product of and an answer to the crisis the Gallic aristocracy faced in the third century after the end of the ‘Gallic empire’; their reappearance in the fifth century is in his opinion not a sign for a continuous movement although it was most likely caused again by the disorder of local administration.\(^{35}\) Drinkwater argues that after the collapse of the ‘Gallic empire’ there were hardly any prominent Gallic politicians on the political stage of the fourth century and those involved in imperial politics like Ausonius were people who had risen to wealth and influence through their occupation as rhetors, lawyers and officers in the new imperial administration after the crisis of the third century, or had gained their power through the exploitation of the aftermath of this crisis. Only under Julian were there more Gallic nobles found in the military and political sphere although their family background was often obscure. Besides, the great families of the earlier empire had disappeared with the end of the ‘Gallic empire’ and it has been argued that even if those newcomers had inherited all the previous aristocratic attitudes towards the empire, it took half a century before these people once more became noticeable in politics and even then they remained a limited number.\(^{36}\) Although the Gallic nobility in the fourth century was perhaps a new creation as it had very few links with the previous aristocracy and had risen to its status due to its own office-holding rather than long-standing family connections and family traditions, there was one thing I would argue which had continued to be

---

\(^{35}\) Drinkwater (1984), (1992); (1989), 191-9, he partly accepts Van Dam’s argument. Van Dam (1985), Ch. I. See also Thompson (1956).

\(^{36}\) Drinkwater (1986), 142-50, against Stroheker and Matthews. Sivonen (2006), 15. Sivan (1993), 17-8, 21-2, 65, 99-100. During the crisis of Valentinian’s severe illness, questions of succession were raised and there must have been a strong enough Gallic faction at court to promote a fellow-Gaul, Sextius Rusticus Iulianus, as possible candidate; Valentinian, though, appointed his son Gratian instead and Iulianus reversed his alliance back to the emperor.
of importance throughout: the link with Gaul as a country, as a native province, as the land from which a person came. Even if one argues that the attachment to the Gallic countryside, and in a wider sense, the *civitas*, was something these ‘new’ aristocrats had adopted like their status as it was an aspect of Gallic aristocratic bearing, it cannot be denied that this attachment had continued to be of importance; otherwise it would have made little sense to perpetuate this aspect. This would be proof of how important this link with the Gallic provinces was. Thus, I would propose that even if the actual aristocratic families were subject to change and their presence in the fourth century was less prominent than before, essential values, whether inherited or newly adopted, such as a strong attachment to their native provinces and their *civitas* remained an important factor of continuity among the Gallo-Roman aristocracy.

How does this close link with the *civitas* and with local Gallic networks work then in regard to the concept of holding office within the empire? As said before, public offices formed part of the self-definition of any Roman aristocrat and were regarded as an aspect of duty towards personal ambition, especially in relationship to the continuation of traditional careers of the family; hence it must have been essential for any Gallic noble to enter some kind of office within the imperial administration or the military. As these tensions with the imperial government were so persistent, a certain reluctance to gain offices at court would be understandable; however, as almost all of the Gallic revolts stood in relation to the political events in the empire and at the imperial court, the Gallic aristocracy must have been directly involved in imperial politics. Mathisen argued that it must have been clear to the Gallic

---

37 For example Ausonius in his poem on his inheritance in Aquitaine praised his ancestral estate: III.1. *de herediolo*, and continued to stress his family’s Gallic background: IV.2., 2; IV.3.12; IV.4.1-7.
aristocracy that, even if it resented imperial politics, a continuation of their lifestyle was only possible with the continuous support of the imperial government.\textsuperscript{39} In Drinkwater’s opinion the Gallic nobility sought public offices as part of their political careers and they were not Gallic aristocrats who had temporarily entered imperial offices but they were imperial officials who happened to be from Gaul.\textsuperscript{40} In the light of his argument stated above that there were several disruptions the Gallic aristocracy faced after the third century, any connection with the \textit{civitas} in the way the aristocracy had felt before would have equally suffered severe strains. I would like to propose, though, that the successors of the old families in the fourth century had indeed adopted the concept of strong links with local networks and at the same time continued to strive for public offices. Thus they could promote their Gallic interests but simultaneously also seek imperial offices; but as previously said, there were few Gallic aristocrats found in imperial offices, perhaps an indicator that overall their political ambitions lay more within Gaul than with the wider empire. Yet, as will be discussed below, with the Gothic settlement in 418, at least for the Roman aristocracy in Aquitaine but increasingly in other territories too, once the Gothic court started to expand, there was a necessity to cooperate with the Goths; thus the preservation of local interests would also have prevented a more active role at the imperial court – at least to a certain extent.

Sidonius surely is an excellent example of this phenomenon: as Avitus’ son-in-law he had accompanied the emperor to Rome where he delivered a panegyric in Avitus’ honour and had been rewarded with a bronze statue in the forum of Trajan. Already in his panegyric to Avitus, Sidonius stressed his Roman as well as his Gallic and even Avernian roots, hence clearly stressing his Gallic link although he also emphasises the fact that despite Avitus’ Gallic origin, he is made emperor to preserve

\textsuperscript{39} Mathisen (1979a), 193.  
\textsuperscript{40} Drinkwater (1989a),150-1 against Matthews; also (1998).
the Roman state; thus Gaul is not acting for its own good but for that of the empire.\textsuperscript{41} Fallen into disgrace after Avitus’ fall, he sought pardon from Majorian. Yet as stated before, in the panegyric to Majorian Sidonius once more stressed his Gallic roots and voiced the danger of recurring Gallic resentments against the empire; bearing in mind his relationship with Avitus, there must have been a reason for Sidonius to raise such a sensitive topic, especially when he tried to gain favour with the new emperor. Surely only a firm personal belief in the securing of Gallic interests would have made him mention this in public praise of the new emperor.\textsuperscript{42} At the same time, Sidonius was certainly also keen to promote holding offices within the imperial administration: he himself became \textit{praefectus urbis} in Rome and a patrician, and tried to motivate his friends too to enter into offices as soon as the opportunity presented itself.\textsuperscript{43} In a letter to his friend Syagrius he urged him to leave the countryside and to become involved in public offices: ‘How long are you going to busy yourself with rustic activities and disdain those of the town…do not bring a slur on the nobility by staying so constantly in the country…give yourself back to your father, to your fatherland’; in another letter to Eutropius he urges him to forget his over-zealous devotion to the countryside and to follow his ancestors in taking up public offices.\textsuperscript{44} However, one ought not to regard these people as mere countrymen whose only difference from the poor farm-workers was their noble name. As Drinkwater suggested, the danger was not so much in their devotion to the

\textsuperscript{41} Sid. Ap., \textit{Carm.} VII.585-90.
\textsuperscript{42} Sid. Ap., \textit{Carm.} V. 353-63. In his writings he rarely referred to his relationship with Avitus or to his reign, not only a sign of Sidonius’ ambiguous style of writing but also a sign of avoiding potential trouble from subsequent politics. See also Mathisen (1979a), 165-71.
\textsuperscript{43} He had also received a statue in his honour, Sid. Ap., \textit{Ep.} I.9.6-8; V.16; IX.16.3. Interestingly it was Sidonius as a noble of Gallic descent who held this prestigious office in Rome; whether that was an attempt by Anthemius to promote a Gallic ‘faction’ at the imperial court or rather a Gallic presence in the political circles in Rome, or a mere coincidence after Sidonius had delivered a panegyric to Anthemius, is open to question; but \textit{Ep.} I.9 shows that Sidonius was involved in political talks and his appointment was presumably more than mere coincidence.
\textsuperscript{44} Sid. Ap., \textit{Ep.} VIII.8 for Syagrius whom he also praised for his later devotion to learning barbarian dialects, although this extent of assimilation was going somewhat too far for Sidonius to understand; \textit{Epist.} I.6 for Eutropius.
management of their country-estates and a keen interest in hunting and farm-
management but in being overtly exposed to the latent uncultivated savagery of the
countryside, which would then turn the previously cultivated person into a similar
brute.\textsuperscript{45} The enjoyment of a certain amount of bucolic pleasures was acceptable but
the high culture of the town was not to be forgotten over them. For Sidonius, then,
the pursuit of the traditional Roman devotion to holding public offices was by no
means applied to the exclusion of the devotion to Gallic interests. As will be seen
later on, this interest in Gallic matters became even more apparent in Sidonius’ later
life when he fought for the preservation of Roman territory (albeit as bishop) but it
did not stop him from feeling bitter resentment against the imperial government and
its lack of support in this matter. Besides, Majorian not only tried hard to avoid
further estrangement from the Italian nobility but also to incorporate the Gallic
aristocracy into his regime to secure their support by appointing people who had
family connections in both regions;\textsuperscript{46} had these nobles only been interested in
keeping access to imperial offices, surely then there would have been less reason for
Majorian to do so as they would have supported him out of sheer personal ambition.
Therefore these aristocrats must have continued to support their Gallic links and
these links Majorian wanted to secure for himself. For example as his \textit{magister
militum} he appointed Aegidius, who stood in close relationship with some of the
oldest and most influential aristocratic families in Gaul and also had widespread
links with various barbarian groups.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{45} Drinkwater (2001), 138-9: proposing that the difference between countryside and town was largely
a mental frontier rather than an actual barrier.

\textsuperscript{46} Mathisen (1991a), 172, 177-94. Correspondence and family ties with Italy were on a rather small
scale though.

\textsuperscript{47} After Majorian’s murder, Aegidius refused to support Ricimer but established his own power-base.
Aegidius was described as ‘king’ of the Franks, see Gregory of Tours, \textit{Hist. Franc.} II.12. See also
further below, p.189.
Thus even when the Gallic aristocracy had faced serious alterations in the aftermath of the third century, the new noble families continued close links with Gallic interests or such links quickly resurfaced; hence the Gallic nobility from the fourth century onwards came to seek political careers in imperial service yet at the same time firmly promoted their Gallic interests. Furthermore, even these strong links with the *civitas* and with Gallic networking did not exclude a concept of Roman identity; the aristocratic values of its nobility and self-definition were based on the sharing of Roman culture and Roman identity. A Gallic aristocrat from the fourth century onwards was in my opinion both Gallic and Roman at the same time; any problems with loyalty to the imperial government were entirely politically based and not culturally inspired. This enabled Gallic nobles like Sidonius to strive to preserve Roman culture, despite being employed at the Gothic and other barbarian courts. The alterations in the political sphere in the empire gradually split up the previously connected idea of political and cultural unity under overall Roman rule. The aristocratic families continued their Roman way of life albeit now confined to the cultural sphere of literature and education, but politically speaking they were increasingly employed at the barbarian courts. By the fifth century earlier tendencies to seek imperial employment became increasingly difficult to sustain, although they were still valued, not least when the imperial court moved southwards, which would have increased the already important focus on local networks although this did not automatically exclude the concept of holding office in imperial service as such; furthermore the establishment of the various barbarian kingdoms soon involved the difficult decision of balancing the necessity to preserve these local links and political

---

48 Sivonen (2006), 72-3, 104. Lewis (2001), 72-3: the *Concilium Galliarum*, the Council of the Gauls, met at the Altar at Lyon, and although the original purpose of the altar was purely religious, the gathering of the leading men of the *civitates* had created a floor for shaping and demonstrating affinity with the Roman sphere; considering the fact that Gaul was more a geographical construction, this had been an important step in creating Gallo-Roman identity in the early empire.
loyalty to the empire.\(^{49}\) It was precisely this seesawing between loyalty to the emperor on the one side and to counteract the increasing pressure of the barbarian courts onto the civitas that created the complex position of people like Arvandus and Seronatus.\(^{50}\) Strict obedience to the imperial administration was highly dangerous, especially in territories where there was a predominant barbarian presence; equally the transfer of political alliances to the new barbarian ruler was potentially a fatal move as it was regarded on the Roman side as treason, which was, as long as the imperial juridical system was in place, potentially punishable with death. As will be seen, there were cases where this process of assimilation came almost at the cost of losing Roman identity completely to the promotion of barbarian interests.

Let us then turn to this process of assimilation or rather to the process of striking a balance between cooperation with the empire, an avoidance of accusations of treason and a seeking of political advancement at the barbarian courts.

\(^{49}\) See also Sivan (1993), 14, 138-41.
\(^{50}\) See Part IV.2 a, b.
2. Assimilation with the Gothic court

How then did this process of political assimilation between Gallic aristocracy and the Gothic court work in terms of unifying political ambitions with traditional concepts of loyalty to the state? Furthermore, what did this encompass for the individual Gallic aristocrat? First of all, it is important to find a definition for this process of assimilation – what is meant by the term ‘assimilation’? Taken from the Latin similis: like, resembling, it can mean: a) to take in and understand, b) absorb and integrate into a people or culture, c) absorb and digest, d) regard as or make similar.\footnote{The shorter Oxford English Dictionary (1973), 119.}

Certainly the second definition is of interest here as the relationship between Gothic people and Gallo-Roman population was a process of integrations and absorption into each other.

For the purpose of my argument I would like to define this term as a two-fold concept: in regard to the barbarian side, it was the establishment and ramification of their military and subsequently political power in a Roman province. Above all, though, it was their acceptance of Romans into their political and administrative system as active members in an advisory and administrative capacity and into their military units as leaders, by regarding their individual strength as an asset to boost barbarian interests instead of seeing them as an enemy to the same interests. On the Roman side, it was the acceptance of this barbarian power and its direct impact on traditional Roman life, society and culture in the province in which this barbarian regime had been set up. Added to this was an active attempt on the side of the aristocrats to regard the barbarian kingdoms as political and military successors of the imperial system and to seek employment there in much the same way as they had previously done at the imperial court. Overall it meant an attempt at serious
cooperation to utilise the respective strengths of both sides in order to create a new political/military/economic and social order. Whether or not that automatically extended to the cultural sphere and regarded an exchange of socio-cultural customs as a prerequisite for political assimilation is very much open to question. I would propose that cultural assimilation was very often the by-product of political assimilation but that the former was not a necessary aspect of the latter. Attempts to engage in this process of assimilation could be a conscious decision as the result of a serious belief in establishing a new political order and to develop the strengths of both sides further; yet it could also be the result of the sheer need to survive in an altered world without any change of a belief in the superiority of Roman culture, an aspect which is obviously much more applicable to the Roman side. Collaboration with the various barbarian courts was potentially regarded as active treason against the Roman empire although it became increasingly a political and social fact. As Heather observed, with the Gothic settlement in 418, it became more or less an economic necessity for any landholder in Aquitaine to enter into some form of collaboration with them. Once Gothic power increased, motives concerning the political necessity of this process were added to this. Employment at the Gothic court gradually developed over the next fifty years: from a small number of individuals, their number increased until Gallic aristocrats were eventually being employed in both administrative and military positions in the Gothic system. This reflected not only the growing acceptance of the Gothic presence which led to a higher proportion of Romans willing to assimilate with them but also the fact that the imperial government came more and more to be replaced by Gothic power.

52 See Bierbrauer (1996) for the continuation of the Romanitas in Frankish areas of settlement in terms of archaeological records and material culture. See also Part I.1.
53 Heather (1992), 90-1.
Sidonius is one of the best sources for his descriptions of various Gallic aristocrats who were actively working at the Gothic court; perhaps two of the most notorious cases Sidonius described were the treason trials against Arvandus and Seronatus, as they vividly demonstrate the complexity of assimilation or rather political cooperation with the Gothic kingdom posed for a Gallic aristocrat. But also his own relationship with the Gothic court demonstrates vividly the complexity of this process and highlights the ambiguity of a belief in any assimilation between the two systems.

---

Arvandus, twice Praetorian Prefect of Gaul and thus a high-ranking Roman officer, had been accused of open collaboration with the Goths against the empire in 470: ‘Amongst other pleas which the provincials had instructed them to urge [a reference to accusations of financial extortion], they were bringing against him an intercepted letter which Arvandus’ secretary admitted to have written at his master’s dictation. It appeared to be a message to the king of the Goths [Euric], dissuading him from peace with the emperor [Anthemius]…declaring that the Gallic provinces ought according to the law of nations to be divided up with the Burgundians…the opinion of the lawyers was that this letter was red-hot treason’.\(^{55}\) Arvandus was clearly taking steps to enter into a political cooperation with the Gothic court. Furthermore, he was apparently openly supporting Euric’s ideas of expansionism and certainly seems to have tried to convince him not to continue the relationship between the Goths and the empire as outlined in the 418 treaty, by urging him not to enter into peace negotiations with the emperor. Another part of his actions could have been linked to the attachment of the Gallic aristocracy to their local networks and the preservation of local interests. His collaboration with Euric was perhaps partly based on his wish to foster and secure Gallic interests, which were increasingly dependent on the goodwill of the Goths.

Considering Euric’s inclination towards an anti-Roman policy when he aimed for a serious programme of territorial expansion, attempts such as Arvandus made to secure favours with the predominant military power in Gaul certainly made sense. In 466 Euric had murdered his brother and predecessor Theoderic II and had stopped following the outlines of the treaty established in 418 which had by and large

continued until then to help support Roman interests and to provide a degree of
stability in Gaul. The Goths ceased to be available as federate troops for the empire,
which meant a rapid decline of Roman influence in Gaul and effectively showed that
the Goths had come to push relentlessly for their own aims without any need to
consider imperial attitudes. Euric strove for aggressive campaigns to gain territory: in
Gaul he wanted the land between the Atlantic, the Loire and the Rhone, and to
establish Gothic dominance in Spain, and despite some resistance (Sidonius’ fight for
Clermont is an example of this), by 475 he was to have annexed most of these areas
(except for the Suebian kingdom in the north-west). Furthermore, the disastrous
result of the expedition to end Vandal rule in 467, which had ended with a major
defeat of the Roman fleet, had drained the empire of vital resources for years to come
and had brought it to the brink of bankruptcy; Rome was therefore in no position to
enforce its rule in Gaul against Euric’s expansionism, which effectively left the
Gothic king to his own devices. Bearing in mind the extraordinary skills of Euric as
a leader and his aggressive policy, this was proving to be fatal. Arvandus must have
known that there was very little interference from imperial authorities to be expected
and that any future continuation of Gallic or Roman aims was to be upheld by Gothic
goodwill. Arvandus’ involvement with Euric was therefore in accordance with
promoting his Gallic but also his personal interests as he had realised that imperial
power in Gaul was rapidly diminishing; he therefore opted to gain support from the
stronger military and political side and hoped to be pardoned by the Romans on
account of trying to preserve Roman/Gallic interests.

Arvandus’ office-holding in Roman service, though, posed a serious problem as any
active promotion of Gothic aims, especially against Roman interests, counted as

---

56 Wolfram (1997), 153. Bury (1889), 341-7. For Gothic activities from 418 until Euric see for
e.g. example Heather (1992), 84-93.
trea. Any Roman who actively helped Euric to realise his plans was therefore seriously opposing Roman interests. Thus the problem of this trial was the difficulty of establishing what precisely benefited imperial attempts at preserving Roman or local interests in Gaul and what counted as treason. That Arvandus was partly also seeking personal favours and had come into trouble for alleged financial extortion and administrative mismanagement in Gaul only added to the complexity. That some fellow Gallic aristocrats accused him of misconduct was not surprising. Their motives were either inspired by a still predominant devotion to the Roman cause, which excluded any serious attempts at assimilation with the Goths and regarded Arvandus as committing treason, or were part of wider political intrigues which offered huge profits out of the relative instability of the new political order and exploited questions of loyalty and political conduct for their own advancement. In Sidonius’ view Arvandus had been caught in this and had fallen foul of correctly interpreting Roman law as he seems to have been unaware that any action that endangered the Roman people and threatened its security was counted as treason. Yet in the light of Arvandus’ high office in the Roman administration this is surprising as he must have been familiar with the workings of the law. Thus it has been argued that Arvandus must have counted on the support of the imperial government, especially of Ricimer, Anthemius’ son-in-law, and the real power behind the throne, to back up his cooperation with Euric. There is no evidence about Ricimer’s involvement with Arvandus, but in the light of his subsequent trial, any support on Ricimer’s side, if it was ever seriously considered, was quickly

---

58 Informers and political spies were nothing new, but the instability of the imperial administration lent itself to being exploited. For example Paulinus of Pella was embittered by the fact that even members of his own family and friends were willing to make a profit through such activities.

59 Ricimer was a grandson of Wallia (Sid. Ap., Carm. II.360-5); he had been appointed magister militum by Avitus and effectively became kingmaker by promoting Majorian, Libius Severus and eventually Anthemius (467-72) as emperors in order to preserve his own power. Ricimer married Alypia, Anthemius’ daughter to cement this alliance. See Bury (1889), 327-41. Harries (1992), 306-7. Heather (1992), 92.
withdrawn. One could take this even further by arguing that if Arvandus did trust in Ricimer’s support for his pro-Gothic policy, it might have been based on an assumption that because Ricimer was himself of Gothic descent, he would have had an interest in promoting Gothic interests; but this was obviously a severe miscalculation on Arvandus’ side. Teitler even argues that Sidonius’ account of Arvandus being ignorant of the fact that a man could be accused of treason even if he never aspired to the throne could hint towards a possible ambition of Arvandus to take his political game much further and to become emperor himself. It is true that the initial charge against him was financial extortion, for which he had been arrested and sent to Rome for trial; it was only the Gallic delegation headed by Tonantius Ferreolus, Praetorian Prefect of Gaul in 451, which had brought forward the far more serious accusation of conspiracy with Euric. Nevertheless I would still argue that the major problem of Arvandus was his interpretation of securing his Gallic interests and the subsequent mishandling of it, and that one should not read too much into Sidonius’ remark about the purple. The conspicuous letter had more to do with disrupting peace between Euric and Anthemius and a new organisation of the Gallic provinces, but it did not mention any ambition on Arvandus’ side to gain more personal power; it is true, though, that Sidonius chose not to elaborate on other charges mentioned in this letter and thus there is no further information on other motives.

The problem with the whole account of this court-case is that Arvandus was a friend of Sidonius who was not prepared to condemn Arvandus for a crime for which he was later more than ready to condemn Seronatus. Furthermore, Sidonius is almost the only extensive source on both cases and his letters were written with the intention

---

60 Anthemius presumably turned Arvandus’ death penalty into exile. If this was the case, it could be an indicator that the official Roman interpretation of Arvandus’ motives regarded them as promoting Gallic interests and less as an attempt of treason against the Roman state. See Teitler (1992), 310-2 based on Sid. Ap., Ep.1.7.11.
of having them published; thus a certain bias or at least ambiguity is inevitably
unavoidable. Sidonius was even willing to risk partial social ostracism by
remaining loyal to him: ‘I am distressed by the fall of Arvandus and do not conceal
my distress…I have shown myself this man’s friend even more than his easy-going
and unstable character justified, as is proved by the disfavour which has lately flared
up against me on his account…I will give the facts whilst paying all respect to the
loyalty which is due even to a fallen friend’; Sidonius’ own serious defence of
Arvandus led some fellow aristocrats (like Magnus Felix) to doubt Sidonius’ own
political loyalty (this was before Sidonius became bishop and played an active role in
defending Clermont against Euric) and prompted some of them to withdraw their
friendship. Furthermore, as Sidonius was Praefectus urbis at that time, he should
have been presiding over the iudicium quinquevirale, the panel of five senators
chosen to investigate serious allegations against senators, and thus have been in
charge of judging Arvandus. Sidonius was not presiding over this panel as either his
term of office had expired by the time the case reached Rome, or, more likely, he had
deliberately been absent from Rome in order to avoid having to judge his friend. He
went even further by explaining Arvandus’ actions as the result of a misinterpretation
of the laws against the opinion of the imperial lawyers, and offered him active help,
although Arvandus rejected this.

