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# The Ostrogothic Military

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Guy Halsall

## Abstract

This chapter explores the place of the army and military organisation within the Ostrogothic kingdom. It is divided into three chronological phases: the conquest, the kingdom of Italy, and the Gothic Wars. Whether the Ostrogoths themselves *were* an army, the nature of the army's settlement and salary in Italy, and ethnic identity's role in the formation of the army are all discussed. The army itself has rarely been studied as a separate institution, which may be because, throughout the Ostrogothic kingdom's short life, the military was inextricably bound up with the nature and the fate of that polity.

## Introduction

The Ostrogothic Kingdom was created and destroyed by conquest and the army remained a central feature of its politics and society. Discussing military affairs in Gothic Italy therefore requires attending to seemingly unmilitary issues like the settlement and its nature, and the kingdom's ethnic politics, which have been the focus of sometimes fierce recent debate. This chapter is organised according to three main chronological phases: the period of the conquest; Theoderic's reign as king of Italy; and finally the Gothic wars. This permits examination of change, as well as allowing the analysis of issues specific to each sub-period. Although the Ostrogothic Italian kingdom endured for only three generations, we must remember that Theoderic's was a long reign by any standards. The troops who accompanied him across the Isonzo in 489 were very different from those undertaking the military operations of his last years and entirely unlike those of the Gothic Wars.

## A: The Army of the Conquest

### Theoderic's Goths: Army or People?

Theoderic's forces in 489 had developed out of several Gothic groupings. Principally they originated in Theoderic's own armed following and in that of his namesake, Theoderic Strabo ("the Squinter").<sup>1</sup> Neither group can be considered as "the Gothic people", although later sources, from within the Italian kingdom and outside, attempted to create that image. Leaving aside the contemporary existence of the Toulouse "Visigoths", the fact that two Balkan Gothic groups existed gives the lie to such a supposition. Rather than being the only two such groups, these were simply the most numerous and, therefore, the most politically and militarily significant.

These bands originated in the instability that followed the fragmentation of Attila's short-lived trans-Danubian "empire" in the 450s. In Attila's polyglot realm, his subjects possessed several levels of ethnicity beneath a unifying Hunnic identity. In a justly famous story, the East Roman ambassador

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<sup>1</sup> Well described in Heather, *Goths and Romans*, pp. 227-308.

Priscus met a Greek in Attila's camp,<sup>2</sup> but this "Greek" also fully regarded himself as a Hun. It has long been pointed out that most of the known Huns bear Gothic names, not least Attila and his brother Bleda. The material culture associated with the Hunnic kingdom emerges from a mixture of local Roman and "barbarian" traditions. After Attila's death, civil strife broke out between his sons and other former commanders. Often depicted as a rising of "subject peoples", it seems more reasonably described as a succession crisis. Opponents of the Attilan dynasty adopted non-Hunnic identities, bringing back to the surface lower-level ethnicities, like the Greek identity of Priscus' interlocutor, which had always existed. Following the defeat of Attila's sons, a bewildering array of "peoples" came fleetingly into view in the Hunnic realm's wreckage.<sup>3</sup> For some, even a solid historical existence can be questioned. Only three named Skiri are known: Odovacar, his father, and his brother.<sup>4</sup> It is difficult to decide whether Skirian identity ought to be considered "ethnic" or familial. Nonetheless, a successful family might attract enough followers for its kin-group identity to be adopted and become an identity that operated in uncontroversially "ethnic" fashion. After all, historians are accustomed to describing post-imperial Gaul, its people, and culture between the late 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries using a familial identity originating precisely in Odovacar's generation: Merovingian. The families of the two Theoderics seem to have stressed a Gothic identity, just as other people with Gothic names had adopted, or continued to proclaim, Hunnic ethnicity. Others made political claims based around Gepidic, or Herulian, or Rugian, identity. Whether any faction should be considered a revival or reappearance of a tribe with a long pedigree seems questionable.

Recent debate has concerned whether the Goths formed a "people on the move", as in traditional *Völkerwanderung* interpretations, or, as in more recent works, simply an army. This is incapable of easy resolution.<sup>5</sup> Extreme interpretations are unsatisfying, not least because "army" and "people" are rather trickier terms to define than might be assumed. Consequently, between the "polar" readings, conclusions are more difficult to pigeon-hole as "army" or "people". Nevertheless the issue is of considerable relevance.

Gothic factions (like, presumably, the others) are described having women and children in tow.<sup>6</sup> This has been taken as proving that they were a migrating "people".<sup>7</sup> This does not necessarily follow. Roman armies took women and children with them too, as did most armies until well into the

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<sup>2</sup> Priscus, frag. 11.2 (Blockley), pp. 266-75.

<sup>3</sup> Fehr & von Rummel, *Die Völkerwanderung*, pp. 75-80; Heather, *Goths and Romans*, pp. 240-51; Heather, *Goths*, pp. 124-9; Pohl, *Die Völkerwanderung*, pp. 118-25; Thompson, *Huns*, pp. 167-76; Wolfram *History of the Goths*, pp. 258-68; Wolfram, *Roman Empire*, pp. 139-43.

<sup>4</sup> Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, pp. 203-5.

<sup>5</sup> The debate has focused more often on Alaric's Goths than the Ostrogoths, but the same issues apply. A clear defence of the "people on the move" interpretation may be found in P. Heather, *The Goths* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 169-78. For discussion of the earlier Goths, many points of which can be made, by analogy, for the Ostrogoths, see Liebeschuetz, "Alaric's Goths: Nation or army?"; Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 189-94; Kulikowski, "Nation versus army".

<sup>6</sup> For the Ostrogoths, see Malchus, fr.20 (Blockley); Ennodius, *Pan.* 26-7,

<sup>7</sup> Peter Heather has repeatedly expressed this opinion, most sophisticatedly in *Goths and Romans*, and *Goths*.

twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> This note of caution, however, does not authorise us to disallow seeing the Goths as a “people on the move”. The “factional” interpretation permits an intermediate course. We might envisage a social group including women and children, but with young male warriors serving more established leaders nevertheless forming the most important element.<sup>9</sup>

After a long period of almost constant campaigning, in and out of official East Roman service, three consequences can readily be imagined. One is the knitting of warrior bands into established, quasi-permanent bodies of men, living together year-round, practising weapon-use and regularly fighting alongside one another. These would acquire most of the significant attributes of regular military units. The whole organisation would have resembled a permanent army. Indeed the Ostrogoths largely functioned as an army in Balkan politics in the 470s and 480s. The second consequence, however, will have been the acquisition of wives, children and, doubtless, camp followers. Paradoxically, then, as the Goths increasingly took on the form and functions of an army, they will have become more socially varied. The third consequence is that young warriors got older; mature warriors became old and possibly infirm. Without an established place in Eastern Roman social, military and political structures, they could not settle down. They had little option but to continue to move and – as long as they could – fight with the rest. This too made the Goths, even if originating, organised and functioning as an “army”, much more like a “people” than most military forces. Therefore, to see the force heading for Italy in 489 as, by then, looking rather more like a “people” than a normal “army”, one need not envisage Theoderic’s Goths as originating as a tribe that upped and moved en masse. Once the dynamics of the situation are thought through, even a narrowly military reading of the Goths’ origins and structure (like this one) must ultimately see the force that arrived in Italy as something more socially variegated. That must impact significantly upon how we understand Gothic settlement.