Just as Sidonius was willing to support Arvandus, in contrast part of his family was
acting as his prosecutors with Tonantius Ferreolus, who was related to Sidonius
through his wife Papianilla (Sidonius’ wife was also a Papianilla) and his paternal
uncle Thaumastus; such differences about political loyalty continued in Sidonius’

---

continue their correspondence with Sidonius although they had been friends since childhood – in the
light of the importance placed upon correspondence, this was a serious break with ties of friendship
and social networking.
family with his brother-in-law Ecdicius fighting against the Goths and Euric in particular, and his own son Apollinaris being employed at the Gothic court as a military leader who eventually fought with Alaric II against the Franks at the battle of Vouillé in 507.\textsuperscript{64} As will be seen later on, in fact Sidonius’ own involvement with Euric and the Gothic establishment in general was more than complex, as he came to accept the political and military necessity of cooperating with Euric and finding employment with the Goths, but simultaneously despised the Goths in the traditional sense of regarding them as brute barbarians. Arvandus’ case in court revealed how difficult this whole concept of active cooperation with the Goths still was despite the establishment of the Gothic court several decades earlier. Looking at Arvandus as an individual participating in this process of assimilation, there were certainly individuals who made a conscious choice of cooperating with the Goths and were perhaps even prepared to run the risk of being accused of treason (despite Sidonius’ denial that Arvandus knew what his actions encompassed). His motives were a mixture of gaining personal advantages, perhaps already apparent in his financial endeavours, which had led to him being accused in the first place. Whether he had hoped also to gain an official position at Euric’s court or only planned to get his personal and local interests recognised, cannot be answered as his process of assimilation was effectively stopped before it could take off.

\textsuperscript{64} Such rifts were also found in other families and at times affected bonds of friendship: a certain Eucherius (recipient of letter III.8) had offered Sidonius help against Euric whereas his son Calminius, a friend of Sidonius (recipient of letter V.12) had fought for the Gothic king against Sidonius during the siege of Clermont. Sid. Ap., Propempticon ad libellum, Carm. XXIV; Ep. III.3. Heather (2005), 419-20. Harries (1994), 13-4; (1996), 37, 39. Teitler (1992), 313. Claude (1998), 124-5.
b) Seronatus

Considering how far Sidonius went to defend Arvandus’ undoubted political cooperation with Euric, it is surprising how ready he was to condemn Seronatus for the same behaviour. However, by 475, the year of Seronatus’ trial, Sidonius’ own situation had dramatically changed and as bishop of Clermont he had become personally involved in a direct confrontation with Euric’s politics. This experience was certainly reflected in his writing about Seronatus’ trial. Seronatus, much like Arvandus, was intent on having his personal ambitions recognised and he was prepared to participate fully in Gothic politics, even at the cost of betraying Roman interests. Seronatus too had held important public offices and was employed by Euric. He was enforcing control in the local area in Euric’s favour with the apparent support of the Gothic king and apparently played an active role in Euric’s aggressive expansionism. Sidonius warned his friend Pannychius of Seronatus’ widespread power and urged him to avoid the danger Seronatus’ presence alone created; in his words, Seronatus was nothing short of a monster whose financial problems and personal greed drove him to extreme measures by exploiting the increasing Gothic dominance: ‘This very Catiline of our age returned lately from Aire to make here one big draught of blood and the fortunes of the wretched inhabitants…in his case a long-concealed spirit of brutality is being revealed more fully every day. His is openly malignant and basely deceitful; he…exacts like a despot, condemns like a judge, accuses falsely like a barbarian…he is ceaselessly busy either in punishing thefts or in committing them…he crowds the woods with fugitives, the farms with barbarian occupants…be brags to the Goths and insults the Romans; he tramples the law of Theodosius [i.e. Roman law] and issues laws of...

---

65 There is very little information on Seronatus’ actual political career; perhaps he had been vicarius septem provinciarum, see Sid. Ap., Ep. II.1.3, VII, 7.2. PLRE, Seronatus, 995-6. Teitler (1992), 310.
Theoderic [i.e. Gothic law]. In contrast to Arvandus, Sidonius never mentioned anything regarding Seronatus’ own opinion about his assimilation with the Goths and whether or not he was aware that his actions equalled treason. It could be that there was nothing known about Seronatus’ personal motives or that Sidonius never bothered to report them because of his hostile attitude towards him. But just as in the case of Arvandus, his status as a high-profile Roman officer would have meant that he had a certain level of understanding of Roman law. Hence it is likely that Seronatus would have known about the dangerous position he was in. Although Seronatus was eventually executed for his actions, Sidonius remained bitter about this whole episode as in his opinion the imperial administration had been barely willing to put him on trial or to execute him. In the light of the desperate situation Sidonius (together with Ecdicius) faced in trying to protect Roman interests against the Goths, particularly in defending Clermont against Euric, a fight which was eventually lost in 475 when the emperor Julius Nepos ceded the Auvergne to the Goths, this bitterness makes sense; for him Seronatus was a Roman whose disloyalty to Rome had helped Euric to gain the Auvergne and was thus indirectly responsible for the hardship Sidonius and his charges had suffered during the siege of Clermont. Although Sidonius made much of this defence and presented Clermont as a bulwark of Roman strength (something we will return to later on), he himself admitted that Clermont was in fact very much under Burgundian protection and thus torn between two rival barbarian powers. Sidonius was undoubtedly aware that the ceding of the Auvergne was a desperate attempt by the imperial side to pacify Euric as it was

---

66 Sid. Ap., Ep. II.1; also I.7.3, V.13.1-4 and VII.7.2. Interestingly Sidonius compared Seronatus with Catiline, a figure of the distant Roman republic, and not with somebody more contemporary; this is a good indicator for the strong continuation of classical education (Sallust and Cicero were still part of the curriculum of an aristocratic education) and its active usage in rhetoric and literature. Whether or not Sidonius also chose the comparison with Catiline to imply a politically more sinister motive of Seronatus’ involvement with Euric has to remain open.

hardly in a position to enforce Roman rule: Majorian’s murder in 461 has been regarded as the starting point of the end of Roman control in Gaul; the *magister militum per Gallias*, Aegidius, refused to accept the new emperor Libius Severus, especially as Aegidius had been a friend of Majorian. Severus lacked military support and called the Burgundians and Goths for help against Aegidius. For the support of Severus the Goths under Theoderic II had gained Narbonne in 462/3, which prompted Aegidius (who died in 465) to rebel, which gave more opportunity to the Goths to interfere; although there was still a degree of imperial administration left in the southern part, it was not sufficient and Julius Nepos finally had to hand over the Auvergne to Euric. Nevertheless this did not stop Sidonius from feeling betrayed by people like Seronatus and the imperial administration in general, which seemingly could not care less about the sufferings of fellow Romans defending Roman rights by not even acknowledging the treason of Seronatus: ‘The state in its turn scarcely had the courage to put him to death after his conviction. Is this our due reward for enduring want and fire and sword and pestilence [during the siege of Clermont]…was it for this famous peace [the handing over of the Auvergne with its capital Clermont] that we ripped the herbage from the cracks in our walls and took it away for food?’ Apart from his damning portrayal by Sidonius, Seronatus seemingly followed a path Arvandus had already started to pursue, but in a more aggressive and open fashion; whether or not Sidonius’ comparison of Seronatus with

---

68 Bury (1889), 333. Burgess (1992), 26-7. Heather (1992), 85. Elton (1992), 172 states that it was surprising for Aegidius, who had the military support, not to have himself or anyone else declared emperor. According to Fanning, though, Aegidius and his son Syagrius had established some sort of independent authority. Syagrius inherited his father’s political establishment and became known as ‘rex Romanorum’, see Gregory of Tours, *Hist. Franc.* II, 18,27. At times both were styled as king of the Franks or have even been called ‘king of the Romans’; considering the general Roman hostility to this title, there has been some considerable debate about the real meaning of Aegidius’ and Syagrius’ title, although the title *rex* seems to have appeared as an official title more often than the Roman associations with it would suggest, see Fanning (1992), 289-97. Geary (1988), 81-2: according to him, the title ‘king’ is debatable, although presumably Syagrius had held some Roman title whereas his power relied largely on his barbarian troops.

Catiline is a hidden reverence to an ambition to rise to the purple, similarly perhaps to Arvandus, or was just a suitable comparison to demonstrate his knowledge of the venerated traditional authors of Latin literature, is impossible to judge.\(^{70}\) I would argue that Seronatus’ actions were attempts to secure interests that were both for personal advancement as well as linked to his local Gallic interests, and as Euric was by now the predominant political and military figure in Gaul, a more serious cooperation with him made sense.\(^{71}\) Thus Seronatus regarded his assimilation with the Gothic cause as a necessity to secure personal and perhaps also local interests. But it has to be considered that there were enough instances where Roman officials had used cooperation with barbarian forces to secure enough strength to bid for the throne, and thus this concept cannot be completely excluded for both Arvandus and Seronatus. However, Seronatus was perhaps not in a powerful enough position as a Roman officer to have had any real chance to stage a rebellion; Arvandus as Praetorian Prefect certainly had the more distinguished career and presumably would have had more support, but as mentioned earlier, the whole idea of them bidding for the imperial throne is very much based on speculation.

\(^{70}\) Teitler (1992), 317.
\(^{71}\) Bury (1889), 342-4.
c) Sidonius and other Gallic nobles

There were more Gallic nobles actively employed at the Gothic court, and not all of them were condemned for treason or harboured higher ambitions of gaining imperial power.\textsuperscript{72} Considering the earlier discussed tendency of the Gallic nobility to promote its own interests, even at the cost of supporting usurpations, such an active assimilation with the Goths (and other barbarian courts such as the Burgundians) should be hardly surprising. As said earlier, part of the self-definition of a Roman aristocrat was the holding of public offices; when the imperial government could no longer provide this, it was increasingly the barbarian courts that started to replace the basis for this. Above all it was the expansion of Gothic power, and the replacement of previously Roman spheres of influence that drove increasing numbers of Gallic aristocrats to enter Gothic employment. A large part in this rise in collaboration with the Goths had been played by Avitus, whose connection with the Goths had started to foster this relationship from the 450s onwards: he was first proclaimed emperor whilst being at the Gothic court where he had sought to recruit help for Petronius Maximus, and was then confirmed by the Romans in Arles. Since he was a scion of the Gallic nobility himself, this certainly encouraged other Gallic aristocrats to follow into Gothic employment.

It was against this background that Sidonius wrote the description of Theoderic II, praising his leadership and even styling the Gothic king as a quasi-Roman: ‘[At his court] you can find there Greek elegance, Gallic plenty, Italian briskness’, and went as far as to call Theoderic the preserver of the Roman people.\textsuperscript{73} Sidonius’ favourable

\textsuperscript{72} See Mathisen & Sivan (1999 c), 31-3.
\textsuperscript{73} Sid Ap., \textit{Carm.} XXIII.71-3; \textit{Epist.}1.2.1, 6. Theodoric’s portrayal bears some resemblance to standard descriptions of other emperors as found in Suetonius and an even closer parallel to Cassius Dio’s account of Severus. Bearing in mind Sidonius’ ambiguous writings, it is very difficult to see
portrait of Theoderic II makes even more sense when Avitus, his father-in-law, had been the tutor of this Gothic king and had been made emperor with the active support of Theoderic in 455. Sidonius was willing to accept Gothic power only as long as it was in accordance with imperial backing; hence a Goth like Theoderic II who had been supporting the Romans in general and Avitus in particular could be portrayed in a favourable light, whereas a king like Euric who was determined and indeed able to enforce his own political plans, which went against Roman interests, was not acceptable. Sidonius even went as far as to accept Theoderic II’s taking of Narbonne in 462/3 without any comment, although this clearly meant the loss of a famous Roman bastion in southern Gaul, whereas he actively fought against Euric in Clermont and saw him as a predator for Roman territory. Sidonius’ obvious difficulties in coming to terms with Arvandus and his rejection of Seronatus were linked more with the fact that the Gothic king in question was Euric and not the more acceptable Theoderic II. Nevertheless, this compares oddly with Sidonius’ own actions regarding Euric’s court and his dealings with people working there. It is true that he with many other Gallic nobles had to realise that the Gothic court was gradually taking over a number of formerly Roman aspects of bestowing promotions, both in the employment of officials at court and also as patrons of art and political favours, and to find an arrangement with this; they were perfectly aware of the fact that the political and cultural future of the Gallic nobility lay with the barbarian courts and that they had to join these establishments in order to preserve their properties and privileges but also to secure their political ambitions. In contrast to Teitler, though, I would not describe this cooperation as a sign of treasonable behaviour but as a working assimilation between Gallic nobles and the Gothic king;

---

75 Harries (1992), 299.
the recognition of the necessity of having the military support of the various
barbarian courts in Gaul in order to secure Roman interests had by now led to an
active political cooperation and Sidonius was no exception in this.\textsuperscript{76}

Wolfram, though, warns us against regarding Euric’s expansionism as an attempt to
gain a ‘universal monarchy, the realisation, so to speak, of Athaulf’s dream’, and
claims that a more profound structuring of the Gothic kingdom in terms of religious
and legal aspects only happened under Euric’s successor Alaric II\textsuperscript{77}. In comparison
to Athaulf’s time, there was perhaps less need to aim for such a concept: Athaulf’s
aim to connect Gothic with Roman strength had lost much of its former dynamic
because the Roman empire of Athaulf’s time had dramatically changed to the point
of extinction. Euric’s expansionism was therefore based on the aim to enlarge Gothic
territory and power, for which he did no longer need the cooperation with the empire
to the extent Athaulf had needed. Mathisen & Sivan, however, have argued more in
favour of a realisation of this ‘universal monarchy’ under Euric who tried to create a
nation, a successor-state to Rome, and to represent/conduct himself like an emperor,
even using the Gothic language instead of Latin during negotiations.\textsuperscript{78} Yet Euric did
continue links with the Roman side when he had taken over many of the former
imperial attributes, and the political and social future of the Roman inhabitants
largely depended on his goodwill. Moreover, the administrative and judicial side of
the Gothic kingdom functioned according to the established Roman system and for
that there were Roman officers employed.\textsuperscript{79} To speak then of a fierce anti-Roman
policy in terms of describing Euric’s politics is perhaps too one-sided; it was anti-
Roman insofar as it annexed former Roman territory under Gothic rule and further
annihilated Roman structures in those areas (it seriously damaged the relationship

\textsuperscript{76} Contra Teitler (1992), 317.
\textsuperscript{77} Wolfram (1990), 154-5.
\textsuperscript{78} Mathisen & Sivan (1999 c), 22-3. Ennodius, \textit{Vita Epifani} 90.
between the imperial authorities and the Gothic court), but it was not an anti-Roman policy to the exclusion of Roman expertise in terms of judicial and administrative aspects as well as Roman culture in terms of literature and panegyrics or indeed to preserve certain aspects of land-tenure which were of interest to the Gallic aristocracy. The number of Gallic nobles in active Gothic service was relatively small in the beginning and then still treated with suspicion (as the cases of Arvandus and Seronatus demonstrate). In Heather’s opinion part of the reason for this was perhaps linked to the continuation of the Council of the Gauls in Arles (the Concilium Septem Provinciarum), which had been instituted in 418, primarily as a body to ensure Gallo-Roman loyalty towards the empire and to counterbalance any underlying currents of potential usurpations; as it was established in the same year as the Gothic settlement in Aquitaine, it was also considered as an attempt to keep the Gallo-Roman nobility from forming alliances with the Goths and exploiting their military strength to form rebellions. Especially in regard to Athaulf’s support for Jovinus (as well as the relationship between Attalus and Alaric/Athaulf, although Attalus was not a Gallic noble but nevertheless a Roman usurper) this certainly made sense. But as mentioned in the case of Arvandus and Seronatus, there might even have been underlying ideas of using their collaborations with the Goths to stage a revolt.

By the end of the fifth century, this somewhat uneasy concept of cooperation was changing and Gallic aristocrats became increasingly involved in both administrative and also military positions at the Gothic court: for example Avitus, a relative of both Sidonius and the former emperor Avitus, was involved in negotiating peace treaties with Euric; Victorinus was Euric’s governor of the Auvergne, and Vincentius, who

---

was made Euric’s *magister militum* in 465, commanded the king’s troops in Spain in 473; according to Gregory of Tours he was made *dux Hispaniae* by Euric as a result of it, although Sidonius only called him a count. Other Romans like Nepotianus and his successor Arborius were employed to fight the Suebes. Sidonius talked about the work of his friend Leo, who had become a minister of Euric and was directly involved in the diplomatic affairs of the Gothic court: ‘For every day in the councils of the most powerful king [Euric] you [Leo] meticulously gather information about the whole world’s affairs and rights, treaties and wars…the man [Leo] who by common consent has acquainted himself with the movements of nations, the diversities of embassies…being placed in a position for the greatest eminence’. Interestingly, though, despite this obvious process of assimilation between the two sides, there were still certain positions which on the Gothic side were linked with aspects of ethnic identity and thus barred for Romans; especially with regard to the kingship and the position of Gothic leader, the Goths were not willing to accept any non-Goth in this position.

So far these were only examples of people who regarded assimilation with the barbarian courts as a process directly linked to political/military circumstances. Some Romans, however, seem to have taken this political assimilation further, and the example of Syagrius certainly hints at the idea that he was an individual who had extended his assimilation with the barbarians also into the cultural sphere. He was employed as an official at the Burgundian court, and Sidonius’ letter to him reveals that Syagrius had made the effort to learn the Burgundian language, although this extent of assimilation, praiseworthy as it was, was for Sidonius dangerously close to...

---

losing all Roman culture and identity: ‘You are the great-grandson of a consul… I should like you to tell me how you have managed to absorb so swiftly into your inner being the exact sounds of an alien race…I hear that in your presence the barbarian is afraid to perpetrate a barbarism in his own language. The bent elders of the Germans are astounded at you when you translate letters, and they adopt you as arbitrator in their mutual dealings…you decide issues and are listened to’. Thus assimilation with the barbarians gradually started to incorporate cultural concepts, which ranged from learning a barbarian language to the usage of panegyrics and poems. Their function as a means to gain favour by praising the ruler remained much the same as it had been at the imperial court. A friend of Sidonius had asked him to provide him with a poem which he could inscribe on a silver basin as a present to Euric’s queen Ragnahild, and Sidonius was perfectly willing to do so: ‘You [Euodius, Sidonius’ friend] were soon going to start for Tolosa at the bidding of the king [Euric]…I suppose you plan to offer the basin thus embellished to Queen Ragnahild in the hope, no doubt, of securing beforehand an invincible support for your ambitions and for your actions’. Obviously the world of royal panegyrics and their purpose of gaining favour and influence had not changed, only the recipient was no longer the Roman emperor but a barbarian king or queen. Furthermore Sidonius himself employed the services of another friend, Lampridius, who was a courtier of Euric, to regain Euric’s favour after having been sent into exile for his role in the defence of Clermont; he sent a poem to Lampridius to pass on to Euric, and as a result of the open flattery of

---

85 Sid. Ap., Ep. V.5.1. Syagrius was a great-grandson of Flavius Afranius Syagrius, consul in 382; interestingly Tonantius Ferreolus who had been one of Arvandus’ persecutors was Flavius Afranius grandson and thus very closely related to Syagrius – an excellent indicator of how much times had changed in regards to how assimilation with the barbarian courts was seen.

the king Sidonius’ confiscated properties were returned to him. Once again it was the Gothic king on whose favour the public position of the aristocracy depended. Bearing in mind Sidonius’ earlier condemnation of Seronatus and his own active resistance against Euric and his politics, this was a remarkable turn. Sidonius’ role at the Gothic court, and especially his personal opinion about the Goths, is difficult to analyse as his writings are highly ambiguous and try hard to conceal as much as possible about the author’s real attitudes. He was deliberately avoiding any precise statement about his political opinion in regard to the Gothic court, partly perhaps to protect himself, especially when he had already been punished with exile because he had opposed Euric’s political endeavours; the more cynical approach would be that Sidonius was a classical survivor of adverse political circumstances and applied his loyalty to whatever establishment was best for his own personal advantage. However, there were some principles he did follow throughout: mainly his belief in the ideal of Rome as a synonym for his own identity as an aristocrat. This was expressed both by Rome’s connection with literary culture, hence his own devotion to literature, and by the pursuit of imperial offices, apparent in his own political ambitions to hold office at the imperial court. Another principle was that the relationship between barbarians and Romans should be based on treaties; his role in the Arvandus trial is a testimony to Sidonius’ ambiguity when he continued to support the same man who had actively urged Euric not to make peace with the emperor, thus effectively supporting him in Euric’s ambitions to pursue Gothic interests alone and not to continue the 418 treaty; a similar situation was to occur in 474 with the Burgundians and the aftermath of Anthemius’ and Ricimer’s death and Nepos’ appointment, where Sidonius’ allegiance changed from support for Nepos to

---

praise for the Burgundian Chilperic.\textsuperscript{88} One ought to be careful therefore not to
overestimate Sidonius as a champion for the Roman cause whose real loyalty was
never altered by any cooperation with the Goths, as it had been forced upon him. It is
ture that he had defended Clermont against Euric and had even styled it as a fight of
the Catholic, orthodox, church against the heretic Arian Euric (unsurprisingly
Theoderic’s Arianism had been elegantly avoided), but, as said before, he had
admitted himself that Clermont and its bishop was far from being this bastion of
Roman values he wanted his readers to believe.\textsuperscript{89} In fact Sidonius was quick to
change from regarding Euric as the leader of a ‘race of treaty-breakers’ to styling the
very same king as the rescuer of the Roman people once political circumstances
dictated it.\textsuperscript{90} Having suffered from the reduced lifestyle and the exclusion from his
friends, Sidonius had heavily exploited panegyrics and open flattery in order to be
restored to his former position.\textsuperscript{91} Above all Sidonius was willing to accept the fact
that the only way to preserve his aristocratic lifestyle and properties, even when he
had become bishop, was to have the favour of the Gothic king, but he remained
reluctant to take his political assimilation into a cultural context. As already
mentioned, Sidonius was happy to praise Syagrius for his efforts to gain a powerful
position at the Burgundian court; the fact that the great-grandson of a Roman consul
was prepared to learn the dialect of a barbarian people was enough for him to remind
Syagrius of his aristocratic Roman roots but above all, not to lose his Roman identity
by keeping his Latin education: ‘Continue with undiminished zeal…to devote some
attention to reading…observe a just balance between the two languages: retain our
grasp of Latin, lest you be laughed at, and practise the other, in order to have the

\textsuperscript{88} Harries (1992), 300-6.
\textsuperscript{89} Sid. Ap., \textit{Ep.} VII.6.4-6.
\textsuperscript{91} Sid. Ap., \textit{Ep.} V.3.3; VII.16.1; VIII.3, 9.3; IX.3.3, 10.1.
laugh of them’. There is a parallel here with him urging some friends to leave their
over-devotion to the countryside behind and to enter public offices in order to do
honour to their family name: to learn a barbarian language in order to assimilate with
the barbarian court in question was acceptable as long as it fostered political
interests. Yet too much exposure to such non-Roman languages and practices bore
the danger of turning the previous educated, cultivated Roman into a barbarian
himself: in Sidonius’ opinion, for the scion of a consular family that was something
which was to be avoided at any cost.

In fact, Sidonius seems never to have changed his opinion regarding the barbarians in
general, and he retained the traditional Roman disdain for them as brutes, as a letter
to his friend Philagrius demonstrates: ‘You [Philagrius] shun barbarians because they
are reputed bad; I shun them even if they are good’, and in another letter ‘...that dull
ferocity of theirs, senseless and stupid and inflammable like that of wild beasts’; his
description of two Gothic women he had to encounter during his exile was scarcely
better: ‘...two Gothic women...the most quarrelsome, drunken, vomiting creatures
the world will ever see’. Politically Sidonius had accepted the necessity of
cooperation and assimilation with the Goths, a move which meant that by the sixth
century the Roman aristocracy had become virtually indistinguishable from their
Gothic (and other barbarian) counterparts; although some former Roman titles
continued to exist and to convey a special status for the title-holder, the political and
increasingly also the social and cultural separation between barbarian rulers/nobles
and Roman aristocrats had vanished. The only tangible difference between the two
was the insistence of many Roman aristocrats on cherishing and continuing the
literary tradition. For Sidonius the only way to preserve Roman identity and

---

aristocratic status was the pursuit of literature and the rigorous devotion to classical education. Culturally Sidonius remained focused on Roman traditions with a strong emphasis on the distinction a devotion to classical literature provided to separate himself from his barbarian surroundings. Interestingly, though, it was the identification with his Avernian roots and his Gallic identity that Sidonius stressed, when he begged Euric to be restored to his Gallic possessions as his Roman roots had been destroyed by the advances of the Goths. Bearing in mind his devotion to Rome as a concept, this is a surprising statement. It could be, though, that Sidonius used this as an expression of avoiding too obvious connections with Roman interests, which could have stood in the way of a rehabilitation with Euric; another possibility is that he regarded his Gallic roots as his ancestral identity and as the Roman aristocracy had always treasured their connection with their ancestors, it was perhaps a clever hiding of his true Roman identity. Besides, it was his native Gallic/Avernian roots and his identification with this background which had remained a focus and was to provide the basis for Sidonius from where he was able to continue his Roman lifestyle; considering the strong emphasis he had put into his earlier career with its nearness to the imperial court and its offices, this continuous focus on his Gallic identity is a testimony to the strong connection of a Gallic aristocrat to his ancestral land.

Assimilation with the barbarians, then, was certainly by no means a straightforward process for Sidonius. However, he is perhaps the best example for this entire phenomenon precisely because of his ambiguity and his changes in opinion. It shows how complex any relationship between barbarians and Romans could be and how much had to change for the Roman aristocrat in terms of overall thinking and perception, both politically and culturally to form a new society.

---

3. The role of literacy

a) The Roman devotion to classical literature

The devotion to and continuation of literature but also its wider context of education and appreciation of classical arts belongs more to the socio-cultural sphere of the Roman world; yet literature and the dominant focus on it found in many contemporary writings was intrinsically linked with the political world and the understanding of how the aristocracy viewed itself. Sidonius’ insistence on the devotion to and preservation of classical literature among his fellow Gallic aristocrats demonstrates not only an insistence on continuing with a traditional Roman pastime but also how much the political sphere and the aristocratic influence within had changed in Gaul. As said previously, when the aristocracy had lost much if not all of its political role in the previous Roman tradition and had applied for positions at the barbarian courts, the way in which the aristocracy now tended to define itself as Romans, and moreover to separate itself from the barbarian world, was through this devotion to literature. The thorough training in ancient poetry and literature, together with the extreme skills with which these could be applied to their own correspondence, enabled people like Sidonius to hide behind such literary concepts, allowing them to foster bonds of friendship across political lines, but simultaneously shielded them from inappropriate and awkward confessions of their real political conviction or employment. Bearing in mind the relatively fragmented situation the existence of different barbarian courts within the former Gallic provinces presented, friends could work in different realms whose politics were not necessarily friendly towards each other, making the cultivation but above all continuation of friendships through mutual visits often difficult if not impossible. For
many of the Gallic aristocrats keeping these friendships through correspondence was therefore vital to remain in contact with their peers; such contact was not only important for their own cultural understanding but often also for their political and ecclesiastical careers; again Sidonius’ own life is a good example of this. The exchange of letters and an overall zealous attention to classical literature made it possible for them to declare themselves as cherishing Roman culture even if they had become part of the political establishment of the new barbarian realms. Moreover, the appreciation of classical literature and its value as a denominative factor to indicate education and social status was increasingly adopted by the barbarian rulers too, and was employed at their courts in much the same ways as it had been at the imperial court, another indicator for the gradual process of assimilation between Romans and barbarians.

The extensive body of contemporary correspondence (about 475 letters from circa 45 authors) both secular and ecclesiastical is one of the most striking examples of the continuation of close-knit family connections and links of friendship, which were often based on a sharing of literary interests and a common aristocratic background. The existence of this correspondence is also an excellent example that, despite the frequently found lamentations of a general decline of the appreciation and availability of classical education, the Roman aristocracy was still able to spend a considerable amount of time on the active pursuit of traditional Roman pastimes. Above all, though, it is a testament to the continuous importance literacy played; in Heather’s words, it became ‘the cornerstone of the social fabric of the late empire’. The establishment of the barbarian powerbases effectively replaced the old aristocratic positions of holding office and their public profile. The pursuit of

---

96 Mathisen (1981a), 95-109, see also (1991b).
literature became one of the most important vehicles for the aristocracy to represent itself as still being part of a Roman world, regardless of the real political circumstances; it also helped them to maintain links of friendship and client relationships which continued to be of importance, even at the barbarian courts. Many members of the aristocracy either were forced or opted to retreat into private life or at least to leave their previously dominant public/political life, whereas the pursuit of literature and correspondence allowed them to foster networks of personal friendship and political connections and alliances. Furthermore, the continuation of such networks remained a vital means to secure and maintain friendship but also political ambitions and offices, and remained an essential part of any aristocratic lifestyle, even if the writer had entered ecclesiastical offices; these literary circles were relatively small in comparison to the vast quantity of the written material, which made belonging to such circles all the more exclusive. The exchange of letters became one of the most important ways to keep up family ties and friendships, especially when the new political situation in Gaul complicated travelling between different barbarian realms; besides, private correspondence was regarded as a duty of friendship. Sidonius wrote to his friend Auspicius: ‘If the times and the places in which we live allowed it I should be taking good care to cultivate our friendship…not merely by the courtesy of correspondence; but since the tempest of battling kingdoms breaks noisily upon our desire for quiet brotherly communion, this custom of epistolary converse will rightly be maintained…it was deservedly introduced long ago for reasons of friendship’. Failure to write to friends was frowned upon and could lead to complaints as it was regarded as a breach of friendship. Sidonius himself was the unfortunate recipient of such broken friendships when Magnus Felix and Polemius stopped any correspondence with him after the

Arvandus trial on the basis of Sidonius’ seemingly dubious behaviour against his fellow Gallic nobles through his controversial support of Arvandus; Sidonius’ frequent attempts to break their silence were met with silence, a fact he severely lamented. Here politics were intrinsically linked with literary pursuits, when Sidonius’ behaviour during Arvandus’ trial had been regarded as dubious or was even seen as a confirmation of his own treacherous tendencies against the Roman state. Although they did not openly accuse him of treason, Magnus Felix and Polemius felt it necessary to withdraw from any close links with someone they could not regard as politically unblemished; that Sidonius himself had felt certain misgivings about Arvandus but had opted to support him precisely because of his own link of friendship with him, and had lost other friends over this, just demonstrates how importantly such bonds of friendships were regarded and how intrinsically linked these could be with the political world. Yet not only personal quarrels but also large-scale political crises between various kingdoms could interrupt the usual flow of correspondence between friends. Warfare not only hindered travel and thus the frequent visits of likeminded friends, but at times placed people in awkward positions as they belonged to different political establishments and any kind of correspondence with people who did not belong to the same circle could have been regarded as treason; the fragmentary situation which the establishment of various barbarian kingdoms had created also had a deep impact on the continuation of pen-friendship. As Sidonius himself admitted, the ceasing of any exchange of letters was necessary to preserve their political position at the various barbarian courts: ‘We [he and his friend Bishop Julianus] live in different realms and are thus prevented from more frequent contact by the rights of conflicting governments [Rome and Euric]. But now on the conclusion of the peace-treaty

[between Julius Nepos and Euric]…our letters will begin to pass in quick succession, seeing that they cease to be under suspicion’; in a similar way he told his friend Faustus: ‘our cities, far separated as they are, with the roads rendered insecure by the commotion of people…put off our diligent exchange of letters and concern ourselves rather with silence’. Furthermore, during the siege of Clermont and his subsequent exile, Sidonius’ correspondence with various friends such as Leo ceased, only to be renewed once Sidonius was reinstalled in his position at Euric’s court. That Leo himself had actively helped to support Sidonius’ claims to political pardon is a confirmation of the strong bonds of friendship these men shared. The fact that Leo was a leading minister of the very same Gothic king whom Sidonius had openly opposed and who had sent Sidonius into exile was politically a somewhat delicate situation but it did not matter personally. Although the art of correspondence was at times practised just for its own sake as a demonstration of education and knowledge, the exchange of letters also helped to preserve personal links of friendship and client-relationships, in times of potential political trouble, such links were crucial as Sidonius’ own attempt to re-establish himself at Euric’s court demonstrates: without Leo’s help and his position as a leading minister at the Gothic court, Sidonius might not have been able to return to his bishopric. Literature in the sense of correspondence served a political aim here and demonstrated that at times it served as a tool to denote political convictions, as the example of Magnus Felix’s behaviour against Sidonius shows, or to maintain links of friendship which stood above political obstacles. 

As seen in the previous examples, literature was intrinsically linked with politics. Once political and military boundaries were too unstable to function as separation

---

between Romans and barbarians, especially when barbarian kings came to regard the command of poetry and literature as a sign of cultural standing, these boundaries became newly defined in cultural terms. In the third century the traditional Gallic aristocracy had largely been lost and was to be replaced by people who gained access to important court positions due to their merits which often included education; rhetoric and oratory helped to achieve important offices at the imperial court, which in turn helped to create a new nobility who had risen to their influential positions through their own knowledge – Ausonius is a good example of this.\textsuperscript{102} Whereas in Ausonius’ times education and the command of classical art and poetry had helped to achieve political positions at the imperial court, in Sidonius’ times literacy was regarded by him and many of his fellow aristocrats as the last thing which separated them from complete political assimilation with barbarian rulers like Euric. The pursuit of literature and the exchange of letters came to act as a cultural definition which separated Romans, at least educated ones, from barbarians, as the latter had generally no access to, and in Roman opinion also no capacity for, such matters; in short, literacy came to be regarded by many aristocrats as a synonym for Roman culture, a last bastion of \textit{Romanitas} especially when political assimilation with the barbarian kingdoms increasingly became the norm.\textsuperscript{103} Classical education with its strict regime of literature and oratory was conveying an exclusive status, accessible only for those few who shared noble birth and wealth, thus all the more emphasising the elite status of these aristocratic circles; even if a barbarian leader ever tried to achieve such a level of education, for people like Sidonius this would have remained an empty concept or a bad imitation, as in their opinion only a Roman could fully appreciate the intrinsic links between classical education, art and the role of the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Sivan (1993), Ch. 5.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Roman nobility as their only true connoisseur. The earlier citation of Sidonius’ warning to his friend Syagrius not to lose his classical education over his serious attempts to assimilate with the Burgundians by learning their language is a prime example of this concept; even the necessity for Syagrius to aspire to political advancement at the Burgundian court by wholly submerging himself into their culture was in Sidonius’ opinion barely an excuse to justify this extent of assimilation by the great-grandson of a Roman consul: ‘Contemporaries and posterity alike…have been trained by your [Sidonius to his friend Johannes] teaching that, though now in the very midst of an unconquerable and alien race, they will preserve the signs of their ancient birthright; for now that the old degrees of official rank are swept away, those degrees by which the highest in the land used to be distinguished from the lowest, the only token of nobility will henceforth be by a knowledge of letters’.  

Although office-holding at the various barbarian courts increasingly became the norm and was largely accepted, the recognition of literary works especially by the circle of friends and aristocratic peers remained an important factor for the self-definition of people like Sidonius and his friends. Despite his own position at Euric’s court and the active political role many of his friends played there too, it was the praise of their peers for a piece of literary interpretation or composition which counted as a quasi-public recognition of their status as an aristocrat: ‘For your [Sidonius to his friend Fortunalis] familiarity with letters is not so small that it would be wrong for you to have some degree of immortality by these letters. So you see the glory of your name shall live on for ages to come’. Whereas formerly it had been the achievement of public political and military offices that had served solely to exemplify the position of the aristocrat in Roman society and to

---

ensure the lasting glory of his family’s achievements, it was now the pursuit of a private interest which served the same purpose.

In fact this omnipresent pursuit of literature as a means of cultivating and preserving aristocratic values of self-definition and identification led to a rather rigid if not static concept of literature with very little dynamics; those who shared this concept almost lived in a nostalgic pseudo-world, jealously guarding this nostalgia against any outside influence or change. By regarding literacy as the sole indicator for a noble status, literacy could not change without endangering the self-definition of those who preserved it; hence the increased dilution of Latin with barbarian words was vehemently rejected (although increasingly practised) and feared. \(^{106}\) So important was the pursuit of poetry and literature that Sidonius regarded it as a severe break with his former worldly lifestyle and a sign of his new devotion to the more ascetic life of the church and his being a bishop when he stopped composing poetry. Furthermore Sidonius and his friends lamented the loss of this very world of literature and classical education and regarded themselves therefore as the last guardians and custodians of a cultural heritage which defined Roman identity, thus forbidding any outside influence which could potentially threaten this world; equally their own, even eccentric style of writing, often criticised as excessively complicated, was mainly due to their attempts to imitate but also to conserve the classical past, although the standards of knowledge of classical Latin and literature were rapidly declining. This overt emphasis on a decline of literacy and the intentions of very few to preserve this literacy only stressed once more their superiority both in being members of a small, exclusive circle and also their elite education in having the ability to do so. Even Gregory of Tours, although he himself had received only a

rudimentary education in classical Latin and literature and lived in a world where the
former Roman sphere was politically a long-gone past, cherished the classical arts
with the same heavy nostalgia as Sidonius and regarded their knowledge as an
exclusive right of a Roman only; the attempt of a Frankish king like Chilperic to
compose poetry in the classical style was therefore seen by him as something outside
the king’s sphere as he tried to imitate a world to which he had no right of access.\textsuperscript{107}

\textsuperscript{107} Van Dam (1985), 163-4, 224-5.
b) The barbarian pursuit of literature

The barbarian interest in literature and its impact on the continuation of classical education is generally difficult to assess. Their political expansionism had created a certain level of destruction of the Roman infrastructure, which had had a negative impact on the extent of public education and schools run by local authorities. The barbarian take on the Roman administration of such institutions was not as devoted to a general pursuit of at least a rudimentary education of the population; education became thus almost entirely dependent on either the aristocracy or the church. For example, in Visigothic Spain the former Roman lifestyle was so severely interrupted that classical education in the traditional sense virtually ceased to exist on a broad level but nevertheless continued to be found in the albeit small ecclesiastical circles.\textsuperscript{108}

Many of the barbarian rulers in fact themselves became very interested in literacy for the sake of royal panegyrics to foster their own imagery and in imitation of their Roman counterparts; some also found a devotion to literature an enjoyable art in their spare time. It would be wrong to argue that the barbarian kingdoms generally opposed classical learning or a continuation of literacy. It is true that the military-oriented society and especially the nobility of the barbarian establishments did not require a command of literacy and education in the classical arts as a means of aristocratic self-definition as was the case in the Roman world; unsurprisingly then the strong focus on a broad availability of education, supported by the government, was in decline under their rule although they had adopted much of the formerly imperial administrative measures. This in turn pushed the pursuit of classical

education into the hands of the aristocracy and increasingly of the church with its monastic establishments; schools were to be predominantly attached to monastic foundations with the majority of the children trained there entering ecclesiastical offices. However, although these institutions gradually moved away from the classical tradition of education and instead were to focus much more on theological training and a thorough knowledge of the biblical texts, this did not exclude a preservation of classical texts too. The majority of the literature produced in seventh century Visigothic Spain for example was produced in the ecclesiastical sphere, with Isidore of Seville as perhaps its most prominent writer.\(^{109}\) However, a lack of governmental funding of education or its gradual association with religious training did not automatically exclude an appreciation of classical literature and panegyrics at the barbarian courts, as panegyrics and poems especially could be effectively used for propaganda purposes, especially when such works were dedicated to emphasising royal greatness and ancestral achievements. Literature in its role as a politically inspired medium continued to exist; the only difference was that it was now a barbarian king who was the recipient of such literary works and official panegyrics, and not the emperor as had previously been the case. Sidonius and his circle of friends such as Lampridius and Euodius at Euric’s court in Gaul or Venantius Fortunatus at the Frankish court provide good examples of the practice of employing educated Romans as court writers and panegyrists. The fact that Venantius Fortunatus was employed by the Frankish court as a poet who dedicated his works to

---

\(^{109}\) Exact numbers for the percentage of clergy/laymen among literate people or for an exact extent of literacy in general are very difficult if not impossible to establish. In Vandal Africa the classical teaching-tradition with its pagan themes was heavily mixed with Christian elements, as can be seen for example in the works of Dracontius and Macrobius; after the Arab conquest, literacy in its Latin form continued solely in a Christian context. Marrou (1964), 458-9. Liebeschuetz (2001), 318-9, 322-34, 336-40.
the kings and other Frankish nobles shows that there must have been enough people

Although literacy never came to play the ultra-significant role among barbarian
societies that it had and was still playing within Roman aristocratic circles, it was
nevertheless an art many of the leading barbarians had learned and acquired a taste
for as soon as they had come into a lasting contact with Rome. A command of
education and literacy as well as its wider context of record-keeping and legal
writings played some role in claiming and manifesting power among equal noble
families in much the same way as within Roman society; a higher level of education
seems to have acted as a measure to indicate the elevated social position of the
educated, especially when it was only accessible to the wealthy. Sidonius wrote to
his brother-in-law who had been closely involved in a cultural exchange with some
leading Gothic families in Gaul: ‘It was due to you that the leading families, in their
efforts to throw off the scurf of Celtic speech, were initiated now into oratorical style
and into the measures of the Muses…after first requiring them to become Latins you
emphasising that it was only with the help of Roman education that barbarians could
be turned into civilised beings and that only the contact with someone like his
brother-in-law and his extensive educational training and knowledge was able to do
this; but the fact remains that these Gothic families had a strong enough interest in
classical arts and literature beyond the simple understanding of an officially spoken
language to engage with someone like Ecdicius and to value his extensive
knowledge. There is a difference between the ability of someone to speak and/or
understand a language because it was the official language of the state or community
the person lived in, and taking an active interest in the finer details of this language
such as literature, poetry and correspondence and to study it for the sake of attaining
this higher level. Certainly the former was the case with many barbarians who served
in great numbers in the Roman army or stood in other forms of contact with the
Roman empire and thus had to have at least a rudimentary understanding of Latin.
However, the number of barbarians who took an interest in Latin literature was to
start with fairly small but became increasingly important as literary pursuits were a
way to present themselves as true successors of the Roman heritage. The example of
the Gothic families who stood in close contact with Sidonius’ brother-in-law can
show that it was presumably prestigious for them to have an avid exchange of
literary interests with a son of a Roman emperor. Bearing in mind the pride Sidonius
and his friends placed in the social connections of all those with whom they
corresponded, to count a member of an imperial family, even a very short-lived one,
as an instructor of literary pursuits was certainly something to be proud of. Thus
these Goths had taken steps to enter a world that had previously been accessible only
to a circle of like-minded aristocrats who zealously guarded the exclusiveness of
their small circles. Some of those barbarians appear to have managed to get accepted
by the Roman aristocracy and even by someone as seemingly narrow-minded as
Sidonius when it came to adopting Roman values by outsiders; in a letter to
Arbogast, Sidonius praised him for this complete absorption of Roman literacy and
the wider moral and social values attached to this: ‘You have drunk deep from the
spring of Roman eloquence, and, dwelling by the Moselle, you speak the true Latin
of the Tiber: you are intimate with the barbarians but are innocent of barbarisms, and
are equal in tongue as also in strength of arm to the leaders of old; I mean those who
were wont to handle the pen no less than the sword…with you and your eloquence
surviving, even though Roman law has ceased at our border, the Roman speech does not falter'.\textsuperscript{112} Considering how uneasy Sidonius felt about Syagrius learning the Burgundian language and just how much nostalgic value he attached to a proper command of Latin, this praise of someone of barbarian descent is certainly remarkable. It shows that Arbogast, despite this barbarian background, had achieved a complete assimilation with Roman culture through literacy, even to the extent that Sidonius was perfectly willing to see his efforts as a way of preserving Latin despite the altered political situation. Yet this praise from a Roman aristocrat did not always apply to every barbarian trying to learn Latin and to use its literature in a similar fashion to the Roman aristocracy; as previously said, Gregory of Tours despised the Frankish king Chilperic for his attempts to compose poetry in a classical style and Charibert I’s poetic compositions will hardly have fared better. The Frankish kings were not the only barbarian rulers who adopted this interest in classical literature; also among the Visigothic kings there were some who composed poems such as king Sisebut, who wrote a saint’s life and several poems as well as letters in a complex rhetorical style. If in comparison with the Visigoths the Franks are considered to have been ultimately the more successful successors of the Roman establishment, certainly in terms of adopting classical literature the Goths engaged in this as much as their Frankish counterparts; indeed the Visigothic revival of literature in the seventh century was highly important, although it perhaps had a less lasting or widespread impact on the future development of European history than Charlemagne’s Carolingian Renaissance. Theoderic not only adopted Roman bureaucracy for running the administration of his Ostrogothic kingdom but he also fostered the traditional classical education; his daughter Amalasuntha received a thorough training in Latin and Greek which she passed on to her son Athalaric.