## Italian Background

The loss of direct imperial control over Africa in the 420s and 430s was critical in producing changes in Italian politics.<sup>10</sup> The seaborne threat from Carthage meant that significant forces had to be stationed throughout Italy, rather than (as hitherto) just in the north. A key element of fifth-century politics was the increasing separation and rivalry between Italian and Gallic aristocracies. However, whereas the fourth-century Italian aristocracy had had little option but to accept the *de facto* shift of the imperial core to the Rhine frontier, it now had an armed force to help ensure its control of the centre of politics and patronage. The Italian army became crucial in peninsular politics, as Ricimer’s long period of dominance makes very clear. Although unable to establish itself over the Gallic factions based upon the Goths of Toulouse and Burgundians on the Rhône, the Dalmatian army, or the Vandals in Africa, it nevertheless dominated Italy, expelling the Gallic/Gothic faction in 457 and the (legitimate) Dalmatian claimant in 475, as well as fending off attacks from African Vandals and trans-Alpine Alamanni.

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<sup>8</sup> Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 190-1. See also *CTH* 7.1.3.

<sup>9</sup> See Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 439, 444, 447 for the importance of age.

<sup>10</sup> For this, see Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 257-83 for Italian political history, and 328-338 for social and economic conditions, and the references given there. Humphries, “Italy, AD 425-605”.

Recruitment remained problematic, however. Lacking effective fiscal control beyond Provence and the Narbonnaise in Gaul or Tarraconensis in Spain, any Italian emperor's income was greatly reduced. The peninsula became a political hot-house as the senators, likewise cut off from properties and revenues abroad, competed with lower-order aristocrats for honours, titles and patronage, especially where local wealth differences were now much reduced. This made the government's ability to levy troops as well as taxes more problematic. Therefore, taxes were used to pay for military recruitment outside Italy, especially in trans-Danubian *barbaricum*. These troops, at least initially, lacked local ties and were more easily employed as a coercive force. Unsurprisingly, the resources used to pay the army were referred to as the *fiscus barbaricus*.<sup>11</sup>

Nonetheless, crucial dynamics operated here too. Roman troops' remuneration had always involved land. Late Roman forces, as noted, lived, and sometimes moved, accompanied by wives and children. Recruits – like Goths – got older, married and settled down. Hereditary military service<sup>12</sup> meant that any children followed their fathers into the army, which, over time, became as integrated into peninsular society and politics as any other group. The soldiery that serially deposed Julius Nepos and Romulus "Augustulus" doubtless contained significant numbers of men born and raised in Italy, even if serving in units with "barbarian" titles: second-generation "Italo-barbarians".

This discussion casts the confrontation between Odovacar's and Theoderic's armies somewhat differently from the clash of "barbarian" armies sometimes imagined. Both sides originated in a very specific, fifth-century imperial context. Their similarities doubtless explain the drawn-out, long-indecisive nature of the struggle and the common changing of sides.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, Theoderic's troops' military experience and long practice operating as units, was probably crucial to their eventual victory.<sup>14</sup>

## Hospitalitas

Crucial to understanding the military's place in Gothic Italy is what has been dubbed, perhaps misleadingly, "the *Hospitalitas* debate"<sup>15</sup> The name *hospitalitas* (loosely, hospitality) came from a late Roman billeting law, describing the division of billets into thirds, the householder taking two and the soldier the other.<sup>16</sup> Procopius' *Wars* allege that the "barbarians" appropriated a third of the land

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<sup>11</sup> Cesa, "Il regno di Odoacre", p.310; See *Variae* 1.19 for its successor, the *fiscus gothicus*.

<sup>12</sup> *CTh* 7.1.5, 7.1.8.

<sup>13</sup> Anonymous Valesianus, *pars posterior*, 10.50-56; Cassiodorus, *Chronicle* 1320-31; *Consularia Italica* (a collection of annalistic texts grouped by Theodor Mommsen under this title, highly misleading in almost every way but convenient for citation) 639-49; Ennodius, *Life of Epiphanius*, 109-19. Heather, *Goths*, pp. 219-20; Wolfram *History of the Goths*, pp. 281-4.

<sup>14</sup> An army of Gallic "Visigoths" decisively broke Odovacar's siege of Theoderic in Pavia (Anonymous Valesianus, *pars posterior* 11.53). Whether this represented pan-Gothic cooperation is unlikely. It may be preferable to see the Gallic faction chancing its arm in Italian politics in established fifth-century tradition, with Alaric II following his uncle Theoderic II's example.

<sup>15</sup> Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 422-47, for summary of the debate to c.2005 and references. Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, pp. 119-86.

<sup>16</sup> *CTh* 7.8.5 (dated 398).

of Italy, and Cassiodorus' *Variae* allude to Gothic "thirds" or "shares". It was long understood that Italy was similarly divided into three according to that billeting law, with one third going to the Goths. This idea fit then dominant paradigms, seeing the fifth century's principal feature as violent "barbarian" conquest and viewing the "barbarians" as land-hungry "tribes".

Walter Goffart's *Barbarians and Romans* undermined that consensus. Goffart shaped his general theory of "barbarian" settlement using the Italian evidence, rather than the Burgundian as had hitherto been more usual. The Italian data were more contemporary, if in some ways less detailed than the relevant clauses of the *Burgundian Code*. Aquitanian Gothic and Burgundian settlements were separated from the documents that described them by time and several phases of development. Ennodius' and Cassiodorus' writings offered a direct view of how "barbarian" troops were settled in a Roman province. Goffart's more famous, move placed the settlement within the context of Roman taxation. He proposed that the Gothic settlers were granted not "thirds" of land but "thirds" of tax-revenue.

Goffart showed that the Roman law of *hospitalitas* had concerned the temporary provision of shelter, not salary, provisioning or settlement. He dismissed Procopius' testimony as politically-motivated. The *Wars* manifest Justinian's ideological campaign, claiming that the West required reconquering, having been lost to "barbarian invasion". Procopius may have distorted evidence to paint Theoderic in a bad light. His reference to a third of the land may even be no more than hyperbole, and have no relationship with the *tertia* referred to elsewhere. Goffart turned instead Ennodius' and Cassiodorus' directly contemporary rhetorical statements that the Goths had been settled without Roman landowners feeling any loss.<sup>17</sup> It was difficult, said Goffart, to envisage such pronouncements if the senators had really been stripped of a third of their estates.

Goffart then analysed Cassiodorus' *Variae* and the technical terms *illatio tertiarum* and *millenarius*.<sup>18</sup> The *illatio tertiarum* had previously been read as a levy of one third of the revenue of the land of landowners who had not had their estates partitioned to provide land for a Goth. Alongside actual expropriation, this would have made Ennodius' and Cassiodorus' rhetorical statements extremely insensitive; this would have represented a serious burden on the Italian aristocracy. The latter clearly retained its fifth-century prosperity under the Ostrogoths - difficult to envisage if their revenues had been reduced by this level. Goffart suggested that the *illatio* was a third of the usual tax revenues, diverted to the payment of the Goths. The "third" (*tertia*) referred to this.<sup>19</sup>

A *millenarius*<sup>20</sup> had been assumed to be, a *chiliarch*, a commander of 1000 men. The term does mean this but Goffart pointed out that a *millena* was also a Roman notional tax assessment unit, still used

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<sup>17</sup> Ennodius, *Epist.* 9.26; Cassiodorus, *Variae* 2.16

<sup>18</sup> Goffart, *Barbarians and Romans*, pp. 73-80. The *loci classici* are *Variae* 1.14 & 2.16-17.

<sup>19</sup> See Bjornlie, elsewhere this volume, for the straightforward fiscal connotations of the *illatio tertiarum*. Relating the *tertia* in question to the fiscal payment schedule simplifies the situation further.

<sup>20</sup> Goffart, *Romans and Barbarians*, pp. 80-88. *Variae* 5.27 is key.

in Ostrogothic Italy.<sup>21</sup> Such units, in specific numbers and perhaps drawn from particular fiscal assets, were set aside for designated purposes. For Goffart, a *millenarius* was a Goth paid with a *millena* of tax-revenue.<sup>22</sup> Conflicts between Gothic soldiers and Italian taxpayers arose where the former attempted to convert a legitimate right to receive a salary into the illegitimate ownership of the land from which that salary was raised.<sup>23</sup>

Goffart's reading has considerable advantages, not least simplicity. No longer did one need to envisage hordes of *agrimensores* touring the Italian peninsula, assessing estates and their relative value before assigning measured portions to specific Goths. The state gained a standing army and lost nothing; revenue collection was simplified. Nonetheless, most historians have remained unconvinced.<sup>24</sup> The most important problem was that, as originally formulated, Goffart's thesis required readers to understand *terra* as meaning "fiscal revenue from the land". Critics argued that this was rather forced. In response, Goffart drew attention to the fact that even straightforward-looking references to land in modern legal documents are not simple. "Land" comes with a web of relations and obligations. This excluded any simple proclamation that *terra* was "unambiguous", as though "land" were itself straightforward. Furthermore, Goffart's argument relied upon more than new translations of words like *terra*. It accounted for many other relationships, frequently ignored by anti-Goffartian critiques.

The main problem for Goffart's critics is that the traditional view was rooted in the appearance of tripartite divisions in the Roman law of *hospitalitas* and in some texts discussing "barbarian" settlement. Goffart decisively showed that the *Theodosian Code's* discussion of *hospitalitas* had no bearing on the issues confronted in fifth- and sixth-century texts describing "barbarian" *tertia* and the rest. Therefore, even if one finds Goffart's argument entirely unconvincing, we cannot return to old-style "expropriationist" theses, based ultimately on that *hospitalitas* law. -

Goffart's interpretation is not unproblematic; his most recent contribution certainly does not "definitively" settle the debate.<sup>25</sup> Some ground-clearing is necessary. We must rigorously keep to the precise issue under debate and to the particular data relevant to it. Evidence, for example, of Gothic land-owning does not contradict Goffart's thesis, which concerned the "barbarian" settlers' *salary* and thus their relations with the state. It discussed "accommodation" in that precise sense, not whether the "barbarians" owned land.

Furthermore, we need not suppose that all the land of Italy was encompassed in the discussion of "thirds". The only text to talk in those terms is Procopius' *Wars*. If, like Goffart, one rejects that testimony, one must logically reject it all. One cannot pick and choose details from it. The most one

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<sup>21</sup> See *Variae* 2.37

<sup>22</sup> Mommsen, "Ostgotische Studien", p.499, nn.3-4, related *millenarii* to *millenae*. Lot "Du régime de l'hospitalité", p.1003, and nn.5-6, thought *millenarii* were officers. Generally, however, it had been assumed that a *millena* was a fixed amount of land.

<sup>23</sup> Goffart *Romans and Barbarians*, pp. 89-100.

<sup>24</sup> Principal critiques include: ...

<sup>25</sup> Goffart, "Administrative Methods of Barbarian Settlement".

might say is that Procopius' decision to mention a "third" might have been motivated by the legal arrangements employed. The documents do not necessarily imply a universal, peninsula-wide arrangement. They need imply only that those relationships applied to those lands or resources necessary for the Gothic army's payment. Indeed, all we need assume is that those relationships applied to the lands or resources necessary to pay those Goths *who were paid in that way*. There is no inference that *all* Goths were remunerated *entirely* in the fashion discussed in the handful of relevant documents in the *Variae*. Critics of Goffart's hypothesis have made the point before that it is unlikely that all Goths received the same payment, albeit on the mistaken assumption that a standard *salary*, rather than a standard *means of paying* a salary, was implicit in Goffart's argument.

Nonetheless, Goffart's reading of the *illatio*, *tertia*, *sortes* and *millenarii* seems reasonable. Late imperial Roman precedents existed for his suggested system; they had apparently been used to pay elite field armies, such as, in a general sense, the Goths were.<sup>26</sup> A Gothic warrior would be paid by a draft on taxation,<sup>27</sup> which he would collect from designated tax-payers, and, as Gothic status seems to have equated more or less with service in the army, this relationship would be inherited by his sons. Most of this situation's key elements derived from the late imperial military. The relationship between Goth and Roman was, crucially, that of government official to taxpayer. No other relative status was implied. A Goth may have been of a higher or lower standing than the Roman/s earmarked to pay him his salary.

The Goffart thesis' limitation is its insistence that this single system entirely sufficed in all cases, in Ostrogothic Italy and elsewhere.<sup>28</sup> That requires complex and sometimes less convincing argumentation. It is simpler to propose that, while Goffart's proposed system provided the Ostrogothic army's essential salary, it was not necessarily the only means used. Different Gothic status-groups may have wanted payment in different forms.<sup>29</sup> The resources of the *sacrae largitiones* and *res privata*, including landed estates and palaces as well as revenues, surely passed directly to Theoderic. At least *one* Gothic family (the Amals) received land to live upon... It is plausible that Theoderic, like the emperors, rewarded some of his followers from these resources. Grants of fiscal land on long-term, emphyteutic leases are reasonably well attested as a form of imperial patronage.<sup>30</sup> Theoderic had other – entirely traditional – resources within the *sacrae largitiones* and *res privata*. Confiscating defeated enemies' property was normal after a civil war.<sup>31</sup> It is reasonable to see Odovacar's senior supporters being expropriated, with their land used to reward

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<sup>26</sup> *CTh* 7,4.20, 22.

<sup>27</sup> That such a system for payment was employed in Ostrogothic Italy is suggested by *ET* 126 and, especially, 144.

<sup>28</sup> See Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. for discussion of the problems with this assumption.

<sup>29</sup> García Gallo, "Notas sobre el reparto de terras"; Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, p.224.

<sup>30</sup> Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, pp. 417-20.

<sup>31</sup> *Variae* 4.32 assigns the property of the proscribed to the fisc. The *Edictum Theoderici* specifies the fisc's claim to incorporate convicted criminals' property in some cases, where there were no heirs. *ET* 112-3.



some of Theoderic's followers.<sup>32</sup> Contemporary sources mention massacres of Odovacar's men.<sup>33</sup> These men had probably been *paid* according to a system like that proposed by Goffart but they also had to live somewhere and that landed property fell to Theoderic to retain or redistribute. We can easily imagine Theoderic's senior or favoured followers being remunerated with land-grants. However, this has no bearing on the documents discussed by Goffart or the precise situations they describe, or to normal Gothic military *salary*.

A considerable swathe of *agri deserti* (lacking registered tax-payers) also existed.<sup>34</sup> The late Roman state had rewarded retiring veterans with land.<sup>35</sup> Employing the *agri deserti*, yielding no tax revenue, for this purpose cost the government nothing. Indeed, enmeshing them in a system of military obligations extended fiscal resources. Note, though, that this is also irrelevant to discussions of *sortes* or *tertia*, which relate to tax revenue. Some dynamics within the Gothic army are relevant here. Not all Theoderic's men were warriors in the prime of life. Some had campaigned for twenty years and doubtless expected to settle down. Others may have fought on into old age, or accompanied the army as infirm ex-warriors, for the protection provided. These would not normally draw an annual salary, plus periodic donatives, in return for military service.<sup>36</sup> Land was a more appropriate reward. Nonetheless, because Gothic soldiers' status and duties were heritable, lands so used were automatically entwined in military obligations, especially when inherited.