However in her case this devotion to classical literature and language, which previously had been readily adopted by other barbarian rulers as a sign of their enlightenment, was rejected as threatening Ostrogothic values and questioning her own self-definition as a Goth. Much in the same way as Gregory of Tours had sneered at Chilperic for being completely out of his depth in learning a Roman aristocratic art, some of the Gothic courtiers regarded her command of Latin and Greek as endangering Gothic interests and unfit for a Gothic queen. The result was a strong anti-Roman opposition against Amalasuntha, accusing her of weakening the young king with unnecessary ideas, which made him effeminate and unfit for proper warfare; she was eventually murdered in 535 on account of having betrayed Gothic values and political interests. There are some interesting parallels between the attitudes of Amalasuntha’s courtiers and those of the followers of earlier Gothic leaders: Athaulf for example revealed to Paulinus of Pella that he as a leader was to a large extent dependent on the consent and support of his followers; earlier Fritigern argued that the opinions of his retinue, which stood in contrast to his own ideas, stood against a peaceful solution of the Gothic relationship with the empire.\textsuperscript{113} Of course it should not be forgotten that the idea of presenting themselves as pro-Roman certainly suited the political aims of both Fritigern and Athaulf at times, and might not have been necessarily an accurate reflexion of a continuous or rather recurring pattern of a pro-Roman leader versus his pro-Gothic retinue. As discussed in Chapter I, questions of ethnic identity were intrinsically linked with the political development of the Goths, and at times a too close relationship with the empire was treated with suspicion, not least out of fear for its power to undermine Gothic interests.\textsuperscript{114} However, one should not forget that a large part of this resentment against

\textsuperscript{113} See Part II.1 b; Part III.2 a.
\textsuperscript{114} The persecutions of Christians under Athanaric are another example of social customs that were treated with suspicion of threatening Gothic interests, as these very customs were closely associated with the empire; see Part V.2.
Amalasuntha was directly linked with her relationship with the Eastern court – undoubtedly fostered by her interest in Greek culture – and had perhaps less to do with the learning of classical literacy in general. Such resentments against classical education and literacy remained rare. The barbarian interest in it continued as late as Charlemagne: he set up a literary circle at his court where each participant was given the name of a famous classical author, in an attempt to imitate a kind of Greek symposion or to copy Plato’s academy; Charlemagne’s support of classical literature and the fostering of scholarship was so influential that it became known as the Carolingian Renaissance.

Amalasuntha’s devotion to Roman/Greek education undoubtedly left her even more open to the Byzantine court and its subsequent political interference in Gothic politics; Justinian used her murder as a justification to invade Italy (Amalasuntha’s affinity with the Greek world was certainly a very convenient political/diplomatic ‘reason’ which Justinian could exploit, regardless how close the queen really stood with Byzantine interests). Thus from the Gothic perspective, the queen’s proximity with Constantinople had not only ‘endangered’ Gothic social values but was eventually also – at least partly – responsible for the war with Justinian. Geary (2001), 122. Bury (1923), 159-67. Maier (2005), 61.

The Carolingian interest in classical scholarship is to a large extent responsible for the survival of classical texts and the transmission of ancient ideas into the Middle Ages. See for example Wood (1997).
4. Roman-barbarian intermarriage as an aspect of assimilation

Assimilation between Romans and members of various barbarian peoples did not happen only on a political level but also on a basis involving social customs such as intermarriage. Although this thesis is looking foremost at aspects of political assimilation, and intermarriage belongs more to the sphere of socio-cultural interaction, it is nevertheless included here because intermarriages between high-profile members of the Roman aristocracy or the imperial family and members of the royal families of the various barbarian courts were very often concluded for political reasons as forms of appeasement and diplomatic alliance. Such marriages were by their very existence an expression of a process of political assimilation because they exemplified the Roman acceptance of the significant position the various barbarian courts had achieved as major political players with whom it was necessary to conclude political alliances. Although the following examples have not that much to do with Gaul per se, nevertheless a law of Valentinian in 373 as well as its later Visigothic form regarding intermarriage between Romans and Goths has often been quoted as an example of a deliberate prohibition of this process in order to stop or at least control social assimilation between Goths and Romans; reasons for this have been interpreted as conscious attempts to preserve ethnic or religious identity and separation, or in contrast as a legal answer to target specific political unrest without any implication for a general prohibition of intermarriage.

A law issued by Valentinian I in 373, forbidding intermarriage between *gentiles* and *provinciales* with capital punishment, has often been regarded as proof that attempts at political alliances between Romans and barbarians through social assimilation had been deeply rejected. Originally marriage between Roman citizens and foreigners
were not recognised, as a legally accepted Roman marriage could only be concluded between Roman citizens as any children born of a relationship between citizen and foreigner were considered illegitimate. However, with the establishment of Caracalla’s *Constitutio Antoniniana* in 212 this rather strict distinction between Roman citizen and foreigner as well as the privileges attached to Roman citizenship were to become increasingly an empty status, which had lost most of its former power.\(^{117}\) The law of 373 stated the following: ‘No provincial, of whatever rank or position he may be, shall enter in matrimony with a barbarian wife, nor shall any provincial woman be united with any gentile. Though such alliances, based on marriages of this sort, might exist between provincials and gentiles, should something suspect or criminal be detected in them, it shall be expiated by capital punishment.’\(^{118}\) Bearing in mind that the formerly sharp distinction between Roman citizen and foreigner had lost much of its relevance, and that intermarriage between Romans and foreigners was a common occurrence, this law is somewhat surprising. Indeed it is controversial in its interpretation, and as subsequent examples demonstrate, this law had very little impact on the usage of marriage as a tool for establishing political alliances. Besides there have been arguments that the law was by no means generally applicable to the process of intermarriage as such but had been invented to address a specific political situation; in fact the extent of its effectiveness on actual reality is more than debatable because intermarriage was increasingly practised. Reasons for this argumentation are numerous: the law was addressed to the *magister militum* Theodosius and not to the civil administrative bodies which were normally the recipients of such laws, which could point to a specific address for the law and not to its universal application. Also the term

---

\(^{117}\) The distinction between slave and freeborn citizen remained, though, despite the law of 212 AD; its sociological impact was to increase in the late empire even more. Liebeschuetz (1998), 132-5, 138.  
coniugium seems to have been a strange choice of terminology, although in the fourth century this term was used equally with matrimonium and was thus a proper legal term; furthermore the law was not transferred into the Codex Justinianus, thus again stressing a more locally confined meaning.¹¹⁹ According to Sivan, the real concern of this law was then not so much forbidding actual marriages between Romans and barbarians, but far more to stop potential criminal activities between Romans and natives in specific provinces. These could be the result of close bonds between Romans and non-Romans, although there is no reason given why such marriages in particular could threaten political stability; presumably mixed marriages were regarded as particularly prone to create trouble over questions of loyalty as the partners had bonds of friendship and family connections including political alliances on both sides. Sivan places this law in the context of Firmus’ African revolt, an argument which is supported by the fact that the recipient of the law was Theodosius, who was sent to Africa in the 370s in order to suppress Firmus’ rebellion; she regards this law therefore as the imperial answer to the political unrest in this region by trying to stop any sort of social alliances, including marriage, when potential revolts against authorities could be the result of such interactions.¹²⁰ In other words, the law was a measure to avoid similar trouble in the future.

Of course intermarriage between Romans and barbarians did occur and none of the high-profile marriages were regarded as a breach of this law. Bearing in mind the deep suspicion of the rising barbarian power, as well as attempts from the Roman

¹¹⁹ Sivan (1996), 137-9. Liebeschuetz (1998), 139-40. Demandt (1989), 77-8. Laws against marriage between Romans and barbarians continued to be issued, for example by Justinian in 535, but this seems to have been targeted at the province of Mesopotamia as a reaction to potential political alliances between Romans and natives.
¹²⁰ Sivan (1996), 139-45; (1998), 192. Firmus’ revolt included followers not only among the barbarian side but also among the Roman population; a distinction between the two sides was therefore not as clear-cut as the law wants to have it. There were thus people who belonged to both Roman and native population, further enhanced by intermarriage, who had alliances on both sides which could lead to problems of conflicting loyalty.
side to assimilate politically with the new forces, created among the Roman
population and especially among the aristocracy, the failure to regard such marriages
as illegal or as neglecting Roman law is telling; had the law of 373 been generally
applicable, there would have been accusations of deliberate misuse of legal
requirements in contemporary writings concerning such Roman-barbarian marriages.
The most famous of these intermarriages concerning Goths and Romans, and further
a strong significance for Gallic politics, was the marriage between Athaulf and Galla
Placidia, which has been discussed previously.121 Athaulf’s action was regarded at
the time as an impertinent and unacceptable move against the imperial court: not
only did it violate the position of the august person of Galla Placidia as an imperial
princess and the half-sister of the emperor, who stood above any marriage-prospect
to a mere Gothic king; it was also politically rejected on the grounds of a direct
attempt on Athaulf’s side to connect himself with the reigning imperial house and
thus to manoeuvre himself into a power-position around the throne. Any marriage-
alliance with an imperial princess provided direct access to privileges and even direct
political power for her husband (Constantius’ marriage to Placidia was undoubtedly
following this concept) and Athaulf was certainly keen to exploit this. Bearing in
mind that Honorius was childless, and the significant position any future child of
Placidia and Athaulf would therefore have in the imperial succession, Athaulf’s plan
to marry Placidia certainly made sense; he would have hoped for the future to act as
the power behind the throne with his son as Honorius’ successor. The refusal by the
imperial officials in Ravenna to accept the challenge this marriage posed to
Honorius’ authority (he had opposed the marriage) and to allow or even support a
Gothic king to become kingmaker was equally understandable. Significant, though,
is that both Attalus and some Gallic aristocrats were indeed willing to support

---

121 See Part II.3.
Athaulf’s move. As Alaric’s and later Athaulf’s appointed emperor, Attalus’ consent was less surprising than the support of the Gallic aristocracy. Whether, though, these aristocrats supported this marriage as an expression and manifestation of a new level of political and cultural assimilation between Goths and Romans (in a similar fashion to Athaulf’s aims in his speech during the celebrations), or explained their support as a temporary move to gain military support in order to press for their own Gallic interests without really accepting this marriage as an expression of Athaulf’s aim to support the imperial throne with Gothic military power, is open to debate.\textsuperscript{122}

Interesting, though, is that despite their rejection of his actions, none of the members of the imperial circle called for Athaulf to be punished with the death penalty – something the literal application of the law would have justified. Although the Goths had become a constant factor in Roman affairs, they were nevertheless not automatically Roman citizens: the strict interpretation of Valentinian’s law would have regarded this marriage as a union between a barbarian and a Roman citizen and thus would have forbidden it. Bearing in mind the open challenge this marriage posed, the lack of a call by the imperial authorities to hunt down and punish Athaulf is another supporting indicator for Sivan’s interpretation of reading Valentinian’s law as an answer to a temporary, geographically defined crisis and not as a generally applicable measure. Of course the Roman officials were militarily in far too weak a position to contemplate seriously the capture of the Gothic king, but not even imperial rhetoric discussed the breach of this law. Indeed resentments against this marriage in general and its political implications in particular were based on Athaulf’s challenge to Honorius’ authority and position, and were thus politically motivated and not concerned about the marriage between a Gothic barbarian and a Roman citizen. This could be another indicator that the law of 373 was primarily

\footnote{122 See Part II.3.}
concerned with the potential danger marriage could pose as a way to create and/or cement political alliances but had nothing to do with specific ethnic issues. Nevertheless, if the law had indeed been created to stop potential political unrest in a province in general, the lack of invoking it in the Athaulf/Placidia case is perhaps surprising because Athaulf’s connection with Placidia, who presented a somewhat different political line from Honorius, as well as the support of the Gallic aristocracy for Athaulf, certainly intensified political tensions with Ravenna in general and in the Gallic province in particular. It must be then that Valentinian’s law had been indeed a very specific legal creation, addressing a political situation in a geographically confined area without any wider implication, which would also explain its failure to reappear in the *Codex Justinianus*.

Although this marriage was rejected by Ravenna, it was by no means to remain a singular phenomenon, as several other examples demonstrate: already one of Athaulf’s predecessors, Fravittas, had married a noble Roman woman, although in his case it had not been so much the outcome of diplomatic/political endeavours as a serious attempt to assimilate with the Roman sphere where he had started to build a political career for himself after he had left his Gothic life behind him. Yet Fravittas’ wife was not a member of the imperial dynasty, and thus their marriage was far less politically explosive than that of Athaulf and Placidia would be; whether there was any resentment on the Roman side against Fravittas as an ex-barbarian leader trying to gain a leading position among Roman authorities by cementing his ambitions through marriage is not known. Furthermore, most likely Fravittas saw this marriage as a way to place him even firmer into the Roman system and obviously had not used it as a way to create a political alliance between Goths and Romans as Athaulf would later do, because Fravittas had forfeited any previous political positions among the
Goths before he had entered Roman service. In fact, there were numerous other marriages of military leaders of barbarian origin with Roman women that were not regarded as breaking Roman law. Any rejection of these officers or the children (Stilicho is a famous example) of such mixed marriages was more racially inspired and based on their ethnic background as barbarians, but not on the practice of such marriages.

Another marriage involving an imperial princess was that of Anthemiuss’ daughter Alypia and Ricimer as a way of guaranteeing Ricimer’s eminent position at court; there is a strong resemblance of this marriage to Athaulf’s ultimate aim, though in contrast to the Gothic king Ricimer was not the leader of a barbarian establishment and was already set up at court as a powerful courtier. In fact Sidonius regarded the marriage as a hopeful sign for peace, although ultimately this was not achieved. Any resentment Sidonius could have had against Ricimer, as a barbarian who further established his power at the imperial court through this marriage, is not known; bearing in mind Sidonius’ already discussed unease with the extent to which some Roman aristocrats took their assimilation with the barbarian court, hidden resentments against a man of barbarian origin or even a subtle reference to Valentinian’s law would not have been surprising. Again the lack of such resentments could imply that the law of 373 was not generally enforced or had no general implication. However, Sidonius was always ready to allow for assimilation with the barbarians in order to foster political concepts, and his hope for peace could be interpreted as a sign that he was willing to regard this marriage in such a manner.

As had been seen in the Arvandus case, Sidonius had no qualms in accepting the very open interpretation of Roman law if it interfered with friendship or personal political conviction; his hope in Ricimer therefore could have justified his neglect of a specific law. The betrothal of Galla Placidia’s granddaughter Eudocia with Huniric,
Geiseric’s son, is another example. In contrast to Placidia’s marriage, which had never been recognised by the imperial court, this alliance was accepted as a formal diplomatic treaty. Although the Vandals had never played the militarily supportive role the Goths had played for the Romans, and the Vandals continued often to be regarded as stereotypical barbarians, it is worth bearing in mind that at the time of this betrothal Geiseric was regarded as *rex socius et amicus* and was in any case politically so dominant that this marriage had more or less been forced on to the Western government; any attempt to quote the law of 373, if indeed anybody ever seriously attempted to invoke it in this context, would have lost its effectiveness as alliances with client kings were a staple part of imperial diplomacy.

Despite political and military necessities, which often dictated such marriages, and an increasing general practice of concluding mixed marriages among the broad population, some resentment undoubtedly remained among some Roman circles and was in most cases based on racial prejudices, which went back as far as Martial and Juvenal, as well as an unchanged belief in the cultural superiority of Rome.123

Presumably the increasing usage of marriage between the imperial dynasty and various barbarian courts and its acceptance as a political necessity in order to ‘buy’ stability for the empire would have helped slowly to erase motives of rejection. As Demandt puts it, the rather frequent occurrence of such intermarriages therefore resulted in the relatively quick disappearance of the typical barbarian from the political scenery as it turned children of such marriages effectively into Romans. This of course would have helped to reduce arguments of cultural rejection even further. In fact the increasing occurrence of such marriages is another indicator for

---

the validity of Sivan’s interpretation of the law of 373. As a result many of the
reigning barbarian houses of the late empire came to be related to the imperial house
and Roman aristocratic families: for example the royal Ostrogothic Amali were
related not only to the imperial house but also to other barbarian dynasties such as
the Visigoths, the Franks, the Langobards and even the Huns. Also some Roman
aristocratic houses married into ruling barbarian families such as the Baiuvarian
house of the Agilolfings, or the Anicii, a family to which Sidonius belonged, who
were related to the Gothic Amali. The result was that a Frankish king like
Charlemagne could trace his ancestral lineage as far back as the Roman emperor
Diocletian, although not in a direct line but at least without any disruption. Indeed
these high-profile marriages were almost always deliberate political tools used
epecially by the imperial house to create bonds of family relationships between the
empire and barbarian dynasties, which, by accepting these barbarian dynasties as
equal partners, were supposed to ensure political stability. Claude argues that
certainly for the barbarian side such family ties with the imperial dynasty were
regarded as high honours, especially when such marriages were overall still an
exception; indeed at the Eastern court any such marriage alliances were deliberately
excluded from imperial politics as the barbarian husbands of the imperial princesses
could otherwise have claimed shares in the political and territorial power of the
imperial court – a sharp contrast with the Western court where marriages, as
discussed above, offered access to power.125

The later usage of the Valentinian law in its Visigothic context is even more
interesting when it was taken into the Breviarum Alaricianum, although the original

124 Demandt (1989), 76, 81-4. Anicius Olybrius’ daughter Anicia for example was betrothed to
Theoderic the Great.
125 Claude (1989), 25-39. Another form of strengthening alliances between imperial house and
barbarian rulers was the practice of adoption.
meaning of the law was seemingly removed in the Gothic interpretation. Adopting and copying Roman laws into barbarian jurisdiction and law codes became an increasing practice, effectively creating a mixture of barbarian customs and laws with Roman traditions of jurisprudence. The continuity and validity of Roman laws in barbarian jurisdiction as well as the application of these laws to each group has been frequently debated and to a certain extent depended on the survival of Roman influence in the barbarian realm concerned; overall, though, Roman legislation remained a dominant factor in the organisation and interpretation of barbarian law. The occurrence of the law of 373 in the Visigothic sphere is therefore not surprising. What is more surprising is the far stricter interpretation than its original Valentinian version: *gentiles* and *provinciales* were replaced by *Romani* and *barbari*, explicitly forbidding any marriage between Romans and barbarians with capital punishment, although it was later revised under king Leovigild who allowed such marriages; its original purpose of dealing with alliances between Romans and the native population within a province was thus removed and it was now concerned with the Roman and Gothic population in general. Bearing in mind the frequency of marriages between Goths and Romans and the close proximity of the two groups overall, such a legal restriction is surprising. Part of the reason why Alaric II had created the *Breviarum* was the idea to create an element of unity in his realm in order to balance possible attempts by the Frankish court to undermine Visigothic authority; a law which strictly forbade any marriage between Goths and Romans was surely counterproductive to the aim of promoting unity among the population.

Problems of interpreting the Visigothic version of this law remain: although the term *Romani* was surely targeted at the Gallo-Romans, the term *barbari* in that context

---

126 See for example article by Liebeschuetz (1998).
127 See Part V.2.
made little sense as the Visigoths never referred to themselves as barbarians.  
Therefore there have been arguments to interpret barbari as a term for describing Arians, but that is based on the assumption of regarding all Goths as Arians. If there was any aspect which would have complicated intermarriage between Romans and Visigoths and would have complicated a deeper level of assimilation in general, it would have been the difference of religion: the Goths were predominantly Arians whereas the majority of the Roman population was Catholic; from the Catholic viewpoint any marriage with a member of a heretical group such as the Arian sect had been forbidden by Canon law since the fourth century. However attractive this explanation is, the choice of terminology by the Goths to regard Arian believers as barbari, remains odd as this comes back to calling themselves barbari, and, as seen before, this was more than doubtful. Furthermore marriage between the Roman and Gothic population was already hindered by religious concerns, which would have made a religiously inspired intention of this law superfluous. Sivan therefore sees the law in its Visigothic context again as an answer to political tensions, this time between Goths and Franks, thus reflecting back on its original meaning in Valentinian’s intention; hence for her the term barbari referred to any nation other than Gothic. Indeed in the light of the aim of the Breviarum, and the otherwise awkward terminology of barbari, this interpretation certainly makes sense. Liebeschuetz however rejects this politically tendentious interpretation, as in his opinion the law was deliberately used by the Visigoths to foster their ethnic separation from the Roman population as well as to guarantee their own military power despite years of living within the empire; the law was then an attempt to

---

128 Sivan (1998), 200-3. Demandt (1989), 80. Ripoll López (1998), 165. Liebeschuetz (1998), 140: in Ostrogothic Italy jurisdiction was mainly in the hands of Gothic officials who were appointed by the king although there were still Romans sitting in the council of the comes civitatis, the royal representative in each city.
129 Claude (1998), 123. Pohl (2005), 67-8. Furthermore, there are problems in terms of distinction between Arians and Catholics, see Part V.2.
preserve some kind of ethnic identity among the Gothic population against the increasing pressure of assimilation with the Roman side. However, the use of terminology makes this somewhat doubtful – this interpretation still fails to explain the Gothic choice of addressing themselves as barbarians – although attempts on both the Roman and the Gothic side to preserve some cultural identity which was inaccessible for the other side were undoubtedly made. A ban on marriage would have enforced ethnic separation and if there was any intention to keep the two sides apart, such a law would have made sense from the Gothic viewpoint. Its enforcement would have fostered underlying tensions between Romans and Goths, which could have added another aspect for the ultimate failure of the Visigothic kingdom in establishing a lasting power-base.

In contrast to the Goths, the Burgundians and the Franks did allow marriages with the Roman population and in case of the Franks this would have fostered the already strong process of assimilation with the Roman sphere. However, Goths as members of the royal and aristocratic families either disregarded this law or did not see it as applicable to them, when for example the Visigothic king Theudis married a wealthy Romano-Hispanic woman; whether this indicates that this particular law was never fully enforced, that it did not apply to the aristocracy/royal family in general or that this group was regarded as being occasionally exempt on the basis of allowing important alliances to strengthen Gothic interests, is open to question. Bearing in mind the problem of attaching the label barbari to the Visigoths themselves and the continued practice of such mixed marriages contrary to this very law, Sivan’s interpretation, to read this law as a temporary answer to specific political situations

---

130 Liebeschuetz (1998), 140; (2001), 355, 361: concerning attempts of ethnic separation raises the question if the almost exclusive existence of Gothic names among the secular leaders can be used as an indicator for their Gothic origins or if it rather reflects the custom to adopt Gothic names regardless of ethnic descent as was the case in the Frankish kingdom. Demandt (1989), 79-80. Sivan (1998), 190, 194-5, 198-9. Claude (1998), 139-40. Pohl (2005), 67-8.

131 Stroheker (1948), 97, 107.
rather than a universal law against any Roman-barbarian marriage, which the
Visigoths adopted with an even narrower interpretation but kept its political aspect,
appears as the far more likely one.
Part V. The impact of the Christian Church

1. The Gallic aristocracy and the episcopate

The relationship Christian ideology had with the barbarians was certainly complex. As already described before, in contemporary writing the barbarian was often a generalised figure, used as a moral stick to beat the Roman people with and to explain the decline of Roman military power and political influence in terms of portraying him as God’s scourge sent to punish the lapsing morals of the Romans. Yet despite such generalisations in theological writing, the church in general and the office of the bishop in particular came to occupy a very prominent position within the new barbarian establishments and their administration. The church came to offer a career option for many members of the Gallic aristocracy, which the altered political setup in Gaul had increasingly blocked; due to the exceptional spiritual but also worldly position the higher church offices incorporated, it is of little surprise that it formed an attractive alternative for the aristocracy to their public offices. For then assimilation with the new barbarian establishment meant to find ways to secure their political and social future: as the barbarian courts not always offered the possibility to continue their political positions, or many aristocrats themselves refused to accept offices as courtiers of a barbarian king due to a reluctance based on issues of xenophobia to accept barbarian power, the church came to offer a significant alternative. Furthermore, the role of religion and different doctrines has often been cited in connection with the eventual Gothic failure and the long-lasting Frankish success. Of course there is much more to the influence of Christianity – monasticism or various different types of Christian doctrine to name but a few in this
period – and this chapter will focus albeit briefly on the role of the church in connection with the Gallic aristocracy as a means of retaining their former lifestyle.

Since Constantine the connection between church and empire had become all the more important. Constantine not only became the first Christian emperor, but his continuous interference in ecclesiastical disputes, most notably in the Donatist Schism in the 310s and the Arian controversy, which he tried to settle in the Council of Nicaea in 325, formed a connection between church and monarch which remained vital for the future. As will be seen further below, both the Visigothic and Frankish kings formed a close relationship with their bishops, the Franks as Catholics even more so, although even the Arian Gothic king regarded himself as having the duty to interfere in ecclesiastical matters as a form of continuing this imperial link of church and state. The development of Christianity in Gaul was intrinsically linked with the rise of monasticism and subsequently of the socio-political importance of ecclesiastical offices. Originally a movement from the Eastern sphere of the empire, monasticism was regarded as a way to renounce the world in order to get closer to God through prayer and asceticism, especially when a lack of persecutions meant not only a lapse of true belief but also a lack of opportunity to prove one’s true faith. For Gaul, one of the most influential characters in developing monasticism as well as the role of the church and the bishop was Martin, with his monastic foundation at Marmoutier but even more in his role as bishop of Tours, although there were other, equally important men like Hilary of Poitiers under whose influence Martin had stood.¹ Equally important was the monastery of Lérins on the Mediterranean coast,

¹ Van Dam (1998), 120-2, 124: argues that there has been a danger of putting too much weight on the role of Martin in the Christianisation of Gaul and on the idea of converting a pagan society to Christianity, without taking into account the change in understandings of authority and community in Gaul, especially when Martin was not native to Gaul. For an excellent study on the importance of St Martin for the monastic development in Gaul, see Prinz (1965), especially 19-46, 481-5. Sidonius for
from Honoratus of Arles between 400-10, which rapidly became a centre for
spirituality and learning, with eminent pupils such as Hilary of Arles, Faustus of
Riez, Eucherius of Lyon, Lupus of Troyes, Caesarius of Arles; Prinz has argued that
Lérins, in contrast to Martin’s foundations, came much under the influence of
northern Gallic aristocrats due to the move of the imperial administration from Trier
to Arles, which caused a move of many of these nobles to the south of Gaul.²
However, people joining ecclesiastical orders in the fourth century did so
predominantly because of religious inspiration, and as Lewis has observed, the
majority of the bishops were in fact drawn from the *curiales* and not from the Gallic
aristocracy; aside from religious inspiration, part of the reason was that the members
of this social group thus avoided financial burdens of municipal magistracies
whereas the aristocracy still had access to public offices within the imperial
administration.³ The merging of aristocratic lifestyle with ecclesiastical offices, and
the high-profile status the episcopacy was to gain among the Gallo-Roman
aristocracy in the fifth century, had not yet been fully established, and the devotion to
an ascetic lifestyle, which meant theologically speaking a complete renunciation of
worldly goods and offices, was still regarded with suspicion. A famous example is
the case of Paulinus of Nola who, as a member of the Pontii family in Aquitania, had
been destined for an aristocratic life of public offices and land-management; he had
rejected his worldly career and under the influence of St Martin of Tours had joined
religious orders and eventually became bishop of Nola in Campania in Italy.
Although for contemporaries this renunciation of his worldly career was already
considered a grave problem, especially for a scion of a famous aristocratic family,

² A fairly large proportion of pupils of Lérins came from an aristocratic background, see Prinz (1965),
Paulinus’ most shocking move was his breaking of all links of correspondence and friendship, and eventually even leaving his own native country – in the eyes of his fellow-nobles any such action was more degrading than they could imagine. As has been discussed before, the breach of friendship by a decline of continuing correspondence was already considered a serious ‘offence’ as it rejected social networks, which was an essential part of aristocratic life; to reject a political career and thus his ancestral rights was even worse. To leave Gaul for Italy and to renounce any further connection with the very same ancestral links was beyond most aristocratic comprehension. His friend and former teacher Ausonius was obviously truly horrified by Paulinus’ strict intentions but despite his ardent attempts to revoke the glorious world of shared literature and friendship, Paulinus rejected such memories as things past because in his new life there could only be his devotion to Christ and not to pagan literature.\(^4\) However, Paulinus’ zeal in renouncing his worldly life was extreme; certainly for Ausonius and other contemporaries there was no problem in combining classical mythology and Christian ideology as in his, and in many contemporaries’ opinion, a Roman aristocrat had to continue the traditional literature and the devotion to classical culture. Sidonius too saw no problem in combining his ecclesiastical office with his aristocratic pastimes and values, although he did try to refrain from too much engagement with classical texts and opted to stop composing classical poetry as a sign of having ended his worldly life. For someone who had used classical literature as extensively as Sidonius, both in his pastime but

\(^4\) Ausonius, \textit{Ep.} 20-2, 25-9. Paulinus of Nola, \textit{Carm.} 10. Van Dam (1985), 304-6. However, Paulinus’ exceptional lifestyle later gained him a position in the social/religious understanding of his contemporaries which Ausonius never achieved, and his subsequent sainthood helped Paulinus’ family to receive a privileged position, which in the sixth century was held in very high esteem, indeed rivalled that of an aristocratic background. Also Gregory of Tours was very proud to trace his ancestry back to the earliest bishops of Tours, which ultimately put him into close proximity with St Martin himself, which was an important aspect of consolidating his own Episcopal power even further. The importance of claiming saints as part of the family remained an important concept, which was also heavily exploited in the Merovingian kingdom (for example St Radegundis and St Balthildis in the royal family) as it added further claims to power to this family, see Helvétius (1996), 403-4.
also in his political career (panegyrics for Avitus and Majorian to name but a few occasions), this was indeed a serious step, and reflects the fact that even Sidonius, who had received very little if any training for the church, regarded ecclesiastical offices as more than a mere career change; by the time of Gregory of Tours, the texts of classical Roman literature were already a highly regarded, albeit distant, idiom, which were preserved alongside the venerated texts of the early Christian writers and saints.\(^5\) The difficulty with Paulinus' decision therefore lay not only in his decision to enter ecclesiastical orders, despite having access to public, imperial positions, but above all his unwillingness to combine his church office with aristocratic values; it would take a few more decades before this merging of the powers of the nobility with the office of the episcopate was complete.

Once the political situation in Gaul had changed and the holding of secular administrative positions was not automatically guaranteed any more, in the fifth century the ecclesiastical sphere and the episcopacy in particular became an attractive option for the Gallo-Roman aristocracy. By providing a serious alternative to political offices (although in due course the role of important ecclesiastical officers did indeed often include a role at the barbarian courts), ecclesiastical positions became another aspect of assimilation of the Gallic aristocracy within the altered political atmosphere. Furthermore, by entering monastic orders or other ecclesiastical offices, the now increasingly necessary assimilation with the barbarian powers could be to some extent avoided or the loss of property and privileges justified: Paulinus of Pella for example had tried to become a member of a religious congregation when the Gothic arrival in Gaul had severely hindered the continuation

---

of his former lifestyle, although he eventually failed to live as a monk; some decades
later Sidonius expressed the opinion that a place in the church was the only real
alternative to leaving the country, that is Gaul, altogether.⁶ Although religious
motives undoubtedly continued to form the basis for many a decision to enter church
orders, the hierarchical structure of the church with its own concept of wielding
power appealed to the aristocratic sense of issuing power and influence; many of
them entered the episcopacy from having held offices within the imperial sphere,
without having received any real theological training or having started in lower
offices within the church. Although to enter monastic orders theoretically meant a
renunciation of worldly conventions and privileges and thus a rejection of
aristocratic values and pastimes, the role of the bishop incorporated a large amount
of public and political power in much the same way as the former public political
offices of an aristocrat had carried.⁷ In regards to the church, the question of
assimilation for the Gallic aristocracy now was not so much about the concept of
finding a political status quo with the new barbarian rulers, but to find a different
way to preserve their endangered socio-political privileges aside from them joining
the barbarian king as his courtiers. In their quest to find another alternative to their
increasingly endangered public position, the church, and especially the Episcopal
office, offered a very attractive solution for the Gallic aristocracy because of the
enormous social and subsequently political prestige it carried, based on the spiritual
power the bishop was invested with.⁸ In contrast to the time of Paulinus of Nola, for
the aristocrats now joining the church the bishopric was regarded as a culmination of
their worldly honours or perhaps more likely as a substitute for the same:
eclesiastical offices, and especially the episcopate, with both their spiritual as well

⁸ See further below for the prestige/power the Episcopate carried.
as their worldly powers and privileges, including the holding of extensive properties
and land, allowed for the continuation of the aristocratic position in society in much
the same way as had been the case before the political establishment of the various
barbarian states; furthermore, the spiritual element carried not only a certain
guarantee of personal safety for every member of the clergy, which the worldly
status of a nobleman lacked (although it did not always protect against political
exile), but also enhanced the already exalted status of the bishop even further.9 By
now the holding of ecclesiastical offices did not interrupt a continuous belief in
aristocratic values of pride of ancestry; Gregory of Tours for example was very
proud of his illustrious ancestors and was happy to promote his own relatives to
equally important offices within the church in much the same way as previously
aristocratic patron-client relationships and family connections had played a role in
securing important public offices within the imperial administration; furthermore, in
Gregory’s case, to boast of an ancestry of eminent men in church offices was now
regarded as important in demonstrating a noble lineage as was the pure worldly
aristocratic ancestry – yet another sign of the significant status ecclesiastical
positions had reached.10 To occupy an ecclesiastical office became as much if not
more a symbol of status and privilege for a noble family than had been the holding of
offices within the imperial public sphere; increasingly it was regarded as so
important for a family to gain success and to fulfil political ambitions that in some
families certain members were assigned from birth to enter the church to make their

9 Euric for example forbade the ordination of bishops in Gaul for some time and sent others into exile
for political reasons, among them also Sidonius, see Sid. Ap., Ep. IV.10.1; VIII.9.3; IX.3.3. Likewise
Simplicius of Bourges, Crocus of Nimes and Faustus of Riez were forced into exile: Sid. Ap.,
Ep. VII.6.9. Gregory of Tours, Hist. Franc. II.26, III.2,10, 31; Vit. Pat.4. equally mentioned other
prominent members of the church in exile, such as Volusianus of Tours and his successor Verus,
Caesarius of Arles or Quintianus of Rodez who was twice exiled. See below pp.258-66.
10 Already Sidonius felt the need to comment on the aristocratic ancestry of Episcopal candidates and
their relatives: Sid. Ap., Ep. VII.9.24 stating the noble lineage of the wife of a candidate for the
For the claim to connect one’s ancestry with saints or to boost saints as family members, see further
above.
career. This meant a gradual monopolising of the episcopate by the aristocracy, which went as far as to regard ecclesiastical offices as part of the aristocratic *cursus honorum* or to limit the episcopacy to members of the nobility only; indeed the majority of the leading bishops of the fifth century, such as Hilary of Arles, Germanus of Auxerre, Eucherius of Lyon or Caesarius of Arles (to name but a few) came from an aristocratic background with few exceptions.  

As Christianity became an integrated part of the barbarian courts, the role of the bishop also became part of the courtly establishment. Thus the Gallic aristocrats were able to assimilate with the new barbarian courts in a political way without being forced to join the political setup of the barbarian ruler. Considering the feelings of Roman cultural superiority, which could still be found among some of the Gallic aristocrats (for example Sidonius), the concept of entering an office that continued and even enhanced their lost socio-political privileges yet at the same time allowed for a necessary assimilation with the barbarian courts was undoubtedly more than inspiring. Furthermore, the spiritual power and the role as an intermediary between God and mankind associated with the bishop allowed for a truly exalted personal status beyond that of a normal aristocratic courtier – again an important issue for any aristocrat who was still somewhat reluctant to accept the altered political situation and the power of the barbarian courts. In regards to the Episcopate, the process of assimilation for the Gallic aristocracy meant their adaptation to and adoption of a lifestyle which previously had been largely unknown to them; by recognising the socio-political potential this position offered to them, the Gallic nobles increasingly

---

11 Van Dam (1985), 203, 210, 217. Anton (1996), 373. Mathisen (1993), 90-2. Beside the fact that many members of the nobility were already interrelated with each other through family connections, the church added yet another dimension to such relationships when it made its members ‘brothers in Christ’, thus adding a further component to promote aristocratic social networks, which was unbreakable and thus stood above worldly connections which could be severed by adverse politics.
monopolised it, and thus created a basis from which they were able to continue their elevated social position beyond the Roman system, albeit in a different way.

Let us now turn to the office of the bishop as such and examine briefly some aspects of his power, in order to understand the exalted position he gained within society. From the beginning, bishops had played an increasingly important role in the imperial administration and had come to represent a symbol of stability and moral focus, dispensing spiritual help and mediating in politically difficult circumstances;\(^\text{12}\) as Sidonius described the influence of his fellow-bishop, Fonteius of Vason: ‘…great as you are in reputation and very great in rank, you are as much to be praised for your condescension as for your lofty position…through your constant intercession you bestow in abundance the blessing of your apostolic protection upon…Simplicius and Apollinaris [relatives of Sidonius]’.\(^\text{13}\) One elemental aspect of this office though stood above all worldly power, and that was the bishop’s connection with the spiritual, religious sphere. The influence someone held who was regarded as God’s chosen intermediary on earth by the people under his charge added an aspect of power which no other imperial or worldly office could ever bestow. In Sidonius’ words, every member of religious orders, even the lowest, was regarded as being of higher status than any worldly magnate could be as it was only the church through which people could obtain the eternal salvation of their souls.\(^\text{14}\) Due to the aristocratic background of most of the bishops, most of them had received an education that enabled them to read and interpret the Holy Scriptures and thus to function as a mediator between his flock and God, an element which became

---

\(^{12}\) See also James (1988), 183-4 for the role of the Frankish bishops.

\(^{13}\) Sid. Ap., *Ep.* VII.4; VII.5, VII.8 and VII. 9 for Sidonius’ own involvement in mediating in the difficult election of a new pontiff for the church at Bourges, for which he asked another bishop, Agroecius of Sens, for further support in calming the situation; also VII.6.10; VII.9.18-9.

apparent in their role in the administration and maintenance, but especially in their promotion of saints’ cults. It was this relationship the bishop had with the saints’ cult in his city that formed a large part in manifesting his power and prominent position as a leader of the people under his charge. The saints and the miracles ascribed to the their cults, but especially the belief in their continuous presence at their shrines and their help as God’s intermediaries, had in many ways taken over the presence of the Roman administration when the pomp of the religious ceremonies and the building programmes to enhance the shrines reflected the grandeur of the imperial court; besides, the writing of a saint’s *vita* allowed for the continuation of classical education and the tradition of panegyrics. In channelling access to the shrine and conducting these rituals, the church and its bishops acted like imperial magistrates in the imperial administration. Gregory of Tours gave a good example of the power a bishop could obtain from maintaining access to a shrine like St Martin’s in Tours as the possession of such a cult enhanced the prestige of both city and bishop. Furthermore, it cast the bishop in a unique role of exercising moral power over worldly magnates as they were all subject to God’s will with the bishop as His instrument; within this ideology at times even a king had to be submissive to the saints’ powers as well as to their representative on earth, the church, because his power was ultimately God-given too – the divine aspect of a monarch as having received his power directly from God was something to develop in the future. As Van Dam observed, ‘holiness was power’ and so therefore were miracles which occurred at the saint’s shrine, as they showed the exceptional life the saint had lived and had been chosen by God as a result of this; hence the person who administered the place where such a demonstration of God’s will took place, and that meant the bishop, equally held power. In fact the bishop was regarded as sharing a relationship with the saint, allowing him to ask for divine intervention on behalf of his people by
praying to the saint, and thus being able to offer aid by curing people from illnesses
and demons; again, the direct access to the holy shrines and this personal relationship
with the saint would have further enhanced the authority of the bishop. For example
Germanus of Auxerre was not only respected for his wide-ranging authority in terms
of interfering in imperial administration, but also because of his spiritual powers,
which enabled him to cure people.\textsuperscript{15} Besides, there was a popular belief that only
those with a sin-free life were granted access to the shrines by the saints themselves
and thus the bishop who daily officiated at those shrines had to be blameless; this
gradually turned him into a sacrosanct figure who, appointed for life, increasingly
stood above worldly law as he was ultimately accountable to God alone. Also in the
fight against heresy the saints’ cults could play an important role in manifesting
Episcopal power as a belief in divine intervention formed part of the orthodox faith
whereas for example Arianism rejected this.\textsuperscript{16} Bearing in mind the enormous
influence and importance these cults had on the population but above all in the role
of the bishop, a rejection of this by an Arian government would certainly have had
some serious impact on the stability of its rule. In case of the Visigoths who were
Arians such veneration would have met with obstacles from a religious viewpoint,
which could have played a negative role in the long-term acceptance of Visigothic
rule (from the aristocratic viewpoint, the Arian church in the Gothic kingdom offered
less attractive ‘career’ options than the Frankish realm). In contrast, though, the
Franks as orthodox Christians not only accepted such cults but even supported the
most important shrines such as the tomb of St Martin with royal donations; not only
did this cement the increasing power positions of their bishops (which would have
been of interest for the Gallo-Roman aristocrats as the majority of the holders of
these positions) but also strengthened the royal authority of their kings.

\textsuperscript{15} See Van Dam (1985), 143, 237, 256-77.
\textsuperscript{16} For example Van Dam (1985), 168-71, 189-97 for importance of saints’ cults in Gaul.
Another, perhaps more obvious role of the bishop was his influence in worldly
administration, although from a strictly theological viewpoint he had no place in
worldly affairs. It was not only the spiritual side of the Episcopate that was appealing
to an aristocrat: also the involvement of the bishop in administrative matters,
jurisdiction and political aspects was certainly of interest to the Gallic aristocracy,
even more so if one considers their continuously close association with the *civitates*
and the local administrative networking within Gaul. Maybe it was this link with the
administrative/political world which was above all of real interest to many of the
Gallic nobles who joined the Episcopate. Within the Western sphere the bishop
achieved a position of lordship which set him equal to the worldly leaders and
enabled him to engage in jurisdiction, to intervene in cases of war or civil matters
such as taxation (from which he was exempt), to care for charity and to engage in
public building programmes, as well as to sponsor and build churches and
monasteries within his diocese and his Episcopal city. Already since Constantine it
had been the church which cared for the poor and was granted financial help,
privileges and patronage by the emperors to support its charitable work; in return the
bishops were supposed to pray for the common good of the emperor and his realm, a
concept which continued in the barbarian kingdoms too. It was this sphere of
charitable works, which was also supported by donations from wealthy aristocrats,
which created a wide following among the population and further supported the
public profile of the bishop.\(^{17}\) Effectively it meant that the bishop took over many of
the former imperial administrative tasks, which enhanced his power, especially when
the former imperial administrative structures within the cities increasingly declined;
laymen did play a role in the administrative running of the barbarian governments

\(^{17}\) Sid. Ap., *Ep.* III.1.2 for donations of a farm and its revenues his relative Avitus (not the emperor)
had made to the church in Clermont-Ferrand.
although the proportion of members of the clergy was undoubtedly high, due to the increasingly strong impact of monastic training in terms of education. Being publicly acclaimed after his election by the inhabitants of the city, the bishop ultimately became the leading man of his city, who was not only involved in its administrative, charitable and religious work but also able to control and use the population as a further outward sign of his authority. As the *civitas* was the central point of local administration in Gaul, the imperial government used the bishops, the central figures in their towns/dioceses, as a vital link between imperial government and *civitas*: as discussed above, the bishops were not only engaged in the spiritual leadership of their subjects but were directly involved in the urban administrative and political business, thus gaining a status of quasi-leaders of their cities and dioceses, which was further highlighted by certain immunities in terms of taxation and jurisdiction.

Furthermore, as it had traditionally been the nobility which had governed the *civitas*, this connection between aristocracy and bishopric would have further helped the said nobility to continue its links with local administration and authority, albeit now through ecclesiastical offices; such links were even fostered by the phenomenon of entire Episcopal dynasties – Gregory of Tours is a prime example – which further monopolised the bishopric for the aristocracy. The Frankish concept of adopting and incorporating the *civitates* into their own administrative system was not only a sign of them adopting the Roman system but also added to their future political success because it closely bound the Gallic episcopate to the monarchy. As Van Dam observed, the conversion of the Gallic aristocracy to Christianity and their adoption

---

18 Van Ossel (1996), 103-5 on the question of the continuation and preservation of urban life and structures in the late empire.
19 The bishop was lord over the ecclesiastical finances and income in his diocese as well as over the monasteries and other ecclesiastical institutions, see Anton (1996), 373-6.
20 Lewis (2001), 75, 84-6: not all bishops were linked with their native *civitas*, which was also in part a result of strong competition for these sees; Sidonius for example became bishop of Clermont-Ferrand although he was a native of Lyon, whereas others like Faustus of Riez became bishop of their native *civitas*. Van Dam (1985), 203-12. Heinzelmann (1992), 243-5; (1996), 387. Schneider (1996), 394. Anton (1996), 374. Drinkwater (2007), 348.
of ecclesiastical offices was not so much a transformation of the same aristocracy but
far more a transformation of Christianity to incorporate aristocratic values. Yet Van
Dam’s argument should be treated with caution because the realisation of the socio-
political opportunities the Episcopate offered, was surely a result of a profound
change to the world of the Gallic aristocracy; he is correct in that way that many of
the core values of the aristocracy, such as their political/public role, their devotion to
literature and the maintenance of social networks, were indeed preserved or even
transmitted into the office of the bishop. What had changed however was the fact
that the nobility now made a sphere their own that they had not previously occupied;
their willingness to assimilate with the new political sphere by entering ecclesiastical
offices, is a sign that the previous aristocratic world had undergone serious changes.