Imagine an elderly companion of Theoderic and perhaps Thiudimir his father, rewarded with an Italian *ager desertus*. No longer militarily active, he has a son in the army, who collects his salary from designated taxpayers according to Goffart's system; he is a *millenarius*. When the old Goth dies, the son inherits his land.<sup>37</sup> But, because he inherited his Gothic status and obligations from his father, that land is now subject to military service. This mature Goth now supports himself from the *ager* (no longer *desertus*) and his *millena/e*, both ultimately granted by the government. Imagine a young Goth who joined Theoderic during his campaigns, with no elderly relatives to support. After the conquest, he is paid from a designated *millena*. He marries an Italian woman and has children. He may or may not buy land but, when he retires, he is rewarded in Roman fashion, with a landed allotment. The same features pertain as with the first Goth. His sons inherit his identity and military duties. When they inherit the *ager*, that land becomes part of a new type of fiscal resource – land held tax-free, in return for military service – and they too have two sources of sustenance.

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<sup>32</sup> *Variae* 1.18 seems to refer more easily to the distribution of expropriated land (and abuses of that situation), when Theoderic conquered Italy, than to illegitimate claims on tax-revenue.

<sup>33</sup> Moorhead, *Theoderic*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>34</sup> Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, pp. 812-23, is the classic basic account.

<sup>35</sup> *CTh* 7.8.1.

<sup>36</sup> See *Variae* 5.36.

<sup>37</sup> The illegal retention (by his uncle) and management of the paternal inheritance of an adolescent Goth of sufficient age to perform military service is discussed in *Variae* 1.38. This text could relate at least as easily to an inherited draft on fiscal revenue as to landed property.

This hypothetical reconstruction seems plausible. Note, that there has been no expropriation of any Roman landlord. Further, the Goffart interpretation of the standard means of furnishing a soldier's salary remains entirely intact. No revision is required of Goffart's reading of the texts dealing with the *illatio, tertiae, or millena/millenarii*.

Crucially, however, this system contained the seeds of potential change. Indeed, recognition of change over time are essential to a full understanding of the issue. Within a generation Gothic soldiers draw their salary not just from taxation; land with attached military obligations has come into the equation. This situation resembles that visible slightly later in sixth-century Merovingian Gaul.<sup>38</sup> The growing connection between Gothic troops and landed communities is precisely the dynamic suggested earlier, whereby earlier "barbarian" recruits had become fixed in the Italian landscape. The power relations remain; the government retained a standing, salaried army while simplifying aspects of revenue-collection and distribution. The advantage of this reconstruction is its dynamism. Over time, salaried Gothic soldiers settled in communities with their families, with social ties beyond those of tax-payer and tax-collector. They nevertheless remained an essentially military body. This allows us to retain Goffart's interpretation and avoid having either to explain away references to Gothic land-ownership or, alternatively, see them as compelling the rejection of Goffart's thesis.

Goffart pointed out another dynamic: the temptation to transfer a right to collect a salary from a designated fiscal asset into the latter's outright ownership. This would completely change the relationships involved, making the tax-payer into the Goth's tenant. Some documents apparently represent attempts to prevent, or investigate allegations of, such abuses.<sup>39</sup> During weak, especially minority, government these can easily be imagined. This dynamic may underlie changes in Merovingian Frankish aristocratic landholding and power during a period of stress largely brought on by royal minorities around 600.<sup>40</sup> If we accept Procopius' account, it may even have been behind the demands that led to Orestes' downfall, though, as mentioned, rejection of the whole story is probably the most consistent approach. Yet another dynamic is the purchase or other acquisition of landed properties, which a Goth would own in the usual way. Unlike land granted as remuneration for service, these would be liable for the *capitatio* and other relevant fiscal obligations. Goths might however want to extend tax-exemption to *all* their lands.<sup>41</sup> This would be a source of conflict.<sup>42</sup> Overall, we should not see the system used to settle the Gothic army after 492 as taking a single form or imagine that the initial state of affairs remained unchanged throughout the kingdom's existence.

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<sup>38</sup> Halsall, *Warfare and Society*, pp. 46-50 and refs.

<sup>39</sup> *Variae*, 8.28.

<sup>40</sup> Halsall, 'From Roman villa'

<sup>41</sup> Such a desire may lie behind the situations described in *Variae* 1.26 and 4.14.

<sup>42</sup> For a Gallic analogy, see Halsall, *Warfare and Society*, pp. 46-7.

## B: The Army of the Ostrogothic Kingdom

### The army in the governance of the kingdom

After his victory over Odovacar, Theoderic's greatest problem was how to unify and govern Italy. Roman aristocratic power, especially below the level of the old senatorial nobility, where authority was probably more intensive within specific localities, and the potential threat posed by leading Gothic families, aggravated the difficulties to communication and the exercise of power posed by Italy's difficult physical geography.<sup>43</sup> Theoderic's relations with the army illustrate his approach to this problem. To maintain authority, the king had to scatter his forces throughout the peninsula. Yet, this potentially exacerbated the problem just described. A local commander (perhaps with as good a claim to nobility or even royalty as Theoderic's) might use his troops, perhaps in alliance with the region's aristocrats, to challenge royal authority.

One solution might be to ensure that Goths did not perform military service in regions where they held *millenae*, though whether such a solution was practical in Italy is doubtful.<sup>44</sup> Theoderic seems instead to have imaginatively employed patronage and propaganda.<sup>45</sup> The army was seemingly assembled regularly in the principal, northern royal centres: Pavia, Milan and Ravenna. Here, Theoderic paid donatives (a supplementary cash salary), rewarded those who had done well and punished those who had not.<sup>46</sup> This enabled the continuous distribution and redistribution of royal patronage, not only in the circulation of offices but also in the geographical redeployment of personnel, preventing any family or faction from establishing a local power-base. Furthermore, it made Gothic noble or royal families compete for royal favour with lower-born rivals.

When assembled for these purposes, the army was subject to manifestations of royal ideology aurally, in speeches, panegyrics and so on, and visually, in the pictorial and epigraphic decoration of the buildings used.<sup>47</sup> The Senegallia Medallion demonstrates that some of the largesse distributed carried Theoderician propaganda.<sup>48</sup> As Cassiodorus' writings show, these ideological productions stressed the army's role as a pillar of *civilitas* and consequently the requirement for harmonious relations between Gothic troops and Roman civilians.<sup>49</sup> They also stressed Theoderic's claim (at least by the latter half of the reign) to represent an ancient, uniquely royal dynastic claim to power.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> For Theoderic's concern with effective and rapid communications, see *Variae* 1.29, 2.19, 4.47, 5.5, etc.

<sup>44</sup> *Burgundian Code* (54.1) suggests something similar being practised in that, smaller realm.

<sup>45</sup> Well analysed by Heather, "Theoderic, King of the Goths", pp. 152-65.

<sup>46</sup> *Variae* 5.27: *bonos enim laus malos querula comitatur*. See also *Variae* 4.14, 5.26-27, 5.36.

<sup>47</sup> Heather, "Theoderic, King of the Goths", pp. 162-3. Some settings for Theoderician ritual are analysed by Annabel Wharton, *Refiguring the PostClassical City*, pp. 105-47; See also Wood, "Theoderic's monuments" (which ignores Wharton's more theoretically sophisticated analysis, as do the discussants: pp. 263-77). On ideology, see Heydemann elsewhere in this volume.

<sup>48</sup> Arnold, "Theoderic's invincible mustache".

<sup>49</sup> *Variae* 2.8, 3.16, 3.24, 3.38, 5.26.

<sup>50</sup> Heather, *Goths and Romans*; Heather, "Theoderic King of the Goths". Arnold, *Theoderic and the Roman Imperial Restoration*, pp. 162-74, stresses the early importance of Theoderic's royalty.