Liebeschuetz, though, warns against the concept of a ‘revolutionary rise’ of the
bishop to this position as in his opinion it was much more the natural outcome of the
decline of the civil administration, thus of the civitas, which left a vacuum to be
filled; furthermore the roots of Episcopal power lay in the bishop’s moral authority
over questions of faith, discipline and entry into church offices as well as his role as
a public leader of the Christian community. Thus effectively the bishop came to
adopt a public position of worldly power because the former imperial system of civic
administration declined, which enabled him to continue his aristocratic
understanding of office-holding whilst enhancing this through his spiritual
dominance. Thus the increasingly high proportion of Gallic aristocrats occupying
Episcopal seats was a result of a form of socio-political assimilation of the Gallic
nobility in much the same way as other Gallic nobles had opted to pursue worldly
careers at the barbarian courts.

---

21 Constantine’s conversion and the Christian faith of all subsequent emperors, apart from Julian, as
well as Constantine’s encouragement to organise the dioceses and ecclesiastical organisation parallel
to the administrative structures of the empire, only supported the increasing power-position of the
There was yet another aspect of the Episcopate that appealed to many members of the aristocracy to enter said office and that was the close connection between the church, especially religious orders, and the preservation and continuation of learning and literature. However, as the traditional system of education declined, it was the church and the monasteries that took over the preservation and development of learning, not only in literary aspects but also in the legal tradition, although the classical texts became increasingly rudimentary as the main focus of education was on the best possible knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. As the devotion to literature formed an essential part of the aristocratic lifestyle, this would have added another aspect of interest to join ecclesiastical offices.\(^{22}\) Again, the office of the bishop enabled the Gallic aristocrat to continue his former lifestyle not only in terms of enabling him to pursue this devotion to classical literature but also to maintain the important social network through correspondence. Although Sidonius claimed that he had to discontinue his former devotion to classical aspects of literature, as these were incompatible with the teachings of the church because of their pagan nature, he nevertheless continued to devote a large part of his time to his beloved literature and to a vast correspondence with his fellow-bishops/aristocrats. Biblical studies became the predominant factor in the literary education of the church, which meant that many of the bishops only had a fairly basic understanding of the texts of classical literature: for example Gregory of Tours was the scion of a Gallic aristocratic family, which in earlier Roman times would have meant for him a thorough training in the classical arts, yet his knowledge of Latin was rather crude and his writings centred overall on biblical knowledge. However, it should not be forgotten that despite the lack of a proper education in the traditional Roman sense, Gregory had still retained the old Roman pride in a command of Latin and its literature when he sneered at the

\(^{22}\) See Part IV.3 a.
attempts of a Frankish king to compose poetry in Roman fashion. In comparison, his friend Venantius Fortunatus had received a more traditional education and was far more schooled in classical literature and poetry than Gregory. Despite their services at the Frankish court and their lifestyle in which traditional Roman values and concepts of education increasingly became an echo of a venerated past, parts of an aristocratic understanding of their exalted status as members of Rome’s former ruling class could still be found among these Gallic nobles.

The traditional aristocratic education and the familiarity with the cultural and political sphere of the respective government thus formed a perfect basis for the highly influential position of a bishop and became therefore extremely attractive to many Gallic aristocrats who could not fulfil their public role in the political arena. Thus the church offered the continuation of a career and a position within the social hierarchy, which lay society could not automatically guarantee any more. Thus the position of the bishop was not something that the establishment of barbarian kingdoms and the decline of former imperial structures had solely created, but was in part based on a development which had already started in the empire. The lack of available public offices had urged aristocratic families in Gaul to seek other means to find substitutes for the same and the church offered an excellent way to combine a public office with aristocratic values.

---

23 See Part IV.3 b. In Visigothic Spain it was the church which established a revival of literature in the middle of the sixth century in an attempt to provide a unifying aspect for the country. Although they were few people as authors involved, the literature produced had widespread influence. Liebeschuetz (2001), 319, 333-40. See also Collins (2006).
2. The Goths, the Franks and the question of Arianism

When comparing the long-term effects of the success of the Gothic kingdom with the Franks, the role of religion has been often cited as a decisive factor why the Goths were eventually losing their power whereas the Franks managed to retain it into the Middle Ages. Religion, or disputes over its practices and rituals, is a decisive factor in the process of assimilation between peoples and cultures. The Goths, like many other barbarian groups such as the Vandals, the Suebes, the Burgundians and others, had adopted the teachings of Arius when they had converted to Christianity, and their decision to keep this form of Christian faith, although it was later officially declared a heresy, has sometimes been interpreted as one of the main reasons why the Goths, in contrast to the Franks, who had adopted Catholicism like the majority of the Roman population, failed to achieve any long-lasting success. However, as will be seen below, the concept of Arianism per se was perhaps far less a decisive factor than sometimes thought.

Why the Goths kept the Arian faith despite its rejection by the Catholic Church is difficult to answer, but it has often been interpreted as a deliberate move, perhaps envisaged to provide a form of ethnic boundary to the predominantly orthodox Roman population. However, if Arianism was indeed used by the Goths as an attempt to create an ethnic or complete religious separation, it succeeded only partially as both Arianism and Orthodoxy were just different branches of the same religion. By following a Christian sect, the Goths remained at least technically members of the empire because the empire was officially Christian too. If they had wanted to separate themselves completely from the imperial context via the religious sphere, the adoption of a specific Christian sect, albeit a heretical one, ultimately
failed to be successful. The adoption of Christianity occurred at a time when the Goths tried to assimilate with the empire themselves. Ulfila’s teaching was in conformity with the official religion of the empire, so when part of the Goths adopted Arianism or rather the *Homoean* version already in the 340s they did so in order to become part of the empire and to justify their claims to be admitted into the empire, rather than to create a deliberate separation. Thus instead of establishing a religious boundary to the Roman population, the Goths had in fact tried to assimilate with the imperial system by following its official religion. If Sozomen’s argument is correct that Fritigern had indeed converted around 376 when a new treaty with the empire was established, then this decision was undoubtedly politically inspired: Fritigern’s attempts to receive the status of *rex socius et amicus* would have further encouraged him to adopt a similar line in the religious sphere to that of the emperor. Although Fritigern failed to achieve his aim, the concept of sharing the same Christian faith with the empire might have been a factor which appealed to the Goths from a diplomatic viewpoint, especially when it came to peace negotiations, as it might have presented them as being less ‘barbarian’ (and thus more agreeable to the Romans) than they would have been if they had retained their pagan religion. Therefore the question over religion as an ethnically defining element came into being only when Arius’ rule was denounced as heresy, which complicated matters because the Goths failed to revoke their Arian belief. Arianism was rejected as early as 325 at the Council of Nicaea when the Council defined the Trinity as *Homoousios*,

---

24 Ulfila’s Christian teaching as well as his translation of the bible into the Gothic language in the 340s had started the Gothic conversion to Christianity, albeit to the Arian brand, although at that time it was the official religion supported by Constantius. However, Christianity was already attested among the Goths before Ulfila, as mentioned by Athanasius, *de incarnatione verbi* 51. Part of the treaty to cross the Danube in 376 might have encompassed their conversion to the then prevailing brand of Christianity, that is the *Homoean* version, accepted until 380. Schwarcz (1999), 451-2, 453-5, based on Socrates, *Hist. Eccles.* IV.33; Sozomen, *Hist. Eccles.* VI.37 argues that Fritigern could have converted in 376 out of gratitude, due to the support he received from the emperor against Athanaric, which would explain the adoption of the Arian faith, although it has to be remembered that at the time the distinction with the Catholics was not yet that apparent.

25 See Part II.1 b.
thus declaring the Homoean belief heretical. Arius’ doctrine continued its influence, especially when the emperor Constantius openly supported Arianism; his death deprived the Arian church of one of its chief supporters and it was officially declared a heresy at the Council of Constantinople in 381. The Goths were therefore not originally followers of a heretical group, although their Homoean version had become heretical, but were declared as such when Ulfila’s teachings failed to exclude Arius’ theory. Whether the Gothic decision to keep the Arian faith was now corresponding with their increasing political power is open to question: it could have been regarded as a way to create a deliberate distinction between themselves and the empire, perhaps for reasons of preserving or even creating a different identity once they had become part of the empire, but remaining simultaneously part of its overall Christian tradition in order to maintain levels of assimilation with the Romans.

It is debatable whether different religious practices were even needed to act as an ethnic boundary to prevent too much assimilation between the Gothic and Roman population. As discussed before, in the fourth and to some extent even in the fifth century assimilation between the Gothic and Roman population was still a process in the making. Ethnic boundaries as well as different social and cultural concepts still existed between Goths and Romans, especially among the Roman aristocracy, despite an increasing level of political cooperation; social boundaries between Romans and Goths continued to be upheld especially on the Roman side despite their understanding of a necessary political assimilation with the Goths. Sidonius, among others, was famously reluctant to accept the Goths as his equals regardless of his political dealings with them. Whether the choice of religion had been a deliberate Gothic move to create some form of ethnic separation from the Romans is therefore

26 Heather (1999), 90, 470; (1996), 131.
27 See for example Part IV.2.c. See also Collins (1980), 202.
somewhat unlikely, especially when the majority of the Gallo-Roman aristocracy, such as Sidonius and most of his peers, did everything to preserve their own Roman background and culture, despite their dealings with the Goths. Certainly from the Roman side, there was less threat to Gothic identity than a deliberate choice on the Gothic side over a specific religion, as a barrier would warrant. Besides, there was perhaps a less clear distinction between the two groups in terms of popular opinion, especially when as late as the fifth century there were still Arians to be found among some of the Romans too, so a religious separation only applied between Goths who were Arians and those Romans who followed the Nicene Creed and were thus Catholic anyway.\textsuperscript{28} Collins has argued that in the fourth century there was no distinction made of Arianism as a specific group anyway, as it was only in the fifth century that different groups which did not conform with orthodoxy, were described as heretical in theological sources. In his opinion Arianism became an ethnically defining aspect for the majority of the Visigoths only in the sixth century, but he also stated that it must have lost its purpose of creating ethnic boundaries when Leovigild tried to impose a conversion of the Romans to Arianism at the Arian synod in Toledo in 580.\textsuperscript{29} However, a strict observation of religious practice from an ecclesiastical viewpoint, as well as an increasing ostracism of the Arian belief, would have separated the Arian Goths and the Catholic Romans already in the fourth century in terms of ritual by providing an almost daily and certainly obvious distinction; also in terms of actual

\textsuperscript{28} Van Dam (1985), 110-2: Manichaeism and Priscillianism are other examples for the potential social and political exploitation of heretical beliefs; certainly contemporaries within the ecclesiastical sphere regarded those two heresies with particular anxiety. Heather (1996), 313-5.

\textsuperscript{29} Collins (2006) 65, 158-9, 160: issues of religious division between Arians and Catholics within the Gothic realm became only really apparent during Leovigild’s reign in the sixth century when he tried to enforce Arian rule as a way to unify Spain; thus theological questions over the nature of the Trinity were only addressed at the Arian synod of Toledo in 580. In Collins’ opinion it is difficult to understand why there were no members of the Catholic church who had tried to convert the Arian Goths to the orthodox faith as had happened in other barbarian kingdoms, which he explains with a lack of intellectual stimuli within the Spanish Church at that time. See also Heather (1996), 281. Mathisen & Sivan (1999 c), 38-9.
language it created a certain boundary when the Gothic Arian Church used and fostered the Gothic language in contrast to Latin; moreover most major towns would have had two religious communities with their own leaders, in some cases even two bishops, which would have further highlighted religious separation among the population.\(^{30}\) On the basis of these different religious practices, Wallace-Hadrill has argued in favour of Arianism as the only real ethnically defining element when the Goths had already adopted Roman customs.\(^{31}\) To belong to a different religion from the majority of the population could thus indeed function as a tool to preserve or even to cultivate a different identity from this majority by focusing on different rituals or even a different language. The use of a different language/dialect as such, especially when embedded in specific rituals such as religious practices, can be a powerful tool to create and maintain ethnic diversity: Ulfila’s translation of the bible into the Gothic language thus served at least theoretically as a tool to assert Gothic self-identification and perhaps even as a form of ethnic self-understanding; but the extent of its impact on the overall development of the Gothic peoples and their ethnicity or the Germanic language is open to question, especially when language used in or created for a sacred context tends to hinder its overall linguistic development.\(^{32}\) Whether then the concept of using the Gothic language within a religious context was strong enough to act as a defining factor of ethnic self-identity as Gothic among the Gothic Arians is open to question. Collins’ argument that there was no real distinction between Arians and Catholics in the fourth century would have made the continuation of the Arian faith even less attractive as an instrument of maintaining ethnic or social boundaries. However, this is surely too general a

---

\(^{30}\) Liebeschuetz (1990), 49-50; (1991), 186-7; (2001), 354-5. Mathisen & Sivan (1999 c), 40. See pp. 49, 51 for a possible link between cult leagues and a potential fostering of political alliances via such leagues; if this was the case in earlier Gothic history, then there might have been an attempt to continue such connections between religious aspects and political identity.


statement, especially when there were distinctly different rituals (a different ritual concerning the person of the king, or the refusal to accept miracles as a demonstration of divine interference) between Arian and Catholic practice, which would have created at least some impact on the population on a more or less daily basis; especially the refusal of the Arian doctrine to accept the power of miracles via the saints’ cults would have had a strong impact on the population, not to mention the role of the bishop and the way in which he could assert his power, especially when the role of these saints’ cults was a vitally important aspect of religious practice at that time.\(^{33}\) Collins might be right, though, that the difference between the two became exploited only later on and that the finer differences of theological doctrine would have been lost on the majority of the population. This means that there was certainly a formally theological separation between orthodox and heretical groups already in the fourth century, although differences between Catholics and Arians might have varied in different realms, and differed in the way in which people interpreted this theological separation. The Visigoths remained Arians until the Third Council of Toledo in 589, when they converted to Catholicism, and Collins could be right that within the Visigothic kingdom there was less profound separation between Arians and Catholics.

Despite this religious separation and a certain tension between the two on this ground, there was never a direct persecution of Catholic Christians as part of a deliberate religiously inspired policy by the Goths. At times, though, differences between the Gothic king and the Catholic bishops in the fifth century were interpreted by some bishops such as Sidonius as an attempt to prohibit or even annihilate the proper faith: ‘I dread less his [Euric’s] designs against our Roman city-

\(^{33}\) Van Dam (1985), 187-90, 258. See above.
walls than against our Christian laws. So repugnant is the word “catholic” to his
mouth and his heart that one doubts whether he is more the ruler of his nation or of
his sect [Arianism]. However, any such sanctions were far more the result of
political interference on the side of the bishops and had little if anything to do with a
persecution of the Catholics. Later Gregory of Tours continued this theme of
Catholic persecutions when he accused both Euric and Alaric II of such actions.
However these persecutions had not been based on a religious conflict and the
punishment of a specific form of belief, but were far more the result of religion
interfering in political interests of the Goths. Athanaric’s persecutions of Christians
are documented in the passion of St Saba, but these were not so much theologically
inspired, but rather were the result of political circumstances since these Christians
were regarded as potential spies of the Roman emperor and as such posed a threat to
Gothic political interests as well as the traditional Gothic religion because of
potential attempts on their side to proselytise the Gothic people; as Schwarz has

35 See also Sivan (2003), 110-1 for Alaric’s interference in religious matters during the sack of Rome, where he acted as a promotor of religious unity.
36 Thompson (1980), 77-81, 83: likewise the Suebes were not practising the persecution of Christians, neither as pagans nor as Arians. The damage inflicted on the Roman population, mentioned for example in Hydatius’ chronicle, was due to them owning property but not their different religion. Hydatius moreover mentioned explicitly the Catholic, orthodox faith of one of their kings, Rechiarius, although the Suebes as a people converted to Arianism (introduced by Ajax, an Arian priest of the Arian Gallic church with the help of the Gothic king Theoderic II) before their eventual conversion to Catholicism in the mid sixth century (as recorded in Gregory of Tours). In Vandal Africa, tensions between the Arian Vandals and the Catholic Romans were exaggerated and exploited by ecclesiastical writers like Victor of Vita to portray the Vandals as persecutors of the true faith, deliberately annihilating anything Christian as well as Roman, thus leading to the extremely negative picture about Vandal rule in Africa. Although under Gaiseric’s reign Arianism was a requirement to enter official positions at the royal court, the predominant reason for the tensions between Romans and Vandals was not so much a different religion but some of the administrative measures by Gaiseric such as the confiscation of church property; the church owned extensive land and properties, thus making it an obvious target for Gaiseric to redistribute this wealth among his followers. The Vandals had inherited a religiously/politically situation in Africa, which had been unstable since the Donatist schism, and their Arian faith had only aggravated matters but not created them in the first place. Thus some of the persecutions and outbreaks of violence against rich Roman landowners were more the result of Donatist followers taking revenge on their Roman opponents, and the Vandal arrival provided a cover for this. More direct persecutions of Catholic Christians happened under Gaiseric’s son Huniciric. The Vandal conquest and looting of Rome in 455, as well as the general lack of Vandal support for the empire in its fight against other barbarian people, only added to this negative picture. Gregory of Tours, Hist. Franc. II. 2, 3. See also Pohl (2005), 82-6, 141-4. Geary (2001), 121-2. Cameron, Av. (1993), 28, 37. Heather (2005), 263-72, 292-9, 382, 395-6. Shaw (2001), 141-2. Clover (1989), 57-60. Raven, 196-8, 206. Lambert (2000), 109-10. Maier (2005), 64-5.
argued, this was closely related to the strengthening of Athanaric’s role as leader, who regarded the Christians as potential Roman partisans. As the imperial government used Christianity as a tool to strengthen its claim of absolute power because it provided a direct link between imperial rule and divine power, Gothic suspicions concerning of how far any Christian mission was also an indirect attack on Gothic politics and its authority were therefore not that far-fetched. The imperial administration actively supported missionaries like Ulfila in an attempt to bring them closer to the imperial sphere; thus the Goths had every reason to doubt the influence of Christianity on them. According to Wolfram, the adoption of Arianism by the Goths acted in many ways as a replacement of their old pagan religion, thus preserving an element of separation between Romans and Goths although it did allow for religious tolerance. In this context religion did serve as an ethnically defining element, as following the pre-Christian Gothic religion was used to create an ethnic boundary against the Christians, who were associated with the empire. When the Goths eventually adopted Christianity, they converted to the prevalent form propagated by the emperor himself, as a sign of conforming to imperial ideas in order to assimilate with them. Once Arianism had become a heresy, it could serve the same purpose of creating or protecting Gothic interests when it acted as a boundary against those Romans who followed orthodoxy. Religion per se was thus not automatically a tool to create ethnic boundaries, but could be exploited as such. Yet the contrast between Arianism and Catholicism and thus between Goths and Franks was on a political level far less apparent than it was from an ecclesiastical/doctrinal

37 There is little evidence for the early history of their religious belief; some information can be extracted from archaeological studies, see Schwarcz (1999), 447-50, 452-4. Heather (1996), 60-1.
39 Ulfila was one of the most famous victims of these persecutions. Kulikowski (2007), 117-22. Heather (1996), 61, 315; (2001), 25. Wolfram (1990), 78-9. Also Sivan (2003), 109-10: the fact that St Saba had survived several Christian persecutions while he was living among a pagan majority, suggests that it was less religion which was perceived as an indicator of socio-ethnic boundaries among the Goths, but rather social class and rank which acted as creators of social boundaries.
viewpoint, although of course the religious aspect could be exploited for political
reasons.\textsuperscript{40}

Euric’s and Alaric II’s alleged persecutions against some prominent Gallic bishops
were predominantly politically inspired. It is true that Euric had forbidden the
ordination or investiture of some bishops but this was a political decision because of
the political interference of some of these bishops and the potential danger which
stemmed from their high spiritual power and status among their followers; it was not
based on religious matters over the difference between Catholic bishops and Arian
Goths. Sidonius made much of Euric’s intervention in ecclesiastical appointments
(Euric refused to accept the elections for the sees of Bordeaux, Périgueux, Rodez,
Limoges, Bazas, Auch and others) and described them as Euric’s attempt to
annihilate any proper faith because of the lack of any Catholic representatives in
ecclesiastical offices and the consequences of lacking congregations in the
churches.\textsuperscript{41} However, Sidonius himself had been exiled to Bordeaux for his active
role against Euric in the siege of Clermont – again a decision on Euric’s side to
eliminate any further negative political interference from a well-connected Gallic
aristocrat, and not to persecute a Catholic bishop for his faith. As previously
discussed, Sidonius was never intending to state clearly his political convictions. His
aim to be reinstalled in his bishopric and to regain access to his properties as well as
his former influential position meant that he could not be explicit about Euric’s
politics and thus had to find a way to explain his exile; a religious motive was
perhaps easier to create than to admit a deep political controversy, especially when it

\textsuperscript{40} Even Justinian used the same precept of fighting for a restoration of the true faith for his re-
conquest of Africa by presenting the Vandals as a threat to Christendom. Cassiodorus, \textit{Var.} III. 17, 43;
IV. 39. Salvian in contrast regarded the Vandal arrival in Africa as a way for Africa to return to proper
Christianity. Furthermore, when the Vandals issued laws based on Christian morality, they established
a superior social concept of society: the Vandals were thus presented as God’s tool, and the
destruction they caused was a rightful punishment of the Romans and their lack of morale and true
(1964), 104.

was the same king who had imposed this exile but on whom Sidonius’ restoration depended. As the role of the bishop encompassed a highly prolific public as well as political role, occasional clashes with the Gothic king were inevitably recurring. In 488 Alaric II recalled Faustus of Riez after Euric had exiled him, although in the 490s he himself exiled Volusianus of Tours on account of political treason, a fate Caesarius of Arles was to share shortly afterwards. But Alaric II was in no way as anti-Catholic as Gregory liked to portray him and his relationship with the Gallo-Roman bishops was equally based on the preservation of Gothic politics and interests as had been the case with Euric. Alaric II’s decisions regarding some of these Catholic bishops might have been influenced by Chlodwig’s interference in Gothic interests. Chlodwig’s fight against the Goths under Alaric II at Vouillé in 507 was interpreted by Gregory of Tours as a religious war of Catholicism against Arian heretics and the subsequent Frankish success as a victory of the true faith. However such a picture seems to have been a deliberate invention of Gregory in much the same way as he had depicted Chlodwig as a new Constantine and God’s messenger on earth. It is true that Chlodwig’s acceptance of Catholicism had avoided the conflict with the Catholic Church, in fact it bound the church and the Merovingian kingdom closely together, and it had allowed for an even closer relationship between the Roman population and the Franks; thus it enabled a level of interaction between the two based on religious unity, which was not always possible in the Visigothic kingdom. Yet Chlodwig’s policy was not as universally welcome as Gregory portrayed it, and as discussed above the Catholic Roman population continued to follow its Arian rulers for some time. Moreover, neither Alaric II was as anti-Catholic nor was Chlodwig as ardently Catholic as Gregory wanted his readers to believe: although Gregory presented Chlodwig as a defender of the true faith, the

---

Frankish king had earlier concluded a treaty with the Arian Alaric II, and had enlisted the help of the equally Arian Burgundians against the Goths, which strongly suggests that the later conflict between the two was politically inspired and not a kind of ‘crusade’ against Gothic heretics. Gregory of Tours most likely pre-dated Chlodwig’s conversion in order to argue that many Gallo-Romans were trying to enter Frankish service to be ruled by a Catholic king; in Wallace-Hadrill’s opinion it also served Gregory as a tool to justify Chlodwig’s aggressive expansionism in Gaul as from an ecclesiastical viewpoint a Catholic king could not merely engage in warfare for its own sake. Although the date of Chlodwig’s conversion is open to debate (Chlodwig presumably converted only after Vouillé) and his aim to undermine Gothic interests had nothing to do with his conversion, Chlodwig did try to interfere in the Gothic kingdom by undermining Catholic support for an Arian king; however, tendencies of certain factions at the Frankish court to convert Chlodwig to Catholicism would have given his interference in Gothic interests an edge which was for Alaric impossible to ignore, especially when there were underlying tensions between Arians and Catholics, which could be exploited for Frankish interests. Alaric II’s response was far from persecuting his Catholic subjects but rather to seek unity among his subjects: he issued his Breviary, which aimed among other points to provide even greater stability in regard to Roman rights.