Royal association or authorisation, trumped all other claims to legitimate authority but competition for this entailed subscription to Theoderic's propaganda and ideology.<sup>51</sup> This process undermined pre-existing Gothic social distinctions and ensured that Theoderic's royal writ penetrated the geographically disparate local communities of Italy. Simultaneously, it assured the army's continuing function, in spite of increasingly complex and deeper-seated social ties, as a state-controlled coercive force.

None of this meant uniformly harmonious relations between army and local society ; such had hardly existed even under the Empire. The *Variae* mention numerous conflicts and complaints arising from the army's behaviour.<sup>52</sup> Gothic troops, Cassiodorus repeatedly enjoined, should not molest, harass or steal from the provincials in areas where they were stationed or through which they were marching.<sup>53</sup> The provincials of the Cottian Alps were compensated for depredations committed as the army passed through the region en route to Gaul in 508.<sup>54</sup> Like Roman troops, Goths on campaign were supplied with food and other necessities (*annonae*) by the fisc. For the kingdom's mountainous northern frontier garrisons this was especially important. Hungry troops could easily start to take what they wanted from their civilian neighbours. Cassiodorus had to write several documents ordering the rapid and effective payment of *annonae*.<sup>55</sup>

## Organisation

The *Variae*, a rich source for the army's place within Theoderic's realm, give a clear impression of continuity from the late imperial situation into Ostrogothic Italy. Other than the army's Gothic composition, the *Variae* provide no *a priori* evidence that much had changed at all. Gothic, like late Roman, soldiers were subject to their own jurisdiction.<sup>56</sup> It seems preferable to read the texts discussing jurisdiction over Goths and Romans in this way rather than assuming that they refer to ancient Gothic tribal custom.

Serving Gothic soldiers were possibly distinguished from civilians (as in other kingdoms) by their long hair (as *capillati*), a survival from the late Roman military.<sup>57</sup> Whether this meant a particular hairstyle or simply referred to serving soldiers' typically hirsute appearance (cp. the French *poilu*) is unclear. The heavy *chlamys* also continued to signify military authority.<sup>58</sup> A possible role in male

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<sup>51</sup> *ET* 43-44 and 46 undermine the use of patronage to influence legal cases.

<sup>52</sup> Most clearly perhaps in *Variae* 4.36.

<sup>53</sup> *Variae* 3.38, 4.13, 4.36, 5.10-11, 5.13, 5.26, 6.22, 7.4.

<sup>54</sup> *Variae*...

<sup>55</sup> *Variae* 2.5, 3.41.

<sup>56</sup> *ET* 145.

<sup>57</sup> *Variae* 4.49, though Gothiness is not specifically mentioned. See discussion in Amory, *People and Identity*, pp. 344-6; Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, p.103; Arnold, *Theoderic and the Roman Imperial Restoration*, pp. 113-15.

<sup>58</sup> *Variae* 6.15. Cp. *CTh* 14.10.1. However, the military identification of the donor/s of *Variae* 1.26 is itself suggested only by a reference to the soldier's cloak (*lacerna*) in the last lines: "tribute is owed to the purple [i.e., here, the king], not to the military cloak", so a circular argument is risked.

socialisation will be discussed later but the late Roman army had long espoused real or invented signs of “barbarian” identity. Its jargon incorporated Germanic terms and the *capillati*’s long hair might also have manifested “barbarian chic”.<sup>59</sup> The army had been a bastion of the Arian creed in late imperial Italy.<sup>60</sup> Overall, it was well suited to maintaining the signifiers of Gothic identity, like Arian belief and the use (at least for specialised technical terms) of Gothic speech.

The army’s organisation is unclear. Theoderic is said to have disbanded the Roman guard regiments as useless ceremonial units.<sup>61</sup> However, the text cited to support the claim says the opposite, although the rank of *comes domesticorum vacans* was certainly honorific.<sup>62</sup> The *Variae* refer to *domestici* and *scholares*.<sup>63</sup> Royal bodyguards are mentioned, albeit with atticising Greek terms (*hypaspistai*, *doryphoroi*), in accounts of the Gothic Wars. The reference to the horse- and foot-guards as *domestici patres equitum et peditum*, which perplexed Hodgkin,<sup>64</sup> may hint at an important structuring element in the Gothic army, to which I will return.

The late Roman army had been organised into a field army (*comitatenses*) and frontier troops (*limitanei* or *ripenses*). Whether this division persisted in Gothic Italy is unknown. A text in the *Variae* held to illustrate the existence of *limitanei* does not support the suggestion.<sup>65</sup> Troops were certainly stationed in frontier forts; Theoderic referred to their function of keeping out the “barbarians” using traditional Roman vocabulary. The *Variae*, however, give no hint that they were recruited differently from the field army. The term *miles* is sometimes used when Goths are not referred to. Goths are more often mentioned in the *exercitus*, on campaign. Given the “barbarian” composition of the late Roman field armies, this might support the notion. However, the formula for the appointment of the duke of the frontier province of Raetia makes clear that *milites* are, simply enough, soldiers in the *exercitus*, contrasting them with *Romani* and *provinciales*.<sup>66</sup> Nonetheless, fifth-century Roman aristocrats – including Cassiodorus’ great-grandfather – had raised and commanded local defence

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<sup>59</sup> Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 101-10.

<sup>60</sup> Amory, *People and Identity*, pp. 236-76. The idea was formidably rebuked in Robert Markus’ review of Amory’s book, *Journal of Theological Studies* 49 (1998), pp. 414-7.

<sup>61</sup> Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, p.256; Moorhead, *Theoderic*, p.254. Halsall carelessly repeats the statement, on the basis of these authorities: *Warfare and Society*, p.45 and n.24.

<sup>62</sup> Procopius, *Secret History* 26.27-28, says that Justinian’s officials disbanded these corps, which had been generously left in place by Theoderic, despite their uselessness.

<sup>63</sup> *Variae* 1.10, 7.3.

<sup>64</sup> *Variae*, 1.10, Hodgkin *Letters of Cassiodorus*, p.150, n.2.

<sup>65</sup> Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, pp. 316-7, referring to *Variae* 1.11 claims (without explanation) that the *milites* commanded by Servatus, *dux* of Raetia, “cannot have been Goths”. Heather, “*Gens and regnum*”, p.118, n.89, builds on this (mis-citing the source) to allege that Servatus is “said to have led *limitanei* (i.e. inferior quality troops)”. *Variae* 1.11 mentions neither *limitanei* nor Romans.

<sup>66</sup> *Variae* 7.4.

forces<sup>67</sup> and it is likely that city garrisons included Roman as well as Gothic soldiers. A distinction remains possible.

The army's ethnic component has been hotly debated, especially since Patrick Amory proposed that Gothic identity was essentially a professional appellation founded in late imperial ideology; to be a Goth was simply to be a soldier.<sup>68</sup> Amory's "rational choice" interpretation has been forcefully criticised by Peter Heather, who contends that the Goths were a people, whose ethnic identity was grounded in a class of freemen.<sup>69</sup> Amory's hypothesis of entirely fluid ethnicity is too extreme, but Heather's primordialism is too crude.

At the heart of the controversy is both sides' failure to appreciate two points.<sup>70</sup> Ethnic change does not imply a straight exchange of one monolithic identity for another. Ethnicity is multi-layered; change involved adding another level, not the wholesale rejection and replacement of one's entire ethnic identity. Different levels of identity can be situationally reordered in importance. An identity can become that according to which one normally acts and is categorised, without one necessarily ever abandoning other identities. This process was illustrated earlier, in the formation of Theoderic's Goths from the wreckage of Attila's realm. The second, related point is that the process whereby a person or, better, a family might change from self-identifying primarily as Roman to primarily self-identifying as Gothic, could take a long time: a generation, perhaps two or three. This problem is accentuated by the Ostrogothic kingdom's short life. Although long, Theoderic's reign spanned less than two generations. The subsequent succession crises and instability and, especially, the outbreak of the Gothic Wars (still only forty-six years after the Goths' arrival on the Isonzo) doubtless put a brake on these processes. Thus it is hardly surprising that one cannot document clear-cut instances of complete ethnic change.

Nonetheless, the Ostrogothic evidence reveals the dynamics of such change visible elsewhere in the post-imperial West. One index is the attestation of individuals with Gothic and Roman names. It must be remembered that adding a name was hardly uncommon in Late Antiquity, especially when associated with a change of status. Gregory of Tours added the name Gregorius when he entered the priesthood; his maternal great-uncle Gundulf doubtless took that Germanic name when he entered the service of the kings of Austrasia.<sup>71</sup> This was one means of gradually changing one's primary ethnic identification. Amory also drew attention to the aristocrat Cyprian, who had had his sons instructed in weapon-use and even had them taught Gothic.<sup>72</sup> This, significantly, took place thirty years or so after Theoderic's entry into Italy. The competition for royal patronage and the advantages associated with military service were seemingly causing even wealthy Italo-Romans to

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<sup>67</sup> *Variae* 1.4.

<sup>68</sup> Amory, *People and Identity*, esp. pp. 149-94.

<sup>69</sup> Above all Heather, "*Gens and regnum*"; Heather, "Merely and ideology?"

<sup>70</sup> Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 35-62, 332-6, for full discussion. See also Swain, this volume.

<sup>71</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Histories* 6.11.

<sup>72</sup> *Variae* 8.21. Full fluency in Gothic seems less necessarily implicit in Cassiodorus' statement than a competent command of army-Gothic argot.

adopt Gothic identity. Service in local garrisons could bring a senior Gothic warrior's patronage, entry into a military household and thence inclusion in the *exercitus*. On that basis, a Gothic identity might be adopted and eventually become dominant. Had the Amal kingdom lasted as long as the Merovingian these dynamics would likely have had similar results to those observable in the writings of Gregory of Tours.

The life-cycle was possibly important within Gothic military service, as already intimated. The *Variae* mention that adolescent Goths came of age when they were liable to serve in the army,<sup>73</sup> plausibly at fifteen. Cassiodorus mentions the training of *iuvenes*, apparently archers (*saggitarii*), and a mobilisation order commands the Goths to bring forth their young men. Here the mention of *domestici patres* takes on an added significance, possibly as a reference to older warriors.<sup>74</sup> Comparison with other post-imperial situations permits the suggestion that when he came of age a Goth learnt his trade either in the household of an older Gothic warrior or in units commanded by such veterans (like, perhaps, the archers of Salona). "Adoption by arms" was possibly important at this stage and would further bind military communities.<sup>75</sup> Merovingian *comites* had followings of *pueri*; the *domestici* in attendance on Theoderic's officials ought possibly to be seen in the same way.<sup>76</sup> Clearly, they were paid by the fisc. At some point they may have graduated to more established units of *milites*, with a salary provided as outlined earlier. Finally, they may have married, acquired lands and settled down, becoming older warriors called out only for specific campaigns but training their own households. This system looks superficially "primitivising", making the Gothic military resemble the Zulu army's married and unmarried *impis*. In fact it fits a range of evidence across post-imperial Europe. Even the late Roman army's twinned regiments of *iuniores* and *seniores* might imply similar careers.<sup>77</sup> The distinction between *doryphoroi* and *hypaspistai* among Belisarius' guards (whatever their actual designation) may suggest a similar life-cycle-based career within a regular army.<sup>78</sup> The suggested role of the life-cycle adds to other dynamics to underline change through time and the evolution of military identities and systems of remuneration.

Theoderic carefully ensured his armies were well equipped and supplied. Cassiodorus frequently refers to the upkeep of proper military camps, regular provision of *annonae* and the supervision of armourers. The king also took a close interest in making sure of his cities' proper fortification.

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<sup>73</sup> *Variae* 1.38.

<sup>74</sup> Mommsen read the text as *domestici partis equitum et peditum*. This may seem more logical but is not grammatically satisfactory. *Patres* appears to be the more common form but the manuscripts do not really allow a decision. I am grateful to M. Maxime Emion for discussion of this point.

<sup>75</sup> *Variae* 4.2.

<sup>76</sup> *Variae* 5.14, 9.13.

<sup>77</sup> See also Napoleon's Old, Middle and Young Guards.

<sup>78</sup> Halsall, *Warfare and Society*, p.199, n.110.

## Archaeological Evidence

The areas where the Gothic army was settled have sometimes been suggested from the archaeological record.<sup>79</sup> Zones of Gothic settlement have been extrapolated from the distribution of particular types of metalwork, usually from inhumations containing such objects (figure 1). Such a straightforward interpretation cannot stand. The origins of most of the material in question (largely feminine) does not necessarily authorise its designation as “Ostrogothic”.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, archaeological material does not have an ethnic identity, so, even if such material demonstrably came from the trans-Danubian Gothic homelands, one would not know whether someone interred with these objects was a Goth who had accompanied Theoderic to Italy, or was descended from one such. Perhaps most importantly, the material is found in very small quantities. If the costume associated with these objects was Gothic, clearly not all Goths were buried in this fashion. The rite cannot therefore simply reflect Gothic settlement. Why were some people buried like this when the vast majority were not?

The context of such isolated finds is, consequently, crucial. Most items were deliberately and publicly deposited with the dead. Although, as figure 1 shows, about fifty sites in Italy and Dalmatia contain such burials, there are usually only one or two such graves on each site. Some are from urban cemeteries, notably at major centres like Rome, Ravenna, Aquileia and Milan and frequently associated with churches.

If these artefacts were associated with Gothic holders of political and military power, their display in the burial ritual must be significant. Pre-Ostrogothic weapon-burials and other furnished inhumations exist, especially in peripheral areas of Italy, , so the custom of displaying a dead person’s status in death was not new. Nonetheless, earlier “barbarian” troops do not generally seem to have manifested their ethnicity like this. That the Goths did so must therefore somehow illustrate the impact of imperial collapse and Gothic conquest upon Italian social relationships. Furnished inhumation was a public display.<sup>81</sup> In the suburban church burials with possible Gothic connotations, its audience was possibly made up of the politically powerful. In rural contexts, as perhaps (if the find does not represent a hoard) with the lavish female burial at Domagnano (San Marino),<sup>82</sup> that audience might have comprised local landowners and lesser people.

That women as well as (if not more often than) men were buried like this argues that the deaths of all members of certain kindreds could be marked by such displays. It also suggests a particular gendering of power. The families employing the ritual demonstrated the basis of their pre-eminence: their association with the Gothic holders of political and military power. This could be linked with competition for royal patronage within local communities and among the political élite. We must also, however, surely conclude that people adopting this costume in public ritual were not necessarily (possibly they were unlikely to have been) Danubian incomers. Nonetheless, these burials’ fairly limited number shows that, while the death of a family member produced stress, the

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<sup>79</sup> E.g. Moorhead, *Theoderic*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>80</sup> von Rummel, *Habitus Barbarus*, pp. 323-37.

<sup>81</sup> Halsall, *Cemeteries and Society*, *passim*.