45 For the debate on the exact date of Chlodwig’s conversion, see for example Dierkens (1996), 186-88, 189; a very likely date is Christmas Day 508. Wolfram (1997), 210. Rouché (1996). Pohl (1998b), 640. Geary (1988), 85-7. James (1988),121-4. Geuenich (1998), 425-8,432-4: Chlodwig’s conversion might have happened after a battle against the Alamanni, and not against the Goths; crucial instruments in his conversion were Remigius as bishop of Reims, and to a lesser extent his wife Chrodechildis, who, according to Gregory, had tried for a long time to convert the king; indeed both her sons had been baptised – undoubtedly with Chlodwig’s consent, which makes any notion of a sudden decision to convert all the more unlikely – although the subsequent death of one of the boys had led to serious misgivings on the king’s side. Thus Catholicism was not as unfamiliar to the king as Gregory’s jubilant note on Chlodwig’s conversion would indicate. Of course a vow in a battle against pagans like the Alamanni (or the Arian that is heretical Goths) would have highlighted Gregory’s image of Chlodwig as the new Constantine, which was perhaps one of the reasons why the two aspects were linked. See also below.
of holding and inheriting property (aimed especially at the Roman aristocracy as landowners), as well as instigating the synod of Gallic bishops at Agde in 506 and the planning of a nationwide council of Gallic and Spanish bishops for 507.\(^{46}\)

Although Alaric did exile Caesarius as his Episcopal power extended outside Gothic borders and he was seen as directly interfering in or even supporting Frankish interests, he was soon recalled; Caesarius might have preached against the Gothic king on account of his heretical belief during his time in exile, but that did not mean an attempt on Caesarius’ side to undermine royal power as he accepted the idea of monarchical rule as God-given. Besides, the differences between the Catholic bishops and the Arian Gothic king seem to have been far less pronounced than Sidonius or Gregory portray them: in fact, the majority of the predominantly Catholic Gallo-Roman aristocrats, among them for example Sidonius’ son Apollinaris, supported and died for Alaric II at Vouillé, which is in itself a testimony to the strength of assimilation between Goths and Gallo-Romans, regardless of their religious convictions.\(^{47}\)

Similar tensions between the Catholic bishops and the Gothic king erupted again in the sixth century when Leovigild tried to assert his power by meddling in the religious set-up of his kingdom, and again it had largely to do with attempts of asserting political/royal influence: for example bishop Masona of Mérida refused to accept the attempts at the king to reassert royal power in his diocese and especially in the city of Mérida; Masona’s refusal to accept the king’s interference led to his replacement with another Catholic bishop who was more acceptable to the king’s


\(^{47}\) Heather (1996), 213-5. Gregory of Tours, *Hist. Franc.* II.37. The subsequent difficulties the Gothic kingdom had to face were not so much the result of religious differences but the lack of political power/organisation due to the death of Alaric II, which led to dynastic struggles. See also Díaz (1999), 335-47.
schemes than Masona. Yet Masona had been replaced not because he was Catholic but because he had offered resistance to the king who tried to enhance the power of the Arian church. Equally Leovigild’s intention to smooth out the tensions based on religious differences among the ruling group within Visigothic society was well intended as a means to create a common identity though Leovigild’s insistence on using Arianism for this failed to be successful. Even possible attempts to promote Catholicism as a way to create a greater element of unity among the ruling factions would have failed as the majority of the Arian bishops, like their Catholic counterparts, came from the Gothic nobility and a move away from Arianism would have endangered their power-positions. These bishops undoubtedly would have kept their influence, as they would have remained in ecclesiastical offices. The danger of switching to Catholicism was not so much a danger of losing Episcopal

---

48 Wallace-Hadrill (1985), 119: Leovigild did not prosecute the Suebic Catholics when he engaged in warfare against them- the campaign against them was politically inspired and not a religious crusade. 49 Collins (1980), 194-9, 201, 207-12, 215-8: Masona of Mérida had become the dominant source of power in the city, whose authority rested on his connection with the local saint, St Eulalia, and the direct involvement in her cult. Furthermore, the royal interference in the life of Spanish towns seems to have been remote, thus the cities were economically and politically largely self-reliant, which therefore meant that the bishop in such a town, even if he had been elected by his king, had much more scope to develop his own power in this urban space than his dependence on the king would theoretically suggest. Leovigild attempted to force Masona to hand over the relics of St Eulalia to the Arian church as a way for them to gain spiritual control over the population by administering access to the martyr’s relics, though this attempt failed. Yet the Arian church did not accept the power of miracles/relics as a sign of direct divine interference, see Van Dam (1985), 189. Hence Leovigild’s attempt to hand over relics to the Arian church would have been pointless from a theological viewpoint, though, it could have been useful from the point of gaining followers from the Catholic subjects.

50 Gregory of Tours, Hist. Franc. II.25, 26, 37; V. 38. Sid. Ap., Ep. VII. 6. Dierkens (1996), 186-9. Harries (1994), 234-5; (2006), 61, 65: The revolt of Hermenegild has been regarded as the reason for Leovigild’s insistence on his Arian faith, instead of converting to Catholicism, though, this notion is rejected by Collins on the ground that the revolt was not a religious warfare: the main problem with Leovigild’s Arianism was not the religious doctrine per se but what the king used it for in his attempts to assert his own power. Heather (1996), 280-3: argued that religious issues did play a role in Hermenegild’s revolt insofar as Leovigild’s attempts to create religious unity by enforcing Arianism had created tensions, which Hermenegild was ready to exploit by using his conversion to Catholicism as an argument against his father.

51 Collins (2006), 66-9, 73. Wallace-Hadrill (1985), 122-3. Heather (1996), 282-3. Several revolts broke out under Leovigild’s son Reccared who had adopted Catholicism in 587, which in turn threatened the former powers of both Arian courtiers, but also members of the Arian church (although a number of Arian bishops had converted to Catholicism at the Third Council of Toledo). Presumably Reccared would have anticipated these signs of resistance although his aim to achieve greater unity was certainly fulfilled, and allowed for Reccared to present himself as a new Constantine (a similarity with Chlodwig’s presentation) when he instigated the Councils of Toledo, with the aim to strengthen royal influence over the church.
power due to the acceptance of a different doctrine but due to having too many bishops in the same town or diocese, as the formerly Arian bishops would have been added to the Catholic bishops already in charge of their flock in their parts of a town/diocese, which would have created tensions over precedence and influence. A move to Catholicism was thus surely less opposed on the premise of theological doctrines than over the question of continuing to hold their power-position. If the religious aspect was indeed preventing any long-term success of the Goths, it was more indirect as it could be an obstacle to the complete assimilation between ecclesiastical officers, mainly between the Roman aristocratic Catholic bishops, and the Arian bishops as well as the royal court with the king himself; furthermore, as most large towns would have had two bishops, there would have been a tendency to rivalry over questions of influence in both the religious as well as the social sphere within the town.

In contrast to such occasional frictions stands the close bond which connected the church and the Frankish monarchy; in Liebeschuetz’ words, the ‘Frankish monarchy was based on an alliance with the church’, which created a bond between king and bishops that was to some extent missing within the Gothic kingdom. 52 For example Remigius of Reims played an important part in eventually convincing Chlodwig to be baptised in the Catholic Church though he had been in close contact with Chlodwig from the beginning of his reign as one of his advisers. Besides, the lives of many of the famous bishops of that time, for example Caesarius of Arles or Gregory of Tours, clearly demonstrate the difficult balance between maintaining royal support as a courtier (which was important both for keeping as well as enhancing personal influence and for receiving royal donations to support the charitable work of the

church) and displaying their role as pastoral leaders. Many bishops in the Frankish realm, though, saw their main duty not so much as to act as courtiers but rather to be spiritual leaders first and to be politicians only second. Perhaps this was one of the more profound differences with the Gothic kingdom that the Gallic bishops instead tried to continue their political influence in much the same way as they had done as lay aristocrats, which would have brought them into conflict with Gothic politics. Besides, when the Goths established their power, the role of the aristocratic bishop in Gaul was still in its early stages and therefore more prone to suffer from different ideas of definition of his power, which would have brought them into conflict with the Gothic king; whereas when the Franks set up their kingdom, the role of the bishop in his worldly and spiritual powers had by now been established and therefore provided far less reason for tension. Furthermore, Chlodwig’s acceptance of the Catholic faith meant the establishment of a kingdom in which both state/king and church became united in an equal position though each maintained its autonomous sphere. It was this unity under one faith which was lacking in the Gothic kingdom, as theological dogmata forbade the support of a heretical sect such as the Arians, which meant that from the establishment of Gothic rule onwards the Catholic Church in Gaul could not fully support the Gothic king in the way in which the same church could support the Frankish monarch.

However, the Gothic kings, despite their non-Catholic conviction, nevertheless did try to interfere in the organisation of the Catholic church in their realm as the Gothic kingship aimed to continue the link between church and state as had been the case in the empire; leaving aside Sidonius’ interpretation of persecution, Euric’s interference in the appointments of ecclesiastical offices demonstrated an active engagement on

---

the king’s side in the links between the Episcopal sees and Gothic politics by trying to protect Gothic interests.\footnote{Heather (1996), 198.} Furthermore, it could have been precisely this interference of the Gothic king in ecclesiastical matters that would have had an impact on the understanding of holding power of the Gallic bishops. To a certain extent then, the differences between the predominantly Romano-Gallic bishops and the Gothic courtiers were not solved, as religious doctrine would have forbidden a complete acceptance of a heretical king; that personal assimilation could, and often did, go much further than theological statements is a different matter. Sidonius for example had been a courtier at Euric’s court although he had been banished by him for his political resistance against Gothic expansion; Sidonius returned in due course to his bishopric and thus to his socio-politically influential position but Euric’s politically inspired interference in ecclesiastical appointments provided ample opportunity for Sidonius to justify his misgivings about the entire establishment of Gothic power.

The adoption of Catholicism by the Frankish king put these Gallic bishops in an increasingly difficult position, especially when the differences between the two royal courts ended in open warfare. As part of the royal Gothic administration, they had to remain loyal to their king although from a theological point of view their loyalty could only be with the Frankish king (in that case Chlodwig) as the Catholic king.\footnote{Gregory of Tours, Hist. Franc. II, 25. Stroheker (1948), 94-6, 100-4. Liebeschuetz (2001), 160-1. In Visigothic Spain the Catholic bishops remained rather anonymous figures although they played an important role in the royal administration. In the Burgundian kingdom the relationship between Catholic bishops and the Arian king seems to have been more open and eventually culminated in the conversion of king Sigismund. In the Vandal kingdom, the rather strict enforcement of opposition against members of the Catholic Church by Huneric and his successors fostered tendencies of separation between the two groups, which added to the eventual Vandal decline, see Wolfram (1990), 174-5. Maier (2005), 78-83.} Furthermore, in the Arian church with a predominant role designated to the king, the bishops, who were elected by the king, played a much less prominent or even dominant role than they were to play in the Frankish kingdom. Furthermore,
exalted status of the king in the Arian Church stood much closer to the understanding
of the nature of the position and power of a Germanic king than the Catholic doctrine
with its message of equality of every man before God; perhaps unsurprisingly then
members of Chlodwig’s own family as well as factions at court were Arians and he
himself took a long time to convert officially to Catholicism, although the baptism of
his two sons, according to Gregory the result of Chrodechildis’ intervention, surely
indicates that Chlodwig was by no means against the Catholic faith and in fact
propagated it himself when he baptised his future successor Chlodomer (his elder
brother Ingomer had died in infancy). In Wolfram’s words, the ‘king was […] the
heart of the Arian church’, which was much apparent in his separate role within
church ritual, which separated the king even further from his followers, both from his
aristocratic courtiers and from the ordinary population. This elevated royal position
could have created an element of separation between the king and the aristocracy as
well as the church; furthermore, it would have diminished, at least partly, the
extensive rights and spiritual power of the bishops, which again would have
impinged on the aristocracy and their proactive adoption of ecclesiastical offices. In
contrast to the Arian church, the Catholic church did not grant that special status to
the Frankish king, which left the bishop to gain his outstanding position of power,
enabling the aristocracy to enter the Frankish church with the possibility to continue
their former elevated position; this in turn could bind the two together in a way

56 Gregory of Tours, Hist. Franc. II. 29-31, 35, 37. Chlodwig’s sister Lantechildis was an Arian and
presumably a member of a whole court faction, which tried to convince the king to adopt the Arian
faith. In contrast to this group stood the intellectual heritage of St Genoveva, propagated and
supported by Chlodwig’s queen Chrodechildis and Remigius of Reims, which eventually won over
57 For example the king had his own church vessels, which highlighted his special status by separating
him from the rest of the communicants; in contrast the Catholic Eucharist included everybody and
made no social distinction within the congregation who took communion, thus emphasising the idea
of all Catholic believers as the body of Christ’s church united in communion. Van Dam (1985), 281.
Wolfram (1990), 207-10. Diaz (1999), 341-2: for the custom of royal unction as a Visigothic creation,
based on precedents in the Old Testament, which further highlighted the powerful position of the
Episcopate. See for example Mathisen & Sivan (1999 c), 39-44 for the organisation of the Arian
church.
which was impossible in the Gothic kingdom and thus would have helped the
Frankish kingdom to establish its rule in a much firmer way that the Goths were ever
able to do in Gaul and Spain. However the argument that it was the Franks who were
the first of the barbarian people to allow for a communication between church and
state in post-Roman times is surely too restricted a view. It is true that the adoption
of Catholicism by the Frankish king made a communication with the Catholic Gallo-
Roman bishops overall easier than it was at times the case for the Arian king, as it
avoided the issue of heresy. Yet, as discussed before, this issue of heresy was
perhaps less tangible in everyday business than some of the theological writings
imply; furthermore, also the Gothic king, despite being Arian, did in fact interfere in
ecclesiastical matters. Communication between the Gothic king and his Gallo-
Roman bishops was thus certainly happening although the Franks undoubtedly took
this connection between church and state even further. From the viewpoint of a
Gallic aristocrat who had entered ecclesiastical offices as a way to re-establish his
former secular power-position, the concept of being a complete subject to the king
also in the religious sphere was thus far less appealing than the same position would
have been in the Catholic Frankish kingdom. If the Arian creed did indeed play any
decisive role in the long-term failure of the Goths to firmly establish themselves, this
lack of a sphere of influence in politics which the bishops had in the Arian Gothic
church could have been a factor, because it would have prevented an assimilation
between church and crown in the way in which this was possible in the Frankish
realm. Overall one should perhaps be careful, though, not to put too much weight
onto the issue of religion as the decisive factor that determined the future fate of the
Gothic and the Frankish kingdoms. At the time Choldwig’s conversion was no
automatic guarantee for the eventual Frankish success, and at the time of the

58 Lewis (2001), 90-1.
Visigothic conversion to Catholicism there was no reason to believe in the eventual ending of Gothic rule; Chlodwig’s adoption of Catholicism rather created a starting point for this success as it enabled the Frankish kingdom to form a working relationship with the church from the beginning of any process of assimilation with the Roman population without having the issue of heresy interfering. The defeat at Vouillé did not immediately end the Visigothic kingdom, even if its survival afterwards was at least in part a result of Ostrogothic interference, which stopped Frankish expansion; thus, the problem the Visigothic kingdom faced was far more a matter of leadership than a question of religious doctrine. However, the ultimate factor that decided the political future of both the Gothic and Frankish realms was surely far more a question of political/military/diplomatic matters – religion was perhaps a factor in these matters but not the sole reason.

Conclusion

It is very difficult to find one concluding answer to the question to what extent Romans and Goths assimilated with each other, and how far this process was universally accepted on the Gallo-Roman side. As has been seen, it was a profoundly complex process that was by no means finished by the fifth century. Furthermore, it was a process which had as much an impact on the Gallic aristocracy as it had on the Goths and other barbarian people. When talking about the development of the Goths in the fifth century, one of the most important and intriguing questions is concerned with their rise to enormous power, indeed they presented one of the first barbarian ‘superpowers’ (the Vandals were another example), but also with their ultimate failure to sustain this power into the middle ages.

The questions why it was the Franks and not the Goths, who ultimately succeeded as the most powerful barbarian kingdom is difficult to answer. Very often it has been put down to matters of religion or the ability to adapt to, assimilate with and continue the Roman administration and jurisdiction; yet all of these factors were in themselves not answer enough to explain the Frankish success, especially when the Goths had shown very much the same pattern of behaviour towards the Roman sphere. In contrast to the Goths, originally the Franks had not been a group which had so openly and directly challenged the empire; they had not created one of those barbarian ‘superpowers’ as the confederation of Vandals, Alans and Suebes had been or had been wandering through half of the empire before forcing their permanent settlement onto the empire. They had primarily lived along the fringes of the Western frontiers and were perhaps more Romanised than other barbarian tribes, which was also reflected in the relatively large number of Franks in imperial service both within
the administrative and the military sphere. Most of them had entered imperial service with their own contingents of followers and in the various political tensions in Gaul they had managed to secure for themselves some political advantages. Chlodwig’s victory over the Alamanni at Zülpich (which allegedly was the reason for his subsequent conversion) in 497 had confirmed the establishment of the eventual Frankish success, which had been completely unimaginable by the fourth century; it had been the Goths and the Burgundians, with their closeness to the Roman sphere and their long-standing relationship with the empire, who had seemed to be the natural successors of Rome; as Drinkwater said: ‘Merovingian dominance of the west was not fated. Things might have turned out very differently if the Visigoths had won at “Vouillé”.’ Indeed the rapid Frankish expansion meant that the next power in its way was the Gothic kingdom which suffered a severe defeat at the battle of Vouillé in 507, and it was only the intervention of the Ostrogothic kingdom under Theoderic, who did not care for any further Frankish expansion towards the Mediterranean, which forced Chlodwig to retreat, leaving Septimania as the last Gothic stronghold. Although the battle itself did little to destroy the Gothic kingdom as such, the death of Alaric II resulted in a temporary confusion over leadership, further weakening Gothic strength, as well as in the loss of much of the Gallic territory, forcing the Goths to retreat to and focus on Spain where they created the Kingdom of Toledo which lasted until the eighth century. However, one battle

2 Drinkwater (2007), 355, 357.
alone, regardless how damaging it was to Gothic morale, was not the decisive factor in securing future Frankish success. Lewis argued that it was the seesawing of the Goths between being loyal and disloyal to the empire, making it difficult for the imperial authorities to settle them, which was part of the reason why they never became powerful enough to offer an acceptable alternative to imperial rule. The Franks in contrast were still in a process of assimilation with the Romans, which allowed them to absorb concepts of power and to accommodate the already established Gallo-Roman aristocracy as well as Catholicism, thus helping them to turn society into a Gallo-Frankish concept. Furthermore, for her, Chlodwig’s recognition by the Eastern emperor as a Roman official, as well as a long series of Frankish soldiers in the imperial forces, supporting Rome against other barbarian threats such as the Huns, helped the Roman side to accept the Franks all the more as allies.\textsuperscript{4} Lewis is to this extent right that the readiness of the Goths to fight for as well as against the empire but above all for their own interests had posed a certain hindrance to their full absorption into the empire, and had resulted in recurring tendencies of the Gallo-Roman aristocrats to doubt the sincerity of Gothic motives to continue and promote Roman interests. However, to take this as an argument for the ultimate failure of the Gothic kingdom in comparison to the Frankish realm is taking the point slightly too far. After all, from a Roman viewpoint the Franks were as much non-Roman as their Gothic counterparts, regardless of their support for the Roman cause as auxiliaries and commanders in the imperial army; Alaric had risen to prominence whilst being part of an auxiliary contingent in the imperial army, thus continuing military support as an aspect of several treaties the Goths had been engaged in with the empire since the early fourth century. Furthermore, the bestowing of the rank of consul on Chlodwig in 508 by the Eastern emperor

\textsuperscript{4} Lewis (2001), 113, 124, 133, 136, 142, 278.
Anastasius, or the Frankish support against other barbarian incursions, would have done nothing per se to endear the Franks more to the Romans than the Goths.\(^5\) Again, Alaric likewise had been given a military title by the empire, but that had not helped to ease the tensions between the Goths and the imperial administration. In fact Athaulf had tried to win vital support from the Roman side by having recognised the need to assimilate with Roman power through Gothic strength, when he talked of a restoration of imperial power; yet even this programme of active political cooperation had done nothing to avoid tensions between the Goths and the Gallo-Romans. The only difference with Chlodwig receiving some recognition by the Eastern empire was that by now the Western Roman throne had ceased to exist; thus the Gallo-Romans were perhaps readier to accept the Frankish king as a successor to Roman interests and Chlodwig himself was able to assert his power among his followers in a much more elevated way than Alaric or Athaulf had been able to do. Whereas when Alaric or Athaulf had tried to gain an official imperial title, there was still a Western emperor existing as well as, albeit temporary, tendencies of a substantial recovery of imperial strength; hence any attempt on their side to win Roman recognition would not have altered the view of the majority of the Roman aristocracy that the Goths ultimately aspired to seize power to replace the said emperor and thus tried to commit treason against the empire. It was only from the middle of the fifth century that the Gallo-Romans realised the necessity to assimilate with the Goths when there was no hope of ever regaining imperial strength to the extent of ending Gothic hegemony. What was indeed fundamentally different between Franks and Goths, and what was perhaps the key for the long-term Frankish success, was the fact that the Franks started to consolidate their power after the Visigoths had established their kingdom and had started a process of assimilation.

with the Roman population, and that by now the Gallic aristocracy was far readier to accept barbarian rule than it had been a century before. By the time Chlodwig actively entered the political stage, the Roman side had more or less already come to terms with the concept of non-Roman kingdoms as a replacement of former imperial power, and had found their own ways to assimilate with this.