<sup>82</sup> Bierbrauer, “Archeologia degli Ostrogoti”, pp. 194-202.



threat posed to local standing was not critical. These displays nevertheless illustrate the tensions involved in establishing local power-structures. The finds' distribution thus most likely reveals the areas where such stress and competition were most common. It is highly likely that these included areas where Gothic newcomers were settled, but the artefacts' distribution need have absolutely no relationship to that of Gothic settlements overall. The evidence, almost invariably discovered long ago in obscure and even dubious circumstances, is of such poor quality that more detailed social and chronological analyses are impossible. Nonetheless, in however attenuated a form, these data show that the political and military power associated with the Goths reached down to local societies and their power-struggles. That the objects which seemingly manifested a connection with Theoderic's government were feminine as often as masculine further supports the suggestion that, however they were salaried, Gothic soldiers and their families became, over time, a fixed component of such communities and their politics.

The archaeological record permits few statements about the equipment of Theoderic's soldiers. Weapons are rare in the find complexes just discussed, not least because so many of them are female burials. Those which are known are unremarkable: lance-heads. Lavish items of horse-harness confirm the written sources' indications that cavalry were a key element of the Gothic army. Several fortifications were occupied in the Ostrogothic period. Invillino (Friuli) is one of the best known and most thoroughly excavated. Although no phase was directly related to the Ostrogothic period, its Period III encompassed that era.<sup>83</sup>

Theoderic's Ostrogothic army was clearly highly organised and efficient. Its Gallic, Spanish and Balkan campaigns were well-organised, well-led and usually victorious. Success breeds success, of course. Warriors continued to join Theoderic and the repeated experience of victory made Gothic troops battle-hardened and confident.

## C: The Gothic Wars

Accounts of the cataclysmic downfall of Theoderic's kingdom in the Gothic Wars provide much detailed, if problematic, data on the Gothic army in action but we cannot use Procopius' account to shed light upon the nature of the Goths who entered Italy in 489. Numerous dynamics were at work that made the armed forces of the 530s to 550s quite different from those of the 480s and 490s. "The Goths", as they appear in Procopius' narrative, owe their nature to the working through of those processes.

Procopius' account demands care. Although filled with the sort of detail beloved by military historians – and generally absent in early medieval western Europe<sup>84</sup> – it cannot be taken as straightforward description, even if Procopius witnessed some events himself. *The Wars* are enmeshed in very traditional classical ethnographic stereotyping and Procopius wrote in learned Attic Greek, striving to liken his account to the great examples of the historical genre: Thucydides and Polybius.<sup>85</sup> Hence the appearance of *doryphoroi* and *hypaspistai* in Roman and Gothic armies.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Bierbrauer, *Invillino-Ibligo*.

<sup>84</sup> Halsall, *Warfare and Society*, pp. 1-6, 177-80.

<sup>85</sup> Cameron, *Procopius*; Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea*.

Procopius' writing – at least initially – was heavily imbued with Justinianic ideology about the rightness of the reconquest. His accounts of the Gothic forces, especially in the set-pieces of the siege of Rome, must therefore be handled with caution. Procopius mocked those “barbarians” who wanted to be Romans. Thus the tragicomic accounts of incompetently-deployed Gothic siege towers and Gothic generals who fail to note the allegedly decisive military difference between the two armies, which Belisarius spotted early in the campaign: that the Romans have mounted archers and the Goths do not.<sup>87</sup> Some descriptions are surely hyperbolic. Procopius' account of Gothic *oplitoi* must surely be heavily ironic.<sup>88</sup> Although an apt description of an armoured close-fighting spearman protected by a large round shield, the term's cultural baggage – the Attic hoplite, civilised citizen-soldier par excellence – and its incongruity when applied to “barbarian” warriors besieging Rome would not have been lost on Procopius' readers. Procopius' less critical attitude towards Totila may stem as much from Totila correctly performing the role of “barbarian warlord” allotted to him by Graeco-Roman ethnography – unlike the comic philosopher-king Theodahad or Wittigis, bumbling would-be *poliorcetes* – as from any disillusionment with Justinianic policy.<sup>89</sup>

Close scrutiny suggests that the two sides were very alike. The possible distinction between older and younger warriors, the former acting as officers for the latter, especially within bodyguard units, has been mentioned. Warriors on both sides shared the ability to fight mounted or on foot according to the situation. This fluidity, rather than a formal division into units of infantry and cavalry, is characteristic of the early medieval west.<sup>90</sup> That the Gothic army, as Cassiodorus makes clear, was a well-organised, more or less regular army on the Roman model, rather than the “barbarian” horde often envisaged in Byzantine accounts or uncritical modern studies based on the latter,<sup>91</sup> also brought the two sides closer together. Indeed, given the predominance of troops recruited from beyond the frontier in the East Roman army, the Gothic army may have been considerably more “Roman” than the forces opposing them. This irony seems to be heavily played upon in Procopius' account. The similarities between the armies certainly facilitated (as in Theoderic's conquest) the changing of sides between the armies. Soldiers in the opposing forces could be barely distinguishable from each other.<sup>92</sup>

The Gothic army's dismal showing in the earliest phase of the war probably attests to the previous decade of political stresses and a lack of active campaigning. Most of the experienced Gothic troops were located outside Italy, in the Balkans (where they scored some important early successes

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<sup>86</sup> These are terms which appear in the accounts of classical Greek hoplite warfare and, in the case of the *hypaspistai*, in Polybius' accounts of the warfare of the Alexandrian Macedonian army.

<sup>87</sup> Procopius, *Wars*, 5.18.42, resolved at *Wars*, 5,27.25-8.

<sup>88</sup> Halsall, “Funny foreigners”, pp. 111-2.

<sup>89</sup> Halsall, “Funny foreigners”, pp. 112-3

<sup>90</sup> Halsall, *Warfare and Society*, pp. 180-8.

<sup>91</sup> E.g. Thompson

<sup>92</sup> Pohl, “Telling the difference”.

against the invading Romans), in Provence and in Spain, where they were probably involved in sometimes successful campaigning against the Franks.<sup>93</sup> Their opponents, by contrast, were battle-hardened and confident veterans, used to victory under Belisarius (even if frequently more by luck than judgement). The dynamics of the earlier Theoderician period were reversed. They would turn back again when Totila's forces experienced a long and unbroken run of success.

The Gothic warrior was characteristically equipped with horse, sword and shield, as written and archaeological evidence from Theoderic's reign also suggests. Some used bows, at least when dismounted, and spears were thrown from a distance as well as used in hand-to-hand fighting. Totila's instructions to his men to discard all weapons other than their swords (if Procopius is to be believed) made sound sense in the context of the battle of Busta Gallorum. A rapid charge directly into close-combat would avoid the fatal temptation to exchange missiles with the Romans, who had the advantage of numbers, especially in archers.<sup>94</sup>

The wars' effects on the Italian peninsula are well-known.<sup>95</sup> Any dynamics that might have led to ethnic changes like those in Gaul and Spain (and embryonically attested in Theoderic's reign) were surely arrested. Sharper boundaries emerged between Goths and Romans, although almost certainly more on the basis of political allegiance than biological descent. Most of the rank and file of the 520s will have been born and grown up in Italy, making them significantly different from warriors born and raised within the peripatetic Ostrogothic army in the post-Hunnic Balkans. Only a handful of those mustered in Theoderic's last military assemblies, even *patres domestici*, will have had any clear memory of life outside the seemingly stable confines of Romano-Gothic Italy. It would be yet more mistaken to see the soldiers facing Belisarius' troops, let alone those who confronted Narses, as shaped by anything other than late antique Italian, Provençal or Dalmatian culture. Marriage further blurred familial and genealogical distinctions. The processes discussed earlier had already led to Italo-Romans joining the army and perhaps adding a Gothic dimension to their own hierarchy of identities. The Goths had always incorporated other groups, sometimes retaining an ethnic label,<sup>96</sup> sometimes not. Byzantine deserters joined them during the wars, doubtless also adding a Gothic identity. Those who returned to the East Romans surely abandoned it again. None of this implies "incomplete assimilation"<sup>97</sup> or solid boundaries between Goths and others. We do not know whether "Roman" soldiers who returned to Justinian's armies were the same men as had deserted earlier. A Roman deserting to the Goths became, in some ways, a Goth, although these troops' non-

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<sup>93</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Histories* 3.21, refers to the Goths' recapture of territory lost after Vouillé. This must have occurred under the leadership of Theoderic's Spanish regent (and later Visigothic king) Theudis.

<sup>94</sup> Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century commanders similarly ordered troops to attack with unloaded muskets when an advance was to be pressed briskly with "cold steel".

<sup>95</sup> Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, pp. 1-60, is classic.

<sup>96</sup> Like the Gepids of *Variae* 5.10-11. Late imperial units frequently bore ethnic titles. Many of these troops doubtless had Gepidic origins but one ought not to assume that they were any more a "people" than late imperial regiments of *Franci*, *Alamanni* or *Parthi*, similarly redeployed with their wives, children and camp followers.

<sup>97</sup> We should note the conservative political connotations of phrases like "incomplete assimilation".

Italian and frequently indeed non-imperial origin continued to mark them out. Given the Italian upbringing of most Goths, it was easier for a Goth deserting to Narses to become Roman.

The dynamics stressed throughout this chapter permit a more subtle reading of the Goths' ultimate downfall than that recently championed.<sup>98</sup> The kingdom's final demise has been claimed to reveal that the Goths were a "people" with a defined identity founded in a large class of freemen with a direct link to the king. The decisive results of the defeat of a portion of the Gothic army, and the threat to wives and children posed by Eastern Roman military operations has been presented as sufficient proof of this contention. This conclusion, however, does not emerge naturally from the evidence. The revival of the discredited Germanist notion of a class of *Königsfreie* need not detain us.<sup>99</sup> The Gothic armies' stratification and inclusion of more numerous rank and file than leaders is hardly surprising; nor is the idea that the latter had a political role.<sup>100</sup> Gothic military communities were embedded within peninsular society and politics. The edges of these communities doubtless hardened during the wars and it is unsurprising that the families of serving Goths should have been more at risk than in the peaceful conditions of Theoderic's reign. It might have been safer to take them on campaign than to leave them behind, giving some Gothic forces a character resembling those of 489. The consequences of the Gothic forces' serious defeats similarly have no necessary bearing on the nature of the Italian Goths. The destruction of its field army at Adrianople (378) had rendered the Eastern Empire – with far greater military manpower reserves than the Italian kingdom – effectively incapable of offensive military action for perhaps a decade. The western field army's slaughter at the Frigidus was decisive; the West never had a sufficient breathing space to rebuild a substantial force of the same standard.<sup>101</sup> Troops can be replaced in numbers but not necessarily in quality and Procopius makes clear that limited manpower was a worry for both sides, dictating Gothic strategy in the 540s and 50s. The men accompanying Totila in his desperate charge at *Busta Gallorum* or who died with Teias in the cataclysmic battle of *Mons Lactarius* were doubtless the Goths' best warriors. Others still died in the disastrous naval defeat of *Sena Gallica* in the Adriatic.<sup>102</sup> That these defeats effectively ended Gothic resistance is considerably less surprising than the fact that it took three bloody engagements to do so and that some Gothic garrisons continued to hold out even then.

The Goths' subsequent disappearance from history<sup>103</sup> is easily encompassed within the dynamics discussed throughout this chapter, albeit in reverse. Although primarily military in composition and function, the Goths had been more than simply an army when they invaded Italy. By the time of Totila's and Teias' deaths, sixty-odd years later, they had – unsurprisingly – changed in many ways.

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<sup>98</sup> Heather, *The Goths*, pp. 321-6.

<sup>99</sup> Staab, "A reconsideration."

<sup>100</sup> It is, again, politically revealing to represent the suggestion that the Gothic rank and file did not blithely follow their officers and social betters' instructions as a surprising and defining feature of Gothic society.

<sup>101</sup> Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 199-200, 243.

<sup>102</sup> Procopius, *Wars* 8.29-32 (*Busta Gallorum*); 8.35 (*Mons Lactarius*); 8.23 (naval defeat).

<sup>103</sup> But see Amory, *People and Identity*, pp. 314-5, for attestations of Italian Goths after the "reconquest".

Their primarily military character had, however, endured throughout. A kingdom created by the sword had perished by it.

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## Key Words

army, warfare, Italy, 6<sup>th</sup> century, Ostrogothic, *hospitalitas*, ethnicity, settlement, Gothic Wars

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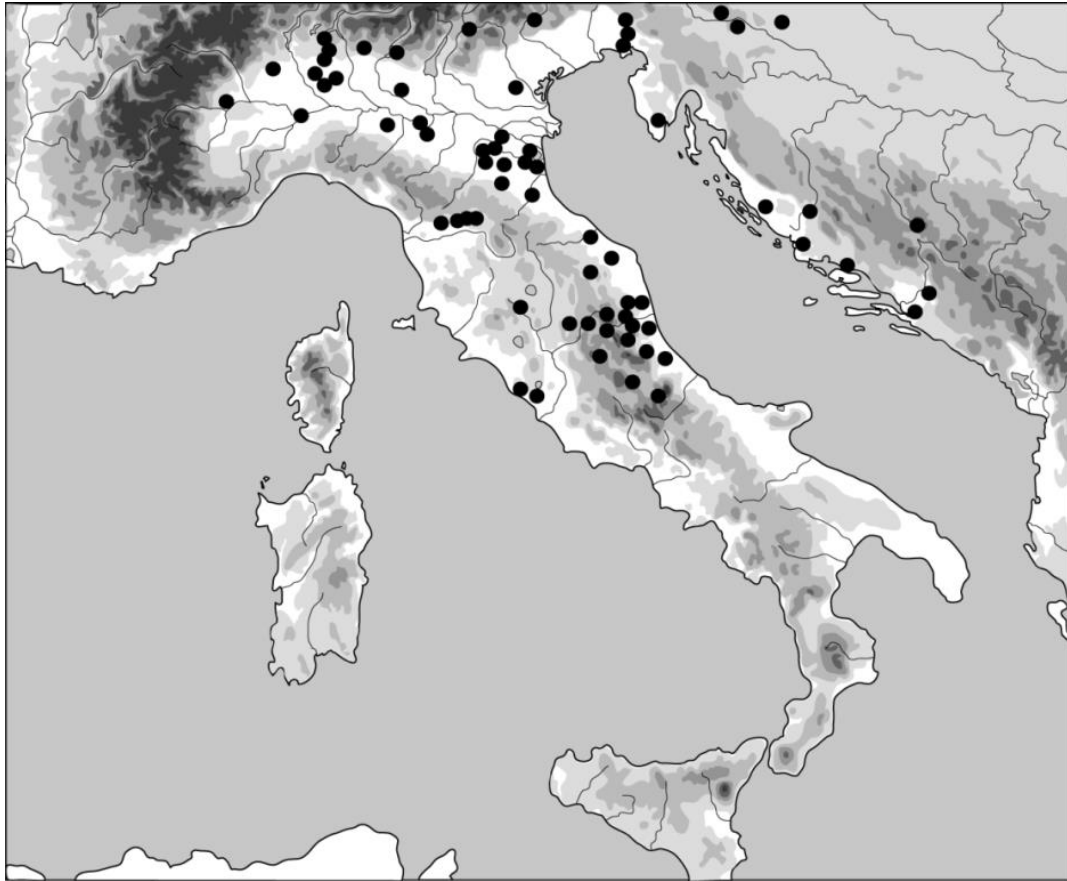


Figure 1: Finds of "Gothic" Material culture