Another part of the Frankish success was their appreciation of and assimilation with Roman practices and customs, especially in terms of continuing and incorporating Roman structures of jurisdiction and administration into their own system, such as the structure of the *civitas*, to savour the typical Roman entertainment of horse-races and poetry, or to have Latin as the official language; all this led to a constant development of the amalgamation of Roman and barbarian customs. The adoption of Roman customs went as far as the attempt to create a mythological Frankish past by tracing back their ancestry to the Trojans, which stood in contrast to ideas of a Scandinavian origin more commonly found among Gothic stories of origin. The adoption of and continuation of the *civitas*-system by the Franks was certainly a point which helped the Gallo-Romans to accept Frankish rule, especially when the *civitates*, essentially forming the backbone of the functioning of Gallic society, had been in place for a very long time; thus the transition to Frankish rule would have been easier for the Gallo-Romans to accept when they left local structures intact.

During the rise of Gothic power in contrast, the Council of the Gallic provinces was reinstituted by the imperial government precisely at the time of the Gothic settlement.

---

6 The Franks also used other non-Frankish people around them, mainly Thuringians and people from the Chattian regions, which seems to have taken a similar status of that to the *foederati* in the Roman system, thus adopting yet another aspect of Roman administration into their own system; their presence can be found in the expanding settlements, which coincided with the further establishment of Frankish power: see Wieczorek (1996 a), 258-9; (1996 b), 354-5. Another example for the increasing adoption of Roman customs is the change in burial practice: the previously common custom of grave-goods such as weaponry declined as a sign of adopting Roman practises of burial customs. Bierbrauer (1996), 110-1, 119-20. Stroheker (1948), 2. Wood (1996), 358, 360,364. Van Dam (1985), 221-3. Pohl (2005), 182. For the origins of the Goths, see Part I.1.3.

7 Lewis (2001), 162, 176.
in Aquitaine in 418, presumably as a counter-measure to prevent further political alliances between Romans and Goths. Yet the Goths eventually closely followed Roman concepts of administration, keeping as well as adapting for example the office of Praetorian Prefect for the provincial administration as well as the taxation and legal system.\textsuperscript{8} Again, to regard the adoption of and continuation of Roman structures of civil administration as one of the main reasons for the Frankish success is perhaps too one-sided, although it did undoubtedly contribute to it. Once again, it was more a question of time and development, which made the Franks understand the necessity to continue Roman structures, and the Romans accept the end of Roman rule in the West. Besides, Drinkwater has argued that the Franks were in fact free from aspects such as imperial concepts of its relationship with its neighbours, especially ideas of a permanent ‘threat’ by Germanic peoples (especially as they were Germanic themselves), serving as a justification for imperial expansion and for their political position in general which allowed them to trust in their own strength of conquering.\textsuperscript{9} This was one aspect of cultural understanding the Franks did not adopt from the Romans, which leads us back to Athaulf’s remark of ‘restoring’ Roman strength with Gothic power; Athaulf’s concept in contrast was essentially the attempt to adopt the imperial system and its understanding of the position of Rome in a universal structure and mixing it with Gothic power. Thus effectively the Goths aimed to become Rome’s heirs in a far stricter sense than the Franks, and perhaps it was this position of being too close to Roman imperialism and self-perception, yet at the same time trying to consolidate this with Gothic concepts of identity and authority, which created another obstacle to the ultimate Gothic success. The Franks in contrast were free of such an ideological burden: Drinkwater has described both Chilperic and Chlodwig as the ‘detonators who released whatever explosive force

\textsuperscript{8} Heather (1996), 192-7.
\textsuperscript{9} Drinkwater (2007), 362-3.
there was in Gallic “Mischzivilisation’”.\textsuperscript{10} Thus the Franks were able to continue and
develop the power that was contained in this Gallic ‘Mischzivilisation’ further,
whereas the Goths had rather formed part of this but had not used its potential for
their own socio-political advantage as the Franks did.

However, the closeness to Roman culture and practices was something the Goths
equally had adopted, and thus it cannot really stand as an explanation for the lasting
success of the Franks in contrast to the Goths. It has been argued that Gallic identity
was a Gallo-Roman identity and, since the empire had eventually disappeared in the
West, it came to rest on the \textit{civitates} as the local power-basis; taken further, when the
Franks continued the structures of the \textit{civitates}, they effectively adopted this basis for
Gallic identity, and thus allowed the Roman side to accept Frankish rule.\textsuperscript{11} This is a
fair point, especially when the \textit{civitates} had always been essential in the local
organisation and administration of Gaul, and there had always been a strong link
between Gallo-Romans and their land; one ought to be careful, though, not to place
the weight of the basis of Gallic identity solely onto political structures, especially
when these structures were subject to alterations due to the ever decreasing Roman
influence, as a substantial part of defining Roman identity was equally based on
cultural understanding.

The only element of the Frankish assimilation with the Roman sphere that was
profoundly different from the Goths was their adoption of Catholicism in contrast to
the Arian faith of the Goths.\textsuperscript{12} Yet, as discussed before, even the point of religion, at
least on a purely theological basis, was far less decisive in terms of Frankish success
than sometimes argued. What was important was the fact that the predominantly
aristocratic Gallo-Roman bishops could continue their concepts of holding power in

\textsuperscript{11} Lewis (2001), 270-2.
a more accessible way in the Catholic Frankish realm than perhaps they could have
done in the Arian Gothic kingdom; the Frankish adoption of Catholicism allowed for
a stronger amalgamation with the Gallo-Roman bishops and thus with the Gallo-
Roman aristocracy than might have been possible in the Gothic kingdom, which
could have helped the acceptance of the Franks from a Roman viewpoint. The
Franks were perhaps ultimately more successful than the Visigoths because they
managed to learn from mistakes the Goths had made earlier on; furthermore, the
influence or interference of the empire was hardly existent any more by the time of
Chlodwig’s rise to power (leaving aside the Eastern empire) and the Franks were far
more able to develop their own strategies without getting entangled in imperial
politics as the Goths had been. Indeed in order to establish and extend their power,
the Franks had to conquer or win over other barbarian kingdoms such as the Goths or
the Burgundians, but not to find a delicate balance with imperial interests, as the
Goths had had to do. I would regard both Franks and Goths as heirs to the imperial
heritage, as both had adopted much of the imperial ideology and had effectively
replaced imperial authority with their own political establishment. It was therefore
not so much a question of one of them being Rome’s successor but rather which of
the two managed to sustain this power. It is the Franks, who are regarded as Rome’s
successors in the West, although it had been the Goths who had managed to establish
the first independent barbarian kingdom and that they continued to be present in the
West, albeit in a different way: the Gothic Kingdom of Toledo lasted until the Arab
conquest in 711.

This process of assimilation and development was equally complex when it came to
its application to the Gallo-Roman aristocracy. By the fifth century, the political

---

13 See Part V.2.
reality increasingly offered ample opportunity for the nobility to notice that the traditional concept of Rome’s unquestioned authority and superiority, expressed in their socio-political position, was not sustainable; the concept of Rome’s invincible might had been based on an ideological idea, which had been supported by its supreme military power and political establishment. At least for many of the aristocracy, ideologies like Virgil’s praise of an eternal Rome, envisaged by the gods or within the Christian context, protected by God, had undoubtedly shaped their perception of their own position in the socio-political framework. Hence when assimilation with foreigners happened – and it had happened from an early stage onwards when more and more foreign cultures were incorporated into the Roman state as client kingdoms or as auxiliary troops within the imperial army, culminating eventually in the *Constitutio Antoniniana* – it had never been anything other than a process which was entirely subject to Roman authority and ideology. Part of this concept was a tendency to create an image of a barbarian ‘threat’ along the frontiers, which provided a background against which aspects of imperial self-definition and troop-movements were justified. If barbarians assimilated with Roman culture, they adopted Roman dress, culture, and used Roman artefacts; but ideas of assimilation with the barbarian side were a very difficult concept for the Roman aristocracy and when it happened, ultimately it continued to include aspects of Roman xenophobia or more specifically barbaro-phobia, even if such notions of ultimate cultural superiority became predominantly confined to the sphere of literature – as we have seen, Sidonius’ life is perhaps one of the best cases to exemplify such thinking. That does not exclude the notion that many of the aristocrats did take up political offices within the barbarian establishments and were willing to trade their Roman loyalty for a personal advancement at the barbarian court; as discussed before, Arvandus and Seronatus are excellent examples of such behaviour, but their trials also highlight the
continuous unease with which such cooperation was still regarded by many of the
aristocracy, including members of the Gallic nobility. From the Roman viewpoint,
assimilation with the barbarians did happen on many different levels and to various
degrees, ranging from an acceptance of political realities to actively seeking political
offices; but a deliberate attempt to understand barbarian culture and politics was
rarely made. Roman cooperation with the Goths in Gaul was based, at least in the
beginning, on the necessity to preserve Gallo-Roman aristocratic interests, and thus
tended to incorporate more the political sphere than the cultural. This cultural sphere
was zealously guarded against barbarian influence, as it was seen as one of the last
ways to preserve and demonstrate Roman culture and learning, thus in many cases
acting as a substitute for the loss of public status and political offices within the
imperial administration in terms of self-presentation and social position. When the
Gallo-Roman aristocracy started to enter ecclesiastical offices and increasingly
occupied the most important episcopates in Gaul, they regained much of their former
socio-political status, albeit in a different way; yet even in this sphere, the emphasis
on traditional Roman literature remained and was still regarded as a sign of a true
Roman aristocrat, even when barbarian kings started to adopt the pursuit of literature
and used panegyrics for their own self-presentation. Certainly in the sphere of
adopting classical literature there was hardly any difference between Goths and
Franks, as on both sides kings engaged in literature as a form of entertainment and
used panegyrics; nevertheless even as late as the sixth century, Gregory of Tours,
who had by no means received the thoroughness of education his ancestors had, was
still excessively proud of his Roman heritage as well as his education, and
considered himself to be culturally in a superior enough position to sneer at the
literary attempts of his Frankish king as a pastime not fit for a barbarian king. In
terms of political assimilation the Gallo-Roman aristocracy had come a long way,
not only as courtiers at the various barbarian courts, but also as officials within the
church; yet this assimilation did for a long time resist being adopted into the cultural
sphere as well. Thus, even when the Gallo-Roman nobles adapted their lifestyle to
the pursuit of a political career at the barbarian courts, such a socio-political
assimilation did not automatically include a socio-cultural assimilation too – again,
Sidonius is an excellent example for this; cultural resentments against non-Romans
continued for a long time and it took much longer for the aristocracy to accept the
new rulers socially and culturally as equals. The Episcopate was therefore an
excellent way to overcome this disparity as it allowed for a continuation of public
influence and power, which very often formed part of the political sphere too but was
not exclusively defined to the barbarian courts as most worldly political offices were,
and of the pursuit of culture in general and in an indulgence in literature and learning
in particular; hence the particularly high number of Gallo-Roman aristocrats in
ecclesiastical offices from the fifth century onwards is hardly surprising.

If there was one side that actively pursued the adoption of cultural and political
elements different from their own, it was the barbarians, regardless of whether this
refers to the Goths or the Franks. The Roman aristocracy only adapted itself to the
different political landscape out of necessity in order to allow for a continuation of
their socio-political status, which of course altered their own political understanding
over time. The Gallic aristocracy did so largely in order to continue or preserve its
privileged position, whereas the Goths (and Franks for that matter) incorporated the
imperial system into their own administration and jurisdiction in order to create,
strengthen and consolidate their own power. Thus ultimately Athaulf’s aim to replace
Romania with Gothia was fulfilled although perhaps in a different way from what
Athaulf had envisaged. As discussed before, it is debatable whether he had ever
wanted to go as far and replace the emperor with a Gothic king, or whether he
wanted to support the Roman system with Gothic help while simultaneously preserving and enhancing Gothic interests. The development of Gothic independence towards a people with a state had started before Athaulf but he had proven to be a true successor of the foundation of the Gothic success Alaric had created. Eventually a Gothic king like Euric was able to take the level of cooperation with the Gallo-Roman aristocracy further, a link that Athaulf had fostered because he had perceived it to be very important for the future success of the Goths. Euric was able to absorb fully the advantages of Roman civil administration and legislation (which included the services of Gallo-Roman aristocrats) in order to enhance Gothic structures but it would not prevent him from fighting the Roman system as being an obstacle to Gothic interests of expanding their power. Athaulf’s legacy was the recognition of the necessity of cooperation with the Gallo-Roman aristocracy and the incorporation of the Roman administrative mechanisms into the Gothic system, as this was to form the basis on which a king like Euric could base and enhance Gothic power. It was this process of creating a ‘new world’ through political cooperation and socio-cultural assimilation between barbarian rulers and the Gallo-Roman aristocrats, which shaped the success of both the Goths and even more of the Franks.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. DICTIONARIES:

6 Lexikon der Alten Welt (München, 1990).
7 Der Neue Pauly (München, 1964-75).
II. PRIMARY SOURCES:


Hydatius, see Burgess, R.W., 1993, *The Chronicle of Hydatius and the Consularia*
Constantinopolitana (Oxford).


Orosius, *Paulus Diaconus – The seven books of history against the pagans*, trans.


----, trans. Dr Roberto Chiapiniello, University of Manchester, unpublished doctoral thesis.


Synesius, *de regno & de providencia*, in Cameron, A. & Long, J. (eds.) 1993,
Barbarians and politics at the court of Arcadius (Berkeley).


III. SECONDARY SOURCES:


Albert, G., 1984, Goten in Konstantinopel. Untersuchungen zur römischen Geschichte um das Jahr 400 n. Chr. (Paderborn).


Allo Isichei, E., 1964, Political thinking and social experience – Some Christian interpretations of the Roman empire from Tertullian to Salvian (Christchurch).


----, 1973, A history of the Alans in the West from their first appearance in the sources of classical antiquity through the early Middle Ages (Minneapolis).

Balsdon, J. P.V.D., 1979, Romans and aliens (London).


Papers of the British School of Rome 54, 170-95.

----, 2004, Ostrogoths from the migration period to the sixth century (Suffolk).


Barrett, C., 1989, Barbarians and Romans in north-west Europe: from the later republic to late antiquity (Oxford).


----, 1992, East Roman foreign policy. Formation and conduct from Diocletian to Anastasius (Leeds).

Bøe, S., 2001, Gog and Magog – Ezekiel 38.39 as pre-text for Revelation 19, 17-21 and 20, 7-10 (Tübingen).

Boeft den, J., den Hengst, O., Teitler, H.C. (eds.), 1987, Philological and historical commentary on Ammianus Marcellinus XX (Groningen).


207 Bowersock, G.W., Brown, P., Grabar, O. (eds.) 20001, Interpreting late antiquity –
208 essays on the postclassical world (London).
210 barbarian identity – critical approaches to ethnicity in the early Middle Ages
211 (Turnhout), 241-56.
212 Braund, D.W., 1984, Rome and the friendly king: The character of client kingship
213 (London).
214 Bregman, J.,1982, Synesius of Cyrene (Berkeley).
216 Imperium Romanum (Stuttgart), 30-4.
218 Brown, T.S., 1984, Gentlemen and officers. Imperial administration and aristocratic
219 power in Byzantine Italy A.D. 554-800 (Rome).
221 römischen Diensten und das spätantike Befestigungssystem’, in Die Franken –
222 Wegbereiter Europas (Mainz), 85-91.
225 (Cambridge), 19-28.
227 445.
229 Gaul: a crisis of identity? (Cambridge), 53-64.
230 Bury, J.B., 1889, A history of the later Roman empire from Arcadius to Irene (395
232 ----, 1923, *History of the later Roman empire from the death of Theodosius I.*
234 Cameron, A. & Long, J. (eds.) 1993, *Barbarians and politics at the court of Arcadius*
235 (Berkeley).
237 ---- (ed.), 1993, *The Mediterranean world of late antiquity AD 395-600*
238 (London/New York).
of the first plenary conference at Merida. Studies on the transformation of visual
literacy, c. 400 AD – c. 800 AD (Leiden).

Clark, E., 1986, Ascetic piety and women’s faith – essays on late antique Christianity
(Lewiston).

und barbarischen Herrschern’, in Chrysos, E. & Schwarcz, A. (eds.), Das Reich
und die Barbaren (Vienna), 25-57.

----, 1998, ‘Remarks about the relations between Visigoths and Hispano-Romans in
the construction of ethnic communities, 300-800 (Leiden), 117-131.

& Schwarcz, A. (eds.), Das Reich und die Barbaren (Vienna), 57-75.

----, 1993, The late Roman West and the Vandals (Aldershot).

Coleman, J.E. & Walz, C.A. (eds.) 1997, Greeks and barbarians: essays on the
interaction between Greeks and non-Greeks in antiquity and the consequences for
eurocentrism (Bethesda).

Spain: new approaches (Oxford), 189-223.


Cunliffe, B., 1988, Greeks, Romans, and the barbarians – spheres of interaction
(London).


---- & de Jersey, P., 1997, Armorica and Britain – Cross-Channel relationships in
the late first millennium BC, Studies in Celtic Coinage, Nr.3, Oxford University
Committee for Archaeology, Monograph 45 (Oxford).


provinces of the Roman Empire A.D. 260-274, Historia Einzelschriften 52 (Stuttgart).


Denkschriften der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Bnd. 193 (Vienna), 21-73.


in *Imperium Romanum* (Stuttgart), 452-63.


----, 2003, *Envoys and political communications in the late antique Latin west* (Cambridge).


---, 1989, ‘The theme of ‘The barbarian invasions’ in late antique and modern
historiography’, in Chrysos, E. & Schwarcz, A. (eds.), Das Reich und die
Barbaren (Vienna), 87-109.

---, 2002, ‘Does the distant past impinge on the invasion age Germans?’, in Gillett,
A. (ed.), On barbarian identity – critical approaches to ethnicity in the early
Middle Ages (Turnhout).

Grabar, O., & Lieu, S. N. (eds.) 2002, The Roman eastern frontier and the Persian

Green, R.P., 1971, The poetry of Paulinus of Nola, Collection Latomus, vol. 120
(Bruxelles).

Greenslade, S.L., 1954, Church and state from Constantine to Theodosius (London).


Hanson, W.S., 1997, ‘Forces of change and methods of control’, in Mattingly, D.J.
(ed.), Dialogues in Roman Imperialism: power, discourse, and discrepant
experience in the Roman Empire, Journal of Roman Archaeology, Supp. Series,
no.23 (Portsmouth, Rhode Island), 67-80.

treason?’, in Drinkwater, J. & Elton, H. (eds.), Fifth century Gaul: a crisis of
identity? (Cambridge), 298-309.


----, 1994, Sidonius Apollinaris and the fall of Rome (Oxford).

----, 1996, ‘Sidonius Apollinaris and the frontiers of Romanitas’, in Mathisen, R. &


Heather, P., 1988, ‘The anti-Scythian tirade of Synesius’ de regno’, Phoenix 42,
152-72.
452 ---- & Moncur, D., 2001, *Politics, philosophy and empire in the fourth century:...*
select orations of Themistius (Liverpool).


Hertzberg, H., 1874 Die Historien und die Chroniken des Isidorus von Sevilla (Göttingen).


Hingley, R., 2005, Globalizing Roman culture: unity, diversity and empire (London).


Greatrex, G. (eds.), *Ethnicity and culture in late antiquity* (London/Swansea), 103-17.


----, 2003, ‘The refugees and evacuees in the age of migrations’, in Corradini, R.,


----, 1963, *Soldier and civilian in the later Roman Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.).


----, 1979b, ‘Sidonius on the reign of Avitus: a study in political prudence’, 
*Transactions of the American Philological Association* 109, 165-71, reprinted in 
(Amsterdam), 199-205.

----, 1981a, ‘Epistolography, literary circles and family ties in late Roman Gaul’, 
*Transactions of the American Philological Association* 111, 95-109, reprinted in 
(Amsterdam), 13-27.

----, 1981b, ‘Avitus, Italy and the East in A.D. 455-456’, *Byzantium* 51, 233-47, 
(Amsterdam), 137-52.

----, 1984, ‘Emigrants, exiles and survivors: aristocratic options in Visigothic 
(Amsterdam), 1-12.

----, 1986, ‘Patricians as diplomats in late antiquity’, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 79, 
(Amsterdam), 67-80.

----, 1988, ‘The theme of literary decline in late Roman Gaul’, *Classical Philology* 
(Amsterdam), 45-53.

----, 1991a, *Studies in the history, literature and society of late antiquity* 
(Amsterdam).

----, 1991b, ‘Phoebus, Orpheus and Dionysus: nicknames and the literary circle of 
(Amsterdam).


----, 1999b, *Ruricius of Limoges and friends – A collection of letters from Visigothic Gaul* (Liverpool).


McLynn, N., 1995, ‘Paulinus the impenitent: a study of the Eucharistikos’, *Journal*
of Early Christian Studies 3, 461-86.


----, 2000, From Roman to Merovingian Gaul (Peterborough, Ont.).


(Cambridge), 64-75.


(eds.), Communication in East and West. First plenary conference of the European Science Foundation Programme “Transformation of the Roman world” (Mérida).

---- (ed.) 1997a, Kingdoms of the empire – the integration of barbarians in late antiquity (Leiden).


Prinz, F., 1965, Frühes Mönchtum im Frankenreich – Kultur und Gesellschaft in
Gallien, den Rheinlanden und Bayern am Beispiel der monastischen Entwicklung

Europas (Mainz), 448-51.


----, ‘Changes in the topography of power: from civitates to urbes regiae in Hispania’, in Corradini, R., Diesenberger, M., Reimitz, H. (eds.), The construction of communities in the early middle ages – texts, resources and artefacts (Leiden),


Stevens, C.E., 1933, *Sidonius Apollinaris and his age* (Oxford).

Stirling, L., 2006, *The learned collector – mythological statuettes and classical taste*
Stroheker, K.F., 1948, Der senatorische Adel im spätantiken Gallien (Darmstadt).


----, 1982, Romans and barbarians: the decline of the western empire (Madison).


Van Dam, R., 1985, Leadership and community in late antique Gaul (London/ Berkeley).

Vanderspoel, J., 1995, Themistius and the imperial court: oratory, civic duty and the
paideia from Constantius to Theodosius (Ann Arbor).


Wagner, N., 1967, Getica – Untersuchungen zum Leben des Jordanes und zur frühen
Geschichte der Goten (Berlin).


400-900 (London).

Wells, P.S., 1999, The barbarian speak: how the conquered peoples shaped Roman
Europe (Princeton).

Wenskus, R., 1961, Stammesbildung und Verfassung – Das Werden der
frühmittelalterlichen Gentes (Köln/Graz).

Wes, M.A., 1992, ‘Crisis and conversion in fifth-century Gaul: aristocrats and
ascetics between ‘horizontality’ and ‘verticality’’, in Drinkwater, J. & Elton, H.

(Leiden).

Whittaker, C.R., 1994, Frontiers of the Roman Empire: a social and economic study
(Baltimore and London).

----, 1997, ‘Imperialism and culture: the Roman initiative’, in Mattingly,
D.J. (ed.), Dialogues in Roman imperialism: power, discourse, and discrepant
23 (Portsmouth, Rhode Island), 143-63.

Wieczorek, A.,1996 a, ‘Die Ausbreitung der fränkischen Herrschaft in den
Rheinlanden vor und seit Chlodwig I.’, in Die Franken – Wegbereiter Europas
(Mainz), 241-60.


